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Preparing teachers for diversity: lessons learned from the US and South Africa

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Abstract

The world's predominant growth populations are largely students of color who have historically struggled for high-quality educational opportunities. Within this context, educational reformers around the globe are challenging teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to work effectively with students from diverse backgrounds. This article reports on a cross-national study that investigates a program designed to facilitate the development of teachers who are committed to teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. It presents an analysis of US and South African teachers' developing discourses that revealed differences in the development of commitment among teachers who engaged in talk-related activities in a teacher education program versus those teachers who engaged in talk-related activities in addition to theory-enacting activities within diverse classrooms. Through the analysis, I explore how teachers' developing commitment can be facilitated by carefully designed classroom activities and show how those developing commitments are revealed in the teachers' discourse practices. My intent in presenting this investigation is to help us better understand how applications of activity theory can assist us in addressing the global challenges that face teacher education programs. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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All around the world, demands for higher levels of education for much larger numbers of citizens are being imposed upon educational institutions that were designed a century ago for different purposes (Darling-Hammond, 1996). For example, in the late 1800s, the general purpose of schools in the US was to socialize immigrants and to provide basic literacy skills to workers in an industrial American society, while in places like South Africa, public schools were designed in the late 1940s to

uphold and enforce the tenants of apartheid. Social, economic and political situations have changed drastically since those times and the enormous complexities of today's world require a new vision for schooling that responds to the needs of the global society in which we live. That vision must articulate a mission for the delivery of instruction that is intellectually challenging while meeting the diverse needs of students who bring varying experiences, resources and beliefs to the classroom. That vision must also ensure that all students have relevant, engaging and equitable opportunities to learn from teachers who are well prepared.

With global trends indicating that the world's predominant growth populations are largely

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students of color, we can expect that tomorrow's schools will present even greater challenges. Those challenges will include increased demands for excellent, well-trained teachers who are interested in and committed to providing successful educational experiences for all students — regardless of their social status, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds. This demand for excellent, well-trained and committed teachers should come as no surprise, since recent research confirms that expert teachers — those whose training and skills development have prepared them to teach diverse students effectively — have proven to be the single most important determinant of student achievement (Armour-Thomas, Clay, Domanico, Bruno, & Allen, 1989; Ferguson, 1991). Research has shown that teachers who have a commitment to teaching all students and the skills and knowledge needed to teach them well, are directly tied to high levels of student learning. Despite this research, the reality is that underprepared teachers constitute more than 25% of the teachers hired each year in the US (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; NDRC, 1992) and an even higher percentage in South Africa (Bhola, 1994; Hartshorne, 1992). The majority of these underprepared teachers in the US and abroad are assigned to schools and classrooms that serve their nation's most vulnerable children — those who are poor, ethnically and linguistically diverse, and at risk of educational failure (Darling-Hammond, 1990, 1992; Oakes, 1990; Bhola, 1994; Hartshorne, 1992). Many of these underprepared teachers lack the knowledge and the commitment needed to guide the development of their students, and they are less likely to see it as their responsibility to identify and meet the needs of their students. All too often, these teachers blame their students when their teaching is not successful (Darling-Hammond, 1992). Because of the limited capacities of such teachers — and their lack of desire to develop them — most classrooms serving poor and minority students continue to provide these students with significantly less engaging and less effective learning experiences (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Dreeben, 1987; Oakes, 1985).

Within this context, educational reformers are challenging teacher preparation programs to enable new and continuing teachers to work effec-

tively with students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Darling-Hammond, 1986; Hartshorne, 1992; Quality Education for Minority Project, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1986). In response to these challenges, a variety of innovative programs have emerged that focus on developing teachers' "higher-order teaching skills" (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988), direct discussions about issues of race, culture and language diversity (Cochran-Smith, 1991), and culturally responsive approaches to instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In addition, careful work over the past two decades has increased our knowledge concerning teacher thinking and decision-making (Clark, 1983), comparisons of expert and novice teachers (Berliner, 1986), studies of the nature of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987), and teachers' practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1986; Grimmer & Mackinnon, 1992). Other work in the area of multicultural teacher education includes research that examines the classroom practices of successful teachers in diverse classrooms. While most of this literature has focused on effective practice with African-American students (Foster, 1993, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994), a parallel literature exists in uncovering the effective practices of teachers of linguistically diverse students (Bountress, 1994; Garcia, 1991; Hornberger, 1990; Moll, 1988). This work is succeeding in building a rich data base and case knowledge of teaching that examines instructional practices in different contexts and for diverse kinds of learners. One significant finding that emerges from a review of this research, is that more research is needed on effective approaches for developing expert teachers who are committed to working with diverse student populations.

The research reported on in this article was designed to investigate the development of teachers who are committed to using literacy in strategic ways to effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse students. This research draws on activity theory and shows promise of increasing our understanding of the types of activities that need to occur in teacher education programs to facilitate the development of teachers who are interested in working with our nations' fastest growing populations. As teachers were exposed to strategically

designed activities in a teacher education program, this research looked at their changing discourses as they moved beyond the production of seemingly appropriate communication about theory and practice toward an internalization and synthesizing of ideas which led them to commitment that transformed their experiences as teachers. This research investigates how teachers move beyond surface level engagements with theory toward transformative engagements that lead them to take positions of reflective commitment that guided them in their efforts to become more effective teachers of our schools' most vulnerable learners.

This study is part of a larger program of research that investigates teacher education, policies and pedagogies that impact the teaching and learning of marginalized students in the US and South Africa. Structurally, the US and South Africa are both seeking ways to more effectively educate large numbers of poor, marginalized and underachieving students who are culturally and linguistically diverse and who are different from the students for whom the majority of instructional materials and school expectations are tailored. Having experienced similar histories of social, economic and educational inequalities in the education of marginalized populations, both countries now perceive the state of education for economically disadvantaged populations to be in crisis. With an end to official forms of social and economic segregation and a need for massive reconstruction of their educational systems, both countries have the potential to learn a great deal and to teach others a great deal as they strive to prepare teachers for diversity in a global society.

1. Activity theory

I draw on the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Leont'ev (1981) to build a theoretical frame that can help to explain teachers' developing commitment and how those developing commitments are revealed in their oral and written discourses as they consider issues of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. Activity theory is an outgrowth of the work of Soviet psychologist, Vygotsky (1978) and his colleagues Leont'ev (1981)

and Luria (1981). Activity theory can be useful in our consideration of this topic since a major tenet of this theory as elaborated by Leont'ev (1981) is that the appropriate unit of analysis for the study of human behavior and developing cognition is a dynamically organized system of activity through which humans seek to accomplish their purposes. According to Leont'ev, activity is "the unit of life that is mediated by mental reflection"; he further explains that the function of this unit "is to orient the subject in the world of objects" (1981, p. 46). We understand that activities may be as diverse as work, play, imitation or education, but they all have in common the characteristics that they call for an integration of mental and behavioral processes directed at satisfying specific goals. Research conducted by Zinchenko (1962/1981) demonstrated that increased engagement with particular goal-directed actions can engender their transformation into the means for carrying out other actions. The research that I have conducted was designed to investigate whether teachers' increased engagement with strategically designed activities in a teacher education course, could engender the transformation of those activities into the means for developing commitment to teaching diverse student populations. Zinchenko's research with children and with university students demonstrated that differences in their voluntary and involuntary performances depend not only on the content and structure of the particular activity, but also on how the subject engages information in an activity — whether at the level of actions or at the level of means to carry out other action. My research with teachers in a teacher education course demonstrates that differences in their developing perspectives on literacy and the levels of commitment displayed in their developing discourses and their subsequent teaching behaviors depended on how the subjects' engaged with information in the activities planned for them in the teacher education course — whether at the level of discussion-related actions or at the level of discussions plus theory-enacting activities that provided the means or the catalyst needed to motivate them to carry out their action plans.

Three central underlying themes of activity theory are important to this investigation: the idea

that higher mental processes in individuals are originally found in social or external processes; the idea that mental processes can be understood only by understanding the tools and signs that mediate them; and the use of a developmental or genetic method of investigation in activity theory which allows us to see, describe and explain the emergence of a psychological function (Wertsch, 1981, 1991). A very important theme for Vygotsky (1981) and other researchers in activity theory, is that the higher intellectual processes are of central concern. In his investigations of higher intellectual processes, Vygotsky noted that the mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 7). He argued that there is an inherent relationship between external and internal activity, and that it is a developmental relationship in which the major issue is how external processes are transformed to create internal processes. Internalization is that process through which developing teachers move beyond positions of cognitive internalization of theory and practices toward positions of reflection and commitment (Ball, 2000). In the words of Leont'ev (1981) "the process of internalization is not the transferal of an external activity to a preexisting, internal 'plane of consciousness': it is the process in which this plane is formed" (p. 57). According to Vygotsky, developmental functions move from the social to the psychological plane: "First it appears *between* people as an interpsychological category, and then *within* the [adult or] child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition" (p. 163, emphasis added). Vygotsky's notion of internalization helps to explain the mechanisms that account for how changing perspectives on literacy and issues of diversity move from the interpsychological to the intrapsychological plane to become catalysts for developing commitment to teaching diverse students. This process of internalization can be facilitated by engagement with meaningful activities in teacher education programs.

A second critical theme in activity theory is the notion that human action is mediated by signs and tools — primarily psychological tools such as language. The facilitation of language use within

a sociocultural environment, then, is the predominant means by which people make sense or meaning. In my research, written reflections and oral discussions served this meaning-making function as the teachers in my course used reflective writing, discussions and language-based activities to confront issues of literacy and diversity in their own lives and in the teaching and learning of others. I proposed that, as teachers talked about and wrote about theory and their own authentic teaching activities in the presence of peers and supportive instructors, they would come to challenge their preconceived notions about teaching diverse student populations and would begin to stretch themselves to consider new possibilities for their future teaching environments. As they contemplated theoretical issues related to teaching for diversity and as they struggled to implement these theoretical notions in teacher research projects and in their own teaching activities, they voiced their changing perspectives in the language they used in their classroom discussions, daily journals and reflective essay writing. By analyzing these texts, I was able to better understand their mental processes (their changing perspectives and developing commitments) as I better understood the tools and signs (the language) they used to mediate them.

Finally, according to activity theory, the developmental or genetic method of investigation allows us to see, describe and explain the emergence of psychological functions. Vygotsky felt that any phenomenon could be captured through studying its origin and development. His insistence on using a developmental or genetic analysis when examining human mental functions meant that, for him, the major route to understanding the mind was to specify the origin of mental functions and the transformations they have undergone as they develop. Thus, activity theory asks us to look at what is uniquely human in behavior and to trace its emergence. The uniquely human behavior that I investigate is the emergence of commitment to teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. I investigate that process by focusing on the activities that took place in my teacher education course and noting the emerging discourse practices that develop as a result of the teachers' engagements in that course — since the development of higher mental

functions takes place first on an external plane before they become internalized. Drawing on the developmental method used in activity theory, I observed the teachers' initial conceptions as well as their developing commitment as psychological processes. Rather than focusing on activities that engage students in teacher education programs at an intellectual level or at an environmental level, activity theory holds that human activities encompass the mutual construction of both — at a social as well as a psychological or cognitive level. As we plan to provide experiences in teacher education programs that accomplish the goal of helping teachers to develop commitment and preparing teachers for diversity, we must realize that, according to Scribner and Beach, “that which is experienced socially is cognitively re-experienced in a newly reorganized form...” (1993). Thus, we must focus on providing activities that engage teachers at a social as well as a psychological or cognitive level.

2. The study

This research was designed to investigate how teachers move beyond surface level engagements with theory and best practices in teacher education programs toward transformative engagements that lead them to take positions of reflective commitment that can guide them in their decisions to become effective teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. To address this phenomenon, I collected the oral and written texts of over one hundred US and South African teachers that I taught over a three period-year. The oral and written texts that I collected were written by these US and South African teachers to reflect their developing perspectives on literacy and teaching during a course that I taught them. The data included the teachers' narrative essays of their own literacy experiences, transcripts of classroom discussions, journal entries, and reflections they wrote in response to carefully selected course readings and course experiences. I hypothesized that, as teachers are exposed to strategically designed readings and activities within a teacher education program, their perspectives on literacy and commitments to teach-

ing diverse student populations would be affected in positive ways. The research was designed to explore how teachers' developing perspectives and commitments can be facilitated by particular classroom activities and how those developing perspectives and commitments are revealed in their discourse.

2.1. Methodology

Building on my previous research that provided teachers with a knowledge base and strategies for teaching students who speak non-prestige varieties of English (Ball, 1992, 1995a, b, 1998), this study investigates US and South African teachers' changing perspectives on what it means for a person to be literate and reveals evidences of their developing commitment. These US and South African teachers were exposed to a course which I designed to give them opportunities to consider the role and function of literacies in their lives and the lives of others and to consider how literacies could be used strategically to teach diverse students more effectively. The course introduced developing teachers to a range of theoretical frameworks that undergird effective teaching of diverse students and provided students a safe environment where they could question their preconceived notions about literacy and its use in teaching all students more effectively. A few weeks into the course, the students were required to read and reflect on a number of short theoretical texts on topics of diversity, literacy and teacher research. In one of these articles, Au defines literacy as “the ability and the willingness to use reading and writing to construct meaning from printed text, in ways which meet the requirements of a particular social context” (1993, p. 20). According to Au, literacy should be perceived as follows:

[It] Should be redefined to highlight the study of multicultural literature, instructional practices that involve an active process of meaning-making, writing instruction that makes students' background experiences central, culturally responsive instruction, and the development of critical literacy. (1994, p. 34)

Au rejects transmission models of school literacy which focus heavily on low-level skills such as decoding, spelling and grammar (1994, p. 30). Instead, she emphasizes a constructivist epistemology which places meaning-making and socially useful literacy at the center of all teaching and learning. Au's definition illustrates the view of literacy as "a social process, in which particular socially constructed technologies are used within particular institutional frameworks for specific social purposes" (1994, p. 97).

A second text that students considered was an extract from Richard-Amato and Snow (1992) on "The Multicultural Classroom". The text was written explicitly to mainstream US educators faced with "language minority students", a situation applicable to many of the South African teachers who teach in multilingual classrooms. The text was useful for drawing content area teachers' attention to cultural considerations, providing strategies for content area teachers of students at different language proficiency levels, and proposing a process approach to writing instruction when working with multicultural students.

Students were given extracts from Genesee's book, *Educating Second Language Children* (1994), to read. Of particular interest were Hudelson's chapter on literacy development of second language children, which echoes Au in its constructivist, meaning-centered social practices approach to literacy, and Hamayan's chapter on "Language development of low-literacy students". Based on her work with low-literacy learners, Hamayan advocates "a well-planned combination of holistic meaningful instruction with a systematic focus on the formal aspects of the structure of language", i.e., a combination of whole language and phonics approaches (1994, p. 287). Additional readings were based on the works of Vygotsky (1978), Bakhtin (1981), McElroy-Johnson (1993), Giroux (1988) and others. The text by McElroy-Johnson cautioned teachers that it would be difficult for them to assist students in developing a voice if they had not yet developed a voice of their own, while Giroux challenged teachers to become "Transformative Intellectuals". In his article, Giroux speaks of his concern with "harnessing this language of critique to a language of possibility in order to develop

alternative teaching practices that are capable of shattering the logic of domination both within and outside of schools". Reading the works of Giroux and others served to ignite thoughtful discussions in our course — not only about re-creating teacher education programs, but also about recreating their own classrooms so they

are committed to articulating a language that can contribute to examining the realm of ... education as a new public sphere, one that seeks to recapture the idea of critical democracy as a social movement for individual freedom and social justice ... that define student teachers as intellectuals who will establish public spaces where students can debate, appropriate, and learn the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve that individual freedom and social justice. (1988, p. 167)

As most teachers enter teacher education programs, they bring with them very limited perspectives on what literacy is, what it means for a person to be literate, and ways that they can strategically use literacies to more effectively teach content area materials to students from diverse backgrounds such that all students have access to educational success. Linked to these limited views, is the fact that many of these teachers have also given very little thought to teaching students who are different from themselves or who have had different literacy histories from their own. It was hoped that through engagements with strategically designed course readings and activities (activities that included in-class exchanges, teacher research projects and teaching in actual classrooms), teachers enrolled in my course would begin to give serious consideration to the possibility of using literacies in strategic ways to teach diverse students. One indicator of these serious considerations would be the teachers' expressions of broadening perspectives about the definitions and uses of literacies in the oral and written texts they produced.

2.2. *Analysis of data*

Analysis of the data took place in two parts: (1) a macro-analysis of the changing perspectives of

100 US and South African teachers who participated in the study concerning what does it mean for a person to be literate; and (2) a micro-analysis of the literacy histories and reflective writings of a smaller subset of the 100 teachers to determine emerging themes that reflected their developing commitment through their changing discourse practices. In addition to narrative essays, literacy autobiographies, journals, and small group discussions, I collected the initial definitions of literacy from the teachers when they entered the course, as well as the evolving definitions of literacy as they approached the culmination of the course from all 100 teachers in my cross-national study. Interviews and video tapes which illustrated the teachers' implementation of theoretical principles as they worked with diverse students were also collected from a subset of these 100 teachers. For the macro-analysis, the teachers' initial and evolving definitions of literacy were tallied, categorized and summarized in Tables 1 and 2 to provide an overview of

the teachers' changing perspectives concerning literacies over the course of the term.

2.3. Findings

Near the beginning of the course, and prior to any engagement with literacy theory, all 100 teachers were asked to write down their own definitions of a literate person. In Tables 1 and 2 are summaries of the US and South African teachers' initial definitions of a literate person and their evolving definitions collected at the end of the course.

As can be seen from Table 1, among the US and South African teachers the highest number of definitions of a literate person before their exposure to the course were limited to the ability of individuals to communicate using reading, writing and oral language with little other qualifications. Fewer teachers conceptualized a literate person as one who used other mediums to communicate effectively.

Table 1
Teachers' initial definitions of literacy

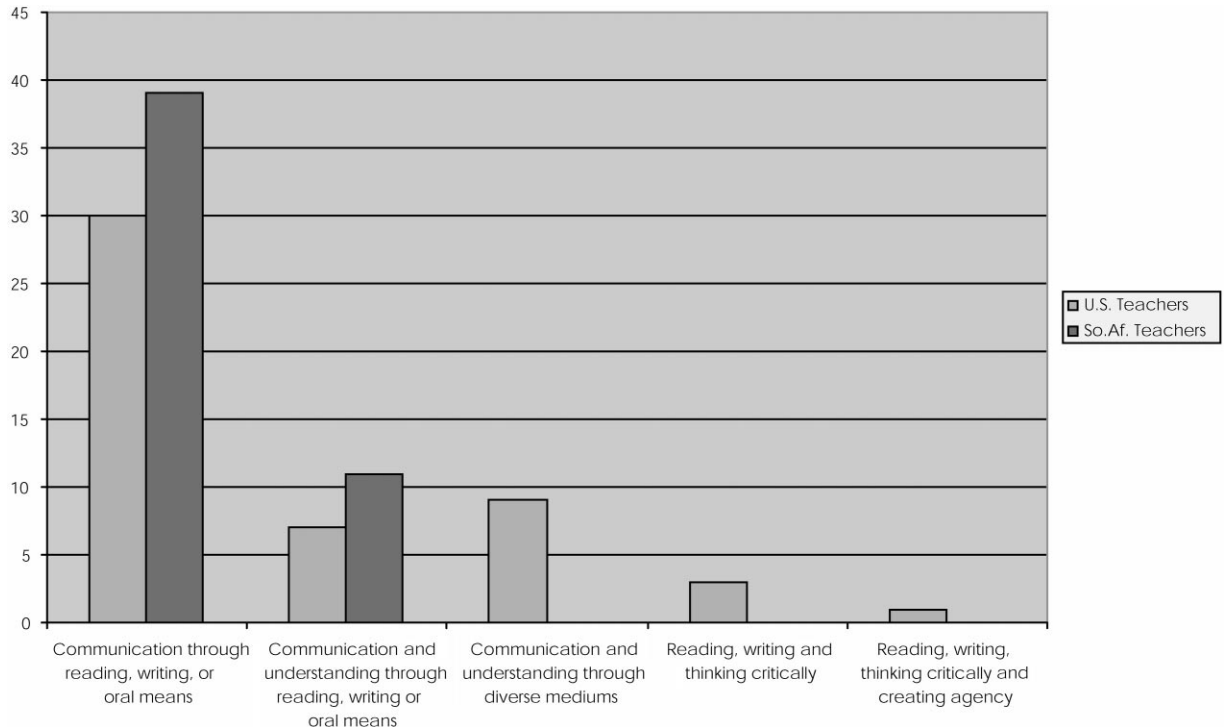
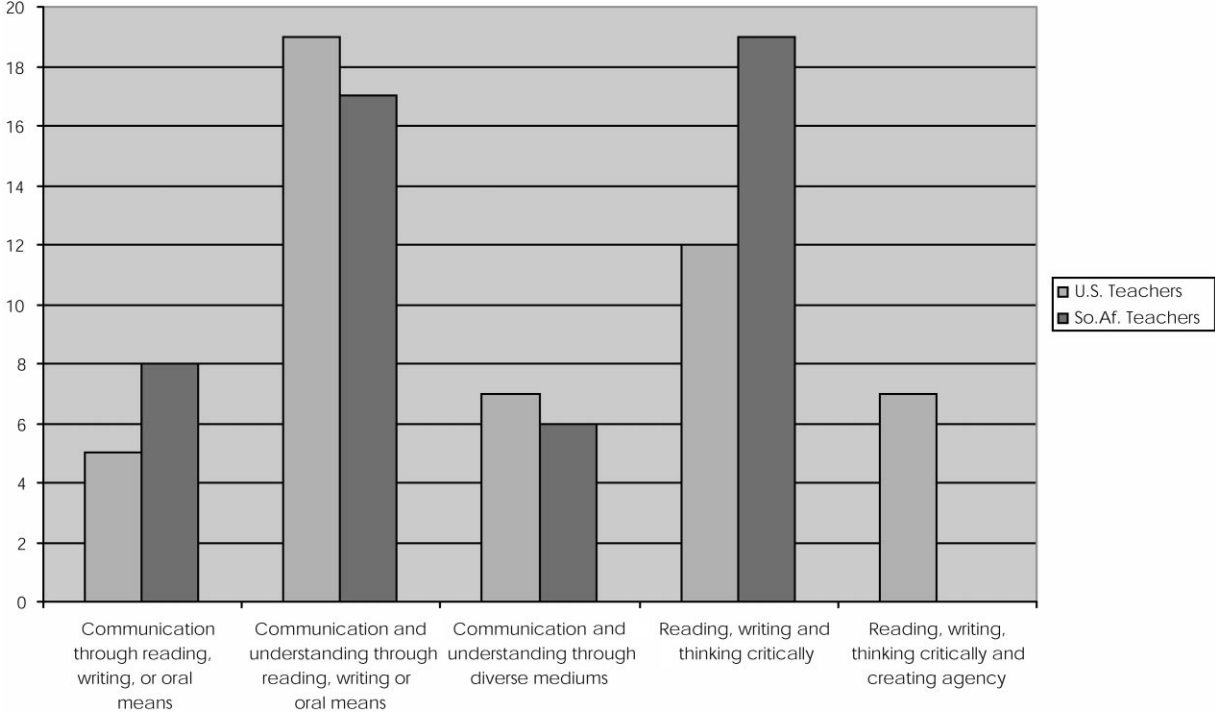


Table 2
Teachers’ post-definitions of literacy



Only one of the US teachers conceptualized the complexities of literacies to include such entities as critical agency in one’s life. Clearly, the majority of these teachers viewed literacies in simplistic terms that were quite limited. In their initial definitions, the majority of the teachers who regarded literacy simplistically as “using reading, writing and oral language” are illustrative of the “autonomous model” of literacy in which literacy is conceptualized in simplistic technical terms, treating it as independent of social context (Street, 1993, p. 5). From this perspective, reading and writing become a technology of forms to be mastered by repetition and drill, in which the issues of *meaning* and *social context* are secondary at best. This practice is particularly debilitating for diverse students and is pervasive in novice teachers’ views of literacy. It is reflective of their limited perspectives on how they might consider using a broad range of literacies to facilitate successful teaching and learning of content area materials to a wide range of students.

Table 2 represents the teachers’ evolving definitions of literacy after their exposure to the course activities and theoretical perspectives. Reading the US teachers’ literacy definitions, I noted that many of them were very interested in the notion of critical literacy by the end of the course. Comparing Tables 1 and 2 reveal that few of the pre-existing US definitions mentioned critical thinking in contrast to a large number of the post-definitions that addressed it. The same trend is apparent with the South African teachers. None of the South African teachers mentioned critical thinking in their pre-existing definitions, whereas many of the post-definitions mentioned it. Several of the teachers indicated their desire to assist their students in acquiring a voice, and they expressed the belief that critical literacy was an important tool for helping their students to acquire a voice. The similarity between the US and South African teachers’ post-definitions was that both groups seem to give responses that suggest that their definitions of

literacy had broadened and their course activities had greatly expanded their conceptualizations of literacy to include a wider variety of mediums.

The goal of the course was to facilitate teachers' considerations about how literacies can be used in strategic ways to more effectively teach their content area materials to all students — including diverse students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The results of the macro-level analysis of the data suggest that these teachers were beginning to broaden their understanding of the many different ways that an individual can be considered literate and their different ways of expressing that literacy. Certainly, Tables 1 and 2 give evidence of the teachers' changing perspectives concerning literacies over time, however, it is not clear from this data whether the teachers' engagements with the readings and activities in the course facilitated the development of commitment to teaching diverse students as well.

In my readings of the teachers' reflective writings, I noted that the teachers discussed more explicitly how their perceptions of literacy had changed and how, as these perceptions changed, their considerations about teaching diverse students changed as well. At the end of the course, many of the teachers were using words like “expansion”, “appreciation”, and “respect” in their expanded definitions and reflective writings where these terms had not appeared in their initial definitions. Whereas the teachers initially thought of literacy as simply being able to read and write or as a “skill”, many of their later perspectives on literacy referred to “an understanding”, “an appreciation”, and “an active thinking process”. Furthermore, in their reflective writings, many of the teachers discussed action plans and strategies that they would use in their classrooms to teach diverse populations.

As I analyzed the extended writings of these teachers, I noticed that there was a difference in some teachers' expressions that indicated the development of commitment among teachers who engaged in talk-related activities in my course versus those teachers who engaged in talk-related activities in addition to theory-enacting activities within actual classrooms. As I looked for indicators of developing commitment on the part of these teachers, the articulation of specific action plans

and strategies that these teachers intended to implement in their classrooms was an important notion since commitment is defined as “the act of taking on the charge, obligation or trust to carry out some action or policy; to make a decisive moral choice that involves a person in a definite course of action” (Webster's Dictionary, 1986). In the section that follows, I share the literacy histories and reflective writings of four teachers in my course as they discuss their evolving perspectives on literacy and action plans for their future teaching. These teachers' shared reflections on the readings and activities that they encountered during the course that helped to alter their philosophies on literacy and their thoughts about their future teaching. Two of these teachers shared reports on how encounters with theoretical readings and activities were used as a vehicle (or catalyst) that helped them to consider the challenges of teaching different students, while two of the teachers do not. These writings help to reveal the mechanisms that stimulate internal activity and change as developing teachers considered changing their perspectives on teaching in diverse schools. Building on Vygotsky's notion of the developmental or genetic method, these data are shared with the assumption that teachers' self reports have value and that they can be used to help capture the cognitive and psychological processes that teachers experience. In their own words, all of the teachers have asserted that they have gained a broader understanding, appreciation and respect for the conceptualizations of what it means to be literate, while only some of them have begun to embark on an active and decisive plan of action that includes diversity.

2.4. Taking a closer look at four case studies

In this Section, I report on the case studies of four participants, two American and two South African teachers who were enrolled in my teacher education course. All four of these teachers were from middle-class backgrounds. The two American teachers are Chris, a European American male in his early twenties and Niko, an Asian American female, also in her early twenties. The two South African students are Melanie, a female of English

descent in her early twenties, and Irene, a female in her mid-twenties who at one time had been considered a “coloured” in South Africa. I will trace these teachers’ discourses that show evidence of developing commitment, or lack thereof, in their reflections on the course readings and discussions of their participation in course activities.

Chris was a European American student who came from a middle-class community in the mid-western United States. As he describes it

I grew up in an upper middle class area, and went to an upper class high school. I admit, I did not fully realize the differences until I did my pre-student teaching experience here in a working class area. Though not an inner city school, this school had its problems, and did hold true to many of the characterizations that our readings pointed out. However, I do believe that many of the characterizations that Anyon (1981) discussed were exaggerated and drawn out.

From the first day of class, Chris was resistant to the new ideas that were being presented. Although a very intelligent student, Chris found reasons for rejecting many of the ideas presented in the readings.

Anyon’s findings on schools and social class did not surprise me. Anyone who has been exposed to schools in areas of varying social class could tell you that the students in the wealthier schools will have higher aspirations, more parental support, and access to more facilities. However, I was initially shocked by how vast the differences were. Actually, I am not quite convinced that Anyon did not choose to select statements from students or teachers, sharp on select issues, or do her best to illustrate the point she was trying to make ... The other articles that I read this week did not sink in as much as I had hoped. Again, I found most of them either rehashing old arguments, or cluttering my brain with technical theories that I found difficult to understand, impractical, and out of touch with my perceived role as a classroom teacher.

Chris fits the description of a novice teacher who comes to the teacher education program with limited conceptions about teaching diverse students, but who is resistant to opening up to new ideas. Chris’ initial definition of a literate person was “someone who is able to read and write”. After his exposure to the readings in the course, Chris described his evolving definition as follows:

Perhaps the change has been too gradual to notice, but I have only incorporated 2 ideas thus far that are different from what I originally intended. I plan on implementing the I-Search assignment as a form of building literacy, and I have enjoyed Vygotsky’s work and will keep it in mind as I teach. I also enjoyed the theory of constructivism. That is mainly due to the fact that I previously held ideas very similar to that of constructivism, and therefore already intended its use, only in my own terms. However, I will admit that reading the particular theory of constructivism, I became more familiar with the terms in which it is explained.

In my early renderings of this course, students were given the option to participate in interactive, activity-based assignments in our class, i.e., teacher research projects, classroom teaching or tutoring activities, or to participate in more individualized assignments that could involve less interactivity with diversity, i.e., multi-media projects or theoretical reports. Chris was one of the students that chose to participate in the less interactive projects. In addition, Chris was not very open to sharing his ideas or considering the ideas of others during class discussions. This lack of openness to considering the ideas of others was expressed in his journal writing as well:

... Finally, the remaining readings, especially the Bakhtin article, failed to teach me anything. In fact, I read the article, attempted to summarize it, read it again, and could not remember a thing I read. Therefore, I will not bore you with quotes from the article, since the point of this assignment, I assume, is to show understanding of the reading, which I have not gained. I feel extremely out of touch with the material

presented, and fail to see how it fits in with my teaching concept. I realize that my concept of teaching is my own, and is probably not like that of the instructors, or classmates. I feel as though I am reading articles written by University professors who have lost touch with the common folk ... I am having great difficulty motivating myself to read the material, and when I do, I either fail to understand it fully because of the fact that I quickly lose interest, or I have to re-read to find the point of the article.

This student's comments on his readings of a wide range of informative articles, help us to understand how teachers can graduate from very good teacher education programs and yet lack the knowledge needed to become excellent teachers of diverse students. Darling-Hammond (1992) notes that many of these underprepared teachers lack the knowledge needed to guide the development of their students, and they are less likely to see it as their responsibility to identify and meet the needs of their students. She further notes that, all too often, these teachers blame their students when their teaching is not successful. That reality is also voiced in this student's journal writing when he says:

I believe that the current education system works well for most students, and I believe that is an optimal level. Education is not for everyone, and not every student will respond to the same style of teaching. Someone will always have something to say about a particular method, so reaching most students is an accomplishment in itself. There will always be a need for people who dig ditches and that sort of thing, so I don't really worry about those who "fall through the cracks" by the standards of today's academicians. I will search what works best for me, and what promotes students to find and develop their interests, while attempting to explain my "core" subject matter materials. [emphasis added by student]

Chris was a student who came to the course with preconceived notions about literacy and diversity that were resistant to change. His decision to limit his engagement with the theory and activities that

were planned for him in the course, also resulted in the limited development of his perspectives on literacy and the levels of commitment displayed in his developing discourses.

Niko was an Asian American student who came from a middle-class community in the midwestern United States. In describing her early literacy experiences she notes that "I was always taught in a positive atmosphere ... I had a positive experience of empathetic and understanding teachers who sincerely desired to help make my learning environment an enjoyable and productive place." During our class, Niko was an active participant. Although she seldom volunteered extended comments during large class discussions, she noted the benefits of participating in small group activities in her journal writing: "although it was difficult at first, once we got over the hump of feeling inadequate about speaking up, the students in our small group discussions were challenged there in ways that reading and writing cannot challenge you. Sometimes we were paired up with the person next to us and discussed passages, issues or situations ... On the whole, these exercises were positive learning experiences". Niko's reflections on her reading assignments revealed an openness to consider new ideas:

The article by Delpit (1988) was an extremely powerful article that challenged me personally and opened my eyes to the reality and possible struggles that I will potentially have in the future ... Delpit's conclusion that, "it is impossible to create a model for the good teacher without taking issues of culture and community context into account" (37) is very relevant. I never realized to what extent this idea holds true until reading the examples of how interpretations of authority and empowerment were interpreted by blacks as opposed to whites. My thoughts about teaching in the inner-city have forced me to consider and think about how it is that I want to approach teaching and how my concept of effective teaching may have to be altered.

Niko was a student who not only volunteered to participate in the on-line tutoring project and face-to-face mentoring activities with diverse student

populations in my class, she also engaged in her own tutoring and peer counseling activities. As she struggled to integrate the new theories and best practices that she was learning about in class into her actual teaching activities, she expressed her developing perspectives in her journal writing:

As teachers, although we have been educated as to “how to teach,” we can never really learn without experiences, circumstances that provide for different variations of what works. We need to take heed to the possibilities that the problems may reside in ourselves and not in the student. In any case, the responsibility to teach them (not only accept them) is the ideal that we need to instill in ourselves ... As I thought about how my readings inform my teaching, the idea that grabbed me most intensely was the idea that we need to “turn ourselves inside out, giving up our own sense of who we are, and being willing to see ourselves in the unflattering light of another’s angry gaze” (46). More than applying this to teaching, this is something that should be applied to any and every situation. To understand our own power and not be afraid to expose our vulnerabilities and raise questions of discrimination is essential to almost every situation.

As Niko talked about and wrote about theory and her own teaching activities in the presence of peers and supportive instructors, she began to challenge her preconceived notions about teaching diverse student populations and to stretch herself to consider new possibilities for her future teaching. As she contemplated theoretical issues related to teaching for diversity and as she struggled to implement these theoretical notions in her teaching projects and activities, she voiced her changing perspectives in the language she used in the classroom discussions, daily journals and reflective essay writing.

At the beginning of the course, I defined a literate person as someone who has basic reading and writing skill in order to function in society. My revised version: A literate person is someone who can actively engage in reading materials such that critical thinking takes place along with ac-

tive appreciation of new found knowledge. Where do I begin to comment in my growth as a result of this class. Even now as I write these words, there are so many unresolved dilemmas, contradictions, questions — and I am trying to live with the worries I’ve confronted as a student who is soon to be a teacher ...

I came into this course arrogant and self assured. Critical thinking had always been my forte; it has been my natural disposition to try and search for deeper meaning and deeper truths.

I began with my personal essay about ... “what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.” And in this way I began the course, with a love for literature, arrogance from acquired knowledge, and hope for a glorious future ... Our class had engaging discussions on critical thinking, on critical reading, communicating with students, and lots of activities. And then I read an article that stated: “The life experience of teachers stem from their beliefs and belief structures ... these belief structures strongly affect the literacy practices a teacher may use...” I began to ask lots of questions: Is this a sin? Is there an escape from such personal biases? ... And from then on, my arrogance began to deflate. I began to realize my potential role within these students’ lives. I was introduced to things I had never even considered. What if my students cannot read? How will they internalize this lack of skill? Who will they become as adults? How can I change this? How can I become the teacher I want to be? ... I began trying to see through the student’s eyes, trying to remember what it was like to be like them. The readings I have done for this class have elucidated cobwebs of half thoughts and have finished solutions that had begun in my head ... In this way my thinking has evolved, going down various allies of hypotheses, analyzing potential results, and choosing what to incorporate or not to incorporate from my new research into my future practice as a teacher ... And one would think that exposure to such future scenarios of “what if” and “what to do next” would calm my anxieties. But ... I am anxious about having been ignorant and insensitive to certain students

... I am afraid to make the wrong moves just as I am excited to make the right one. But in the end, I take my future position ... as a privilege to have the opportunity to help mold the wet clay that will one day become fine art ... I do not see myself as an English teacher, but a teacher of life, an educator of human emotions, of human relationships, and human history. I believe the subject at question is not the literature but the many diverse students that I will be teaching. It is their minds that I am exploring and trying to expand.

Niko was a student who came to the course with preconceived notions about literacy and diversity that were open to new ideas and to change. Her decision to interactively engage with the theory and activities that were planned for her in the course, to participate in the on-line tutoring project, the face-to-face mentoring activities, as well as her own tutoring and peer counseling activities, served as a catalyst that helped her to seriously consider the challenges of teaching diverse students which was displayed in her developing discourse.

Melanie attended a teacher education program that was offered at a major college of teacher education located in the Guatang providence of South Africa. In describing her early literacy experiences she notes that "I was exposed to reading and writing at an early age. As far as I can remember, I was able to read before I could go to school. My Mom would always read to me and I would read it back to her. She would go through the words for recognition. I also remember that I never read comics as a child. I always read classical books. My Mom did read fairy tales which help develop my imagination." Melanie further recalled that "I always wanted to be a teacher ever since I was young. I started here at the University studying Law. Within 3–4 weeks I changed to Education ... Then, I studied some through distance education at UNISA, and now I am completing three years at the College of Education." In discussing her readings of the course materials, Melanie recalled that:

I learned a lot from the readings. I learned that according to Vygotsky, children's learning begins long before they attend school. I agree with

this statement because parents' input before children go to school stimulates them. Everything is a learning experience, e.g., children learn speech from adults. A child's learning should be taught at the child's actual level. Work that is a bit harder can be introduced to motivate/stimulate the children's potential level for learning. I also feel that collaborative learning is also important because, people learn from each other. They get different ideas and perspectives from one another ... I do agree that a teacher must have a literate classroom environment. I think children should be read to on a daily basis.

Melanie has some interesting insights into the cultural/sociological aspects of teaching. She states that teachers need to be aware of the cultures of all of the students in the classroom in order to teach them each most effectively. She seems to really identify with Vygotsky's points, and emphasizes the point that children should be surrounded by literature and should be free to explore their interests. Although Melanie learned a great deal from the readings, she is also very aware of the limitations that teachers face in terms of curricular decisions in South Africa.

In Sarah Hudleson's (1994) article, many of her strategies seem unrealistic in the South African schools. With the strict rules that have to be followed and the strict adherence to the syllabus, new teachers cannot go out and change the world until the top officials who dictate change have changed their attitudes. Then and only then will the new teachers who have wonderful ideas be able to incorporate their ideas. This will not work for me, because, for me, teaching is a personal thing. I feel that a teacher knows her own students, and she knows what work best in her own classroom.

Melanie was very aware of the limitations that teachers face in terms of curriculum. Melanie seemed frustrated by the limitations that she felt would be imposed upon her as a teacher (i.e., she would not be able to structure her future classroom and her curriculum as she wished) and, as a result, she was not a very active participant in the course

activities. When I questioned her about her lack of active participation, she explained that it was due to several frustrations that she was experiencing. Melanie explained that, as South African classrooms have become increasingly diverse, she had begun to question her commitment to teaching. She further explained that, in many cases, there are now large mismatches between the economic, social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the students and their teachers. So drastic have been the changes in the education system in South Africa that many preservice teachers like Melanie have decided to abandon teaching as a career because of what they feel is poor preservice preparation for the emerging challenges that face teachers and because they feel that the job provides too few rewards in relation to its responsibilities. Melanie says:

Education in my country is changing at such a rate and has changed very much from when I was a young student at school. If I were to be honest with myself, I know that I do not want to be a teacher for the rest of my life ... Since the beginning of this year I decided I did not want to teach anymore ... I do not want to teach because there is not enough money in teaching. I have set my ambitions on other things. I would like to write children's books or make children's educational videos. I do still like children, but I do not feel I could cope with a classroom situation all the time ... My life has changed drastically this year, so I feel I will not teach even when I qualify. The qualifying papers are just a piece of paper behind my name ... I am going into a business with a friend. Currently, I have no motivation to teach.

Irene attended a teacher education program that was offered at a major university located in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Although the university offered a traditional teacher education program, Irene was enrolled in a course for current teachers who were seeking further certification in a Further Diploma in Education program. This teacher education program was designed to prepare teachers to teach in multilingual and multicultural schools. Irene was a beginning teacher who lived and taught in an area of the

city that had been designated as a living area for "colours" during the former South African system of apartheid. Irene came from a middle-class background. In describing her early literacy experiences she notes that

My childhood was always centered around my mom and the school she taught at, the same school I am teaching at. She was always busy with this play or that stage production ... I remember memorizing songs and scripts. It wasn't long before I was going to Speech and Drama ... and ballet ... Now I realize that this background has quite a bit to do with who I am and how I think about things today.

Irene had always wanted to be a teacher. She explains, "I never actually thought about any occupation other than teaching. One could say I was socialized into it. I came from a family of teachers, my Mother, Father, Brother." Irene was an active participant in my course. Not only did she actively participate in the large and small group class discussions, but she completed the daily activities and assignments, the teacher research project, and she integrated the theories and best practices that she was learning into her classroom teaching on a daily basis. As she completed her readings, she shared her thoughts on how students should be treated in the classroom: that there should be, "Equality, mutual respect for all learners and their languages and culture." She also expressed her desire to create a multilingualism and multiculturalism environment, "by respecting my learners, who they are and where they come from".

Irene articulated that she felt that it was her responsibility as a teacher to go beyond simply standing in the front of the classroom and transferring knowledge from herself to the students. Irene felt that her role as a teacher is to be a "friend, confidant, counselor, social worker, mother, father, doctor and nurse". This statement shows that Irene is willing to go above and beyond the role of a traditional teacher to give all aspects of herself to her students.

After reading McElroy-Johnson and articles on critical reading and critical thinking in the course, Irene wrote in her reflective journal that she wants

her students to be independent thinkers and to develop their own voice. She expressed what she wants for her students in her classroom:

I don't want little robots, (I want) to allow my kiddies to talk, to have the space to experiment, to grow, to think for themselves, to pose questions, then to seek more questions, to look at themselves, to help themselves, to speak out for themselves. I want to free my kiddies from what has been, to allow them to be whatever they want to be. I want my students to develop their voice because I, through a series of lectures in this course, am now once again believing in my own voice.

This shows that Irene, like Melanie, also understands that the South African educational system of the past was tremendously limiting and stifling for many South African students. However, rather than become frustrated and decide to leave teaching, Irene has come to realize that it is now her responsibility as a teacher to step in and aid in the rebuilding of the minds of the children who had once been told they were inferior and unable to succeed.

Irene's definition of literacy evolved to one that included the ability to "critically analyze, critically discuss, communicate visually, verbally and via script", as well as one that "also takes into consideration the cultural background of the students. Literacy also involves the ability to voice out your thoughts orally and ... to interpret what your surroundings or environment look like. Knowing and realizing the imbalances of the society". Irene stated that this growth in her view of literacy was directly correlated to her attendance in this course and now she feels that she "needs to make a stand for what she believes literacy is". When asked to write an essay about her most meaningful learning experience, Irene talked about this course as her most memorable learning experience. She wrote that,

Ironically my most important learning did not come about when I was an early learner but rather when I became an educator. It has not been a single event, but rather a series of events.

It did not occur in the past but rather the present. What I am currently experiencing in this course is my most memorable learning experience. This whole course is having such a profound experience on me; it is changing me socially, emotionally and intellectually. I've learned that despite 'the system', I can and want to change my teaching ... since joining this course I was instilled with new ideas about my approach to tackle and develop literacy in my class. Yet, it frustrates me as well. I want to change and develop so fast, and yet, time pressures won't allow me to do all I want to do. I want more. I want to institute so much more, but time limits me. I say this is my most memorable learning experience because it has instilled in me the desire to keep learning, and I know that this will influence my little kiddies.

This shows that for Irene the course activities have had a phenomenal impact on her, and have greatly helped her to gain the strength needed to go out and be an active agent of change in a system that desperately needs restructuring. Irene clearly indicates that she feels the course has armed her with the essentials she needs to go out into the system and "make waves". She confesses, "I know that as much as I don't want to make waves, waves are a part of the nature of events. Having recognized that I need to make a stand for what I believe literacy is, I am far more relaxed. The frustration has eased". Irene left my course with this commitment. As a teacher, she went out into the South African school system determined to make the waves that would better the lives of her South African students. A few years later, I received a letter from Irene that said the following:

Dear Arnetha:

It was such a wonderful surprise to hear from you ... I have since moved from ——— [my prior school appointment]. I left soon after our course ended. In finding my voice in your class, I also found my independence. My former school was a very safe environment, so safe that it would have stifled me eventually. That to me was too dangerous, I could not risk that ... That year,

I applied for another post and was hired to bring transformation in my new school ... The school then was the last bastion of Apartheid. It certainly made for an extremely interesting ride. I was right there at the cutting edge of transformation ... the children had been exposed to hate and prejudice ... But, through hard work, patience and lots of love we have brought the children together. It is wonderful to see them so close, when 7 months ago they would have nothing to do with each other. Similarly it has been a wonderful experience to see each child find their own voice. ... I am enjoying myself, but I must admit that it is quite stressful ... [My school] is by no means an easy environment to work in, it is too fraught with prejudice and misunderstanding. I suppose that is to be expected since we are still trying to come to terms and understand all that has happened in this country, it still makes for an interesting learning experience. One thing is sure I will never be quite the same after this experience. Thank you for your class! Regards and best wishes, Irene

According to Vygotskian theory, human thought is constructed during activities based upon a dialectic between instruction and development, with instruction defined as any directive that elicits activity and development as the reorganization of consciousness through that activity. Perhaps, for Chris and Melanie, when they made the decision not to totally engage in the course activities, they were also reflecting a decision not to engage with committing to teach diverse students at this time in their life. For Niko and Irene, new thoughts and perspectives were constructed during their engagement with the activities that took place in my course. These new thoughts and perspectives served as a catalyst to help them consider broadened possibilities for their teaching. This research demonstrates that differences in the developing perspectives on literacy and the levels of commitment displayed in the developing discourses of teachers depended on how the subjects engaged with information and the activities planned for them in a teacher education course — whether at the level of discussion-related actions or at the level of discussions plus theory-enacting activities.

Leont'ev asserts that

human psychology is concerned with the activity of concrete individuals, which takes place either collectively — i.e., jointly with other people — or in a situation in which the subject deals directly with the surrounding world of objects — e.g., at the potter's wheel or the writer's desk ... if we remove human activity from the system of social relationships and social life, it would not exist ... (pp. 46–47)

Leont'ev emphasized the notion that intellectual activity, such as engagement with theory in teacher education programs, is not isolated from practical activity, which includes ordinary daily activity as well as activities that are generally counted as intellectual. In the case of Niko and Irene, the intellectual activity plus the interactive classroom activities served as the catalyst needed to motivate them to carry out their action plans. This notion is particularly germane to considerations of literacy socialization on the part of developing teachers. As preservice and practicing teachers come into teacher education programs with their own literacy histories, they should not only discuss ideas interactively, challenge pre-existing assumption, write about and read new information. They should also be given an abundance of opportunities to struggle with the realities of implementing those theories through teacher research and classroom teaching and for reflection on theories and practice within a supportive, yet challenging, learning context. Thus, their learning becomes intellectual as well as activity-based. This activity occurs with the support of instructors as more knowledgeable others, with exemplary teachers, and with peers who challenge them to question preconceived notions and to imagine new possibilities for teaching. Scribner (1968) said that these types of "... social processes function as mediating mechanisms in psychological change and development...". The participants in my teacher education course who chose to actively engage in the social processes allowed those processes to function as mediating mechanisms for psychological and cognitive change and development to occur.

3. Conclusions

Educational reformers are challenging teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to work effectively with students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. This article reports on a cross-national study that investigates a course designed to facilitate the development of teachers who are committed to teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. It presents an analysis of US and South African teachers' discourses that revealed differences in the development of commitment among teachers who engaged in talk-related activities in a teacher education course versus those teachers who engaged in talk-related activities in addition to theory-enacting activities within diverse classrooms.

In this article, I have drawn on a rich data base of oral and written texts produced by US and South African teachers to provide examples of the definitions and themes that emerge in teachers' discourses as they consider issues of teaching poor, marginalized and underachieving students. I began by making the case that presenting this investigation could help us better understand how applications of activity theory can assist us in addressing the global challenges that face teacher education programs. To conclude, I want to summarize key points or substantive issues that emerged from this investigation concerning the preparation of teachers to teach diverse students. These issues point to some of the possibilities of activity theory in teacher educational research.

- The analysis of the data revealed a quantitative and qualitative difference in the teachers' pre- and post-definitions of literacy which suggested that teachers' definitions had broadened after the course; teachers were beginning to expand their understanding of the many different ways that an individual can be considered literate and different ways of expressing that literacy.
- This research demonstrates that differences in teachers' developing perspectives on literacy and their levels of commitment depended on how the teachers engaged with information and the activities planned for them in my teacher education course — whether at the level of discussion-

related activities or at the level of discussions plus theory enacting activities.

- Teachers reported that changes occurred in their considerations about literacy and levels of commitment when they chose to actively engage in social processes in the course which functioned as mediating mechanisms for psychological and cognitive change and development. Teachers should therefore be given an abundance of opportunities to struggle with theory as well as the realities of implementing theories through reflection, teacher research and classroom teaching within a supportive, yet challenging, learning context.

For decades, educators and linguists have examined the importance of language and its impact on education (Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1983; Foster, 1987). What these studies have in common are their attention to speech events and performative aspects of language and how they relate to teaching and learning. A next step that is needed is the development of approaches that can assist us in assessing the effectiveness of teacher education programs in preparing teachers for working with diverse students. These approaches should concern themselves not only with issues of classroom practices, but with issues of how classroom practices can facilitate teachers' movement toward positions of reflective commitment to teaching diverse student populations.

In the midst of discussions on the improvement of teacher education programs, little has been done to explore the use of discourse analysis as a tool to help us gauge the effectiveness of programs in their efforts to prepare teachers for today's changing school demographics. This article presents an analysis of US and South African teachers' discourses as an investigative site. Through an analysis of their discourse, I explore how teachers' developing commitment is facilitated when intellectual activity is coupled with interactive participation in carefully designed classroom activities and show how those developing commitments are revealed in the teachers' discourse practices. My intent in presenting this investigation is to help us consider ways that discourse analysis can be used to reflect the effectiveness of our efforts to develop more teachers who are committed to teaching *all* students.

Through this article I hope to bring attention to the need for the development and support of teachers not only in the US, but across national boundaries, who are preparing to teach the world's poor, marginalized and underachieving populations. By better understanding the processes by which teachers' commitment to issues of diversity can be facilitated, we can gain greater insight into the development of pedagogical approaches that will help instructors design more effective teacher education programs and help teachers understand how they grow to become agents of change within current reform efforts to improve our nations' schools.

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