

## Chapter 7

### THE TAPESTRY OF RELATIONSHIPS

#### Looking at the Relationships Between Students and Families

In this chapter, I finish filling in the background of the tapestry by looking at the overall context of the case whose parameters include all the students and all the families who have participated in the program to date. These data are presented in vignettes that highlight interesting phenomena which emerged from the participants in the course to date. These student and Latino voices help the reader understand the passions and relationships that have kept the class vital. I also present the dissonant voices that had to be dealt with in different ways. Thus the reader can realize that despite the strength and positive aspects of the course, there were certain obstacles that had to be overcome.

The voices in this chapter represent participants who span the five semesters of the course, beginning with Tom whose flourishing philosophical statement summed up the tone for the course in its initial semester, and ending with the voices of preservice teachers who recommended that CTB should be required for all students who plan to teach ESL. In the vignettes, I have chosen to look at a variety of situations, ranging from heritage speakers to non-Spanish majors as a way of allowing the reader a glimpse at the diversity of students whose experiences have provided a rich background for this study. These vignettes are not presented in depth; I have chosen to examine selected aspects of relationships that veered away from the norm in some manner. The format of my interpretive and clarifying voice appearing in italics continues from the last chapter. In the final chapter, I present the general findings that resulted from the vignettes in the form of implications for programmatic change or for further study.

The relationships and experiences referred to in this chapter provide the reader with the opportunity to examine the class from its inception to the semester following the semester of data collection, not in detail, but in broad, sweeping strokes. The reader can thus examine the possibilities, responsibilities, and ramifications of a service-learning course situated in the Latino community.

### *Preparing the Canvas*

The first semester was experimental; I was teaching a course like no other I had ever taught, and the students were taking a course that was similarly unique to their university experience. On the syllabus, I stated that the students would “construct their own knowledge so that it will be meaningful and applicable to their own projects and goals, thereby granting them ownership of the class and its outcome” (see Appendix H). True to that promise, we worked together to decide how to proceed; the students were instrumental in shaping the class. I did not realize how the students felt about the co-construction process until Kristine, who repeated the course twice, commented in her second transformation paper that she missed the student involvement in planning the course the second time. At that point, all the theory I had read about students perceiving themselves as stakeholders and assuming ownership of their learning became real and pertinent to me, contextualized as it was in this student’s voice.

### *The Dynamics of the Course*

Each semester was completely different from the others, and I believe that difference resided in the personalities that made up the class and the families as well as the personal lives of both. In teaching a course in language, literature, or Foreign Language Education Methods; the foundation of the course is provided by the texts and student interaction with the texts. Each class has a personality, and some classes are more exciting than others, based on that collective personality. However, most classes are self-contained, offering little or no outside interaction between the instructor and the students except for specified appointments to discuss class material or grades.

CTB, however, is a different matter. In a sense, all the participants involved in the course are also text, including the instructor. There is constant interaction among the students, the families, and the instructor, resulting in a class that is rich in relationships. We all change positions from time to time, but the links that exist between us are always present. At times the relationships are focused on only two of the groups: Latinos and students, Latinos and instructor, or students and instructor, but the links continue to be present, whether in bold or pastel threads.

For example, when we are in class, the students and I are the bold threads, but since much of the class dialogue revolves around the families, they are ever present with us, albeit in pastel threads. When the students are with their families, the focus is on those two groups; when I am with the Latinos, our relationship is the focus. Nonetheless, any time that two of the groups are together, the third group is present in spirit. On the syllabus, I include my home phone and my cell phone, because I know that I may be needed at any time for information or for assistance. The students and the families both know that I am accessible for emergencies at any time of night or day. They also feel free to come by my office at any time. It is not uncommon for students to come to my office to have lunch or to ask for advice about seeking information for their families. In class, the discussion ranges from the academic to the most personal sharing about Self or about the families, usually contextualized in the theme of the week. From the outset of the class, the agreement is that the information shared in class does not leave the room. All of these elements create a course that is different from most.

*Community in the classroom.* Because of the personal, intimate nature of the class, the sense of community tends to be strong. The students often comment on the relationships they develop with each other, relationships that do not occur in other classes. They seem to bond together in close relationships I have not observed in other classes. In commenting about our workday, Magda wrote:

Last but not least, I got to know some of the other students in the class that day and they all seemed like such great people. I could see that everyone was as excited as me and it just makes me happy to know that there are so many good and caring people out there. As someone else was saying in a previous reflection, everyone is here because they want to be, not because they had to or because they needed to fulfill a requirement. We are all here to do something special to our community and I am glad I can share this wonderful experience with everyone. I think we have a great group in the service-learning class and I hope we can be there to help each other out and to share stories (Reflection, February 2, 2003). This sense of a learning community prevails throughout the semester for most of the students, creating a synergy that is not always part of the university experience.

*Learning beyond the classroom.* The students are also captivated by the fact that their education is transcending the limits of the classroom. Tom captured perfectly Dewey's (Flinders & Thornton, 1999) concept that has formed a foundation for the CTB course when he wrote his final transformation paper at the end of the first semester of the course:

I chose this service-learning class for many reasons. First of all, I have realized in the last year or so (even before I had a sneaking suspicion) that my education transcends the walls of a classroom. In fact, I realized that the majority of what I have learned in this life has come from the direct interaction with other people, listening to their stories and attempting to the soak up all the wisdom contained within. I think we are all teachers and until we understand that, we will never learn. Secondly, I simply find no reward in everyday college life; I have a desire to be productive, cultivate good, and am not satisfied by the age-old mantra that "real life" is something that eludes you until graduation. As this semester draws to a close, it is hard to look back at our time with the Martínez's as a completed project or something that could be assessed as a success or failure. These words will have different definitions and connotations depending on each group and their families. What did we want to get out of this experience, what did we think they would get out of it? I know what I expected, but I don't know how to compare that with what happened, to tell the truth. My Spanish speaking ability sky-rocketed, my understanding and compassion for the Hispanic population living in the United States has been truly born because for the first time I have been truly exposed to it. What I am trying to say I suppose, is that this experience did what any good learning experience should, it transcended the world of classrooms, standardized testing, levels and degrees of performance, the usually stale and dry relationship between student and teacher, and replaced it all with a living adventure that can not be categorized or evaluated with a check in a box. I'm not sure if that came out coherently but this class will not end at the end of the semester, nor will it's [sic] benefit end after the last test when most college kids forget why they were supposed to learn whatever was being taught to begin with. None of this will happen, because this is not a class, at least not the way we define

it now, it is community, people, emotion, frustration, life; true education that can't be separated from anything else (Transformation Paper, May 8, 2001).

Tom's eloquence expresses perfectly the impact that the class has on many students as they take learning outside the classroom. In class conversations, reflections, and transformation papers, there is constant mention of learning that is deeper because it is contextualized in a meaningful life experience.

The students also appreciate the interrelatedness of the readings they do for the class; they value the fact that they can relate them to real-life situations as was evidenced in the excerpts from the student reflections in chapter four. Each week multiple reflections express relationships contextualized in academic understanding. Whether the week's theme is "Who are the Latino Americans?" or "Identity Issues" or "Crossing the Border," the students manage to relate the readings to their families.

### *Troubling the Tapestry*

For the most part, the students who have participated in the class have been enthusiastic and committed, but there have been students whose goals and expectations did not correspond to those of the class. For a few, the commitment of the twice-a-week trip to Roanoke is difficult, and they do not fulfill the requirement for the 50 hours although they complete all the academic requirements. A few students do not complete all the readings and writings expected for the class, but at the same time, they fulfill the requirement for time spent with the families. Just as in most university courses, there have been students who fall short of the requirements, both academically and in service, but since the rubric is specifically outlined in the syllabus, they accept the responsibility. However, without fail, the student evaluations have positively indicated that the course opened their eyes to the circumstances of Latinos living in the United States.

Conversely, the majority of students each semester not only fulfill the requirement for hours in the community; they also do all the readings and write reflections, articulating what they have learned as they integrate the academic and Latino communities. Additionally, there are students whom I have to constantly remind that they need to do the work for their other classes; I emphasize that failing other courses is not an endorsement for service-learning. In other words, just as in other classes, there are

students who are not fully committed to my learning goals for the class, whereas other students far exceed my expectations.

### *Latino-Americans and Latin Americans*

One group of students who personified this dichotomy of relationships includes the Latino<sup>1</sup> heritage students who have participated in the class. For some, taking the class was cathartic and identity building; others were unable to blur the otherness that separated the recent immigrants in our program from the established situation of their own immigrant families.

The students who found the course a means of reconnecting with their roots reflected on the sense of wholeness that surfaced as they visited with their partner families and the sense of belonging to the culture their parents had not emphasized at home. Two Latina American students in particular established strong bonds with their families. The young women were different from each other, but their reflections intersected in discovering an identity about which they had previously been uncertain or unaware.

### *Smooth Threads*

*Reweaving the threads.* Deborah is a Latina-American whose parents immigrated to the United States from Chile. After a visit to her extended family in Latin America over the summer, she wanted to become as involved in the community as possible. In addition, she was preparing to be a social worker or counselor, and she thought working in the Latino community would give her added insight in working with the Latino families that she felt sure would be part of her caseload.

However, the experience of participating in CTB touched her in an unexpected way. In her first reflection, referring to her Latino heritage, she wrote, “Through this service-learning class, I hope to feel more complete than I have in the past.”

She opted to visit three different women. That particular semester there were only about fifteen students, so Deborah decided to take each woman for a shorter time so that

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<sup>1</sup> Latino American refers to a person who is of Latino heritage but who is now a resident of the United States. Latin American refers to a person who lives south of the United States border.

she could provide more ESL instruction to people who otherwise would not have had a student partner that semester. One family included Aminta, a Honduran woman with baby Cíntia, at that time less than a year old, and Arturo, four years old and bursting with energy. She also worked with Diana, a sixteen-year-old mom who had no role model for mothering, and who lived a lonely life since her partner worked long hours in a local restaurant. Deborah had good relationships with each of these women and with Arturo, but her real relationship occurred with Ana, an Argentine law student in her thirties who in the company of her husband and two children had left her home country to escape the oppression and economic hardships that beset her in Argentina. Living in the Roanoke Valley and working at a local fast food restaurant shape a life different from the one left behind, but she treasures the freedom she finds here, and her plans for the future include obtaining immigration papers and providing a better life for her children.

Doing the readings for class caused memories to flood into Deborah's consciousness, memories that had been forgotten for many years. Deborah said that reading *House of Houses* (Mora, 1997) reminded her of the time she spent in Chile visiting with her relatives:

Of all the readings for this week, *House of the Houses* was the one that I especially enjoyed. It spoke to me because it continuously reminded me of my home and family in Chile, and of the different life I live and person I am when I am there. I was familiarized to the different sights, sounds, smells and routines that I miss everyday, as I live a life here that lacks these pleasant familiarities and that seems too planned out and monotonous to that of back home (November 5, 2001).

Visiting with Ana and her two children Isaías and Mercha provided similar memory jolts for Deborah: "Whenever she describes how it was in Argentina, living day to day, it reminded me of my 'happy' times when I was in Chile. But, then when she describes her life here, I am deeply touched and saddened by what she had to give up" (Reflection 6, October 7, 2001).

The connection for Ana was equally strong; the two of them were making plans for Deborah to visit Argentina to meet Ana's family and stay with them for a while. Ana

is the only Argentine to participate in the program, and her schedule does not always permit her to work with a student.

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*Whereas Deborah was able to connect with Ana in a deep and meaningful way, she maintained more of a teacher/student relationship with the two Honduran women with whom she also partnered. Deborah's own family had been in the U. S. for such a long time that they had become established and were comfortable middle class citizens of the U. S. Whereas I never observed any privileging of her position on Deborah's part, I still wondered if the connection with Ana might be related to the fact that she was more like in the family Deborah had met and learned to care for in Chile the previous summer.*

*Argentina and Chile are part of the southernmost are of South America, and both have cultures with more European influence than Honduras, whose population is primarily indigenous. Perhaps this commonality of culture influenced the connection between the two women.*

*In addition, Ana was in the last stages of obtaining her law degree when she decided to leave Argentina, making her educational level comparable to Deborah's. Even though Ana was working in a fast food restaurant, placing her in one hierarchical order (cf. Ransford, 2000), her speech, manner, and interests placed her in another, thus creating another commonality between her and Deborah.*

*Although Deborah was fond of Aminta and Diana and their children, I never sensed the strong bond with them that she formed with Ana. She was their teacher, friend, advocate, and nurturer, but not their kindred spirit, which was the theme that emerged from the data when she referred to Ana.*

*Deborah graduated this past spring, and despite the fact that her Spanish professors suggested that she continue in graduate school to study literature, she chose to go into social work with Latinos as a way of giving back to the community. By her own account, her life was truly transformed by her experience with service-learning and the opportunity it provided for her to reconnect with her heritage.*

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*Discovering lost threads.* Similarly, Marta felt a deep connection with her family. The daughter of a Mexican father, she grew up having no sense of belonging to the Latino community in Texas where her dad was stationed in the army. Her grandmother only spoke Spanish, and she had attempted to speak with her, but with little success. According to her account, her parents tried to Americanize her as much as possible; consequently, she grew up with no sense of Latino identity.

Her placement was with a large Mexican family, the Garcías. At the time she was visiting the family, there were eleven people living in the three-bedroom house: mom; dad; preschool daughter; two elementary-school-age sons; a middle-school-age son; a high-school-age daughter; an eighteen-year-old daughter; and a grown daughter, her baby, and the baby's father. In addition, two other grown daughters visited often with their large families. It was not unusual for twenty family members to be there in the evening when Marta and John, her partner from the class, visited.

They cooked together, danced, and played games; but Marta and John also helped with finding out information about bills or services, acting as cultural mediators in many instances. John even accompanied the mom and younger children to a parent-teacher conference and interpreted so they could all communicate.

In the course of the semester, Marta began to identify with the Garcías rather than her class partner, a White Anglo male. She was often frustrated with him for making comments that she perceived as racist or as insensitive. In her frequent visits to my office, she expressed her feelings, but by her own account, she never mentioned them in her reflections since they went out to the entire class in an email list. I told her she could send hers just to me, but she chose not to make them as personal. In her final transformation paper, however, assured that I would be the only person to read it, she finally described her feelings and frustrations from the partnership:

Visiting the family was not the only way I learned about myself. Working with a partner this semester opened my eyes to different things. John and I were at the same level of Spanish and we were both there to volunteer to teach English and help them [the Garcías] succeed. I never thought that who we were would play an important part in the relationship each of us developed with the family. I was able

to see how Mexicans reacted to Americans. Towards the end of the semester, I realized how much John and I are not equal.

While we were in Roanoke, there were different times where we assumed different things. I didn't think of why we disagreed so much until we were coming back to Blacksburg. We discussed how making comments about different topics may or may not be considered rude. He would say something that he thought was completely fine, while [I] felt it was inappropriate. We had a chance to discuss our reasons why we felt the way we did. [A]t first, I thought I was offended because it was giving an impression of the both of us, no matter who said it. [A]fter thinking about it for a long time, I realized that what he had said offended me for being Mexican. I figured if what he said offended me, then it would offend them too. I realize that he never had the intention of offending the Garcías or me, but I think I made him realize how different it is to be in a society where you are the minority. John is white, Protestant, educated and one day will be middle-aged. He has the advantage in our society, and it is hard to live in a place when the minority groups' culture is viewed as being different and wrong in some occasions (May 6, 2001).

Marta worked her way through the labyrinth of identity, as she expressed in the same paper:

I have learned so much more than I ever expected to. I am not the same girl I was at the beginning of the semester. I don't think I will ever be that girl again. This class has opened my eyes to the Hispanic community. I appreciate my Mexican background more than ever. I have learned a lot, but unfortunately I haven't learned everything there is to be a Hispanic in the United States, it has only just begun (May 6, 2001).

*Looking at the thread in a different light.* John was also aware of the differences in their points of view, as he expresses in his final transformation paper:

My partner and I talked about social issues on the drive out to Roanoke and on the way back. This amounted to about 3 hours a week. We also had class for 3 hours a week where we discussed how our lessons were going and issues that arose

from the time we spent with our families. We vented our frustrations. Most times other people had the same or similar frustrations. We came up with ways to deal and resolve the problems cooperatively. We also shared our joys and encouraged each other.

My partner Marta is half-Mexican. She is also in charge of social and service programs at the Catholic campus ministry. I am a white, Protestant male so we started with some different views on things. Sometimes there was friction but we were both always glad for the exchanges and the benefit of the other point of view. She would occasionally point out things that I had done or said that she thought might have been offensive to the Garcías's [sic]. I still firmly believe that the Garcías's [sic] knew me too well to take anything I did or said as personally offensive. They knew how much I cared for all of them, and that I would never intentionally say or do anything to offend them. Regardless, it was good to know what things to be more sensitive to. It was hard to tell what things were off limits taboo because even topics that I thought they would hesitate to discuss they readily talked about. (May 6, 2001).

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*I was interested to read John's ideas about the situation, because Marta had talked to me extensively about the same issues. As I read both Marta's and John's transformation papers, I felt I was witnessing a true transformation of perceptions that might not have occurred without the catalyst of the class. Marta's transformation dealt with her identifying with her Latino roots; John's dealt with his becoming somewhat more sensitive about Latinos. Whereas Marta positioned herself with the Latino family, John continued to position himself in the dominant culture. His comment that the Garcías knew him well enough to not be offended can be interpreted by saying that the Garcías positioned themselves as subdominant, thereby denying themselves the right to say anything even if they felt offended (cf. Collins, 2000).*

*John did talk to Marta, and he did make an attempt to see her point of view, but she remained frustrated with him through the end of the semester. Although their transformations were different, they each experienced change. They each crossed cultural borders, albeit in different ways.*

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The García family continued to welcome the students into their home, but they never bonded with any of the students in the same way they did with Marta. Last November, when I interviewed Marisol, her mother Adela, and her dad, Francisco; they had many positive comments to make about the students who were partnered with them that fall and who had been partners in the intervening semesters, but they said more than once, that the other students were not like Marta.

When they responded to my questions about Marta, I could have been inquiring about a cherished family member or friend. As I talked with the family, their deep affection for her overrode any emotion, positive or negative, they felt toward any of the other students. Whether the Garcías would have reacted to the other students differently had they not first had Marta as their service-learner is an interesting question to ponder.

Despite the mutual respect and affection that seemed to develop between the families and the students I followed in the fall, I never witnessed the unity and the sense of shared culture I perceived between Marta and the Garcías and between Deborah and Isabel. Based on the interviews with the families, conversations with the students, and the reflections written by the students, I feel that the bond that existed between these students and their families was formed by a shared heritage that cannot be duplicated when the participants do not share the culture. I believe the bond was further strengthened by the awakening of a sense of cultural heritage that occurred in both students.

### *Knotted Threads*

Lest the reader think that all students enjoy all aspects of the class and there are no snags in the program, it is necessary to mention some of the problems that have arisen during the four semesters. There have been students who were not compatible with their families, families who were not at home when they had said they would be, and students who did not have a service-learning disposition. Each of these situations caused a less than perfect partnership between the student and the family, sometimes necessitating a move for the student to a different placement.

### *Heritage Can Hurt the Relationship*

One of the greatest incompatibilities I encountered occurred between another Latina-American student and the Mexican woman with whom she partnered. Veronica's parents had immigrated to the United States many years ago. From her account in her reflection, her parents were hard-working people who had struggled for the success they now enjoy. She perceived hard work as being integral to success, and she had the belief that anyone could be a success in this country if they were willing to work hard enough. Her Latina partner Victoria was an eighteen-year-old with an infant son, Paco. Fernando, the father of the baby, worked in a factory, and frequently when I visited with the MICC<sup>2</sup> nurse, there was not enough food to feed the family. Victoria and Fernando were from a tiny *rancho* [village] in Mexico. They had attended school through second grade, and were unable to read or write in their native language. Veronica entered the placement with enthusiasm and a desire to "help people help themselves improve their lives." She goes on to say:

I hope the family I work with realizes that I'm not there to give them charity and that their only purpose is to receive my handouts. I want them to learn how to help themselves and find hope in what may seem to be a desperate situation. I hope that they feel inspired to improve their lives and utilize the facilities that are available to them in a wise and efficient manner (Reflection, January 20, 2002).

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*As Veronica handed in one reflection after another with this negative tone, I continued to write notes in the margins, explaining the purpose of the program and the Victoria's circumstances, but to no avail. I tried to talk to her, but again without any perceptible change in her perception. I later learned that she had problems with her home-stay family during a semester abroad in Latin America, resulting in a change in placement, so her problems were not limited to CTB.*

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Soon after Veronica and her service-learning partner Melissa began visiting the home, Victoria began showing them her hospital bills and asking for help. Veronica

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<sup>2</sup> MICC is the designation for MICC for the Maternal and Infant Care Coordination program, a Federal program that provides home visits by a Health Department nurse who monitors the babies' development through the age of two.

interpreted the pleas for help as meaning that Victoria wanted them to pay her bills, and she became quite incensed. She also saw Victoria as being lazy and shiftless in contrast to her own hard-working parents. Eventually, Victoria got a job and ceased to be at home when Veronica and Melissa arrived. Since there was no telephone in the home, she had no way of informing the students, so there was a lack of communication on the part of everyone. I was unable to get in touch with Victoria due to our incompatible schedules. The students were moved to a second placement in the second month of the semester. The second placement was a great success for both Melissa and Veronica, who said in a reflection:

I think I was adding to the stereotype when I was writing my first reflections about Victoria. I judged her too quickly and didn't get to know enough of her background before deeming her manipulative and accusing her of having ulterior motives. I don't hold her in contempt now and I was being selfish when I got upset about her not trying to learn English, seeing that we had to start off at square one every single time we went to see her. I'm not sure of the whole story although I tried to figure it out, but that still doesn't excuse my judgments (Reflection 9, March 24, 2002).

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*Whereas in general the relationships shared by the families are characterized by friendship and caring, Veronica's relationship with Victoria was distinguished by anger and frustration although she did eventually realize that she may have misjudged her motives for her actions. Her change in attitude was impressive.*

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### *Family Problems*

In the semester of the formal study, two of the families who were new to the program did not comply with their commitment and I had to move the students. I had met Imelda at the Health Department and she had indicated an interest in participating in the program: "Con cuánta frecuencia vienen?" [How often do they come?] asked not with a tone of eagerness, but rather of hesitation. However, I did not pay attention to the warning signals I sensed but could not articulate.

From the first, she was not reliable, and eventually, I had to move Sheila to another placement because Imelda would set a time for Sheila to visit, and then when Sheila arrived in Roanoke after driving an hour to get there, Imelda would not come to the door. I tried to call and talk to her, and never got an answer on the phone. I had assumed that she just decided she did not want to participate, but when I interviewed Rosa, her next door neighborhood who was one of the four Latinas that I eventually followed, she said that Imelda had asked her what had happened to Sheila because she quit coming. I explained that Sheila had gone several times and not found her at home and that I had called and had no response. Rosa said that Imelda worked all night and often slept so deeply that she did not awaken when someone knocked on the door or the phone rang.

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*Sheila is African American, and after my interview with Rosa, I questioned whether that could have been the root of the problem, especially since a similar situation occurred the same semester with Renee, another African American student. I am wondering if this is an emergent theme that would merit further investigation. However, I am reluctant at this time to theorize or make assumptions about the situation. It is possible that the problem lay in scheduling difficulties with no other reasons for the unsuccessful placements. Without Rosa's interview in which she refers to African Americans in a derogatory tone, I would not even mention the issue.*

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Luckily, another student who had set up a tutoring program in a nearby school shared that the family of two of the children from her program wanted a student to visit their home. Sheila changed placements, and continued to work with the family the following semester. She referred to them as “her family” and from conversations with the family and from reading Sheila’s reflections, they both seemed to share feelings of deep affection and respect.

#### *A Different Twist*

One of unique stories that arose from the semester of the study included Mike, a business major in his last year of school, and the García family, with whom Marta and

John had partnered the first semester of the course. By the time Mike and his partner Betsy entered the Garcías' home, all of the daughters except one had left home to live with their husbands and partners. The oldest son, Jorge, had left to live with one of his sisters in a city about two hours from Roanoke. When I went for the interviews in November, Francisco had partitioned off two of the bedrooms and a bath for their remaining daughter Lucía who lives with her partner Domingo. Francisco and Adela share the remaining bedroom on the main floor with Aracely, the four-year-old whose anemia first sent the nurse to the house. The two next older boys, now in middle school and high school, shared Marisol's former apartment in the basement.

The "apartment" for Lucía was not the only change I found; Francisco had built a lean-to on the side of the house, installed a professional bakery oven, and begun a bakery business. I knew the bakery was underway from an entry in Mike's reflection (October 21, 2002):

The perspectives presented in these readings [Haslam, 1993; Ortiz Cofer, 1993; & Salinas, 1993] apply themselves well to what I am witnessing with the García family as they are on the verge of opening their bakery of Mexican breads. The business effort is almost completely being fueled by Sr. G. While having a business would represent a good source of income for he [sic] and his family I feel as if there is much more reasoning behind this venture. He has told me that everyone in his family will have some role (roll, ha, bad pun) in the operation. So I think that the bakery will also represent a legitimate claim to this country as well as providing assurance that his entire family is employed. Sergio [the oldest son still living at home] is already running bread samples around the neighborhood to Hispanic families that they know, hoping to "get 'em hooked." Although this takes some coaxing I am sure he is happy to help his family out.

Tuesday we are going to meet at the house and visit a lawyer. I will try my best to translate what I am expecting to already be convoluted English, lawyer talk; and we will figure out the best way to this thing further off the ground legally. It should prove interesting.



Another class I am currently taking is Small Business Consulting. I am excited about working with the Garcías in a similar capacity. I can also tell that they see me as an ally in accomplishing all of this.

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*From my journal comes a description of the house and my first glimpse of the new apartment and bakery:*

*When I entered the Garcías' house, I immediately smelled the rich fragrance of bread baking, different from the aroma of frying chilies that usually assailed my nose, causing my eyes to run and my lungs to protest in strangling coughs, embarrassment about my body's rejection of Mexican culture flooding over me. Adela just laughs and says I am not used to the fumes.*

*After the warm, strong hugs that always greet my arrival, we settled down on stools at the counter that formed a half wall between the kitchen and the living room, ready for the interview. As I looked to the right, I noticed the door leading to two of the bedrooms and the bathroom had been boarded up. Seeing my interest, Adela said that Francisco had built an apartment for Lucía and Domingo. She explained that since all the girls have left and the boys are in school all day, she and Aracely were lost with so much space. I admired the large, bright, white tiles that had replaced the worn, dingy carpet on the living room floor. Francisco had also finished the arched passage to the kitchen, creating a wide spaciousness that transported me to Mexico. The red tiles that outlined the arch made me remember that Francisco is responsible for much of the decorating at the Mexican restaurants whose physical plant he supervises. Entering the house takes me to a bit of Mexico, located in Roanoke, VA.*

*After the interview, Adela and Marisol insisted that I have a bowl of pozole [stew]. When I protested that I was on a diet, Adela said, "Pero el pollo no engorda." [But chicken won't make you fat.] Adela served me a huge bowl of steaming broth floating with chunks of chicken and white hominy, setting a basket of bread in front of me. As I slurped up the soup and chewed the bread, I complemented Adela on her cooking that was as divine as ever. "Where did you get this bread?" I asked. "I would love to buy some."*

“Francisco lo hizo en la panadería.” [*Francisco made it in the bakery.*] *It was at that point that I realized that a portion of the wall had been knocked out and an opening led to a lean-to right outside the kitchen. Just then, Francisco led me on a tour of the bakery, a long narrow space filled with an immense professional baker’s oven that occupied most of the room. A man was busily removing gigantic trays of hot bread from the multi-shelved ovens, at the same time replacing them with other trays of unbaked dough. Proudly, Francisco explained the entire process, exhibiting pride of ownership. He insisted on filling a large plastic bag with rolls in a variety of shapes and sizes, some sweet and some not, for my family and me to enjoy with our meals (Journal Entry, November 2, 2002).*

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During the course of the interviews with Francisco and Adela, they shared their feelings about Mike:

*Ahí estamos tratando poquito a poquito de establecer este negocio y por lo que cuenta de Mike, él nos ha ayudado mucho. No hemos podido estudiar bien el inglés con él porque hemos andado mucho muy ocupados pero el ha hecho todo lo que ha podido por enseñarnos el inglés y por ayudarnos con su idioma porque hay que hablar a la ciudad a los inspectores y a los proveedores.*

[Here we are trying bit by bit to get this business going and as for Mike, he has helped us really a lot. We haven’t been able to study English with him because we have been busy running around all over but the fact is that he has been able to teach us some English and to help us with his language because it’s been necessary to talk to the city and the inspectors and suppliers.]

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*Throughout the conversation, Francisco continued to apologize that he and Adela were not studying English with Mike, which was what they perceived the purpose of the class to be. Despite my assurances that the students partnered with the families in order*

*to help in any way as cultural mediators, both he and Adela assured me that Mike tried to teach English, but they were just too busy with the business.*

*I was fascinated to see that Mike was having a real-world experience, one that tied together two threads of his life—business and Spanish—in a powerful yet practical way.*

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Curious as to whether they had the idea for the bakery before meeting Mike, they replied that they had, but they had seized the opportunity once they realized that he knew about business:

*Le dije a Mike, “Vamos a ocupar que nos ayudes para ver lo de los permisos y todo que se ocupa” y él me dijo: “No, yo donde estudio. . .” como que él también sabe algo de contabilidad o de comercio. . . . Que él inclusive estaba asesorando una fábrica o un taller por allá en Buena Vista creo me dijo. Ya le dije pues: “¿Nos quieres ayudar?” “Si,” pues con nosotros se ha portado muy bien el muchacho ese, sí, no tenemos nada que decir mal de él.*

[I told Mike, “We are going to hire you to help us see about the permits and all they involve,” and he told me, “No, where I study. . .” how he also knows something about accounting or business. . . . That he was even acting as a consultant at a factory or shop over there in Buena Vista, I think he told me. So then I asked him, “Do you want to help us?” “Yes.” Well, he has treated us really well; we have nothing bad to say about him.]

Marisol, the oldest daughter in the family speaks more English than the rest of the family, so they tend to rely on her for many of their dealings with the Anglo world.

Although she has moved out of the apartment she, her husband Manuel, and their little boy Mani shared in the basement of the García home for several years, she only lives down the street and remains close to the family. She was instrumental in establishing the business, and they have named her president of the company. Marisol came in after I had already interviewed Francisco and Adela, and when I asked her about Mike and his part in helping to get the bakery started, she replied:

*Porque Mike nos está ayudando. . . no sé si le platicó mi Mamá del nuevo negocio, para ir con el abogado a la ciudad de Roanoke, hablar con el dueño del*

*negocio, ayudarnos a leer los leases, contratos, los contratos y nos está ayudando a ver como él está estudiando sobre esto, sobre como llevar a cabo un negocio en su carrera, él nos está orientando.*

[Because Mike is helping us. . . . I don't know if my mom told you about the new business, to go to the lawyer for Roanoke City, to talk with the owner of the business, to help us read the lease, contracts, contracts, and he is helping us to see since he is studying about this, about how to get a business going, he is getting us started.]

In response to my question about whether they could have established the business without Mike's help, Francisco and Adela replied that they would have had to get help from one of their two sons-in-law who speak English. Francisco added, "*Pero como ellos trabajan más lejos entonces pues sí nos ha ayudado bien, sí, o sea, que sí hayamos podido salir adelante sin Mike, pero haya sido difícil y él nos ha facilitado más las cosas.*" [But since they work so far away, well he has helped us well, yes, and yes, as to whether we would have been able to get ahead without Mike, but it would have been difficult and he has made things a lot easier.]

Mike's enthusiasm for helping with the bakery continued throughout the semester. He seldom wrote reflections, saying that it was his last semester in the university and he just wanted to enjoy the experience of working with the Garcías and of participating in the class. He did not report his hours, but the stories he told in class of his efforts on behalf of the Garcías revealed many hours spent with the family. When I reminded him that I had to have something for a grade, he shrugged and said he did not care about grades. On January 6, 2003, after the class had ended in December, Mike sent me an email to let me know the business was official; he included a copy of the contract.

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*The relationship that Mike and the Garcías developed was one of mutual respect and reciprocity. They needed his expertise with small business matters, and he appreciated having their real-life situation to put the theory he was learning in his class on small businesses into practice. Through my conversations with all of them, I realized that their situation exemplified the concepts of confianza [trust] and networking (Greenberg and Moll, 1990). Their relationship was not one that either described in*

*terms deep friendship, but each member of the relationship seemed to value the partnership that developed between them. Mike presents an interesting case for developing an integrated curriculum in which Business, Spanish, and Service-Learning could join to create a powerful internship experience for students and the community.*

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### *Common Roots but Not Common Language*

Mike's partner Betsy presented another interesting phenomenon. She was one of the few students who took the class without being able to speak Spanish. I purposely paired her with Marisol García because Marisol speaks enough English to communicate without depending solely on Spanish. Betsy's desire to teach ESL in the community paired with her interest in community service led her to participate in the class. At all times, she gave so generously of herself that the language issue was no problem on her part. At first, she often went with Mike, but eventually she went alone to Marisol's house down the street from her parents' home. Betsy's approach to the experience was academically based, and her reflections usually demonstrated that:

I learn more about what it is to teach with each time I meet with the García family both from how I help them and from what they teach me. Freire's (1970) philosophy of education through dialogue suggests that teachers are part of a classroom and not the focal point from which all knowledge is dispensed. His point is especially valid within the service-learning context, where although I am with the García family to help and teach, I am and will be learning more about their life experience and how ethically and effectively to teach. In reading Moll and Greenberg's (1990) article, I found many similarities between their work and this service-learning experience and I am only beginning to see the many "funds of knowledge" and "social networks" that exist within the García family. However, I am already learning much about their unity, sacrifice, and celebration and enjoying personal and academic growth with the García family (September 29, 2002).

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When I asked Marisol how she felt about having a student who does not speak Spanish, she said.

*Ah, yo no sé, para mí, a mí me sirve más, no sé para otra persona que a lo mejor no habla nada a lo mejor es más complicado, pero para una persona que tiene un poquito más de inglés yo pienso que es más mejor porque se acostumbra el oído y puede platicar más, sí, sí, yo pienso que es muy buena opción; una persona que no hable español.*

[Ah, I don't know, for me it does me more good, I don't know for another person who doesn't speak (any it is more complicated, but for a person who speaks a little more English I think it is better because you get used to hearing it and you can speak more, yes, yes, I think it is a very good option, a person who doesn't speak any Spanish.]

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*During this same interview, Marisol talked about Marta, and how she understood Marisol's family better. However, she realized that probably more language acquisition occurs in the forced-immersion experience that results in a partnership when the participants do not share a common language. She had been fond of Seung, the Korean student who taught her in a previous semester, so I wonder if it was the lack of shared language that created the neutrality or was it something deeper?*

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When I asked Marisol to use five words to describe her relationship with Betsy, she said, “*La relación de maestra, como amiga, sociable, ¿Qué otra? Inteligente, muy concentrada.*” [The relationship of teacher, a friend, (she's) sociable. What else? Intelligent, very focused.]

I then asked her to compare the relationship she had with Marta, whose heritage was Latino:

*Con Marta, era más bailadora, le gustaba nuestra música, más, más, como si fuera de la familia, como más mexicana y con Betsy no, porque yo sé que si le invito a un baile, a lo mejor no le va a gustar o algo así, que no es lo mismo o si bailamos un baile, no le va a parecer, es diferente, con ella es más como más enseñanza, más aprendizaje, tipo papel y con Marta era más, más, aprendíamos pero también era más relajo, era más diferente, uhm, porque yo si le ofrezco frijoles a Betsy a lo mejor no los va a comer, no le va a gustar, no los va a*

*conocer y Marta si, Marta ya conocía todo lo nuestra, no pero porque ya los conocía y las tortillas y todo lo que nosotros comíamos, mientras que Betsy, no, ella tiene otro tipo de comida, gustos, bebidas, todo, es diferente sí.*

[With Marta, she was more of a dancer, she liked our music, but it was more, it was like she was family, more Mexican, and with Betsy, no, because I know that if I invite her to a dance, she isn't going to like it or something like that, that it isn't the same, or if we dance, it won't seem, it is different. With her it is more teaching and learning of the paper and pencil kind, and with Marta it was more that we were learning but it was also more relaxed, it was different, because if i offer beans to Betsy, more than likely she won't eat them, she won't like them, and Marta, yes, Marta knew all our (culture), but because she already knew about them, and tortillas and all that we ate, while Betsy, she has a different kind of food, tastes, drinks, everything is different.]

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*I always wonder about the efficacy of having students who know no Spanish in the program, so I was interested to hear Marisol describe a relationship that offers more in terms of language acquisition, but less in the sense of friendship and relationship.*

*Marisol's comments are reminiscent of Isabel's who contrasted Kathy's willingness to try food with the other student's refusal to sample anything different. I believe it is not the food that is the issue; it is the perception of acceptance of one's culture, which in turn indicates acceptance of one's Self. In the future, acceptance of different cultural practices is an issue that needs to be addressed at the beginning of the semester. However, I am not sure that was the root of this problem; Marisol felt so close to Marta that no one could take her place. Nonetheless, acceptance of cultural practices was an emergent theme.*

*Although Marisol spoke kindly of Betsy, her comments were for the most part neutral. The García family seemed to like her well enough, but there was no outburst of excited enthusiasm when I asked them about her. Marisol felt a sense of solidarity with her due to their similar backgrounds that included economic hardship, but at the same time, her appraisal of the relationship concentrated more on their differences than their similarities.*

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*Preparation for Teaching*

In the five semesters I have been teaching the service-learning course, 21 practicing and preservice teachers have taken the course. The theme that the course should be required for all preservice teachers, especially those who plan to teach ESL, ran through their reflections and transformation papers. The reasons regarding the importance of including the course varied from helping preservice teachers understand the backgrounds of diverse students to enabling them to discover a means of personally understanding cultural differences.

In this section, I have gleaned excerpts from the reflections and transformation papers of three graduate students in Teaching and Learning: Tiffany who was pursuing her doctorate and Betsy and Karen who were pursuing their Master's Degrees in Education, Curriculum and Instruction with a Concentration in Teaching ESL. The themes that emerged from these students are representative of those appearing in the written documents of the education students. Many of their reflections dealt with concepts from the service-learning course that they were able to relate to their ESL teaching. I chose to include the data from Tiffany and Betsy because they examine the perspectives of students who did not speak Spanish. Additionally, Tiffany brought the perspective of a Graduate Teaching Assistant, who was supervising preservice teachers in the field at the time she participated in CTB. Both Tiffany and Karen had some classroom experience which heightened their awareness of the demands inherent in the multicultural classroom Betsy, on the other hand, took the course prior to her internship experiences, so she had never been in the classroom as a teacher.

Tiffany had just returned from spending two years in Japan where she taught English to Japanese school children. She spoke no Spanish, so her relationship with her Mexican family was limited to her teaching ESL to them. Tiffany had done both her Early Internship and her Student Teaching prior to accepting the position in Japan, where she taught elementary school children. She brought with her knowledge of the content area, as well as knowledge of the needs of Japanese children in the ESL classroom, but she had no experience, either within the classroom or without, regarding Latino students.



From the beginning of the course, she expressed delight at being able to interact with Latinos and to learn about their culture.

Betsy, who worked with Marisol García, brought with her the perspective of a student who did not speak Spanish. She had graduated with a degree in English, so she entered the program believing that ESL should be taught to students in the same way English was taught to native speakers. Whereas I examined her relationship with Marisol earlier in the chapter, in this section I will investigate her perspective about education.

Karen, on the other hand, did speak Spanish, having worked as a missionary in Latin America for two years. After teaching elementary school for three years, she decided she wanted to return to graduate school to seek a master's degree that included an endorsement in teaching ESL. According to her own account, she chose Virginia Tech's graduate program because of CTB.

The semester she began both her degree and her involvement with CTB, I had a call from the assistant principal at one of the elementary schools in Roanoke asking if the service-learning students could mentor the students at his school. Karen was interested in spearheading the program, so in the course of the semester, she spent countless hours organizing and running the program that involved about five Tech students. Her reflections and transformation paper are the result of the experience she had with this program.

There are more data from Karen, partially because she brought her prior experience as an elementary school teacher and a missionary teacher in a Latin America, but especially because she became so involved with the course through the tutoring/mentoring project in the elementary schools, the Roanoke Project (RP). She constantly reflected on the ways her experience with RP would impact her teaching when she returned to an ESL position in the elementary school after receiving her degree.

I present these excerpts as a means of examining the effectiveness of a service-learning course situated in a program for preservice teachers:

The reasons I chose to take this particular service-learning course are centered around my career as a teacher. Primarily, I am interested in knowing more about migrant families and the challenges they face in their daily lives, especially as they might relate to ESL students in my future classrooms. It seems to be much

more difficult to build relationships with ESL students' parents than with other parents, and I hope that this experience will help me find ways to build such bridges. . . . I would like to gain a better understanding of Latino opinions about being educated in an American school as well as their expectations. I hate that my students face so much pressure to transform themselves, and hope that I can help alleviate that through knowing more about their cultural values. . . . (Tiffany, Reflection 1, February 5, 2001).

Thus, I would recommend service-learning to other preservice ESL teachers in the *first* part of their studies, while they have a lot of time to focus on their families. This course would be a good opportunity to focus on developing interpersonal, intercultural skills for beginning teachers, especially since the target population is increasing in number throughout Virginia and the rest of the East Coast. (Tiffany, Transformation Paper, May 10, 2001).

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*For Tiffany, CTB provided a valuable opportunity to learn about ESL students and their backgrounds. Her point of view as a novice to Latino culture again demonstrates the efficacy of CTB in a Teacher Education program even when the students do not speak Spanish. Based on her recommendation, it would be feasible to consider an internship in the Latino community prior to the semester the preservice teachers do their Early Internship in the schools.*

*She is correct in stating that relationships between the school and the Latino community can be problematic due to cultural and linguistic barriers, and CTB provides a way for teachers to become comfortable in relating to cultures diverse from their own.*

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In her transformation paper, Betsy talks about the impact CTB had on her perspective toward teaching ESL:

However, I did not foresee the personal impact that working with these families would have upon my vision for teaching and my attitude towards community responsibility. Service-Learning was overwhelmingly beneficial to my education in that it plucked me out of the microcosm of academia and brought me to the faces, the stories, and the needs of those I aspire to prepare. . . .

However, I can emphatically state that before knowing this remarkable woman [Marisol], my opinion regarding teacher-student relationships was that teachers served only to relate an academic topic of information to his/her students. Now, I see that teachers constantly discover social, cultural, and academic values from their students and that learning happens when both parties know that each have much to learn. . . .

My time within this Service-Learning course has solidified my vision and passion to become an advocate through education and service for individuals like those I have come to know through this course. Learning is an infinite journey, so also should be human caring and service towards one another (December 7, 2002).

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*I watched Betsy develop as she reflected on the academic readings and service experiences. She began the semester as a rather rigid English major who at first opted to use some English grammar books that she resurrected from a shelf at home so she could provide Marisol with a solid base for learning the language. As the semester progressed, she developed into an intuitive preservice teacher who realized that top-down language acquisition (cf. Shrum & Glisan, 2000) would allow Marisol to accomplish the necessary tasks to find greater success as an entrepreneurial businesswoman in the United States.*

*Working with Marisol facilitated Betsy's understanding that learning a second language must involve communication and interaction (Shrum & Glisan) and not just grammar rules. Betsy was working fulltime, so she was seeking her master's degree over a period of two years; consequently, she had not yet taken the methods course for teaching second languages. I will be interested to see if her grasp of current theory has been influenced by the practical experiences she had in CTB.*

*Another important facet of Betsy's expanded understanding of the role of the ESL teacher involved her realization that the ESL teacher is an advocate for her students. ESL teachers function differently than many of their colleagues, being the only liaison for the students whose English-speaking skills are limited. They are expected to be the ESL students' teacher, cultural mediator, liaison with other school personnel, counselor, and advocate, to mention a few roles. Betsy had firsthand experience that will enable her to*

*enter the profession with a deeper comprehension of the responsibility she is undertaking. As I read these papers, the pragmatic nature of the course for ESL teachers came into focus.*

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Karen, on the other hand, possessed the basic cultural knowledge about Latinos before participating in the program, but she wanted the experience of service situated in academia. The greatest shift I observed in Karen was her change in feeling that content knowledge is the sole basis of teaching to a feeling that the teacher must spearhead community-based efforts as well as appreciate the diversity existing in students and their communities.

In an early reflection, Karen said, “My philosophy of teaching has already begun to shift from that of pragmatism and academics to ‘response-ability’ and service.” She went on to say,

In a *Call to Action* (<http://ed.gov/pubs/FaultLine/call.html>), it lists the contributing factors to the poor education of Hispanic-Americans and recommends possible solutions. Two of these recommendations include organizing community-based efforts and training teachers to deal with multicultural populations and linguistic minority students. Our Service-learning class fulfills both of these suggestions. For my community project, in addition to going into the schools to tutor Hispanic students in English, we are seeking to develop a community-based tutoring program which links VT students and Roanoke City Schools. Our class's ultimate goal is not simply to assist individual families but rather to transform the community's approach in providing for the needs of the Latino population. How exciting it is to be part of such an impacting program (Karen, Reflection 6, October 5, 2002).

For my future plans, my service-learning experience only enhanced my original desire to return to the classroom as an ESL teacher. Nevertheless, my view of myself as a teacher has expanded from simply serving as an educator into playing the role of a social agent. When returning to the school setting, I will seek for ways to help initiate change within society in order to fulfill the individual needs

of my students within the classroom (Karen, Transformation Paper, December 7, 2002).

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*Karen is addressing the issue of changing the infrastructure of society for social change. In the course of the semester, she was able to effect change at the elementary school. She recognized that as a teacher, she could perform in society as an agent of change. (cf. Cochran-Smith, 1999; Smylie, Bay, and Tozer, 1999). Like Betsy, she developed an appreciation of the multifaceted role of the ESL teacher. I expect she will continue to effect change in her future role as a classroom teacher.*

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Karen continued her reflections about her responsibility as teacher, articulating her belief that the teacher could affect the community:

Through this class and my experience in the community, I am realizing more and more the awesome responsibility of my role as a teacher. It not only impacts the students within my classroom but also the community around me. (Karen, Reflection 6, October 5, 2002).

CTB is a unique course which effectively combines academic learning, social responsibility, and community service into one dynamic class. One of the main reasons why I chose Virginia Tech for my master's studies is for this opportunity to put the academic knowledge I was acquiring into practice. What I did not realize would happen is the life-changing impact my service-learning experience would have on me.

Through modeling, I hope to instill in my students the importance of service and the appreciation for diversity. Although this service-learning class will come to an end, my prayer is that the priceless lessons I have learned will be continued and carried on through the lives of my future students. My ultimate goal as a teacher is to create a community of learners within my classroom that will someday be reflected in the world around us (Karen, Transformation Paper, December 7, 2002).

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*It was in reading Karen's reflections and transformation paper that I realized that CTB provides rich data for assessing whether students have the dispositions necessary for teaching. During the semester I began to analyze the data, I also prepared the reports for the NCATE visit to Virginia Tech. As I analyzed our Second Language Education Program using the Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Standards ([www.chre.vt.edu/NCATE](http://www.chre.vt.edu/NCATE)), I realized that the reflections I received in CTB gave me an articulated view of the preservice teachers' dispositions for teaching. I am able to assess their perspectives as future teachers.*

*All of these students, one who spoke Spanish and two who did not, found the service-learning course to be transformative in terms of their teaching experiences. Based on these writings, I would expect them to perform as teachers with a greater awareness of cultural diversity and multicultural education.*

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### *Summing Up*

I have attempted to present the sweeping strokes of the background and a few of the interesting phenomenon in a course that has been in place for five semesters. By choosing students who for one reason or another provide a glimpse at a different facet of the class, I have allowed the reader to sense that the class is a microcosm of society; there are aspects of the class that are positive and that based on data outweigh the negative events that do occur. However, those negative elements must be presented and examined in order to shape a fuller picture of the course and the corresponding study. It is impossible to generalize about either the students or the families who participate in the program.

In chapter nine, I present the findings of the study, and the implications. In presenting the implications, I refer to some of the vignettes from this chapter, since they provided the inspiration for some of the programmatic changes and future studies I suggest. The weaving of the tapestry is complete. The time has come to view it from the front in its entirety.