A PRESERVICE TEACHER'S DEVELOPING
CONCEPTIONS OF MULTIPLE LITERACIES
AND LITERACY INSTRUCTION:
THE CASE OF SARAH

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The student population in this country is becoming increasingly diverse, with predictions of between 30 to 40 percent of school enrollment to be comprised of students of color by the year 2000 (Hodgkinson, 1985). Students of color are already the majority in the fifty largest school districts (Banks, 1991); one in four of all students is poor (Kennedy, Jung, & Orland, 1986); and increasing numbers are language minorities (O'Malley, 1981). In contrast to these demographics the current teaching force is only 12 to 14 percent nonwhite, and there is an increasing number of white prospective teachers who have had little experience with diverse populations (Center for Educational Statistics, 1987; Hadaway & Florez, 1987/1988). These statistics highlight the importance of adequately preparing preservice teachers for the instruction of diverse students.

Many teacher education programs attempt to help preservice teachers move beyond their personal educative experiences by directly addressing issues of student diversity. Multicultural courses customarily provide the histories and general characteristics of minority groups, attempting to raise preservice teachers' cultural consciousness and academic expectations for diverse students (Trent, 1990; Cushner & Brislin, 1986; Larke, 1990; Haberman, 1991; McDiarmid, 1990). Most of these types of courses report little or no change in preservice teachers' attitudes and dispositions (Cazden & Mehan, 1989; Zeichner, 1993;

Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Multicultural field experiences, another method of addressing issues of student diversity, also customarily focus on preservice teachers' attitudes and dispositions towards diverse students (Sleeter, 1989; Zeichner, 1993). Research indicates that these programs show more potential for successfully accomplishing their goals (Grant & Secada, 1990; Sleeter, 1985).

While empirical research on multicultural teacher education programs is scarce (Grant & Secada, 1990; Zeichner, 1993), there exists even less information regarding how preservice teachers conceptualize actual subject matter instruction for diverse students. This is especially important in the field of literacy. Students' literacy usages vary across diverse communities, families and personal needs. These differing language forms, termed "multiple literacies" (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 1992), often differ from how literacy is used in school settings where the language forms and interactional styles most often reflect those of the dominant culture (Trueba, 1990; Cummins, 1986; Deyhle, 1985; Shade, 1982). This disparity often makes the teaching and learning of school literacy problematic (e.g. Heath, 1982a; Heath, 1982b; Michaels, 1981), especially since the multiple non-school literacies of most teachers and preservice teachers are compatible with school literacy.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how preservice teachers perceived and interpreted students' multiple literacies in school and non-school settings. Insight into this issue will inform the broader question of how teacher educators can help

preservice teachers learn to incorporate non-school literacies into classroom literacy instruction, a crucial element of effective literacy instruction (Eisenhart & Cutts-Dougherty, 1991; Trueba, 1990; Gumperz, 1986; DeVos, 1983). This paper discusses the perceptions and interpretations of one of four research participants.

Methods

Participants

Sarah was one of four preservice teachers who participated in this study. She was a junior in an alternative teacher education program which focused on instructing culturally diverse elementary school students, and as part of this program was actively involved in a conventional first grade classroom two half days a week. As an option offered through a literacy course, Sarah had also elected to spend one afternoon a week interacting with children enrolled in La Clase Magica (LCM). As part of the Distributed Literacy Consortium organized by Michael Cole (Cole, 1990), LCM was an after school computer assisted literacy program located in a neighborhood community center. Children at both sites reflected similarly diverse cultural backgrounds, except there were more Latino and Asian children present in the after school site than in the classroom.

Data Sources and Collection

Conceptions of Literacy Instruction Questionnaire The Conceptions of Literacy Instruction Questionnaire (CLIQ) was

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administered at the beginning and conclusion of the term (Malenka & Gallego, in progress). The CLIQ consists of eight items, each describing a possible literacy situation. The first four items focus on *what* is learned during literacy instruction; the second half focuses on *how* literacy learning occurs. The possible responses to each of these situations correspond to information processing or socio-cognitive perspectives of literacy. Sarah ranked the response options for each item in order of preference, and then explained her reasoning.

Pre-Term and Post-Term Interviews Pre-term and post-term interviews were conducted. These interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Sarah was asked to explain her thinking and reasoning in responding to the CLIQ items. Also, the influence of context was probed. For example, after discussing the content of literacy instruction for a student with below grade level reading ability, Sarah was asked to rank and discuss the same options for students reading at grade level.

Field Observations Sarah was observed four times in both her classroom and LCM placements, for a total of eight observations. Observations were scheduled at two week intervals during times she indicated that she would be engaged in literacy instruction. Each set of classroom and LCM observations occurred during the same week, and each observation lasted for 45 minutes.

Field notes taken during the observations were narrative descriptions, recording the content and process of literacy instruction by providing verbatim accounts of participant, teacher, and student statements and interactions. Later, these

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notes were used to re-create the observed field experiences as vignettes. The vignettes contained as much of the original language as possible and always reflected the actual events.

    Field Interviews Sarah was interviewed following each set of classroom and LCM observations, for a total of four field interviews during the ten week term. These interviews were conducted in an office on the university campus within the week following each set of observations, and were tape recorded and later transcribed. Interview questions focused on Sarah's interpretations of the content, method, and value of literacy events experienced during the field observations in both her classroom and LCM placements. She was also asked to discuss similarities and differences in literacy instruction at the two sites.

Analysis

    Determining Sarah's Theoretical Conceptions of Literacy Instruction A portrait of Sarah's conceptions of literacy instruction was constructed based on her responses to the pre-term and post-term interviews. The transcript of her responses was read several times with the following questions in mind: (a) What elements did Sarah notice and address in each CLIQ item? (b) How closely did Sarah's verbal explanations correspond to the selected options? (c) How did Sarah's verbal explanations compare with the theories which corresponded to the selected options? (d) Did Sarah's responses change when different contexts were described?

Patterns of commonalities in Sarah's responses, both across CLIQ items and in the preceding areas, emerged. Pre-term and post-term portraits of her conceptions of literacy instruction were constructed, and then examined for changes which may have occurred during the term.

Determining Sarah's Interpretations of Actual Literacy Instruction With field notes of the classroom and LCM observations serving as guides, Sarah was interviewed following each set of observations. The interview transcripts were read several times with the following questions in mind: (a) Which elements of literacy instruction did Sarah notice in each setting? (b) What did Sarah "count" as literacy? (c) Which student behaviors did Sarah notice, and how did she interpret them? (d) How did Sarah evaluate literacy learning? (e) How did Sarah respond to students' non-school literacies? (f) How did Sarah compare literacy instruction in the school and non-school settings?

Patterns of responses emerged and were reported along with the corresponding vignettes of the field observations. The vignettes were then rewritten to include only those details relevant to the analysis.

Constructing the Case of Sarah The case of Sarah is organized in the following manner: (a) a brief introduction, based on the researcher's perceptions and casual conversations with Sarah; (b) a description of Sarah's theoretical conceptions of literacy instruction, based on CLIQ and pre-term/post-term interview responses; (c) analysis of the four classroom field

observations and interviews, illustrated with one example; (d) analysis of the four LCM field observations and interviews, illustrated with one example; and (e) analysis of Sarah's comparisons of literacy instruction in the two settings.

The Case of Sarah

Sarah was a junior in the alternative teacher education program when I first approached her about participating in this study. She responded in a cheerful and positive manner, seeming happy to be of assistance. Sarah continued to be relaxed and enthusiastic throughout the term, especially during her interactions with children at the non-school site. She appeared to genuinely enjoy the time she spent with the children.

Sarah's motivation for applying to a teacher education program which focused on diverse learners appeared to have been influenced by her interest in speaking Spanish. She often smiled when she heard children speaking this language, and was quick to join in the conversation or to initiate a new one. Another indication of Sarah's interest in children and Spanish was her volunteer work with children in a predominantly Latino community center. She often referred to these experiences.

Sarah was assigned to a first grade classroom in an elementary school located within a lower middle class community. The students in her classroom were culturally and ethnically diverse, although the majority were White. Sarah expressed surprise at the lack of games and toys in the classroom, and at the quietness and cooperation of the students.

Sarah's Theoretical Conceptions of Literacy Instruction

Approximately eighty-seven percent of Sarah's pre-term responses to the CLIQ and subsequent interview questions reflected a socio-cognitive perspective of literacy learning; approximately twelve percent reflected an information processing perspective. Approximately sixty-two percent of Sarah's post-term responses reflected a socio-cognitive perspective of literacy learning; approximately thirty-seven percent reflected an information processing perspective.

The literacy perspectives reflected in Sarah's responses to the CLIQ served as a starting point in constructing her theoretical conceptions of literacy instruction. Her discussion of these items during the pre-term and post-term interviews explained her thinking about the depicted literacy situations, portraying the reasoning behind her selections and serving as the basis for constructing the following pre-term and post-term portraits.

Pre-Term Conceptions Prior to her field experiences in the classroom and alternative site, Sarah's discussions of literacy instruction emphasized the importance of stimulating children's interest in reading: "If they're interested they're going to want to learn about it and so, that's what I want to promote is the interest and then that will lead into their development." Sarah planned to use children's literature and learning centers to promote this interest, but she also viewed children working together as key to motivation. She stated that a student "would feel more like he was accomplishing something, because he was able

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to work with others." Sarah appeared to view cooperative learning as more than merely a motivational tool, however. She also stated that through working together students "can get different ideas about things and look at things from a different perspective."

Sarah's discussion of literacy instruction for diverse learners was an extension of these same ideas. She planned to focus instruction around literature which interested the students because "if they're interested in it, they're going to want to pursue it and keep going at it." At the same time, Sarah stated that a teacher may have difficulty relating to a child culturally different from herself, and that this child would benefit from interactions with other students. She stated that "if you didn't know Spanish or you didn't know about his culture, maybe you wouldn't know what to talk about with him. . . . [A native Spanish speaker] would probably learn better if he learned from others in a natural environment."

Sarah expressed conflicting sentiments when discussing students' use of non-school literacies in a school setting. She appeared to value their personal expressions of community literacy while at the same time viewing use of standard English as necessary for success in mainstream society. However, Sarah was unsure how she would provide this instruction: "It would be difficult for me to know where to fit in standard English."

Post-Term Conceptions Following her field experiences in the classroom and alternative site, Sarah continued to emphasize the importance of promoting students' interest in reading through use

of children's literature. She restated her pre-term conception that if a student "enjoys what he's doing, then he'll want to keep doing it and then he'll feel good about himself reading. . . . First he has to enjoy reading and then you can work more on the strategies."   Sarah also restated the value of children working together, with the additional explanation of different prior knowledge as the reason for varying perspectives. She used her own experiences as an example: "Other people come with different prior knowledge than I have, and so by listening to what they have to say, I can get more out of it."

Sarah included consideration of students' prior knowledge as an important aspect of effective literacy instruction. Along with the importance of student interest and cooperative learning, she noted that instruction should start with the familiar and make connections to new material. Sarah stated that maybe students "already know some stuff about the subject and if they think about that first then they can more easily connect what you're going to teach them than if you just throw these facts at them and say, `Okay, here you go.'"

Sarah's post-term conception of connecting instruction to prior knowledge was especially apparent in her discussion of literacy instruction for diverse learners. She noted that a culturally diverse student "doesn't relate to the things ... that he has [no] prior knowledge about, and so I should probably use something more culture specific and get him involved." Sarah also stated that connecting to a diverse learner's prior knowledge would promote an interest in reading: "Culture specific materials

are important. . . . They'll be interested in it ... and then they would like reading."

In reference to students' use of non-school literacies in the school setting, Sarah again stated that she would not edit students' regional dialects. However, she no longer discussed students' use of non-school literacies as legitimate expressions of communication. Rather, Sarah expected that the students would do their best to incorporate "correct" English in their writing and so would accept their efforts:

> I think that it will develop. . . . They would probably know
> to write it correctly or as correct as they know how, so I
> would assume that they would do the best they could.

Sarah did not discuss how she supposed the students would acquire this knowledge of standard English.

Sarah's Interpretation of Classroom Literacy Instruction

Sarah's participation in a first grade classroom reflected several aspects of her pre-term and post-term conceptions of literacy instruction. Her participation also illustrated a complexity and depth which were not revealed during those interviews. Sarah not only used children's literature to promote interest in literacy but also to instruct across subject matter areas. She not only paired students so they would enjoy learning and acquire various perspectives but also applied this conception to herself and the classroom teacher. Reflecting her post-term conceptions, every lesson began with activating the students'

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prior knowledge--not through teacher directed reminders, but by soliciting and building on students' ideas.

Sarah's initial interpretations of classroom literacy instruction focused on the classroom teacher's actions. When she began planning and implementing her own lessons, however, Sarah seemed to search for ways to improve the teacher's instruction. She further envisioned instruction which she perceived as unacceptable to the classroom teacher -- therefore, she planned to implement these ideas in her own future classroom rather than in this current setting.

Sarah's discussions during the pre-term and post-term interviews regarding literacy instruction for diverse learners were not fully actualized in the classroom. Her instruction did not contradict these conceptions, which were primarily an extension of her conceptions of literacy instruction for all students. However, she did not appear to have opportunities to explicitly adapt these conceptions for culturally diverse students.

Following is an illustration of Sarah's interpretation of classroom literacy instruction:

The children in Miss Chambers' first grade classroom looked up at Sarah from their places on the carpet. She sat in front of them on a chair, next to a stand of chart paper.

"Today we're going to learn about shadows," Sarah told them. "Let's brainstorm about shadows. What do you know about shadows?"

"When it's sunny, they show," a boy seated near her offered.

Sarah wrote this on the chart paper, and then turned back to the class.

"Something else? Amanda?"

"When it's cloudy, they don't show."

"You're right," Sarah remarked as she also recorded this statement. After several other students also contributed their ideas about shadows, Sarah sat back and surveyed the list.

"What a good list!" Sarah commented. "Right now, I'm going to read a story for fun. Later, I'll read you an informational story."

The students listened attentively as Sarah read about Mr. Wink and his shadow Ned. At the end of the story, they discussed where Ned went when it rained. Sarah then picked up the informational book, and they further discussed the facts found in there. The students appeared confused as to what really happened to shadows at noon, and Miss Chambers interrupted Sarah's lesson with an attempt to clarify this point.

"Now you're going to make your own shadows," Sarah told the students at the lesson's conclusion. She plugged in the slide projector and turned off the classroom lights.

During the pre-term and post-term interviews Sarah had discussed the importance of promoting an interest in reading through children's literature. Her use of both a fictional narrative and an informational book reflected this concept of literacy instruction. During the post-term interview Sarah had also discussed the importance of beginning instruction with what

students already know, and she began this lesson by activating the students' prior knowledge of shadows. Sarah wanted the students to learn how shadows are formed, and stated that she believed most of the students had learned this:

> I wanted them to learn how shadows are formed, and that's about it. . . . When I got their prior knowledge down first, they really knew a lot. . . . I think that they did learn that ... light doesn't go through you ... and where your shadow is, is where you block out the light.

During the pre-term and post-term interviews Sarah had discussed the benefits of students working together. After reflecting on the classroom teacher's interruption of this lesson on shadows, Sarah extended this concept to her relationship with the classroom teacher. She stated that working together with the teacher benefited not only the students, but also herself:

> I wanted the kids to understand, that when the sun's out, there is a shadow ... and that's what I tried to explain. I don't think it came out too good. . . . Afterwards, I thought, it's not a big deal that she jumped in because I want the kids to get the most out of it that they can, and if she can explain it better than me, then that's good. They'll learn from her, from both of us. And also, when she jumps in, I can see where I have problems and see what she does so that I can do it.

Sarah concluded the lesson with an activity in which the students used the light from a slide projector to form shadows on the wall. In this way, the students were able to physically experiment with shadows and test their newly acquired knowledge. The information from the books became immediately real for them.

Sarah's Interpretation of Literacy Instruction in a Non-School Setting

Sarah's participation in La Clase Magica, an alternative educational site, reflected several of her pre-term and post-term conceptions of literacy instruction. She demonstrated an awareness of issues related to linguistic diversity, such as when she suggested playing a computer game in a child's native language, Spanish. In addition, she considered how language differences might influence the understanding of a board game. Sarah's instruction also reflected her conceptions regarding the importance of students' enjoyment, such as her appreciation of the students' enjoyment and sense of accomplishment when they played "Mario Brothers."

During the pre-term and post-term interviews Sarah had also discussed the benefits of cooperative learning. At LCM, she acted as a kind of partner to the students with whom she worked. For example, she took turns reading directions when playing several of the computer games and commented on how well some of the students worked together.

Following is an illustration of Sarah's interpretation of literacy instruction at LCM:

As Sarah inserted the "Lemonade" disk into the computer, she noticed that this game had both Spanish and English versions. She had already been speaking some Spanish with Paulo, the ten year old boy with whom she was working, and knew that this was his first language and the one he spoke at home.

"Should we play this game in Spanish?"

"Okay," Paulo agreed.

"Let's read the directions, because I haven't played this before. Do you know how to play?"

Paulo shook his head, so they started to read the directions together in Spanish. Sarah asked for clarification on some of the terms, and although Paulo was cooperative he was also eager to start playing. He sometimes pressed the "Enter" key in order to skip ahead, and consequently they missed several lines of text.

As Paulo started to play the game, he continued to help Sarah with the Spanish vocabulary; Sarah instructed him on the mathematics involved in running the lemonade stand. Still, Sarah did not understand enough of the Spanish which flashed so quickly across the screen to effectively help Paulo with the game. Finally, she turned to him with a suggestion.

"Do you want to try this in English?"

Paulo sat back in his chair and nodded thankfully. Sarah selected the English version of "Lemonade" and they again started reading through the directions together. This time when Paulo attempted to skip ahead, Sarah stopped him and insisted that they read every line.

Sarah's suggestion to Paulo that they play "Lemonade" in his native language of Spanish reflected her discussion during the pre-term interview regarding the value of students' non-school literacies. It also reflected her statements during the post-term interview of starting instruction with what students already know,

in this case the language. However, Sarah found it difficult to

help Paulo while playing the Spanish version of this game:

> I was trying to slow him down and have him read it, but the
> Spanish, I wasn't so sure. I knew most of it, and I could
> get the gist of it, but I didn't know exactly what it was
> saying, so I would try to ask him.

When they switched to the English version, Sarah was able to

provide more guidance. She was also more insistent about reading

the messages on the computer screen:

> But then when we switched to English, I could understand it,
> and even though he wanted to push the buttons real fast, I
> could still catch a glimpse of it. What we did is, I said,
> "Okay," I said, "We have to read this. You read one line and
> I'll read the next." And that worked pretty well.

During the Spanish version of the game Sarah was compelled by

her inadequate knowledge of the language to be a cooperative

partner with Paulo. She appeared comfortable in this role,

reflecting her pre-term and post-term interview discussions that

working together is enjoyable and academically beneficial. While

playing the English version, however, Sarah became the expert both

in the language and in the mathematics--she and Paulo were no

longer equal partners. At this point Sarah provided more

direction for Paulo and insisted that they read every line of

text. However, she still chose to remain partners at the level of

taking turns reading aloud.

Comparison of Sarah's Interpretations of Literacy

Instruction in a Classroom and in a Non-School Setting

Sarah perceived the culture of the classroom and the culture of LCM as very different, stating that it was "real hard to find similarities" between the two settings. She often referred to the classroom atmosphere as "formal" and LCM as "relaxed":

> School's so much more formal. . . . [The classroom teacher] wants everything just so. You do this and then you do this and then you do this, and that's how you do it, no other way. . . . She likes it to be the way she wants it to be, whereas at LCM, they can just do whatever they want, basically. I mean, as long as they're not hurting anyone else. . . . LCM is so much more relaxed.

Sarah noted that learning occurred in both settings, but that the classroom agenda was set by the teacher while students had more control over the LCM activities. Along with the games, she perceived this as contributing to the students viewing LCM as a place for fun, while the classroom remained strictly a place to learn. The student enjoyment which Sarah perceived at LCM reflected her discussions during the pre-term and post-term interviews regarding the importance of enjoyment and interest in promoting student motivation:

> [LCM is] supposed to be a learning environment, but I don't think the kids think of it as a learning environment. They think of it as fun stuff to do. It doesn't mean they're not learning, but like school you're there to learn, you know? That's what they have to do. . . . In the classroom, it's the teacher's classroom, and that's the way it should be, but at LCM it's everybody's classroom, and they can, we can do it however we want to do it.

Sarah preferred the culture of LCM over that of the classroom for several reasons. She was able to become personally acquainted with the children at LCM and have fun with them. She also had the opportunity to speak Spanish with them, as when she played "Lemonade" with Paulo. Sarah stated that this enabled her to learn about social issues in a way not possible in the classroom, reflecting her statements during the pre-term and post-term interviews regarding the importance of understanding diverse learners:

> I like LCM better. I like going there, 'cause I always have fun with them. And I like the chance to interact in Spanish, too. . . . Sometimes I think I learn more than they do [at LCM], not so much about literacy but social stuff. Social skills and society, I learn about there. I mean, not that I don't learn about it in the school, but at school it's so much more formal, you don't get a chance to get to know your kids like you can at LCM.

Sarah envisioned her own future classroom as being "a little bit noisy," more like LCM than her field placement classroom. She stated that "a more open, interactive atmosphere would be more conducive to learning" because "different people do things differently." She also stated that this type of environment would provide the opportunity for students to learn in their own ways. Sarah attempted to implement some of these ideas in her field placement classroom.

Conclusions and Implications

Prior to her field experiences, Sarah envisioned effective literacy instruction as promoting children's interests in reading through use of children's literature, learning centers, and cooperative group work. She also perceived cooperative group work as helping students acquire differing perspectives. Following her field experiences, Sarah added the element of prior knowledge to her discussions of effective literacy instruction.

In the classroom, Sarah found opportunities to apply many of her concepts of effective literacy instruction. However, she stated that she often did so in spite of perceived disapproval from the cooperating classroom teacher. Sarah envisioned literacy instruction differently than did her cooperating teacher, and stated her theories were closer to those found at LCM. Without the field experience at LCM, Sarah would not have had a model for the type of instruction she wanted to provide for students in the classroom.

LCM also enabled Sarah to interact on an individual basis with diverse students. Although diverse students were also present in her elementary classroom field placement, it appeared that the constraints of classroom instruction were not conducive to Sarah's recognizing and responding to diverse students' multiple literacies in that setting. She noted and appreciated the opportunity to do so at LCM.

Not only did LCM provide the opportunity for individual interactions with diverse students, it also provided a link between school literacy and students' multiple, non-school

literacies. The freedom of choice which the students experienced within the parameters set by the games and the overall structure of LCM enabled them to experience control over their environment. They were able to negotiate the degree to which they relied on school literacy. Consequently, Sarah was able to observe students' use of non-school literacies and attempt to scaffold instruction to incorporate these approaches in literacy learning.

Field placements in multicultural school settings can provide valuable experiences for preservice teachers. However, they may not enable them to directly experience diverse students' multiple, non-school literacies. An additional field placement in a non-school setting may be more conducive to doing this, with more probability of impacting on preservice teachers' conceptions of literacy instruction. It may instruct preservice teachers in how to incorporate non-school literacies into classroom literacy instruction, a crucial element in the education of diverse students.

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