

## Focus Group Notes 9/22/09

### Question 1: In what ways does the MA/Credential program *support* your own teacher learning?

#### Theory in Courses

- We've learned lots of theory but practical methods and feedback help us see where we make connections.
- Theory courses helped me to critique my incoming ideas about teaching.
- Would be helpful to be in classrooms while taking theory courses
- Loved theory class
- Theory directed our practice
- It doesn't: first quarter of program spent too much time on theory.
- It bridges critical theory with education.
- Providing a theoretical framework and foundation to look at teaching and learning.
- For those of us in the Ed. minor, this was a refresher. It helped to solidify our knowledge but with a new perspective—because now we are seeing teaching as a career. “We take it a lot more seriously now. In 207 the readings and reflective papers helped us to form a cohesive argument.
- To introduce alternative theories and realities
- It provides new theories to think about, some are comfortable and others force you to stretch.
- Plenty of new theories and pedagogy through reading
- Summer courses interesting but disconnected from classroom

#### Social Justice

- Social Justice focus- To look at individual teacher goals in terms of these issues and apply the readings.
- It was refreshing to get a language for my social justice views (but got sick of hearing the same buzzwords over and over).
- EDUC 207- Teachers as agents of change.
- To collaboratively discuss diverse experiences, hearing about many different ways education has played out for us and others
- Teaching is a political job. We have to weigh the demands versus the freedoms it affords.
- Broad views represented
- We learn to be advocates.
- 

#### Critical Thinking and Reflection

- Progressive/critical thinking skills supported
- Opportunity to hear others' perspectives on ed, past experiences that shape our views
- Opportunity for self reflection on how our views were formed
- Discussion, critical thinking, critical analysis, debates
- Reflect on contradictions between my own experience and what I am learning and seeing
- To engage in reflection about tensions

- Forced reflection is very welcomed!

### **Cohort**

- Cohort is an opportunity: it's the crossroad between theory and placement.
- Developing a community of learners in cohort fosters a developing student community.
- Small classes/cohorts, break out groups in cohorts, and cohort supervisors provide support .
- I was in CSUSJ and one difference that I really appreciate the cohort experience where we are all in the same level or content area. The conversations apply more to where I am and help me go deeper into my context.
- Cohort provides support. You realize you're not alone.
- Community building, hearing people in cohort and at same placement
- Small cohorts
- Cohorts are great for hearing about others' experiences and sharing your own
- Love cohort
- Access to other graduate students' perspectives is valued.
- UCSC setting provides a space (atmosphere) for reflection on student teaching assignments.
- Not enough talking (SS and MS)
- Collaboration among peers
- As the tribes book points out, human interactions are always changing. We are learning how to relate to young people.
- We help students learn how to interact with others in class.
- Beginning student teaching has been a forum for teaching practice discussion

### **Placement**

- Student teaching placement location/cooperating teacher provides a match to student needs.
- Being exposed to resources/materials we would not normally seek out is valued.
- Placement is key experience so far
- Placements are powerful and help make concrete the reality.. helps me "see" the tensions we are discussing and how they are negotiating them.
- Placement helps me to see what is happening in the field of education.
- This program got me into a school to do my observation/stu teaching (other t ed programs, because of school layoffs, can't find placements for everyone).
- Now in placement, some connections being made
- Informal observations provide good feedback and suggestions such as what prereqs need to be addressed before a lesson takes place so that students will be successful with the material.
- Placement variety, being able to have multiple experiences

### **General Comments**

- The more you learn about education the more you realize you don't know.

- The program helps you learn about overarching tensions in class – you’ve got to know what you’re getting into if you’re going into teaching. Is education always in crisis?
- The program is necessary in order to get a credential!
- EES assignment: exploring the educational setting
- Ed 180 was better intro to teaching
- MS has already started case studies
- Teaching special pops provides more time and space to let placement tie into our own classes vs. 211 class
- Spend too much time on mundane information
- MS feels they *have* gotten strategies, more geared towards MS
- Health courses have given insight into 504/IEP student learning
- Understanding of ‘mainstreaming’
- Assignments have guided our observation in the classroom
- We value the discussion b/w grade level teachers
- Move on to focus on student teaching, being in classroom
- Become familiar with greater community of teachers, research, get motivated
- Program is affirmation of why we are here
- Experience, access to cutting edge research
- Bulletins are great support
- Summer bridge is good

**Question 2: What are some *other ways* you hope the program can support your learning this year?**

**General Comments**

- Help me to further examine and replace my conceptions of what separates good teachers from bad teachers. Help me to figure out what’s important in my own teacher learning and what I can put off until later—b/c right now there’s just too much stuff.
- Can I find a balance? Feels pretty idealistic in content we are getting in courses compared to the placement contexts
- I hope to see how to negotiate the PI environment and context
- Actually what a PI / scripted curriculum is like in local settings
- Build confidence as a teacher
- Grapple with the expectations on me
- Build skills and confidence with whole group facilitation, management that are congruent with the ideologic perspectives we are learning about in courses
- We need to learn more about Houghton Mifflin and other district-adopted programs. We need to learn how to bring the program to life.

**Lesson Planning**

- We want direction/engagement in lesson plan strategies and structure to understand how to implement lesson designs in our placement settings.
- Improve our understanding of “how to do it”, i.e. blending educational theory with lesson plan mechanics.

- Help with developing a lesson plan. The SS classes required them in the summer but we would have liked a model. MS- received a model and written sample. Would like more models and ideas on how to implement strategies and lessons in class.
- Enduring understanding lesson plan format not as helpful.
- How formal should formal lessons be?
- In Single Subject we need lesson planning instruction sooner, before we have to create a lesson plan. Some have never done lesson plans before.
- We need a 1 or 2 hours seminar on lesson planning before we have to create plans for use in placement.
- Summer classes: lesson plans, feedback
- Been in placement since August, have yet to cover lesson plans
- Awesome lesson plans with transformative teaching
- Lesson plans, how to do them! Sooner!
- Feedback from lessons

### **Suggestion for Placements**

- More about student teaching before being placed
- Teachers as researchers: Would like more assignments related to what we are observing in the classroom and relate it to the readings—more focused observations. For example, What are journals for? Anything else besides the guidelines given at the beginning of placement?
- Student teaching placement guidelines: Would like to know more specifically how much to be leading- How many lessons to lead per week. Need more direction and time to talk to CT.
- “What are we supposed to do in placement?” Not enough guidance.
- Would like to see more classes at UC aligned with school placements (schedule-wise)
- Acknowledgement of out placements efforts and time put into our work
- Placement differences are good to see
- What if my CT doesn’t know what’s expected of me and him?
- More time to talk to others, share about placements
- Frustrated – want to see more teachers!
- More scheduled timeline on when to teach

### **Suggestions for Cohort**

- Time to talk about placements in cohort and how our experience in placements relate to what we are learning (reading). Placements are like “the elephant in the room.” We only have a few minutes to talk about them.
- Would like more discussion about placements in beginning of seminar
- How do we incorporate aspects of social justice in our classrooms?
- Our cohort leaders just basically model for us what we’re supposed to do as teachers. I wish they would actually engage us in intellectual conversations as well.
- No more “how we feel”
- Treat us like adults, grad students
- More control over topics discussed in class
- No more useless activities—extended name tags, picture drawing.
- I feel like I am talked to and treated like the elementary students I am going to teach. Please treat us like thinking adults.

- Continue to broaden our perceptions of what we “see” (experience) at our school sites around specific issues, e.g. race, isolation, tracking, student conflict, or other aspects of school culture.
- Feel like some activities are fluff – would like to use class time for more open forum
- We need specific practical strategies.
- “Embarrassing” to show what we do in class
- Wish that math and science were separate
- MS program, value modeling of teaching strategies but would like more grown up time
- Analyze strategies our CTs use
- More discussion of materials, articles, books

### **Political/Economic Context**

- We need training on how to resist attacks on public ed and teacher identity.
- How do we fend off budget cuts in the face of big business tax breaks?
- The gov needs to prioritize. We all need to be able to keep our jobs. We can work towards this through petitions, union involvement, a push for solidarity.
- We need to build dialogues across nations about theory and practice of education. We need to learn from the successes of other cultures. We need this exchange of ideas within the US, too.
- We need to make schools smaller rather than bigger.

### **Other Comments**

- UC in general, hard on theory, lacking the practical, ex. Art major.
- More reading class discussion
- Less theory now, get into more practical application, please show me the tools to apply theories
- More practical strategies
- Repetition between ed Minor and other courses.
- Need Clarity (health class)
- More faculty feedback
- Supervisor and advisor, individual support
- More information on deadlines, expectations & large assignments for the whole year.
- Program communication--Give us the info we need for all three quarters.
- More communication between supervisor, professors, administrators
- Too much emphasis on GBLT, too separate from culture, should be in June’s class
- More classes like Trish’s class – gives us practice and teaching skills.
- Collaboration with various subjects
- Address issues of job market/credential transfer to other states
- See how teachers support each other, opportunity to observe other classrooms, how teachers have different approaches and techniques, other emphases
- 2-unit classes are too much
- Combine health class and special pops
- Health class not very academic
- Ask for student feedback throughout year.

- Ideas about stages of development
- Writing curriculum was a shot in the dark without developmental background
- Info about subbing

### **Question 3: What's an overarching question or tension that is guiding your own development as a teacher right now?**

#### **Working within Curricular and Other Constraints**

- How do we address a school which implements a “heavily” tracked program?
- How do we incorporate “student voice” in a very structured classroom or lesson format?
- Kids respond more to sociocultural curriculum and inquiry-based instruction, but we are also constrained by the standards. It's nice to make the connections to their experience and interests and we can see that it works.
- Scripted Curriculum >>> How can I be the kind of teacher I want to be in a scripted context?
- How do we adjust to a grade-level curriculum which is delivered to underperforming students?
- NCLB provides sanctions rather than support
- Tension within a high school where we teach tracked classes (college prep or not) What can be done? What has been done?
- The standards – there's a lack of freedom to incorporate creativity. Teachers are teaching to the test. Where's the passion? The excitement?
- There is so much focus on the students being able to identify and state which standard they are covering during a lesson.
- Math standards are hard to assess due to language
- How was ed changed in recent years?
- Applying what was learned and reality of current school environment
- 

#### **What and How to Teach**

- The focus of the summer seemed to be social justice and the Bridge is more practical. How to tie them both to the placement?
- Navigating the standards while incorporating fun stuff
- Tension between teaching students to play the game or be critical learners
- Race relations and multiculturalism – how do we incorporate these into school programs in order to enrich the school experience?
- Can I teach these things that I believe, capable of walking into these environments and doing this physically, emotionally, intellectually?
- Children are aware of skin color at an early age. They can't ignore it.
- Actual student comment: “Teacher, I like your color.”
- How do schools perpetuate/challenge inequalities?
- How do we bridge the gap between where students get their knowledge and what we should be teaching them?
- Tension between finding my own authentic teaching style and not falling back on the way I have been taught (teaching as apprentice)
- Wondering how theory will apply in classroom

- How does theory “look” in the classroom?
- How do we lesson plan, do lessons?
- How do we learn about MANY successes of teachers

### **Teaching in Relationship to CT**

- CTs sometimes suggest that you watch what they do and follow the same. Sometimes difficult because we’re not comfortable giving the consequence, or the “vibe” of the class is dependent on the CT’s personality, or we don’t want to undermine the CTs authority.
- Also, not feeling comfortable when the CT makes a factual mistake in lessons. How do you respond?
- My CT is the complete opposite of who I am and the way I would approach things? How do I deal with this?
- My CT is super energetic and enthusiastic. My personality is different. How do I find my own style with my CT being so different?
- The boundaries b/w CT and students teacher, find a balance b/w their lessons and our own.
- CT teaching is only one way
- Disconnected from CT
- How can we be ourselves in CTs classroom?
- Do our CTs have support or training to know how to work with us in 1<sup>st</sup> placement?
- Discipline problems and criticizing CTs’ materials

### **Working with Students**

- Authority, control, energy
- Being too friendly with students
- Understanding how students think before they arrive in class
- How to focus on kids with disabilities without singling them out
- Addressing behavioral issues
- So much time is spent on keeping students in their lines (2nd gr.) and etiquette that they lose out on what they have to learn.
- Feeling that it’s not our place to be “the tough guy.”
- How do we address issues of student discipline and conflict resolution?
- How do we support classes where students could go beyond in their level of work?
- Guilty that my students deserve better than I can give them.
- Balance of discipline, friend v. teacher
- Experience of students
- Developing alternative strategies
- Feeling students deserve better
- How to instill motivation within students, finding where I fit in class

### **Budget and Jobs**

- CA public school budgets
- Where am I going to work? Will I be able to get a job when I finish?
- Worried about getting a job

- With cutbacks, teachers have to scramble to find a job and then they have to commute farther.
- Not being from CA, I need to learn more about this state in which I will be teaching.

### **Dealing with Multiple Demands**

- Where can I negotiate and express my own desire to say NO or YES?
- Life balance
- Grappling with role of students teacher, doesn't feel real
- Bad commute
- How do I deal with feeling so overwhelmed? Teaching, manage classroom, cultural sensitivity, standards, etc.
- Kindergarten experience is new, seem to be winging it
- Dual Immersion program at one school—Teachers speak mostly in Spanish, but kids respond in English.
- How can we arrange, change schedule of UC classes so we don't feel so scattered on have to leave placements early
- Time! Stuff is cramped.
- Money.
- Felt hard to perform in terms of instructor's opinion
- What is my role, expectations and limits
- Should I start in an easier school?
- Am I going to be ready next school year? I'm not now.
- Do I really want to be a teacher that was to fit into our current system?
- Am I in the right placement? Why am I in 1<sup>st</sup> grade if I want to be in 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup>?
- How to deal with political aspects of the job
- Working with administration.
- I need to learn the content knowledge better.
- Feel like guinea pigs sometimes!
- Don't beat yourself up over mistake
- Personal needs v. program needs
- Generational issues, older teachers, younger students
- Tension on where I fall on the Bilingual Program Spectrum / Context (English Immersion, Dual Language Immersion, Other Bilingual Programs)

### **4. “Social justice teaching” tends to mean different things to different people. What are some tenets that all of us in this group can agree belong in any definition of social justice teaching?**

- Social justice is a continuous critical assessment of self, students and systems.
- Equity vs. equality: ensuring that each student is getting what they need (more resources).
- Valuing Equity over Equality
- Equity v. equality
- Equitable practice

- Acknowledging differences between equity and equality
- Equity, awareness of our own impact on people
- Equity and content, go beyond standards
- Equity in schools but also within classroom
- Equity v. equality
- Ed equity
- Difference between equity and equality
- Equal educational opportunity and access for all students is essential.
- Valuing all students equally.
- Bringing in multicultural perspectives (other than Western Anglo-Saxon perspectives).
- Culturally relevant lesson planning.
- Incorporating culture into lessons
- Recognizing differences amongst students
- Experiences of all kinds of people
- Materials represent diverse perspectives
- Maintaining consciousness about our classroom diversities
- Addressing diversity of classroom
- Awareness of student background
- Preparing ALL students to meet their full potential and have access to ALL opportunities Appropriate adjustment of teaching, i.e. modifications, needs to exist especially in considering high expectations for all students.
- The ability to not always judge things but to open-mindedly examine them instead.
- Critical examination of the teacher's prior assumptions about students
- We want to teach people HOW to think.. teaching the ability to critically think / problem solve.. how to be critical learners
- Teach students to be critical about issues.
- Providing a good critical ed for our students
- Critical thinking
- Looking at whole person, critical analysis
- How to find answers, now what the answer is
- Students who have high specific needs (i.e. "need it more") must have access to teachers and resources.
- A belief that thru education we can transform/remake the world
- Ability to make lessons exciting and interesting.
- The ability to begin at the individual level and moves out from there.
- Being open-minded
- Constant assessment of the way you convey your thoughts and how they are perceived by others.
- Not seeing the primary language as a negative.
- Valuing Individual Identities of our Students
- What do we need to know about the world? Global thinking? What is national identity? Being critical, having debates.
- Addressing social issues and having open dialogue across perspectives
- Bringing Community into the Classroom
- Includes supporting students to become contributing members to the community

- Institutionalized oppression – what the state says is what we have to do/teach.
- Ideological clarity
- What are our views? What are the dominant views?
- Becoming an advocate, an ally
- Have demands you can stand behind and push for.
- Yosso: critical race theory in education – how it is applied.
- Connect students with the world. Help them understand global issues.
- We give a damn.
- Multi-faceted, multiple methods of teaching
- Catering to needs
- Finding a balance for all students
- Framing discipline in a way that empowers
- Know about kids' backgrounds, what makes them tick, why they do what they do
- How do students develop self-image, what do we do as teachers to educate children and also shape identities
- Categorizing, detracked classrooms
- Authentic problem-based activities
- Kids know why they're learning what they're learning
- "Why should I care?"
- Make scripted curriculum more purposeful for self and students
- Umbrella of respect
- Teachable moments
- Clarifying words, labels, stereotypes, stigmas
- Effectively working with indifference levels of learning
- Accepting and understanding, not judging or labeling
- Differentiated teaching
- Not having preconceptions, aware of biases and expectations
- Fostering self-directed learning, students teaching each other
- Setting safe tone in classroom
- Inter-generational responsibility
- Systemic and institutionalized injustices, be aware of address
- Consciousness of imbalance and how to address
- Sociohistorical context, where students are in a system
- Responsibility to meet needs of all students
- Compassion for humanity. Start with this!
- Empathy and solidarity
- Self reflection
- Setting boundaries