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ETHNOGRAPHY FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

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Preservice teachers are faced with many challenges when observing elementary classrooms and often jump to critical evaluation based on too little evidence. The authors wondered if preservice teachers could use observation methods from ethnography and sociolinguistics to delay their evaluations and interpretations of classroom practice and see from an insider's perspective. The authors developed a study in which 42 preservice teachers learned how to observe through this approach and then observed 22 elementary teachers with fieldnotes and interviews. Classroom discourse was central to the research as observers recorded the "talk" during writing instruction. By analyzing the notes, interviews, and summaries, the authors found that preservice teachers were able to record talk and action in classrooms without critical evaluations. They used quotes from fieldnotes as evidence for their interpretations of what was happening. Their summaries included discussions of how discourse shapes instructional events and how teachers use talk to organize and manage classrooms.

Keywords: *classroom observation; ethnographic fieldnotes and interviews; classroom discourse; preservice teacher observations*

One of the requirements in many methods courses in teacher education is to do classroom observations. Still in the process of learning the profession, preservice teachers are faced with many challenges when asked to observe elementary classrooms. One challenge is that the various and complex contexts within classrooms demand different ways of acting and speaking (Erickson, 1982; Green & Harker, 1982). Another is the rapid decision making of the classroom teacher with readjustments to the various roles and positions that are required to meet the individual needs of different students (Dixon, Frank, & Brandts, 1997). These various factors make the classroom vulnerable to criticism by those who do not understand the complexity of what is occurring. The problem this presents to preservice teachers is that they often jump to interpretation and critical evaluation based on too little evidence and use their own

experience instead of close observation as a frame of reference.

When preservice teachers are asked to observe classrooms with rating scales, checklists, coding systems, or counting measures, they are using systems that are predetermined, contain questions from outside the classroom being observed, and define in an a priori manner all events that will happen (Borich, 1999). Teaching and learning as complex phenomena are seen as narrow categories, and underlying assumptions and theories that drive these schemes look as if they are based on simplistic models of instruction (when that is not the case). Preservice teacher observations from this perspective are based on what research says should be happening in classrooms and not on what is actually happening in classrooms. Critics of these coding methods point out that observers are less likely to gain access to how classroom

participants organize and interpret interactions (Edwards & Westgate, 1994).

What other recourses then do we have when we ask preservice teachers to observe complex contexts of teaching and learning inside classrooms? We address this problem by drawing on anthropological research methods that study the complexity of classrooms so that preservice teachers can become different kinds of observers. Observers using a qualitative perspective view interactions between teachers and students inside classrooms as cultural and linguistic (Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Florio-Ruane, 1990). A qualitative or ethnographic approach assumes that the cultural practices of members of a social group can be uncovered by listening to the language and observing the actions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The purpose of ethnographic and sociolinguistic observation is to understand teaching from the perspective of the practitioner and to uncover the social practices of the members of the classroom (Green, Dixon, & Zaharlick, 2002). Rather than observing classrooms from a predetermined set of tasks that should be happening in classrooms, an anthropological view of classrooms as cultures understands that what is happening inside classrooms is socially constructed through language (Cazden, 2001; Dixon, Frank, & Green, 1999; Edwards & Mercer, 1987); that is, teachers plan lessons by following curricular guidelines and assessments and strive to become effective teachers. However, what is actually happening moment-by-moment, day-by-day inside classrooms is constructed socially by teachers and students as they engage in conversations and particular social practices (Bloome, 1985; Rex, 2001; Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992).

Our experience with ethnography prior to becoming teacher educators made us think about using ethnographic methods of observation with preservice teachers who were required to observe in elementary classrooms. Our orienting questions for the current study were the following: Could preservice teachers use observation methods from ethnography and sociolinguistics to delay their evaluations and interpretations of classroom practice?

Would field notes and interviews help preservice teachers see what was happening inside classrooms with more understanding of what teachers were doing? In deciding what kind of inquiry would answer these questions, we developed a study in which 42 preservice teachers learned how to observe through ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods and then observed 22 teachers in elementary classrooms. In the current study, we found that preservice teachers who used an ethnographic lens during their observation were able to delay critical evaluation of classroom practices and use field notes as evidence for their interpretations of what was happening during writing instruction.

Classroom communication, in the form of conversation, is central to the research described in this article. In the current study, we asked preservice teachers to observe classrooms by recording the "talk" of teacher and students as they interacted during writing instruction. By making dialogue the focus of their observations, we asked these preservice teachers to inquire into how talk between teachers and students creates knowledge about writing and how it might be different in different contexts. We gave them guidelines concerning what events to observe, how to see from a member's perspective, how to take field notes, how to think about point of view, and how to describe writing instruction by using the language of the classroom. As Edwards and Westgate (1987) wrote, "While talk is certainly complex, subtle, illusive and often ambiguous, it is about time educational research adopted appropriately complex and sensitive forms of enquiry and explanation" (p. 14).

THEORETICAL FRAME

Ethnography

Within the discipline of educational ethnography (Green & Bloome, 1997), the current study was grounded in anthropological methods of participant observation (Spradley, 1980) and ethnographic interviews (Agar, 1994; Spradley, 1979). In explaining an ethnographic

approach to observation for preservice teachers, we drew on Spindler and Spindler's (1987) 10 criteria for good ethnography: observations are contextualized, hypothesis emerge in situ, observation is prolonged and repetitive, the native view of reality is attended, the task is to elicit knowledge from informants, questions for interviews should be generated in situ, a comparative perspective is present, ethnographers make what is implicit and tacit explicit to informants, interviewers must not predetermine responses by the kinds of questions asked, and any form of technical device will be used.

Sociolinguistics

The current study also draws on the theories from sociolinguistics, or the study of language use in educational settings (Bloome & Green, 1984; Cazden, 2001; Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1972; Green, 1983a; Wilkinson, 1982). Wilkinson wrote that sociolinguistic "descriptions provide us with a richer understanding of the life in classrooms, revealing the diversity of students and the complexity of communicating in this context" (p. 3). She described three assumptions that underlie a sociolinguistic perspective. The first is the concept of communicative competence, which is a belief that knowing how to speak within classrooms is just as important for student success as knowing what to speak (Florio & Shultz, 1979; Mehan, 1979). The second is that the classroom is a unique communicative context as compared with other social settings in that it is intended to facilitate the acquisition of academic information by students. The third is the view that students differ in their knowledge of classroom communication thus regulating their chances for academic success. In her study of teaching as a linguistic process, Green (1983b) described why conversations are critically important to observe within classrooms. She wrote,

Teaching, therefore, is a creative process; it is a process of creating environments, of creating activities, of creating situations with children so that children can master the academic and social content of schooling. The vehicle for this creative process is communication. (p. 183)

RELATED RESEARCH

Although there have been studies that have used ethnography with in-service teachers for purposes of teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Denyer, Florio-Ruane, & Raphael, 2001; Hubbard & Power, 1993; Wallat, Green, Conlin, & Haramis, 1981), and studies of classroom students as ethnographers (Beach & Finders, 1999; Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998), only a few have used ethnography with preservice teachers for observation (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992; Cordova & Neves, 2001; Dick, 1993; Frank, 1999). Florio-Ruane (1990) became one of the first to guide preservice teachers to observe classrooms through ethnography by asking preservice teachers to become anthropologists to temporarily "hold our interpretations in question and to suspend our value judgments so that our observations can be more complete and reflective of the people we are studying" (p. 34). She asked students to draw maps of the classroom, record event logs, and become participant observers and ethnographic interviewers. She distinguished between "recording facts about what is happening (e.g., by writing down word for word what someone says)" and between "making interpretations of those facts (e.g., making educated guesses about what they might mean to the people involved)" (p. 340).

Other studies that look at talk in classrooms have found that instructional conversations are sometimes patterned intentionally by teachers to form classroom cultures that are more inclusive (Rex, 2000; Rex & McEachen, 1999), or to help students build identities as authors who write in workshops together (Frank, 2001), or to illustrate how elementary students can take on identities of mathematicians, historians, and scientists by engaging in different discourses and social practices (Lemke, 1990; Lin, 1993; Yeager, Floriani, & Green, 1998). As researchers studied classroom discourse (Cazden, 2001; Edwards & Westgate, 1994), they discovered that there are traditional ways of talking in classrooms (Mehan, 1979; Wells, 1993) where teachers ask questions they already know the answers to and nontraditional ways of talking that encourage the acceptance of alternative

student answers (Hiebert et al., 1996). By looking at classroom talk, Rex and her teacher colleagues (Rex, Murnen, Hobbs, & McEachen, 2002) were able to make a claim about how teachers teach through storytelling. Other studies in mathematics classrooms looked at student understandings through investigating the way mathematic teachers talked (Lampert, 1990, 1998).

METHOD AND DESIGN

The site of the teaching college in the current study is located 5 miles from the center of a large urban city with substantial Hispanic American and Asian American populations. Our college has a long-standing tradition of serving the linguistically diverse cultures of this region and has one of the most culturally rich and distinctly varied student bodies of any university in the nation. When the research took place during the academic year 2000-2001, all credential candidates in our California university who wanted to teach in elementary school were admitted to a graduate program in education that usually took 1 to 3 years to complete.

The 42 preservice teachers in the current study (20 in one class and 22 in another) were 5% African American, 28% Asian American, 31% White, and 36% Hispanic American (nine were men). At this commuter campus, 67% were working in elementary schools in the county as either teachers with emergency permits or as instructional aides. The 22 experienced, credentialed teachers who were being observed in the current study were 23% Asian American, 59% White, and 18% Hispanic American (only one man). The number of years of teaching experience of these teachers ranged from 3 to 23 years. All teachers were working in elementary schools near our university and were engaged in some kind of writing instruction during part of the day that they had identified as "writing workshop" or "writers' workshop."

The graduate course in the current study (Proseminar in Writing/Language Arts Instruction) met once a week for 4 hours for a 10-week quarter. For this course, the preservice teachers were required to do a 14-hour observation in a

classroom where writing workshop was being taught. We asked the preservice teachers to observe a teacher who was using writing workshop as the instructional method for writing because we were focusing on that approach in the course and because we wanted them to be able to connect the theories presented at the university with the practice in the field. The assignment was to take ethnographic fieldnotes for 4 days and to interview the teacher on the 5th day.

Students were taught ethnographic methods of observation. To do this, we first defined *ethnography* and then shared ethnographic fieldnotes taken from our own research and demonstrated how more evidence can be obtained by writing as much of the talk and action as possible. We asked them to focus their notes on conversations during writing instruction, especially during writing conferences. We provided a video for practice and discussed the differences between descriptive and interpretive fieldnotes or note taking and note making (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997). Then they practiced taking fieldnotes in other classrooms at the university before they observed elementary classrooms (see Frank, 1999 for a detailed discussion of classroom observations).

In previous years, when we asked preservice teachers to take fieldnotes, they tended to write about the talk instead of writing the talk as they heard it. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) discussed the importance of collecting the speech of the actors in ethnographic notes:

As far as possible, therefore, speech should be rendered in a manner that approximates to a verbatim report; this minimizes the level of inference. . . . We can inspect the notes with a fair assurance that we are gaining information on how the participants themselves described things, who said what to whom, and so on. When we compress and summarize we not only lose "interesting" detail and "local colour," we can lose vital information. *The actual words people use* [italics added] can be of considerable analytic importance. (pp. 181-183)

In addition, when observers did not focus on writing as much of the talk as they could, we noticed that they sometimes drifted into interpretations. This is normal for all of us when we observe social situations, and judgments creep into what we observe. However, because

preservice teachers tended to make evaluations based on limited knowledge of teaching and learning, we wanted the observers to hold off on interpretations and concentrate on trying to capture all the talk first. It is difficult enough to try to write down everything teachers say in classrooms but almost impossible if the observer is also writing down interpretations, judgments, or evaluations (Frank, Uy, & Adenika-Morrow, 2000). We wanted the preservice teachers to concentrate on the language of the moment and wait a bit to interpret or assess what they had seen and heard.

Preservice teachers were taught to analyze the fieldnotes and write a summary of their findings. To do this, we asked students to reread their notes line by line (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) looking for three or four ideas "that struck them" or that they thought were significant. In bringing forth those ideas, we asked them to search for names, events, patterns, or routines that would point to certain themes. We asked them to use the quotes from their fieldnotes as evidence for their interpretations and discussed with them how rereading them might lead to new interpretations. While modeling how to analyze these notes, we drew on our own research fieldnotes and summaries (Uy, 2003).

Parallel to this work were textbook readings and discussions by the preservice teachers about writing process, writing assessments, and language arts instruction. Discussions in class ranged from the technical and structural aspects of designing a language arts program (such as literature focus units, literature circles, theme cycles, and reading/writing workshops) to theoretical discussions of time, choice, response, and ownership as important concepts to understand in writing workshop (Atwell, 1998). They watched videos of teacher conferences, discussed how the teacher's language during these conferences is vital to the formation of a writing environment, and engaged in writing groups where they responded to each other's writing.

Data Collection and Analysis

Our data collection and analysis were guided by our orienting question: Could observers who

use an ethnographic and sociolinguistic lens delay their interpretations of classroom practice and see from an insider perspective? We questioned whether they could write fieldnotes that included the talk of the classroom without quick interpretations based only on their experiences as a frame of reference. Would delaying evaluations help them interpret the observations with understandings that included teacher and student perspectives? Given the nature of the problem, the kind of data that we asked preservice teachers to collect included fieldnotes, interviews with in-service teachers, and summaries of the observations. The preservice and in-service teachers knew we were working on this research study and signed release forms allowing us to use their notes and summaries in our report. All names used here are pseudonyms.

Fieldnotes. Preservice teachers wrote fieldnotes by hand during their observations as they recorded as much of the talk and actions as they could (Figure 1). The notes were written in elementary classrooms during a period known as "writing workshop." Preservice teachers noted the time in their fieldnotes when they started observing and thereafter noted it periodically. Most of the observations were done in pairs in the same classroom on the same days. All 42 were physically present during the observation except two who did their observation from a videotape. All notes were in English except two, which were in Spanish. The fieldwork was completed over a period of 10 weeks during the fall quarter of 2000.

Fieldnotes were read before the summaries during our analysis. We counted the number of pages and found that the average number of pages was 26 (Table 1). The larger data sets were more descriptive of the sites and included more details of the talk and actions. The notes were examined to see if they were holistic in nature; that is, we wanted to know whether the fieldnotes described who was talking, when, where, under what conditions, and for what purposes. We wanted to know whether the context of the situation (Erickson & Shultz, 1981; Green, 1983a) was included in the fieldnotes. To examine that aspect, we looked at whether the

Ms: Teacher
S: student

15 student

11/6

Observation
Teacher waits in front of Classroom.

Ms: Take out your Writing Workshop Folder.
- lets see what we are going through
- I like the way Sandy has her folder out
- oh im going 2 give u a min. to see what u are going 2 be working on.
- I need 2 check what u are doing
- lets review quickly
- Friday's minilesson.
- Kelly thanks Ms Kimble how many people are doing something
- Kimberly: I know u were listing
"S: Kimberly: me."
"Ms: It u write about 1 person are u talk is going 2 be diff. if u talk about two people.
- let me choose someone show who I haven't chosen.
- Jaks were are you at?
"S: I don't know
S: Pre writing
"Ms: Kimberly: look up at the chart 2 help you.
"Brandon were 2 you at
"S: Drafting
"Ms: Jessica: Pre writing
Ms: yo been 2 writing 4 5 days, I'm going 2 put u down for drafting.

Figure 1: Christy's Fieldnotes 11/6/00

speaker of the conversation was identified (teacher or student); what the topic of conversation was; whether actions were also included in the notes; if the time of the day had been recorded; if books, writing samples, boardwork, or artifacts had been collected; and whether the observer had described where in the room the action was taking place.

We also looked at whether the observer was able to keep the field notes focused on the minute-by-minute classroom events rather than on personal interpretations. Because ethnographic and sociolinguistic perspectives would not impose an outsider's description of events while being constructed by members, we wanted to see if the observers would let the participants name events and practices instead of assigning names to things from outside the classroom (such as writing workshop, writer's workshop, status-of-class, author's chair, etc.).

Interviews. The interviews were a combination of formal and informal conversations with

Table 1 Criteria That Guided the Analysis of Field Notes

Field Notes	Notes
Number of pages of field notes	1099 (average 26)
Field notes included conversation (talk)	41 out of 42 yes
Field notes included interpretations, evaluations, or judgments	33 none; 8 very few
Field notes included map of classroom	28 yes
Field notes included collection of artifacts	12 yes
Student interviewed teacher	40 yes

in-service teachers after the fieldnotes were collected. Usually the preservice teachers waited until the 5th day to sit down with the in-service teachers and ask questions about the observation during recess or lunch. The questions were focused on what had happened during writing workshop and why. In some instances, the questions became more personal as preservice teachers asked how long teachers had been teaching or why they had decided to teach in elementary school. An ethnographic perspective was part of the process of interviewing, and preservice teachers focused on what they could discover from the informants.

The preservice teachers asked us what questions to ask during the interviews, and although we gave them some ideas (Agar, 1994; Spradley, 1979), we cautioned them that their questions would evolve from the observation, would be different depending on the classroom, and would depend on their own individual interests. The questions that developed ranged from, "Could you describe a typical day in your class?" and "What are all the ways space is used by the students in the classroom?" to questions more focused on writing workshop such as "How did you find out about writer's workshop?" and "Where do you get your ideas for writer's workshop?" If the preservice teacher used the observation to guide the interview, the questions were more specific: "What are the spoons for on the homework chart? What are the orange tickets for? How many journals do they have?"

Some of the interview questions were peculiar to writing workshop. For example, when one preservice teacher asked, "Is there an area you perceive as needing improvement in the writer's workshop with your students?" the

teacher answered, "Yes, peer conferencing is an art, but my students don't see that. They don't know enough to ask a good question. They're not critical enough. They don't take the peer conferences seriously. Sometimes they just socialize or fool around" (Margaret). In this way, preservice teachers collected data from practitioners concerning theoretical concepts learned in class. While we expounded on the benefits of peer conferences for writing revision at the university, they were hearing practice wisdom from classroom teachers about how peer conferences may be beneficial but were also difficult to implement in real classrooms.

These interviews served the purpose of "member checking" with the in-service teacher, which is a method that enables an ethnographer to triangulate or check interpretations with members of the culture (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this way, the preservice teachers were able to draw on "shared perspectives on what constituted the reality under discussion" (Edwards & Westgate, 1987, p. 72) while they summarized their observations. Most in-service teachers were unfamiliar with the process of being observed with fieldnotes and interviews and were typically interested in what the preservice teachers were doing. One preservice teacher wrote,

I did an informal interview with (the teacher) and I tried to speak to her about what I saw daily after class. At first she told me I made her very nervous because of all the writing I was doing. I showed her my field notes and informed her that I was only writing down what I saw and not opinions or interpretations. She seemed to be satisfied with my answer and did not mention the amount I was writing again. (Mary)

Summaries. The summaries were similar to "fieldwork journals" that Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) described as "a running account of the conduct of the research that includes a record not only of the fieldwork, but also of the ethnographer's own personal feelings and involvement" (p. 192). During the analysis of the summaries, we each reread their fieldnotes and then compared them to the summaries, taking notes as we read. Afterward, we came together and discussed whether the sum-

maries had drawn evidence from fieldnotes and interviews and whether they had made interpretations based on that evidence. If the fieldnotes illustrated different conversational contexts, we examined whether the preservice teacher was aware of these different contexts and aware of the differing conversational demands for teachers and students for each context (Cazden, 2001; Erickson, 1982; Green & Harker, 1982). To investigate this aspect, we reread summaries to see if they quoted conversations from their notes or interviews, if they referred to differences in classroom events, or if they used their fieldnotes as evidence for interpretations that they made in the summaries.

FINDINGS

The task for teachers and researchers is to make the usually transparent medium of classroom discourse the object of focal attention. (Cazden, 2001, p. 4)

In the following discussion we illustrate how an anthropological frame provided preservice teachers a disciplined way of evading too-soon-crystallized judgments, how it helped them use evidence they had collected themselves for their interpretations of classroom practices, and how ethnographic interviews gave them a way of collaborating with experienced colleagues. We also provide evidence to show how using a sociolinguistic lens helped preservice teachers see how in-service teachers directed instruction through talk, and how talk was used by the teacher to organize and manage the classroom.

Observing Events

In the current study we found that preservice teachers doing observations from an ethnographic perspective were able to write fieldnotes that described what was happening inside classrooms without jumping to judgment. In the notes, we found that 41 preservice teachers were able to write descriptions about what was happening during writing instruction without making interpretations or evaluations based on their own personal perspectives during the data collection period. Of the preservice teachers, 33 had not made any interpretations

(Figure 1), and 8 made very few (and these were in the form of questions to be asked of the teacher during the interview rather than evaluations, as in Figure 2).

In the following example, we compare field notes from Barry and Valerie to illustrate this point. Barry did his observation early in the quarter before the lessons on ethnographic observations. His fieldnotes show that he did not record the talk of the teacher or children and, because he was not recording conversations concretely, illustrate how he failed to learn as much as possible by not collecting enough evidence. He filtered what was heard through his own interpretation and then summarized it. We compared his notes, taken on his last day of observation, with the fieldnotes of Valerie (taken in the same classroom) who was just beginning her observation and who had completed the lessons on ethnography. It can be seen, as these two sets of fieldnotes are compared side-by-side during author's chair, that while Barry was compressing and writing about the talk, Valerie was recording as much of the words that the teacher and children used as possible. She was collecting more information from the classroom to use as evidence for her interpretation. Barry's field notes during one moment in this classroom (9:50 a.m.) contain one line, whereas Valerie's contain 18 lines.

Barry's Field notes for 9:50 a.m. 10/17 (Megan's Author's Chair):

9:50: During Author's chair, I notice the papers have become more descriptive

Valerie's Field notes for 9:50 a.m. 10/17 (Megan's Author's Chair):

9:50: Teacher rings bell "Okay it is author's chair time" Students get up push in chairs and take their compositions along with them to the rug area. Teacher pulls out a log and calls out a name of student and title of story.

"Your Done!" a student remarks.

S—Comments: I like when you said . . . I like your brother's curly hair.

S— Questions: How old are your brothers? What are the names of your parents and brothers?

Teacher: What is a name going to do for you? Names are important to inform us. Character "Viola Swamp" ugly name. Think of a swamp is ugly and dirty. Well the character plays a . . . that is mean and ugly. So that's why names are important.

11:15
Teacher waits for students to get their notes out
T— "raise your hand if you remember the idiom from last night (students hand)
S— "your blood runs cold."
S— "RL Stine has it in *Beast*."
S— "It means you're afraid."
T— "who would like to read the idiom today?"
T— "Does make my blood boil mean I'm hot? - No."
S— "happy?" - "No."
T— "read - yes!"
T— talks about 1,11 finger raising
S— "These boys make my blood boil when they always play jokes on me."
S— "when you miss the bus."
T— "I want you to write in your notebook, what makes your blood boil."

Figure 2: Hilda's Fieldnotes 11/2/00

Comparing these two sets of fieldnotes illustrates that writing as much of the classroom talk as possible allows preservice teachers opportunities to see from the teacher's perspective. Observers who use ethnographic techniques see informants who are engaged in "cultural rituals" and in doing so are able to see what is actually happening and not what is assumed is happening. The difference between writing about the talk and writing the talk verbatim means the difference between glancing quickly at a classroom from an outside perspective and seeing or understanding it from the emic or insider's perspective. By interpreting at the same time, he was trying to describe the classroom in his fieldnotes ("I notice the papers have become more descriptive"), Barry missed an opportunity to observe how a teacher teaches descriptive writing. In this instance, the teacher gives her students a useful writing strategy, telling her students that writers can name characters so that readers will understand their personalities. She draws on Viola Swamp, an ugly and mean substitute teacher from *Miss Nelson Is Missing* (Allard & Marshall, 1977), as an example.

For 4 days of observations, Barry only took six pages of notes and then wrote his interpretation of writing workshop in his summary:

The loose atmosphere brought a high noise level. I am not sure students were able to write effectively with the loud noise. Student collaboration changed into visiting and drawing pictures instead of proof-reading and revising papers. I wonder if the writer's workshop time could be better focused in a more directed manner.

Valerie, on the other hand, took 42 pages of fieldnotes during her 4 days of observing that were all focused on the conversations during writing instruction. Her conclusions about this same teacher's writing workshop were quite different, believing that

now I have a more accurate understanding of how to proceed with creating an atmosphere like Megan's in my own classroom some day. I feel confident enough that as soon as I get my own classroom I will start a writer's workshop as soon as I start teaching. I noticed that just reading the information in a book is not the same as witnessing an actual session.

Valerie was able to look at informants acting in various roles and relationships as she found that "everyone knew just what was expected of them, so they kept the noise level down." In addition, Valerie noticed how this teacher used the language of writers: "I really like how Megan used technical terms when answering children." Valerie implied that there was a role reversal in writing workshop as she concluded her summary with, "What struck me the most from observing this class was that the workshop ran so smoothly and everyone was learning from it. It was almost as if it was being run by the students." Not only did she observe what writing workshop looked like in a classroom but also was able to visualize herself as a writing workshop teacher in the future. Her ethnographic fieldnotes gave her the opportunity to see this classroom from the perspective of the teacher to understand what was being accomplished and why.

Using Evidence for Interpretation

Using an ethnographic approach for observation, preservice teachers collected evidence in the form of fieldnotes and then used this evidence to summarize their interpretations. One of the most striking differences between these

summaries and ones we received in the past from preservice teachers who had used coding systems was that these observers were using quotations from their notes as evidence for their interpretations of what happened during writing instruction. They were writing and speaking from an informed position as participant observers who had spent time with one teacher. For example, Connie's summary explained what she noticed about the teacher conference and used quotations from her fieldnotes:

She gave positive feedback that I think helped the students reflect on their own pieces. With Student #1, her remarks were both guiding and encouraging: "What is the main idea. Good sentence. . . . Good detail. . . . What did you think when that happened? How about a sentence or two where you explain it?" With Student #2, she asked a lot of questions that helped the writer develop her piece: "How are you going to give me examples of what that is like? How does your monster move? How are you going to scare me? Help me to imagine." She makes the writer aware of her audience. She gives suggestions about what to include.

In Connie's summary, the description of the conference centered on how the teacher helped students expand their writing by giving attention to detail and to questions readers might ask. She drew on the evidence collected in the fieldnotes to give examples of how the teacher talked during a conference. Connie also noticed that the conference context was a place where writers "reflect on their own pieces" and that the resource used to teach writing was the student's own piece. What is interesting in this summary is Connie's point of view. Instead of explaining from her own position as a preservice teacher and student, she has taken up the concerns of the teacher and focused on how the questions that the teacher used in the writing conference were based on the needs of the student. Connie draws from the observation an awareness of how teachers engage in instructional conversations depending on the needs of their students.

Ethnographic Interviews

Using an ethnographic approach allowed preservice teachers opportunities to collaborate

with more experienced teachers during ethnographic interviews. Of the 42 preservice teachers, 40 engaged in interviews. Observers became skilled note takers; however, until they had a chance to interview the teacher, the fieldnotes presented some questions for them. As one preservice teacher wrote in her summary, "Interviewing and observation are both important. One is not complete without the other." In one instance, a preservice teacher observed a child covering her mouth during author's chair and questioned the teacher about this.

There were several things that *I needed (the teacher) to explain to me* [italics added]. One was, why did Julie cover her mouth when she spoke in the author's chair? Julie, a very shy child, had just started using English this past year. It was her first time in the author's chair. (The teacher) was thrilled that she had come so far. (Melody)

In another case, a preservice teacher recorded in his fieldnotes how the teacher pointed to the students instead of calling them by name: "When I point to you you'll come back to my desk and get this piece of paper. (She doesn't call on students—she's pointing to them.)" In his summary, he explained how the interview clarified this observation: "Much of the time (the teacher) will point instead of calling out a student's name. *When I asked her about this* [italics added], she said, 'It's to make sure the students are paying attention to me with their eyes as well as their ears'" (Nate). In this way preservice teachers used interviews to answer questions about what the teachers were doing during the observation as well as why they were doing them.

Some preservice teachers e-mailed their questions to the in-service teacher. These e-mails gave preservice teachers opportunities to discuss teaching and learning on an experiential level with practitioners. In addition, they asked questions about strategies that happened in a context that both had witnessed instead of discussing abstract concepts at the university. When asked over e-mail if the class had been a "GATE" (Gifted and Talented) class, the teacher was able to expand this observation and guide the preservice teacher to a more child-centered

view of instruction as she explained how writing workshop is beneficial for urban classrooms with a range of resources. She answered,

No, I do not have the GATE class. I have quite a range of abilities. You may notice that many of my students are English Language Learners. Writing workshop is good for them because it is a low anxiety, process approach to learning writing conventions and form. (Karen)

Observing How Talk Shapes Instruction

From a sociolinguistic perspective, looking explicitly at the classroom talk helped preservice teachers understand how in-service teachers directed instruction and how classroom discourse shapes instructional events. Summaries pointed to how teachers used the vocabulary of writers such as *proofread* and *revise* as they taught writing. In doing so, they were noting how teachers and children took on identities of authors and writers by using this language. As Melody wrote,

The third thing that impressed me the most was that the classroom was rich with writers' vocabulary. Everyday, as evidenced by my notes, Megan went over the writing process. She uses the phrase, "That's what good readers and writers do, keep revising," and "Use proofreading symbols to revise." I heard her say, "I like your web."

Preservice teachers who recorded the language also noticed that certain classroom cultures had particular ways of talking and acting. It is possible this "situated vocabulary" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) is what helps preservice teachers see from an insider perspective. Willa discovered that observing in a classroom where children begin to direct the routine means that they develop a kind of culture (or as she called it a "secret society") with particular kinds of classroom language. Willa wrote,

Throughout my observation it quickly became apparent that the students were the ones running the class. (The teacher) would ask the children about the next thing they would be doing almost daily. The children all knew the routine. It was almost like being part of a cult or secret society. *They had their own language* [italics added]. During Writers' Workshop, as they were signing up for what to work on that day,

the students would say "D1, D2, peer conference, teacher conference or publish."

It was this attention to and focus on classroom language that allowed these observers to notice how the talk was used to teach writing. Their fieldnotes that froze the dialogue on paper helped them understand the importance of using words such as "D1" (which meant, "I'm still writing my first draft.") or "peer conference" (which meant that the author was meeting with a colleague and discussing how to revise a piece of writing). They drew from their fieldnotes evidence that illustrated how language was the medium for instruction and how it was used to support students as they became writers (or mathematicians or historians or scientists).

Classroom Management

Focusing on the classroom language helped preservice teachers observe how teachers use "teacher talk" to organize and manage classrooms. Some realized that the success of having children make their own decisions in a workshop environment depended on the organization, structure, and hard work of the teacher. Henry wrote,

The students were also responsible for themselves and their writing. There was a lot of independence but there was also *structure and organization* [italics added]. The students had various processes they had to go through, but they had the freedom to go through it at their own pace. I also saw how much work it was for the teacher. It's hard to teach students to be independent and think independently because they are so used to being told what to do all through school.

Henry was not seeing this classroom as chaotic but as complex with structure and organization that was put into place by the teacher. The challenging and daunting question for these preservice teachers of how to provide a democratic classroom for children while at the same time organizing a well-managed environment was answered as the observers took fieldnotes on the talk and actions of the members. They appreciated watching experienced informants who could show them organizational strategies

and teach them tricks of the trade. For instance, transitioning from one event to another and getting the students' attention were concerns of observers. They noticed how "Counting Down," "Simon Says," and clapping patterns were used to involve and organize the children. In one instance, music was used to direct events. Connie wrote,

I also noticed that music was a big element in her class. She played classical music after high activity outdoors to soothe the children, and she played James Brown's "I Feel Good" in a freeze-frame format to get the students in a fun mood to clean up.

Critical Issues of Equity and Social Justice

Although preservice teachers did not observe classrooms long enough to research critical issues of equity and social justice in depth, there were two instances where gender and racial differences during writing workshop were discussed in our university classroom. The first concerned gender issues during the author's chair. Mindy wrote in her summary,

In particular, an incident that stood out to me was that on the first day, during Author's Chair, a female student read a poem expressing her dislike for skateboarders which was a good poem, in my opinion, and generated a lot of audience response. The second day that I observed Author's Chair, a male student wrote a rebuttal poem expressing his dislike for Barbie. I thought it was interesting to see the Chair being used as a forum. What I liked, too, was that Karen allowed the students to express themselves while at the same time curtailing the class response by saying, "We're even now. [No other poems like that are needed]."

Mindy's summary begins to unravel the complexity of classrooms and explains why this weeklong observation helped her see the continuous timeline of patterns evolving. She observed how giving children choice in a workshop environment leads to complex questions of power, social positioning, and identity. She had the opportunity to see not only these events but also how the teacher reacted to them. From a perspective that explores how language is used in different social contexts, the observing and recording of conversations such as this

helped Mindy reflect on and discuss with others critical issues in the use of writing workshop

The second instance in which critical issues were discussed involved one classroom with two recent immigrant children from China who did not speak English and were classified as English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students. One preservice teacher who was observing, Patricia, pointed out that this teacher had not involved all the students in the workshop. Although positive in her final description of the teacher, Patricia, who was herself a Chinese American, wrote,

On November 2, there were two Chinese students sitting at the round table. Due to their limited English skills, they did not do the same activities or lessons as the other students in the class. Susan gave them a sheet of paper with 10 words and asked them to write the words and draw pictures corresponding to the words. For the whole 50 minutes, these two students drew pictures. I observed that they were drawing Pokemon. For those 50 minutes, she did not come to the round table. It was understandable that she had 30 students to attend to in only 50 minutes; however, I felt that these ESL students were somewhat abandoned and isolated from the class.

Patricia's critical observation of this teacher resulted in her ultimate decision in her summary that writing workshop was not a successful strategy because she thought the teacher was not able to effectively involve students who did not speak English. Patricia made her evaluation from an informed perspective. She collected 23 pages of ethnographic fieldnotes across 4 days. Her notes were detailed and descriptive in that they illustrated the talk and the actions of the members of the classroom. She waited to make interpretations until she had a chance to interview the teacher and then critically examined her notes from her position as a future teacher who was interested in ESL students. She collected data about how sometimes, in some classes, ESL students are not included in whole-class instruction.

DISCUSSION

Fieldwork involves the disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in ways that are different.

Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people. (Spradley, 1980, p. 3)

The current study found that when preservice teachers used fieldnotes and interviews as tools to observe classrooms from ethnographic and sociolinguistic perspectives, they were able to describe what was happening from insider perspectives. Preservice teachers who were skilled note takers were able to first record the talk and actions of the classroom, and then interview the teacher before making interpretations and summarizing what was happening. By looking and listening closely, these participant observers became fluent in the everyday life of the classroom. They were able to hold off on making certain kinds of judgments until after they had spent some time in the classroom. By then they were able to see the classroom from multiple perspectives and weave these together into an interpretive summary that used the fieldnotes as evidence for their conclusions. Instead of only observing from a preservice teacher point of view, they could now reflect on perspectives from the classroom teacher, the children in writing workshop, and data collected from their own fieldwork investigations. They became informed observers whose fieldnotes contained "more pedagogically relevant information than the notes of novice note-takers" (F. Erickson, personal communication, December, 1, 2001).

Because talk is so important in creating and constituting events in classrooms, preservice teachers were asked to recognize that talk is a medium to look at because "talk is instrumental in shaping events" (Edwards & Westgate, 1987, p. 134). When they recorded the classroom discourse, they began to have an appreciation for how talk affects instruction. Observers saw talk as central to the social practices involved in writing instruction and noticed how the talk structured and shaped writing events. By looking for interactions between teachers and students, they began to understand the "silent language" that is present in classrooms and develops over time, sometimes becoming such a regular and routine language for insiders that it cannot be explained explicitly or observed overtly. As Willa noticed in her summary, the students she observed "all knew the routines. It

was almost like being part of a cult or secret society." Looking explicitly at the talk gave preservice teachers opportunities to see how teachers directed instructional conversations and used the language of authors with children to teach writing. Preservice teachers also learned the language of management and recorded how teachers used words to organize workshop environments ("By the time I spell *chimpanzee* let's have our notebooks out," "You've been prewriting for 5 days so I'm going to put you down for drafting").

Ethnographic interviews were vehicles for informing beginning teachers about why inservice teachers did what they did. By looking over the fieldnotes and hearing interpretations of what was happening from another perspective, experienced and novice teachers together reflected on what happened, how it happened, and whether it was successful. Interviews corroborated the observations for preservice teachers and also validated for the experienced teachers that what they were doing was significant and valued. Instead of looking from textbook practices and personal experience alone, these observers drew from their own research data to ask experts about practices they had seen working successfully in classrooms. As one of the observers wrote in her summary, "In the 4 days that I observed her, I learned so much. I am currently using some of the techniques she used in her classroom with my own students. I plan to go and visit her once a month" (Christy).

Ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods helped observers ask critical questions to explore instructional approaches. Some students were able to go beyond the university discussions about writing workshop and ask questions such as "What do I think about gender discussions in the workshop? What responsibilities do I have as a teacher in relation to these issues? and How am I going to include English Language Learners in my own writing workshop?"

Ethnographic methods hold special potential for giving preservice teachers a fine-grained understanding of complex instructional contexts and to see how best practices are enacted in classroom settings. More specifically, these

methods allow the observers to see that for all its complexity, writing workshop is also doable and is a potentially valuable approach in the hands of knowledgeable teachers. These ethnographic techniques have the potential to provide new teachers with ways of exploring their own teaching contexts as teacher researchers. By reflecting on their own practices and recording their own classroom conversations, teachers can use ethnographic and sociolinguistic perspectives to discover why lessons did not produce the results they had hoped for, why some students are learning and others not, how the social text in classrooms can be used to teach the academic text, and how to give access to all children. The summaries illustrated how preservice teachers were, through their analysis of experienced teachers' practices, envisioning who they might be as future writing workshop teachers.

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