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Antecedent Experiences in Early Childhood Teacher Education: The Hidden Treasure

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Antecedent Experiences in Early Childhood Teacher Education: The Hidden Treasure

by

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Mr. Patrick is the first man teacher I have ever had. Not only does he arrange the classroom differently (not in rows like in my first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grade classes), but the things we do in Mr. Patrick's class are a lot of fun. We work in groups a lot, and do other things like listen to records and fun field trips.

I've started working in a day care center after school. I had 15 two year old children in the class by myself today. This classroom is so small. All I can do is to sit and make sure things are OK and that no one gets hurt.

I graduated on Saturday with my Child Development and Family Studies degree, and I started working Monday. I was introduced to the University affiliated Child Care Center through a field experience in my child development class.

The lead teacher is in no rush to leave, and after three years I have decided that I'm not growing so I have applied for a position at a Montessori school here in town. I am taking the position with the idea that the school is going to expand and eventually I will be a head teacher.

I don't know, it just didn't work. I have thought about going back to school to get my teaching license. This just seems like the opportunity for me to do that since I am going to be unemployed with nothing to do. So, here I am.

The above vignettes are mile markers of an individual's journey to become a teacher of young children. They were revealed in multiple conversations between the informant and the researchers. Laura was able to share her perspective on the value of her antecedent experiences in her preparation to become a teacher. To frame Laura's experiences in the field of education we begin with an overview of research which looks at the value of antecedent experiences in the educational setting. The task of learning to teach is a complex and arduous one. This study will explain one student's quest to become a teacher.

Antecedent Experiences

Knowledge of teaching is found not only in the mind, but also in the whole being of an individual. The knowledge gained from a teacher's experiences can be found in his/her practice (Tamir, 1991). This identifies teaching as unique among professions. Novice teachers have been intimately involved with the process of teaching as learners and now they enter the classroom as teachers (Clark, 1988). "During this 'apprenticeship of observation' students internalize many expectations of 'what teaching is' and 'what teachers do' " (Onslow, Beynon, & Geddis, 1992, p. 302).

Teaching is a problem solving endeavor, a process of deciding what one wants to accomplish, what strategies are likely to help, what happens as a result of putting plans into practice, and what

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* *Author note: The work presented here has been truly collaborative and the order of the authors is arbitrary.*

changes need to be made to enrich practice in the future (Ross, Bondy, & Kyle, 1993). Future teachers must have knowledge of practices in order to implement their knowledge and beliefs. Lamme and Ross (1981) found that "teachers who can express their beliefs clearly are better able to implement them than teachers who have difficulty expressing their beliefs" (p. 27).

Most teacher education programs view students' acquisition of information to become successful teachers as an active process. Hutchings and Wutzdorff (1988) warn that "mere activity does not constitute experience" (p. 7). They declare that the teaching and doing processes in teacher education consist of a cycle which begins with observation, actual doing, reflection, trial and error, hypothesis and theory development, and ends with theory testing. This integration of knowing and doing "is not simply a matter of application, but rather an ongoing process in which both knowledge and experience are repeatedly transformed" (Hutchings & Wutzdorff, 1988, p. 7).

Teacher education programs emphasize the ongoing processes of gaining knowledge and experience, with many assuming that students enter programs as "blank slates" with little knowledge about what is needed to become a teacher. This is interesting since students have been participants in teaching and learning all of their lives. The major concern of teacher education programs for most students is the outcome of their education or the accumulation of experiences, and not the process (Goodman, 1984).

As a culminating experience in teacher education programs, students complete "student teaching." As a result of student teaching, students change. Their personal knowledge is no longer the same; they have added new experience to their lives confirming or altering their perspectives of teaching (McLaughlin, 1988; Moon, Niemeyer, & Karls, 1989). Many student teaching situations become opportunities for cloning, where student teachers are expected to mimic their supervising teacher rather than being encouraged to construct their own ways of teaching (Onslow et al., 1992). Goodman (1984), in his study of student teachers, found this to be the case. When students were asked why they were teaching what they were teaching, a common answer was because their supervising teacher had told them to teach a specific way.

This reality makes it difficult for student teachers to maintain their individual integrity while student teaching. There will always be external voices urging "new" teachers to follow the leads of others. But, it becomes the neophytes' responsibility to incorporate the good advice of others while maintaining their own integrity (Hodges, 1983). In telling a story of her own student teaching experience, Carter (1992) says the disparity between what she knew to be best for children and the expectations of her by her supervising teacher placed a strain on her. In this situation, the bridging of one's philosophy, from formal education to practical experiences, is made much more difficult by the lack of support that student teachers find in their student teaching experiences. This is not to imply that different philosophies cannot be educative, but the devaluing of a student's knowledge and antecedent experiences *is* noneducative.

Student teaching is an optimal situation for student teachers to share and discuss their beliefs and theories and to make them stronger and sounder. When working with teachers, Clark (1991) and Clark and Lampert (1986) found the best way for teachers to discover what they know and believe was to share it with another teacher. This in turn affects how teachers teach, see, and act upon their role as teacher. This process of reflection not only brings theories of education to the surface, but also provides opportunities for analysis and revision of theories. This becomes to the student teaching experience an opportunity for validating philosophies and theories of how children learn and what role the teacher plays.

A common belief is that first-hand experience is of educational value. We use phrases such as "that was a real learning experience," "practice makes perfect," "experience is the best teacher," and "let experience be your guide." Yet, student teachers do not always feel that their experiences are valued in the classroom. In this culture, schools send the message that learning comes from books, and by being told, not from experience (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1983; Russell & Johnston, 1988).

Teachers learn to teach primarily through experience and participation, first as students, then as teachers. Most teachers claim that the teaching concepts about which they know the most have come from first-hand experience (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1983; House, Lapan, & Mathison, 1989; Russell & Johnston, 1988). Therefore, learning must be rooted in the students' experiences, which they bring with them or build out of current situations (Hutchings & Wutzdorff, 1988). In fact, preservice teachers typically have many life experiences and few professional experiences. The challenge for teacher preparation programs is to incorporate these antecedent experiences and beliefs into existing programs.

Where It All Began

In the following pages two stories are told. The first describes the interrelationships of the participants. The second retells Laura's stories of becoming a teacher as she integrated her experiences and her education in order to receive a state teaching license.

Laura was introduced to us by a colleague. The colleague and Laura had been friends and neighbors. Maria's (first researcher) friendship with Laura developed as they studied together for a class in which they were both enrolled. Laura later enrolled in a graduate level course, Curriculum in Early Childhood Education, which Maria taught, and an Early Childhood Science Methods course, which Amy (second researcher) taught.

Through these interactions, we came to believe that Laura could teach us about the importance of her preservice teaching experiences. Her unique experiences (as compared to those of traditional preservice teachers), and her strong beliefs about teaching combined to make her an excellent informant.

Laura's antecedent experiences are unique in that they are rich and varied. As a sixth grader, Laura was a peer tutor for first graders. She had also been a child care teacher while in high school, and a teacher's aide while an undergraduate student. Since graduation, Laura has been a teacher in an early childhood center, a teacher in a Montessori school, the director of a summer program, as well as having worked in a before- and after-school program. These examples show the variety of teaching in which Laura has engaged and the depth of her experiences. We believe most preservice early childhood teachers have experiences outside of the early childhood teacher education program, but we judge that, at 26 years of age, Laura's teaching experiences go beyond what is typical. For example, after completing her initial four-year degree, Laura was an assistant teacher in an early childhood center for three years. This is a bit unusual for the traditional undergraduate teacher education student.

As a student in our classes, Laura spoke regularly about her beliefs and modeled them extensively. Everything she did was done with her philosophy in mind. She holds to a strong conviction that children are active learners, and that their environment should be arranged to invite them to discover and to inquire about the materials present. Laura perceives her role as

teacher to be a guide or facilitator of children's learning. In order to guide or facilitate children's learning Laura sees herself as a learner in the classroom, gaining insights for curriculum development from children's previous experiences. As Laura's story is told these qualities are delineated further.

Uncovering the Inside Story

This naturalistic research study focuses on discovering insights and understandings of a single phenomenon. We sought out description and explanation of the role which previous experience plays in the preparation of preservice teachers. By utilizing the case study approach we were able to gain a perspective on Laura's experiences. This perspective "offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of [teacher] education" (Merriam, 1988, p. 3).

Our informal conversations with Laura were not guided by an arsenal of questions. Based on previous interactions among the participants, we knew that each of us recognized and valued the importance of previous experiences in learning. Therefore, we were confident that the issue of experience would be raised in conversation. Our informal conversations with Laura, our observations of Laura as a student teacher in her kindergarten and first grade teaching placements, as well as our observation of her as a student in a university graduate level class can only be interpreted through reflection on our experiences in these settings. In turn, our personal knowledge of and past experience with Laura "color" our interpretations as we retell Laura's story and interpret our field notes and transcribed conversations.

According to Munby (1982), case study research in education often makes the following assumptions, (1) there is an element of shared perception amongst the participants assuming what is seen by two people is the same, (2) the responses given by the informant are taken by the researchers as having the meaning the researchers attach to the responses, and (3) researchers traditionally accept that the meaning retrieved from a statement in a transcribed interview is consistent with and equal to the meaning intended by its author. We have striven to eliminate the effects of these assumptions by sharing our interpretations of the data with Laura and by asking her to react to a draft of this paper.

Naturalistic descriptive research on teaching changes all the participants involved, and "such research can instigate changes that reverberate for months and even years. The footprints we leave and the pictures we take make a difference in the lives and work of teachers" (Clark, 1991, p. 432) as well as researchers. For us, it has been difficult to separate *how* we have been changed from *what* we have learned.

Laura's story begins with her recollection of her personal decision to become a teacher. The story continues into the present with Laura telling about each of her student teaching placements. Finally, we discuss what we have learned from Laura and how our interactions with her have changed our perceptions of our roles as teacher educators.

The Retelling of Laura's Story

The following is a story of Laura's journey as paraphrased by the reseachers. This is what we heard Laura say:

Just the other day I was thinking about why I decided to become a teacher. I think it was when I was in the sixth grade. It was my most memorable classroom, and Mr. Patrick was probably my most memorable teacher. It was the only classroom I ever had where I was not sitting in a row. In some ways he was doing a little bit about what we are trying to do today. It was not nearly as advanced as child centered classrooms now, but back then it was unique. While in the sixth grade I gave up my recess to go into a first grade and be a part of that classroom.

In high school I really knew I wanted to be a teacher of young children. I remember working in a church affiliated child care center where my brother's girlfriend worked. When I think about how many two year old children I had in one room by myself, it's horrifying. The room was so small I could not model behavior. I would classify what I was doing as babysitting and not teaching. After that child care experience, I thought I wanted to open my own day care center. As I grew older and wiser, I realized it was going to cost a lot of money to do this.

In college I started out as a psychology major and then I decided it was really too difficult for me, so I chose something else. I do not know how I was introduced to child development courses, but eventually I chose to major in child development and family studies. I do not know why I did not choose education. Maybe it was because I was still in a child care mode and I saw that as more developmental than educational. In my junior year, I had a field experience at a university affiliated child care center. At that point I wanted to change my major to education, but my Mom said "No." After I had my field experience I was hired at the center as an aide.

Following graduation, I was hired as an assistant teacher at the same center. I worked there for three years and I believe this is where I learned the most about teaching and where I developed my philosophy of education. After three years, I felt I was not growing. There was nowhere for me to go because the teacher I taught with was not planning to leave. At that point I decided I needed something which would allow me to grow. I applied for a position at a Montessori school. I took the position, having been told the school was going to expand and I would be a head teacher. At this point I did not have to go through the Montessori training. That job ended very quickly–I was there for two weeks. I do not know if I did not like the Montessori philosophy or the personality of the other teacher which might have been a reflection of Montessori's philosophy. Specifically, I did not like the way she spoke to me, or to the children. This situation just did not work, so I decided to go back to school and get my teaching license in early childhood education.

I am finished with my course work and I am student teaching now. My first placement is in a kindergarten. I am frustrated with this experience because I am not the teacher I want to be in this environment. I feel like the supervising teacher makes me better than the children. Because of this, I am somebody the kids look up to but in the wrong way, for the wrong reasons. I am expected to stand up at the calendar and use the pointer as if I am some almighty person.

I continually have to try to be the teacher I am expected to be. I am expected to prepare for and teach morning circle, prepare twenty learning centers, as well as prepare and teach three language or math lessons per week. After morning circle I am expected to teach two lessons to two different ability groups of children, while the remaining two ability groups of children choose teacher designed activities at the learning centers. This is immediately followed by closing circle.

In one of my evaluations my supervising teacher commented on morning circle time. In her evaluation she wrote:

> Students should not be talking to each other during morning circle, they should be listening to you or the student speaking. The calendar helper should answer the questions. You may call on others to help if necessary, students should not interrupt.

Give them a warning if they interrupt more than once. Morning circle is much too long. How can I help you learn to accomplish this faster?

This is the most stressful part of the day for me. It is hard for me to remember all of the activities. I almost always forget part of morning circle. To me, this is saying there is too much going on. I believe the children are talking because some of it is boring. I understand my role as a teacher is to make it exciting. This is hard to do when you do not believe in some of the activities.

I am also frustrated because I am busy every minute of the day. I have no time to interact directly with the children. We have no time for spontaneous conversations or discovering together. When a child approaches me to tell me something they did last night, I have to say, "I'd really like to hear about that, but I can't right now." It frustrates me even more when there is no time later. I cannot even say, "Tell me at choosing time" because then I am teaching a lesson. There is no time for us to build a rapport. My only escape is when I read a story. I can sit on the floor and be with the children and talk to them about the story.

My biggest frustration is having no idea what the kids think about or what they are doing within the learning centers. We have no discussion about the items at the centers so I have no idea what they are doing with the materials. There is also no time for the children to be critical thinkers because all of the thinking is done for them. All of the supplies are placed out for them. I choose the colors of the yarn they get to use, I get the scissors out, their shape is already cut out for them, so they do not have to think.

To me it's very product-oriented. In comparison to other classrooms I have been in this is good, but in comparison to my previous teaching experience this is unnecessary. I was frustrated because I was struggling to come up with all of these activities which I found unnecessary. My supervising teacher recognized my frustration. She believed that my philosophy is getting in the way as I try to meet the needs of her classroom.

I believe children should be able to discover things, learn, and talk about what they do and share with others in the classroom. In the environment I am in, this is not happening. I think it is important for children to become critical thinkers and to be able to problem solve. In so many environments I have seen in the public school children are told what to think and what to do. How can we expect them in junior high or high school to pick what classes they want to take, what they want to be, or to have them prepare for the future? All their lives someone has always told them what to do.

I feel like I do not know anything about teaching when I am in this classroom. I do not think my previous experiences are valued at all as teaching. During my student teaching interview, it became apparent to me that what I had done previously was not valued as teaching. Granted teaching in a child care center may be different, but I honestly do not think it has to be different.

I think supervising teachers do not give student teachers enough credit for knowing what works for themselves in the classroom. I see student teaching as providing an opportunity for student teachers to figure out what is important to them in the classroom, and what makes them more successful. Unfortunately, student teachers are put under so much pressure to teach the way the supervising teacher teaches, the only thing we learn is that their methods are not always appropriate for us. Hence, we do not really have the opportunity to experience what is right for us. However, I think a person grows to some extent or maybe even more, because being in a classroom where the philosophy is different from your own challenges your philosophy. I think in order for me to keep growing and developing I have to be exposed to different philosophies and educational styles. It is important for me to see teaching styles I would not use, because this experience validates what is appropriate for me, and what is not. So, in a sense, this placement has been a great learning experience for me.

My second placement, in the first grade classroom, is much more relaxed and I feel much less stress. I do not feel like there are any specific expectations placed on me. When I make a decision it is my decision and my supervising teacher lets me have experiences and then we talk about it at the end of the day. This is great because I have had the experience myself; therefore, her suggestions are much more meaningful to me. She values my experiences and gives me time to reflect on what has happened. I am allowed to make mistakes. In my previous placement, I was told what and what not to do. I prefer being given opportunities to make my own decisions and to reflect on them with my supervising teacher so I can improve myself as a teacher.

This supervising teacher is flexible, and I like that. This classroom makes it easy for me to go with the flow, and to use the children's ideas. The children are given many choices. These choices give the children an opportunity to engage in critical thinking and they are also able to share their ideas collaboratively and cooperatively. This really sparks and maintains their interest in the classroom activities.

This first grade student teaching experience reconfirms for me that my philosophy can work. I see the children doing wonderful things without me at the front of the classroom directing their learning. In the activities they choose they are still learning, making observations, cooperating, and taking turns. It is easy to value the children's experiences when your own experiences are being valued. Therefore, I really appreciate the fact that my previous experiences are valued, and I can be an active participant and a learner in the classroom with the children.

My experiences are important to me because they have made me the teacher I am. I do not know if it is the way I was brought up, but much of it is common sense to me. So when I have to defend my philosophy, I think "Why can't you see it this way?" I think the way I have developed has a lot to do with my first teaching experience. I do not credit the development of my philosophy to my first college degree; even though I understood the process of how children develop, there was not a connection made between education and development. My experience at the university affiliated child care center showed me how to provide experiences which would foster development, and not to expect the development to be complete at certain ages.

I think that my teaching experience has prepared me much more than my classes ever could. However, while my teaching experience has assisted me in developing my educational philosophy, my formal education has helped me to use research and theory to support my philosophy. I think something the university does not offer as far as classes are concerned is learning theory or discussions about practical experience. But having been in the classroom before, I was able to draw from my experiences to make sense of the research and theory I was learning about. I think right now the best way to develop philosophies and educational styles is to be a part of state, regional, and national conferences where I hear about practical experiences and what is working for other teachers in their classrooms.

I think my educational philosophy has not developed from one set of experiences. I think it stems from many different experiences such as teaching at the university affiliated child care center, my formal education, and my personality. It is really hard for me to separate what I feel personally from what I might have learned academically. I cannot imagine that sitting in those classes all that time has not helped me to form some ideas about what would be best for children.

My academic experiences make me a better teacher because they allow me to express my beliefs with parents and other teachers. Through my classes, I am becoming more confident as a teacher and as a professional, because the way I feel personally is supported by researchers and theorists.

What We Learned

Our analysis of the role of experience in teacher preparation is framed in what we have learned from listening to and retelling Laura's story. As early childhood educators we believe experience plays an important role in children's learning. As Laura told her story, she revalidated for us how imperative it is to value the experiences of all students, regardless of age. As a result, we realize as teacher educators that we will only be successful in our classrooms if we not only value experiences, but incorporate them into the learning process.

In her kindergarten placement, Laura realizes that she is not the teacher she wants to be for two reasons. First, Laura believes that mutual respect between the children and the teacher is crucial. However, respect does not hinge on a title which one is given. Second, she values her students' experiences, what they bring to the classroom and what they do in the classroom. Laura knows that in order for her to "know" the children in her classroom, she must rely on what she learns from observing and interacting with the children. Therefore, in order for Laura to be the teacher she wants to be, there must be mutual respect among the people in the classroom and opportunities to observe and interact with each other.

Through her antecedent experiences, Laura knows that the children need not address her as Mrs. Ballard in order to respect her. As Laura states in the story about her kindergarten placement, she believes this is respect for the wrong reason.

> *I want them [the children] to call me Laura because I don't personally believe that they respect me only because they call me Mrs. Ballard. They respect me because I'm nice to them and I respect them, I listen to them and they listen to me, we respect each other because we're people. They can call me Mrs. Ballard and have the relationship that I would want, but they could call me Laura and still have the relationship that I want. Just because we make them call us Mr. or Mrs. does not mean they respect us.*

Throughout Laura's story of her kindergarten placement, she continually mentions that she is frustrated with the lack of opportunities for her to observe and interact with the children, to be able to know what they are interested in, what motivates them to learn, or what they have learned that day. She describes a classroom environment where she is teaching a language lesson and can hear other children talking. She continues by saying,

> *I can hear them but it's totally out of context for me. I don't know if it's appropriate or inappropriate.*

Because of the physical space of this classroom, Laura is not able to observe the children while she is teaching one group and other groups are choosing at the learning centers.

> *It keeps me from observing, just being aware of what's going on. Not only academically, but socially as well. There's no way that I would know if they learned a skill [at the learning center] because, like I said, there's no chance for me to observe. I think it would be better for the teacher to know what's going on. If I could be at the activity table, I would be able to observe a little bit and see whether or not that skill was learned.*

These examples underscore the issues which frustrate Laura in her kindergarten placement, and which hinder her in becoming the teacher she wants to be. Dewey (1900, rev. 1915), in his book *The School and Society*, states that one of the great wastes of the school comes from its inability to

provide the child with experiences in which he/she can utilize the experiences acquired outside the school. In the same sense, Dewey states that children are also "unable to apply in daily life what [they are] learning at school. That is the isolation of the school–its isolation from life" (p. 67). If Laura's experiences had been valued, she might have seen her student teaching as more valuable to her education.

Laura's experiences were valued in her first grade placement and she was much happier in that classroom. Laura's supervising teacher in this situation allowed Laura to be the teacher she wants to be and valued Laura's antecedent experiences and knowledge about children. Here, Laura was not required to isolate her present experiences from her past experiences.

Even though this research began by focusing on the role of antecedent experiences in teacher education, Laura taught us that reflection is a key component in teacher education. We were inspired by the depth and the naturalness of Laura's reflective abilities, and her intent to improve herself as a teacher. We learned that in order to be successful early childhood teacher educators, we need to encourage our students to continually ask themselves *why* they choose to do the things they do in their classroom. Likewise, we need to ask ourselves why we do what we do in our classrooms, and what is of most benefit for the preservice teachers in them.

Through our conversations with and observations of Laura, it became clear to us that she is a very reflective person. For example, Laura recalls a math lesson:

> *I did my math lesson. I did it four times in one day. I really felt like the morning kids got cheated. I learned from what they did and took that to the next group. We were estimating with unifix cubes. They had a strip of paper that the unifix cubes fit exactly on. So they had the paper in a little baggy. All I said to them was you and your partner need to estimate this strip of paper with the unifix cubes. They had to record, they had to predict, and they had to write what they really found. I did a demonstration with one of the kids. I noticed these two that were paired made a really cool game out of it. One of them closed their eyes and would pick a slip of paper out of the bag. And they would then try to guess, the person that pulled the slip out of the bag actually put the amount of unifix cubes on the paper, while the other person was writing down their estimation. It just worked out beautifully. They were both interested. So I tried to take that on to the next experience, and the kids really had the best time. So that wasn't my lesson, that was something that came from ..., granted it didn't come from that group that I was particularly working with, but I tried to look at how they were learning the best, and how the children understood it the best and take that on with me.*

In a later conversation, we asked Laura about being a reflective person and if she thought that she was a reflective person.

> *I think I'm a reflective person only when I am discussing with somebody else. I'm not sure that I'll be driving home and think, "How did everything go today, you know, let's reflect on that." But through conversations, like if somebody asks me what we did today in math, and I say, "Oh it didn't go very well." Then I might think, "I need to think about how I could have made it better." But I'm not sure without some sort of an initiation that I would think about it. I don't think it has to be another adult either. For example, in that unifix incident I was telling you about, the children did help me reflect about "My lesson is pretty boring." I guess reflection can be so broad. You can reflect in different ways. I guess to formally reflect and to sit down and say, "This lesson didn't go well," but with each group it was different. Obviously I reflected on something that had happened in the past and thought, "Oh, let's not do that any more."*

Laura is reflective by nature. As a result of her reflective abilities, she remains a learner in her classroom. Laura's reflective abilities have also assisted us in learning about the role of antecedent experiences. We asked Laura what she had learned from this experience, and she reflected:

> *I don't know if I can really say what, a specific thing that I've learned. I think that having you guys watch me has really helped me to think, and a lot of times when I'm driving back and forth to school I think about how I want my environment to be and I think having you watch me and ask me these questions, it's really helped me to decide how, not that I know yet, but it's helping me think through some things.*

Conclusions

This is an in-depth story of a single teacher. The findings and implications generated are appropriate to this case study and may not represent the experiences of other preservice teachers. Yet, it is a powerful story of an individual's quest to become a teacher. Reflecting on our decision to choose a single case study, we believe that one insightful informant provided us with a more complete picture than could a vast array of less reflective informants.

Laura's experiences have played an important role in her becoming a teacher. Prior experiences provide students with an enormous amount of knowledge which can be used in their preservice teacher training. Similar to our findings, Harris (1989) found that the older the student is, the more experientially gained knowledge he/she is likely to have, and noted that "adult learners view experience as their most important source of learning" (p. 41). The challenge to higher education is to recognize the needs of adult learners who claim prior knowledge. Teacher education programs need to incorporate antecedent experiences into the curriculum.

Most teacher preparation programs provide opportunities for preservice teachers to gain practical knowledge through observations and early field experiences. In addition to her observations and early field experiences, Laura found that attendance and presentations at state, regional, and national professional conferences helped her to gain personal practical knowledge. We would propose that teacher education programs include some element of professional organization experience. Examples might be facilitating students' attendance at state conferences, and encouraging them to present at conferences.

In conclusion, we believe experience plays an important role in learning. As we listened to Laura's story, we were reminded of the urgency to value the experiences of all students, regardless of age. We realize that, in order to be successful early childhood teacher educators, we must value experiences and incorporate them into our classrooms. In fact, we believe antecedent experiences are the "hidden treasure" of teacher preparation programs. We have also become aware of the need for reflection in the classroom. We can best meet the needs of our students by asking ourselves why we are doing the things we are doing in our classroom, and what is of most benefit for the preservice teachers we teach. Likewise, we should ask our students to ask themselves these same questions.

We believe learning is a continuous process. In her teaching practices, Laura reflects this belief by remaining a learner in her classroom. But, her beliefs extend beyond the classroom. In fact, she concludes as a consequence of this research that "we are learning together, just learning different things."

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Ten Steps to Collaboration: The Story of a Professional Development School

by

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Since the fall of 1985, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and the East Longmeadow public schools have worked together in a preservice and inservice staff development program that has attracted considerable attention in the New England region. In the following pages we will detail the course of our project's development and discuss the principles, accomplishments, and pitfalls of our continuing process of collaboration.

PRINCIPLE ONE: To be successful, a collaborative project must address and balance the basic needs of both parties.

In our conception of the Professional Development School project, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and the East Longmeadow public schools were responding to two forces: our recognition of mutual needs and a growing awareness of our responsibility to be activists in the educational reform movement of the 1980s. The university needed to improve preparation of novice teachers, and the school district needed to revitalize veteran staff.

Our professional development school began with initial meetings in the fall of 1985 between Peter Cannone, then principal of the East Longmeadow High School, and Professor Irving Seidman of the School of Education. The East Longmeadow High School (55 teachers and 650 students) had recently been accredited, praised for its accomplishments, but also cautioned about the possibility of complacency settling in among its veteran faculty. Cannone was worried both about reinvigorating a mature faculty and about coping with a projected teacher shortage in the 1990s. Seidman, as head of the Secondary Teacher Education Program, was concerned about the adequacy of practicum placements for students completing the all-important student teaching phase of their teacher education experience. Both the number of potential placements available and the quality of those placements were matters of concern.

The solution to our mutual concerns was for East Longmeadow High School (and later the Birchland Park Middle School) to become the equivalent of a teaching hospital for the School of Education. The collaborative relationship would assure the school's access to the pipeline of the best teachers the university developed, and the university would be assured of excellent practicum placements for students in math, science, social studies, and English. Further, it was hoped that the public school faculty would reap intellectual and professional benefits that would empower them and enrich the East Longmeadow school district. As Cannone and Seidman outlined their collaborative teacher education clinical site project, Dr. Helen Schneider of the School of Education joined the team, and in 1986 the triad became co-directors of the University of Massachusetts/East Longmeadow project.

A major purpose of our professional development school project has been to re-create for new teachers the medical profession's concept of a teaching hospital. We believed that joint involvement of school and college faculty in the crucial period of student teaching was an ideal opportunity to markedly improve the student teachers' experience at a pivotal point in their preparation and induction. The real and symbolic rite of passage we call the practicum affects the student teacher's entire subsequent career. Unfortunately, as Goodlad (1984) has observed, placement in student teaching sites has been an idiosyncratic and often random procedure. We also believed that there