

# Using Narrative Inquiry to Understand a Student–Teacher’s Practical Knowledge While Teaching in an Inner-City School

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The present study uses narrative inquiry to follow, Julie, a preservice teacher’s journey through her yearlong placement in an inner-city school. A qualitative analysis of four interviews, 12 written reflections, and seven transcribed group discussions revealed a sense of culture shock felt by Julie. In particular, her sense of conflict focused around self as she interacted with her mentoring teachers, her students, and coping with doubts about her own abilities and self-worth. Julie’s story suggests clear ways of avoiding similar situations in the future and improving preservice teaching generally.

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**KEY WORDS:** narrative inquiry; inner-city; preservice teaching.

“What do I teach a child who knows fatal?  
What do I teach the child who knows ‘fatal’  
as a bullet that pierced a loved one on the porch?  
What do I teach the 12-year-old child that sucks her thumb  
all day at her desk?  
What do I teach the child who wiped up his father’s death-  
blood off the bathroom floor?  
What do I teach the child whose teeth are rotted to the gums,  
but neglected puppies bring authorities to their door?  
What do I teach the child who learns persuasive language  
by begging her father not to shoot Momma?  
What do I teach the child who knows a meal only as it is  
served on a school tray?  
Suggestions please”.  
Written Reflection #8

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Narrative inquiry provides a means to help preservice teachers entering the field of education reflect upon their prior constructions and beliefs of what it means to be a teacher. Olson (2000) asserts that preservice teachers already have developed an understanding and knowledge of what good teaching looks like and have an image of the type of teacher they want to be. These images of what it means to be a teacher are implicit, unexamined and instilled prior to entering teacher's college. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) examine both the personal and contextual elements of the narrative understanding, particularly in the area of teacher knowledge. They maintain the importance of understanding the stories of what happens when the teacher and student meet in the teaching-learning environment. In relation to preservice teachers, they assert that the students are "exposed to professional knowledge, issues, and views that are not yet part of or that contradict their present narrative knowledge of teaching and learning" (p. 110). Previous works by the same authors, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) indicate that the teachers stories can take the shape of a metaphor for the teaching-learning relationship; indicating that "Life's narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations" (p. 2). The introductory narrative above provides insight into the preservice student's practical knowledge and experiences of working in the inner-city context.

Lived experiences can be translated into rich narrative stories useful for both teaching and research. In the early 1990s, several educational researchers turned their attention to the value of collected stories based on diaries, interviews, group discussions, and other reflective procedures. According to Carter (1993), the purpose was to "capture the richness and indeterminacy of our experiences as a central focus for conducting research in the field" (p. 5).

Narrative stories provide a rich backdrop for understanding the contextualized situations in which teachers come to know what they know and make the decisions that they do. Using narrative stories, Rushton (2001) observed Mary, a student-teacher, grow in self-efficacy during her year-long internship while teaching in an inner-city school. Additionally, Rushton (2003) shared the stories of two African-American's experience of teaching in the inner-city school as they revealed their progression from dissonance to empowerment. Clandinin (1989) followed the process by which a first year kindergarten teacher gained practical knowledge of how the classroom worked. Further, Craig (1995, 1998) tracked a teacher's career over a 5-year period as it developed from "preservice teacher," to "substitute teacher," to "long-term replacement substitute teacher," to "full-time teacher," and illustrated how the particularities of placement can influence a professional life. Collier (1999) observed that reflective practices enabled educators, particularly preservice teachers still in the process of forming their ideas, to

better understand the learner and adapt their planning accordingly. She also found that reflecting during these experiences helped in the discovery and synthesis of personal philosophies. Finally, Brindley and Emminger (2000) used the diary of a preservice teacher to tell of "one thoroughly discouraging placement and a second excellent experience" (p. 110), from which they derived recommendations for improved teacher supervision.

There have been many calls for improvement in teacher preparation (Holmes Group, 1995; National Commission, 1996; The Project Alliance 30, 1991). One issue is the growing ethnic diversity in schools. Preservice teachers should know that pupils today are about 35% non-White, a percentage predicted to grow substantially in the next decade (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). Preservice teachers need to acquire the background knowledge and skills necessary for handling cultural diversity, along with an awareness of any stereotypes they bring to the situation (Kea & Bacon, 1999; Peterson, Cross, Johnson & Howell, 2000).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) and later, Rushton (2001, 2003), both indicate that research on student-teaching has been negligent in establishing the perspective and the student's voice working in the inner-city schools. Hynes and Socoski (1991) also reviewed the literature and concluded similarly, i.e., "effort to assess preservice teachers' individual attitudes about teaching in urban schools" are not sustained. What they discovered was that students entering a teacher preparation program generally held negative attitudes toward teaching in inner-city schools. A recent search conducted by this author on the ERIC and Education Abstracts data bases revealed that the situation is beginning to change slightly in the past 2–3 years (Rushton, 2003).

Early studies on the observation of student teaching were typically limited to 13–20 weeks in suburban, white, middle-class environments (Fuller, 1969; McDermott et al., 1995; Nettle, 1998). With respect to inner-city schools, although studies have been conducted on how teachers manage (Kozol, 1991; Kretovics and Nussel, 1994; Weiner, 1993), information is scarce about how preservice teachers fare (Rushton, 2001). Recent studies, however, have begun to explore this topic. For example, Kea and Bacon (1999) used reflective journal writing from 69 preservice education majors (40 of whom were African-American) to open a dialogue on cross-cultural awareness. Rushton (2000, 2003) analyzed interviews, written reflections, and transcribed group discussions to follow the life experiences of five preservice teachers as they grew in self-efficacy in an inner-city school. These findings suggest that preservice teachers experienced a culture shock when they entered the schools. Aggravating their concerns were the normal worries about getting along with their mentoring teachers and pupils, as well as coping with self-doubts about their abilities and values that maybe unique

to the inner-city school context. Eventually, the preservice teachers began to manage their problems, take risks, and grow in self-efficacy. The great majority opted to pursue a career in teaching. Rushton (2003) also described the two African-American student-teacher's journey as preservice interns also in an inner-city school environment. Jillian and Mia moved from initial shock, eliciting both emotional and cognitive dissonance, to cultural assimilation as they adapted to their concerns about their students, their worries about getting along with their mentoring teacher and their doubts about their own abilities to teach.

Recently, studies (Calderhead, 1991; Clandinin, 1989; Joram and Gabriele, 1998; Tillema, 1994) are also beginning to look at practical knowledge and beliefs about learning and teaching that preservice students bring to their teaching practicum's and how prior beliefs influence (1) their understanding of children's learning, (2) the social context of learning environment, and (3) their own ability to process new information. Anderson et al. (1995) suggest that the student's practical knowledge and established belief systems will restrain the preservice teacher's ability to learn and be open to different perspectives. Further, Kagan (1992) indicates that some students' beliefs relating to how schools work and are so well-established that they are unable to change those beliefs. This is particularly so, when the environmental cues and learning/teaching environment is significantly different from that in of the preservice teachers.

The present study uses a narrative inquiry to follow Julie, a preservice teacher, as she journeys through a special 1-year teaching placement in an inner-city school to an unfavorable outcome and a decision not to pursue teaching as a career. Julie came to the program at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville because it had been specially designed to deal with urban/multicultural issues. Resulting in a Master's degree, it provided an additional fifth year of teacher's college with a wider range of experiences regarding the way inner-city schools worked. Julie wanted "to make a difference in the lives of these children." By using Julie's oral and written accounts of her interactions with her mentoring teachers and pupils, we watch her struggle to make a career decision as she is torn between wanting to "minister" to these children as she had previously experienced working with church's urban ministry program, and finding her own self as a teacher.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Theoretical Framework*

This research study incorporated a blending of symbolic interactionism and narrative inquiry in order to better understand Julie's journey as she

completed her fifth year of teacher's college. Symbolic interactionists explore the functional relationship between how people perceive themselves, how they see others, and how they believe others perceive them (Blumer, 1969; Van Manen, 1991). Blumer (1969, p. 12) described the interactions of individuals as lines of actions which, collectively must be recognized as the inter-linkage of separate acts by the various participants.

Lived experiences can be translated into rich narrative stories. Narrative in the form of stories has become a powerful tool for researchers. As Noddings (1991) claimed, "stories have the power to direct and change our lives" (p. 157). In the early 1990s, educational researchers such as Carter (1993), Connelly and Clandinin (1990), and Van Manen (1991) turned their attention to the benefits of collecting stories. Carter (1993) stated that the purpose was to "capture the richness and indeterminacy of our experiences" resulting in narrative stories as "a central focus for conducting research in the field" (p. 5).

An in depth, semistructured approach was used to gather three separate sources of text (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Fraenkel and Wallen, 1996; Seidman, 1991). The first source of data consisted of interviews conducted with Julie throughout the course of the 1996–1997 school year, in September, November, February, and April. During the interviews, Julie described her experiences and perceptions. To guide the interview, Julie answered questions such as, "What experiences stood out for you the most?", "Tell me a story about what has happened to you or one of your students during the past month?" and "What has impacted you the most?" The second source of data consisted of 12 weekly reflections that Julie wrote about her experiences during the year. In these I asked Julie to reflect on and write about a particular incident she had observed that stood out for her. The third source of data consisted of transcriptions from weekly taped discussions in which Julie and the other preservice teachers from her cohort discussed their previous week's experiences.

### ***Data Analysis***

The initial analysis of Julie's stories and interviews began with a complete reading of all interviews, weekly narratives, and discussions she had had with the other student teachers in her cohort. During this initial set of readings, it became apparent that several themes were consistent throughout her narratives (written or oral). At this point, I began to index these themes with various highlighted colors and with notes in the margins. For example, conversations relating to her mentoring teachers were coded in one color and filed separately, discussions she had with her relationship with God in another, and her beliefs about working with the inner-city children yet a

third and so on. From here, I created new folders for each of these separate narratives and re-read them looking for new themes. Several categories emerged covering three basic areas and yet one main theme prevailed throughout. The main issue facing Julie was that of conflict and discontentment between her previous beliefs regarding working with inner-city children, from an Urban/ministry perspective and her desire and subsequent conflict with those beliefs in becoming an elementary school teacher. The three areas of discussion that persisted were her interactions with her two mentoring teachers, her belief in not being supported by the university supervisor, and her own lack of confidence in handling classroom management. Her faith in God was also a dominant theme throughout all the interviews, discussions and narratives. Indeed, it was Julie's faith in God, and her inability to pursue this in an educational context that finally had Julie decide not to teach.

### ***My Role***

Prior to becoming a doctoral student and instructor for the Urban/Multicultural program at the University of Tennessee, I had supervised several student teachers in the program and was interested in their experiences and transitions into becoming teachers. Later, as a graduate teaching assistant, I both taught and supervised these students in the semester prior to their final internship. In this semester, each of the students was required to spend several half-days a week, for 4 months (January–April), in an inner-city school classroom so as to become familiar with the school and its environment. As part of their course requirements the preservice teachers were required to write journals about their initial experiences. Also, at the end of each week, we would discuss what their experiences had been during that particular week. I became both concerned and interested in their experiences as many of the students became intrigued with the issues facing them in the inner-city and discovered that their beliefs about teaching were challenged. This led me to decide to study the experiences of these preservice teachers more fully as they moved into their year-long internship. Julie was a participant in this study (Rushton, 1997). Before the beginning of their final year-long internship, I stepped down from serving as her supervisor and instructor so as to minimize biasing her responses during the interviews.

### ***Setting***

The elementary school in which Julie was placed was located in downtown Knoxville, about 5 miles from the campus of the University of

Tennessee. The school had been chosen along with three other inner-city schools to participate in the Urban/multi-cultural program established by the university to train preservice teachers. There were approximately 500 kindergarten to sixth grade students, of whom 90% were African-American. Of the 500 students, 95% were on a subsidized lunch program. The school was within walking distance of the public housing estates known as "The Projects."

### ***The Participant: Julie***

Julie described herself as an optimistic 23-year-old single white woman who had lived most of her life in Knoxville, the same city where she attended the university. Julie expressed herself freely on the intimate details of her life. She described her up-bringing as "somewhat unstable," as her parents had divorced when she was 10. Following the divorce, her mother took Julie and her two brothers to another state; but, after a bankruptcy and a broken engagement, the family returned to the mother's hometown. After living in a trailer park with dwindling financial resources, Julie and her brothers moved back to live with their father. When Julie was 16 her father re-married and life changed again. After living "with my Dad and younger brother in the bachelor's pad in which we stayed up late and hung out," her life incorporated a step-brother and sister and a more "Beaver-Cleaver type of environment." Julie continued to live with her father and stepfamily until she entered the university where she lived with a roommate, Mary, who was also in the program.

Julie completed her internship at Washington Pike Elementary School along with Mary (see Rushton, 2001). She described Washington Pike Elementary as one of the most difficult inner-city schools in the city. Nonetheless, she also claimed to have loved it (at least at the beginning of the interviews). From the very first interview, it was obvious that Julie's passion in life was to do "the Lord's" work. She was candid about her Christian beliefs stating:

...probably my strongest desire is to be a light in people's lives. You know, if I had the opportunity and if someone wants to hear me talk about the Lord, to talk to them what my hope is, I would. I don't know what I would do without God.

In early adolescence, Julie became a Christian. "Finding God" gave Julie comfort during the disruptions in her home life and "saved her from temptation during her teenage years." She said, "I see now that God has protected me from all these things [drugs and teenage sex], and I'm very

thankful.” Julie’s faith played a major role in leading her to become a teacher. It was part of how she defined herself. Prior to enrolling in teachers college she had taught in an “Urban, inner-city ministry,” and really enjoyed “hanging out with black kids in the projects.” She stated, “probably my strongest desire is to be a light in people’s lives.”

## FINDINGS

Julie’s internship revolved around a series of interrelated conflicts dealing with her mentoring teachers, the university and beliefs about her own inadequate teaching. Julie began her intern year with a somewhat naïve belief that she was going to be a “sort of savior” in the lives of the students she was to encounter. Difficulties in teaching philosophies with her mentoring teachers, a perceived lack of support from her university professor and her awakening perceptions of the lives of the inner-city children led to conclude that she was not “called” to be a classroom teacher. Julie’s personal and practical knowledge was challenged and shifted during this year-long internship. Although she had previously worked with inner-city children with a local ministry organization, her experiences with the culture of the students at this school was far more drastic than what she was used to. She also felt dismay over the lives led by the inner-city children and the inadequate training she had received to handle disruptive behavior. Three areas of discontent were identified in Julie’s narratives.

### *Mentoring Teachers*

Most of Julie’s stories and discussion centered on her mentoring teachers. Her first mentor was Mrs Sanders, of whom Julie had a favorable initial impression. “I think she respects me, and I’m real honest with her,” Julie said. She discussed how she could learn from her and believed that this was a profitable learning situation. However, Julie soon came to perceive Mrs Sanders as much too stern, during the second interview Julie states:

I struggle with my teacher. She’s a real drill sergeant. I want to learn strengths from her, but I don’t want to learn her weaknesses. I’m scared that I would learn her weaknesses and learn her discipline style and end up doing it her way. She screams at the kids all day long. It’s really mean.

Julie believed her mentoring teacher lacked sympathy. Caught between trying to please Mrs Sanders and wanting to embrace the upset children, she did not know which way to turn. When relating a story about a first grader

whose cat had been killed the night before, Julie wrote in her reflective journal, "As Kari walked into class today struggling with Blackie's death, she [the teacher] showed no compassion. Mrs. Sanders just saw Kari's sluggishness as disobedience, she sarcastically announced, 'Why are you so slow today Kari? Get on the ball!'" In another story, Julie wrote,

Chris looked up and saw the dreaded stare of Mrs Sanders. He knew her wrath was on him, and there was no escaping it. 'Have you done your chalk plate!' Mrs Sanders said very sternly. 'No,' Chris replied. 'Why not young man? You know the routine. This is the 12th day of school. What is wrong with you? Did you hear me? Hello [she knocks on his head], is anyone in there?'

These examples of her mentor's unyielding attitude took place during the first months of school and Julie at first attributed them to the teacher's need to gain control. Julie described how unpleasant the teacher was to her too, and in front of the pupils. She said, "I do feel like she treats me like one of the kids at times like, 'I told you to do that!' or 'Turn the page!'" During the third interview, after Julie had changed classrooms, she continued to describe her former mentor in the same way:

The teacher was mean and hateful... 'I feel like she was a dictator...' Didn't give me any control. Would yell at me in front of the principal. She could be nice, but she had such a control thing that we didn't go well together.

For the second half of the year Julie was given a younger grade of student and her mentor proved to be at the opposite extreme from her first. Julie described the differences between the two teachers as, "my first teacher was so hard on them, and I didn't want to be like that and the second teacher was so lenient on them and I didn't want to be like that either." At first, Julie described Ms. Mallory as "the teacher next door... we have a lot of the same morals, seems like we have a lot in common. She is a Christian." But Julie was soon alienated by Ms. Mallory's lack of planning, disorganized behavior, and ineffective management style, all of which compounded the serious behavior problems in this fourth grade class. Recognizing that this "is probably the worst class in the school... and the attitudes of the students are REAL bad," Julie had hoped to discover management techniques to deal with disruptive behavior. Julie found that the main method Ms. Mallory employed was to send pupils to the office. She said, "We have the most discipline problems in the school because Ms. Mallory just won't handle a situation on her own. She is like, 'I am sick of you, go to the office.' You know... 'I am angry. Go to the office.'"

At first, there was a positive outcome for Julie from Ms. Mallory's "hands off" approach in that Julie was given full reign over what she could do. Julie began a variety of new activities in the classroom. "I started journals, started 'read alouds', and hands-on projects, and did... like... fun games like, 'spelling basketball.'" However, as time passed, Julie would ask, "Ms. Mallory, what is your plan for this afternoon?" and Ms Mallory would say, "We will just wing it for today." Julie said, "She just didn't even know what we were doing the next day. There was never a plan. I think it is great to be flexible and have a place for structure, but they need to go together."

After 5 months of what Julie perceived to be poor mentoring from two different teachers, she began to question whether to continue in the program. Aggravating Julie's difficulties with her mentors was her view that they lacked sympathy for many problems in the pupils' lives. Some of her writings reflected how she imagined the children felt. Her written reflections focused on the children's perspective of what they felt, and why they felt it, and how the teachers perceived the children. For example, Julie wrote the following reflections in which she blended the experiences of her student's lives into a story format:

Hi my name is Tina and I am nine years old. I live with my mom and step-daddy and three brothers and sisters. I had a brother that died, but I don't think about him anymore. My sister died when she was a baby. One day, I can't wait to go to heaven. Maybe I will get to see my real daddy again. He got shot when I was four. My step daddy just got out of prison and my mom just went in. I don't see how they ever have time to get together, if one of them is in jail all of the time. I live in Washington Pike Elementary Homes and am in Ms. Mallory's forth grade class. They say I have an attitude.

Hi, my name is Duane and I am nine years old. I live with my mom in Washington Pike Elementary Homes. She drinks every night, but I am used to it. Last night she got drunk again, and came home with a man that I had never seen before. She gets drunk a lot. Somebody told me that she is addicted to alcohol and can't get off of it. She falls down a lot and tells me to go to my room. I am in fourth grade. They also say that I can have an attitude too. I get in trouble a lot.

Hi my name is Eric and I am nine years old. I am a mixed kid from Washington Pike Elementary Home. My mama is white and my daddy is black. I never get to see my daddy too much, but my mamma does have men over all the time. Today I found out how my mom gets money beside what we get from welfare. When men come to our house, almost every night, they go to her bedroom. Then once I saw one of them give her money. Someone told me my mamma was a prostitute. I called them a liar and hit them. Men yell at my mama and always have their hands on her. It makes me mad, but she doesn't stop them. People tell me my

mama is a Whore, but I love her very much. I wish she wouldn't let men be mean to her. I am in fourth grade. I recently got suspended for three days for pinching Ms. Mary (an intern at Washington Pike Elementary) on the butt. I saw my mama's friend do it to her, so I thought it was okay. I also get in trouble a lot.

In each of the above cases a child's life is described as though the child was telling the story. Julie had captured both the child's voice and the impact the environment had played. The punch line, "I also get in trouble a lot" is indicative of Mary's beliefs of the teacher's seeming lack of insight and understanding of the child's life. Julie's wish to "save these children" ran deep and she could not understand why her mentoring teacher and other teachers were not equally as compassionate.

### ***Conflict with Self***

Julie had begun her intern year believing that teaching in a school would be similar to her earlier experience working in an urban ministry, a belief that was disconfirmed. In the urban ministry she had enjoyed being spontaneous with the children, but she felt the culture of the school, and the behavior problems and issues of control that plagued teaching there, made this inappropriate. Julie's prior experience of working with inner-city children had allowed her to show a "more natural, creative, joyful self," whereas at school, "dancing and playing with children on the playground" was unacceptable. The contradictions between her expectations and reality led Julie to doubt her career choice. During her first interview she said,

I don't know what the future holds. I don't know if I'm supposed to be a teacher. I mean, hopefully that is what I will do for the next couple of years. But I love what I did in [the inner-city ministry]. That would be more my job, I think.

In her second interview, Julie again expressed frustration at not being able to be as friendly to the pupils as she desired to be. Julie's initial belief that being friendly to the children would also gain their respect, gave way to needing to exert control.

I tried to bring balance. I found myself just not having any respect. You know why? Cause in the beginning I was this fun teacher that would dance with them on the playground. Then I had to take more control, and they didn't understand.

By the third interview, Julie was still struggling with how to be a friend to the children while maintaining a professional demeanor. Julie continued

to feel frustrated about having to restrain her natural spontaneity. She stated,

I am silly, and I like to be silly and do kid stuff. But I think when I teach, especially in the inner-city school, I feel like I turn into something I don't want to be because when you do the kid things, these children don't see me being a kid and an adult. They can't associate the two. They don't know what that is like. You know... most teachers here scream, and I mean scream, at them to get them to do things.

By the fourth interview, Julie reviewed her progression over the year from being the children's friend to being a professional teacher. She said,

I started the year out being these children's friend, and all I knew was ministry and hanging out with black kids in the projects and I loved it. And I wish I had been told to start out tough. Don't give second chances in the beginning cause they will walk all over you. And they did.

Julie remained confused and uncertain throughout the year. Toward the end of her last interview, Julie compared herself to the other interns in her cohort, emphasizing the differences between their goals and her own:

I am just very confused about what I am supposed to do with my life. I know that I have a heart for the poor, and I see myself working best one on one with kids, and that is just why I don't know if teaching is for me. Maybe the difference between me and the other interns is that I went into this with a total 'ministry mind set' rather than a 'teaching mind set.' The reason I chose [this school] is because I knew [this school's] kids. I had done two years of inner-city ministry, and I loved it. But as I got into teaching, I was like, 'this is not exactly what I was looking for.'

Julie found her internal conflict over preservice teaching very stressful. At one point she had to leave the classroom, go into the bathroom, get on her hands and knees, and pray to God to help her get through the day. Julie claims that that was a turning point for her:

It wasn't like this big breakdown, but it was like my turning point. I went to the bathroom in the teacher's lounge, literally got down on my knees and I was like 'God, I can't do this alone.' And I think that is when my attitude started changing. I had been doing everything on my own... 'I can do this. I can do this. I

can be a good teacher'. Finally, when I got down on my knees and said, 'I can't do this, but You can,' is when I felt like I had more strength, more peace and more 'you know I messed up, but I am OK.'

### ***Conflict with the University***

Julie felt that the university had not taken proper care of her. Her supervising professor had dropped by only twice throughout the year to indicate, in an offhand manner that everything was going well. He had not taken the time to ask her how things were going from her perspective. She said, "There are times when I may really need to talk. My advice in the future would be just to watch out for the intern and really be there for them."

In her last reflection, Julie also stated that the university had not prepared her enough for coping with inner-city issues. She concluded that she had "learned more about poverty-stricken environments and poor children than I've ever known before." All she could think of to do at this point was to "cry a lot and pray a lot" because nothing else seemed to work. Even though she desired to "take my kids home with me everyday," she seriously questioned her ability to teach, saying, "I definitely have had more doubts this year than I ever had about teaching and about working with inner-city youth." Even though Julie had experienced working with inner-city children, the intense exposure to their lives as well as the responsibilities involved in teaching appeared to contradict her earlier experiences.

During her very last interview, Julie made a more specific assessment of what was missing in her university courses. She expressed frustration at the university for not training her in techniques of classroom discipline, stating that "pretty much all the inner-city interns that I have talked to feel that [the university] did not prepare us whatsoever about working in the inner-city schools." Julie even claimed the brochure for the Multi-Cultural Studies Unit misled when it stated that one of its goals was "to teach future teachers to educate in low socio-economic areas and with poverty children." As Julie pointed out, "one of the biggest things we have to deal with is problem behavior and classroom management, and we did not have one class on that, which I don't understand." Instead, Julie felt she was taught a "bunch of theories" and "cute ideas" that did not apply to typical school events: "What do you do with children who will not do their work, and every time someone even brushes them, they [explode in anger], but yet you know that their daddy is a drug dealer and they probably only get two hours of sleep a night?"

Julie described her frustration with a program that had failed to give her the structure she needed. She believed that a bit more structure, or better mentors, or a more interested supervisor could have tipped the balance

against her decision to leave. She especially regretted that her mentoring teachers had not supported her need to be friendly while giving her practical advice on how to deal with disruptive behavior:

I feel like I had no structure through this entire intern process. I am not telling you this to complain. But I am trying to tell you my situation. I have tried to have a good attitude and I can do this... I am not saying that if I had this great mentor teacher, I would want to teach... but I mean, I struggle so much now with wanting to teach. I don't know if that is because my internship has been so hard or if I am not supposed to be a teacher. Do you know what I mean?

## DISCUSSION

Julie spent a year student teaching with children in the inner-city school. In her narratives she describes a powerful journey in which her original intention of becoming an elementary school teacher with disadvantaged children changed. After 5 years working toward a Master's degree, in a program designed specifically to train teachers to work with the intricate complexities of working in the context of the inner-city, Julie decided not to become a teacher, but rather work with Urban/missionary youths. Had Julie's experiences been different, i.e. had she been in a more supportive environment would she have come to this same conclusion? How much of her decision was influenced by the circumstances and experiences she encountered during her internship? And, to what degree could this have been prevented with more supportive mentoring teachers?

From the first interview, Julie shared openly her passion and faith in God and "being the light in people's life." She also talked about wanting to become a teacher and her passion for working with inner-city children in an educational setting. Julie's journey and subsequent stories indicated a difficult path. Other researchers have alluded to the preservice experiences as being one that attests to many difficulties and uncertainties (Fuller & Brown, 1975; Pilard, 1992; Rushton, 2001, 2003; Sitter, 1982) faced by student teachers. However, in all of these cases, the preservice teacher was student-teaching from 13 to 20 weeks in suburban, middle class environment. Julie student taught for a year in an urban setting. It is also evident that preservice teachers often undergo a period of time in their student-teaching placements in which they experience periods of self-doubt (Rushton, 2001, 2003). Julie clearly had demonstrated her concerns, doubts and moments of fear to the degree of changing her occupation.

The results of this study supported earlier work on preservice students. Lantz's study (1964) indicated that students of education ought to be placed in "non-threatening classrooms" in order to better develop their self-

efficacy. In light of Julie's experiences, one could conclude that a more nurturing mentoring teacher and classroom may have provided her with a more solid foundation. Walberg (1968) indicated that often the student teacher finds themselves caught between wanting to befriend the children in their class and maintaining classroom discipline. For Julie, her entire year was a juggling act between "ministering" and "dancing with the students" and maintaining a setting in which her students respected her as the teacher. Similarly, Glassberg and Sprinthall (1980) indicated in their work that "student teachers often become more authoritarian, rigid, impersonal, restrictive, arbitrary, bureaucratic and custodial by the end of their student-teaching" (p. 14). However, for Julie, this was not the case. She maintained throughout her internship an inner quality of support and compassion for these students.

By the end of her intern year, Julie decided that teaching was not what she had expected. She had entered teacher training with a view to helping disadvantaged children. She came with positive expectations based on prior experience working with children as a religious missionary in the inner-city. Despite her knowledge of these children's life-situations and her obvious sympathy for them, after 5 years studying to be a teacher and earning her Master's degree, she realized that formal teaching was not for her.

The inner-city school poses special challenges to preservice teachers. To what extent are teacher preparation programs adequately preparing them for such adverse conditions? The Urban/Multicultural Education program that Julie participated in had been uniquely designed to help preservice teachers understand the socio-economic, cultural, and political issues involved. Julie was one of 23 students in this cohort and the only student that chose not to continue teaching.

Connelly and Clandinin (2000) discuss the nature of teacher knowledge through the use of narrative inquiry in terms of three-dimensional space, these being temporal (past, present, and future), personal/existential, and place. They state, "We imagine a teacher's knowledge to be positioned along each of these dimensions and, therefore, to inhabit a three-dimensional space." (p. 317) They connect 'Temporal' with Dewey's belief that experience is continuous. Each experience we have—an event, situation, or feeling—is cultivated from a prior experience and becomes part of the next one. Julie described her confrontations, joys, and moments of truth in relationship to what her prior understanding was (i.e., missionary work) and what she hoped to achieve. As I watched and listened to her experiences, I saw a student whose mounting experiences clearly lead her to her decision not to teach. For Julie, her past imprints and reference points of working with the Urban/ministry, at times, appeared to be a detriment in her developing her teacher stance. She continually compared her not connecting with her stu-

dents at the same level she had in prior circumstances. Julie often discussed what it was like for her working with former children with a “missionary mind-set.”

Again, Connelly and Clandinin (2000) discuss the second criteria, personal/existential, of teacher knowledge and narrative inquiry in terms of Dewey’s beliefs that exchange takes place between a person’s inner self and the surrounding world. They elaborate on this further by stating that teacher’s knowledge is the combination of personal and existential, inner and outer, qualities. Few teachers, and even fewer student teachers, have the opportunities to experience the kind of incidents that Julie had. Her story is rich, one that involved a dilemma between her faith in God and wanting to teach inner-city ministry and her personal goal of becoming a teacher. For Julie, the year was about how her mentoring teacher, the students, her interaction with others in inner-city environment and her lack of support from the university shaped her story and her knowledge of becoming a teacher. Her existential faith and the nature of her beliefs regarding her role in “being a light to people” clearly shone in all of her discussions. It is interesting to note that in the earlier study (Rushton, 2000) all of the interns had a strong religious component and view. Further study of the role of one’s religious beliefs and faith in God and how that impacts becoming a teacher might be warranted.

The third dimension Connelly and Clandinin (2000) discuss in terms of teacher knowledge is that of “place.” They state that place has a special influence on teacher knowledge, such that, “we think of it as a third dimension in our narrative inquire space. Virtually everything changes in some significant measure as teacher narratives unfold in different places.” (p. 318) Certainly the interaction and impact that teaching in the inner-city in Knoxville, Tennessee, had on Julie was important in shaping her views of teaching. Had Julie taught in a middle class suburban setting with supportive mentors, she may indeed still have wanted to be a teacher. The inner-city environment poses special challenges to teachers and preservice teachers alike. Of particular concern is whether teacher preparation programs are adequately preparing student teachers to teach in such adverse conditions? The Urban/Multicultural Education program Julie participated in was unique in that it was designed to help student teachers understand the socio-economic, cultural, and political issues that face teachers who work in the inner-city.

Julie believed her mentors had curtailed her natural enthusiasm, her supervisor had not been there to discuss the situation with her, and the university had failed to train her adequately. Julie was a well-motivated, warm-hearted person, and the program should have been able to rectify the situation and find better solutions for the difficulties she encountered. Julie’s

narratives show the importance and impact that a mentoring teacher can have on a preservice teacher's aspirations and how a university supervisor's position of power can influence a student-teacher's willingness to step forward and discuss what is happening to them.

Unfortunately Julie's experience is not all that unusual. Another adverse experience by a preservice teacher was described by Brindley and Emminger (2000), who made suggestions about how to prevent such events in the future. They pointed out that whoever determines the intern's placement, whether university or local school personnel, it is important that the needs of the intern be prioritized. Brindley and Emminger's (2000) suggested that one way to minimize such adverse experiences for preservice teachers was to make greater use of the Professional Development School (PDS) model that has emerged as a leading university-school partnership model in the United States where as many as 1043 exist (Abdul-Haqq, 1998). While individual PDS vary, they typically include: (1) placing interns as a cohort on the school site; (2) building co-teaching teams of pre- and inservice teachers; and (3) utilizing site-based delivery of university courses incorporating applied assignments and school teachers as instructors. PDS models are reported to produce lower attrition rates once the teacher has entered the profession versus those students that experience typical teacher preparation programs (Abdul-Haqq, 1998).

Understandably, this is one case study, and generalizations are inappropriate. However, further research could be conducted to explore the impact of preparing teachers in the inner city. Using Julie's example, several questions arise. "How are we screening mentoring teachers, especially those that teach in urban schools, i.e. what criteria is used to determine quality mentoring teachers?", "How do we teach preservice teachers to deal effectively with the unique situations and circumstances that arise in inner-city schools?", "What is the long range impact of this year on Julie's career and life?" and, "What role does one's religion, spiritual or existential beliefs have on the teacher?"

In the end, Julie's story reminds us of how challenging an internship can be. Teacher educator's need to remember that fieldwork can lead to a miserable experience and leave a sense of abject failure, destroying both the trust felt toward the university program and the preservice teacher's commitment to the profession. Julie's experience reminds us all that there is much room for improvement on all sides. Mentoring teachers might learn from Julie's experiences to remind themselves of just how much influence they have on aspiring young teachers. Future interns might learn from Julie's experiences and build upon them to create richer experiences for themselves. Colleges of Education might become more aware of the

dynamics between mentoring teachers and preservice teachers in terms of placement and support.

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