

LEARNING TO TEACH WHERE YOU ARE:
PREPARATION FOR CONTEXT-RESPONSIVE TEACHING IN
ALASKA'S TEACHER CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

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Abstract

Context-responsive teaching is defined in this project as teaching that responds to individual student needs and interests, linguistic backgrounds and family characteristics, the local community and the local natural environment. Context-responsive teaching, as defined in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, consolidates into one concept the pedagogical knowledge, skills and dispositions associated with culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching, differentiated instruction, and purposeful collaboration with parents, families and communities. The research completed for this project examines current practices relative to preparing context-responsive teachers in Alaska's elementary and secondary teacher certification programs. A survey examining context-responsive teacher preparation experiences was developed and distributed to practicing teachers in Alaska who received their initial teaching certification from the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), or the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS), and who graduated in 2006, 2007 or 2008. The experiences of the graduates were juxtaposed with information on the three programs gathered through interviews with teacher educators currently working at UAA, UAF and UAS. Current practices at the three institutions are examined in relation to a literature-based framework of "best practices" in context-responsive teacher preparation. Following a presentation of the data gathered in this mixed-method investigation, nine research-based recommendations are offered for strengthening context-responsive teacher preparation in the state of Alaska.

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Dedicated to my dad, Ray Barnhardt

You can retire now.

Chapter One: Context-Responsive Teaching: A Definition

This dissertation is on the need for teachers to teach their students in a context-responsive manner, and on the need for teacher preparation programs to teach pre-service teachers strategies to do so. It rests on the assumption that students come to school nested in multiple layers of context that need to be understood, acknowledged and integrated in to the educational process in order for them to successfully learn about new ideas and concepts. It assumes that student will be academically successful when the new information presented in school is connected to and builds on the knowledge they bring from their lives, experiences, family backgrounds and worldviews, the communities in which they live, and the places in which they live and go to school.

1.1 Researcher's Interest in Subject Area and Chapter Overview

As an undergraduate student of education studies and public policy at Brown University, I completed a senior project and thesis entitled *Encouraging Culturally Responsive Teaching: Affecting the Head and the Heart*. That project stemmed from a semester spent during my junior year at the Bank Street College of Education in New York City, participating in an “urban education semester.” A primary focus of that program and that semester was to get a small, diverse group of participating undergraduates to think deeply about issues of race, class and diversity and begin to discover what it meant to teach in a “culturally responsive” manner. I focused my senior research and thesis on interviewing past participants in the “Urban Education Semester” to see what impact, if any, the program had on their perceptions of race, schools and culturally responsive teaching. This project is a larger extension of that work, completed almost twenty years ago.

In the intervening years, I have worked as an elementary classroom teacher of diverse populations of students and currently am in my fourteenth year as a teacher educator at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. In my work at UAF educating future teachers, I integrate many activities, assignments, and resources that I hope will cause the pre-service teachers I work with to eventually teach in a culturally responsive and place-based manner. In my experience as a teacher educator, I have found that I really don't

ever know if what my colleagues and I are doing is having any long term impact on the practices of the teachers who complete our programs. The desire to know “does what we do *matter*?” is another primary motivating question behind my research focus.

Additionally, the desire to learn more about the current body of research on teacher education strategies that encourage future teachers to learn about their students, families, communities and natural places, and to learn what the research says in regards to effective practices in these areas of teacher preparation plays a strong part in the focus of this project. What *does* constitute effective practice? Am I, as a teacher educator, reflecting that consensus in my work? How can I strengthen what I do, and how can I help the program I work with strengthen its work? These were questions I had in mind as I developed and implemented this research project.

Additionally, from a larger point of view, the need for research on practices in teacher education reflects McDonald’s (2010) comment at an American Education Research Association presentation that “We need to look at not what are the traits of culturally responsive teachers, but what are their practices and what are the implications for teacher education?” A report of the Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States, commissioned by the National Research Council of the National Academies (2010) found, in attempting to examine the practices of teacher preparation programs, that “there is currently little definitive evidence that particular approaches to teacher preparation yield teachers whose students are more successful than others. Such research is badly needed” (p 174). They go on to state, in the report summary, that “the highest priority research would be studies that examine three critical topics in relation to their ultimate effect on student learning: (including) the effectiveness of various approaches to preparing teachers in classroom management and *teaching diverse learners*” (p. 174). Lowenstein (2009) mirrors this need stating “although much important theoretical work has been done in multicultural education, especially around the issues of race and racial identity, the actual practice of teaching and learning about issues of diversity in teacher education is more nebulous” and “research in teacher education classrooms remains in need” (p.178).

The first chapter of this dissertation will present a definition of context-responsive teaching and offer some examples of teaching strategies that put this type of teaching into practice. The idea of context-responsive teaching draws from and expands on the teaching strategies and repertoires described in education literature as culturally responsive teaching, place- and community-based teaching, differentiated or “responsive” teaching and teaching that collaborates with families and communities, as well as on my own experiences as an elementary teacher for ten years, and a pre-service teacher educator for fourteen years. Teaching in a context-responsive manner requires that teachers not only understand the contextual factors that influence their student’s lives, but also that they have practical strategies for learning about these factors *and* a range of meaningful ways to incorporate (respond to) this contextual information in their classroom practices.

In this chapter, information on what teachers need to know about their student’s lives and situated contexts will be presented, followed by ideas regarding realistic strategies teachers can use to gather this information and then ideas for enhancing the learning process by meaningfully integrating this information in to the curriculum and pedagogical approach. Included also will be information on the dispositions or “habits of mind” required of teachers who strive to be context-responsive in their teaching. Throughout and following the description of context-responsive teaching, the rationale for synthesizing pedagogical ideas from disparate knowledge sources into one coherent concept will be presented. The remainder of this dissertation will then turn to the issue of teacher preparation and explore how teacher preparation programs could, and are, preparing their teachers to teach in a context-responsive manner.

1.2 What is “Context” and What Do Teachers Need to Know About It?

The contexts of student’s lives and their family situations and backgrounds in tandem with the communities and larger “places” in which they live and go to school form the foundation on which education will occur. McIntyre, Rosebery & Gonzalez (2001) write “Instruction always takes place within a context. At one level, the idea of context has to do with trying to connect learning in a discipline with children’s learning

in their everyday experiences, that is, their lives out of school. The key transformation then becomes the exploration of how to ground their learning . . . in everyday experience, while at the same time helping them acquire academic (competence)” (p. 121). In order to effectively bridge children with the subject-matter knowledge we hope to teach them in schools, teachers must first come to learn about the students’ foundations. The lives of students reflect their own individualized approaches to the world, the worldviews of their families and those they live with, the situated experiences of the communities in which they live, and the larger environments or “places” in which their communities and schools are located. All of this contextual information directly impacts the extent to which students can or cannot make connections to school-based subject matter and extend their academic understanding. Johnson (2002) articulates the connection between the functioning of the human brain and the need for contextualized teaching:

(Contextualized teaching and learning) succeeds because it asks young people to act in ways that are natural to human beings. That is, it conforms to the brain’s functions, to basic human psychology, and to three principles that modern biology and physics have discovered permeating the entire universe. These principles – interdependence, differentiation, and self-organization – infuse everything that lives, including human beings. . . . When the brain manages to connect new details with familiar experiences, it keeps them. When it cannot weave new details into familiar patterns, it expels them. (p. 22)

Johnson goes on to explain the direct link between connecting learning to students situated lives and powerful learning experiences:

The brain’s ability to locate meaning by making connections explains why students who are encouraged to connect schoolwork with their present reality, with their individual, social, and cultural circumstances today, with the context of their daily lives are able to attach meaning to academic material and therefore retain what they study. Deprived of meaning, their brains jettison academic material. (p. 23)

If making connections is crucial to meaningful learning, teachers must know what it is important to connect to in their students lives.

The contextual information that is worth responding to in the classroom can best be divided into two categories: information that must be learned about each individual student and his/her family, and information about the larger community and environment in which the students live. As it is the norm for teachers to be introduced to a new group of students and families on a yearly basis, we will call this first category “yearly” knowledge. Provided that a teacher stays in a school location for an extend period of time, we can assume that some of the community and place-based contextual information will not have to be re-learned every year, but instead will be a body of knowledge that a teacher accumulates over a period of time, so this category of contextual knowledge will be referred to as “accumulated” knowledge. One motivation for this distinction is the need to mitigate the concern that a teacher needs to learn about *everything* every year. Practicing teachers function under severe time constraints and it would not be reasonable to propose a framework suggesting that they must find the time to learn *everything* about their student’s lives and contexts as part of their yearly obligations.

So, what *is* the important “yearly” knowledge teachers need to discover about student’s lives and the family contexts in which they live? A place to begin is looking at individual students. Teachers need to know their students’ aspirations and motivations, their preferred styles of learning and how they work in relation to others around them, and they need to know some of their hobbies, interests and passions. As Dewey wrote in 1897, “Education must begin with a psychological insight into the child’s capacities, interests, and habits. It must be controlled at every point by references to these same considerations” (p. 427). Because this information is inherently tied to the individual lives of each student, two concepts are central to the ways in which this knowledge is gained by the teacher: (a) the establishment of meaningful, trusting relationships with students, and (b) the importance of listening carefully to children, both in terms of what they say and what they do (Schultz, 2003). The importance of establishing relationships

and of listening will be discussed in more detail when the issue of strategies teachers can use to learn about the contexts of their student's lives is reviewed.

The other category of knowledge that must be obtained every year by teachers relates to knowledge about the students' families. LePage, Darling-Hammond, and Akar (2005) note:

There is a growing body of empirical evidence that shows that well-structured family participation in education enhances students' academic success, improves school behavior, and reinforces stronger self-regulatory skills and work orientation. A bond between parents and teachers and schools contributes to student learning and well as positive attitudes and behavior. (p. 338)

Families define the contexts of student's lives, and therefore the crucial nature of the family-situated information teachers must be recognized in order to meaningfully connect school learning to students' lives. What knowledge is important to know in regards to families in the context of students' homes? The work on "Funds of Knowledge" undertaken by Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) best summarizes what teachers might learn from the families of their students. The authors define family "funds of knowledge" and the process of learning them as:

. . . understanding local households historically. This approach involves understanding the sociopolitical and economic context of the households and analyzing their social history. This history includes their origins and development and, most prominently for our purposes, the labor history of the families, which reveals some of the accumulated funds of knowledge of the households. Funds of knowledge refers to those historically developed and accumulated strategies or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household's functioning and well-being. (p. 450)

Extending this concept, the information that could be gathered at a household level might include family histories of habitation and migration, language acquisition and use, education, and vocation. The relationship between this family context and the family's goals for the education of their children should also be ascertained. Knowledge of family

histories could also shed light on the experiential foundations of the worldview(s) of family members that shape the child's situated experiences. Foundational understanding of individual family worldviews can and should be considered in conjunction with those of other families in the local community and the larger place, and threads between and across family histories should be recognized by, and responded to in practices by teachers.

Knowledge of the communities and places where students and teachers live and where schools are located is an area that teachers can build up over time spent at a particular school or in a particular community and place. Many of the same strands found in family historical knowledge can and should also be learned about the larger community: What is the history of habitation and migration in the community? Who comes here and who leaves and why? What languages and dialects are spoken in the community and how are they used? What is the educational, social and economic history of the community, and what is the current context of schools and work? Additional contextual information that bears understanding at a community level includes knowing who "important" members of the community are (and how "important" is defined by community members), what controversial or challenging issues the community is currently faced with, where community members tend to gather (including where students go in the community outside of school time), and what community resources are available that could connect school learning with external resources in a meaningful manner.

An understanding of community context, however, should not stop at the level of human-based histories, challenges, resources and spaces. These human-based community elements do not exist outside of the natural environment or "place" in which the community is located. Gruenewald (2008a) writes that "Place foregrounds a narrative of local and regional politics that is attuned to the particularities of where people actually live" (p. 308). Geertz stated "No one lives in the world in general" (as referenced in Gruenewald, 2008b, p. 145). Gruenewald extends that notion, stating "experience is "placed" in the "geography" of our everyday lives, and in the "ecology" of the diverse

relationships that take place within and between places” (p. 145). Attuning to this notion, it follows that a context-responsive education should also respond to the context of “place.” Scollon and Scollon (1988), in describing a potential place-based curriculum, list 32 questions on a proposed final exam testing “How Well Do you Know Your Place?” (p. 86). From this list, we can learn some of the important place-based elements that create the context in which schools and communities exist. Among other things, Scollon and Scollon suggest that persons who “know” their place can identify local geologic and aquatic landmarks and their significance in the community, some local plants and animals as well as factors threatening their continued existence, local natural resources and the ways in which they are being used by community members, and primary weather patterns. Knowledge of the physical elements inherent to individual places can enhance the learning process both through the integration of the resources into the school-based curriculum, and in the teacher’s understanding of the ways in which the local physical world provides a foundation for the worldview of families indigenous to, or with a lengthy history in a particular location.

Knowledge of community and place-based resources and histories can and should intersect and overlap with knowledge of individual family histories and resources. The situation of children within these larger contexts provides a rich and useful foundation for understanding the diverse “repertoires of practice” that children live in their daily lives and bring with them to school (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). The framing of understanding student, family, community and place-based contexts as crucial elements to which a teacher must “respond” offers an alternative to the oft-referenced frame of “culturally” responsive teaching. A directive to teachers to teach in a “culturally responsive” manner leads inevitably to Gruenewald’s (2008b) question of “to what in culture should educators be responsive?” (p. 150). Gonzalez’s (2005) notion regarding the on-going challenges of what exactly is meant by “culture” and her historic analysis of how the use of culture as a construct in education practice has both helped and hindered historically underserved populations of students is particularly illuminating when evaluating the efficacy of asking teachers to teach in a “culturally responsive” manner. Gonzalez argues

that the education profession needs to move “beyond culture” and she writes that “once we start to peel back the layers of this (concept of culture) we find a complex history, a variety of definitions, and wide disparity in theories of culture” (p. 29). After outlining the changing definitions and uses of the term “culture” over time, she continues saying that “as is evident, anthropologists have not moved in uniform step toward any single vision of what does or does not constitute culture. It continues to be contested terrain, with convergences, divergences, as well as exit points” (p. 37). In reference to the continually emerging nature of the term and concept, she writes that “more and more, culture is viewed as dynamic, interactional, and emergent” and that “perhaps, therefore, we can think of culture as a set of inquiries” (p. 39). She concludes, in reference to the work she and her colleagues have undertaken in regards to discovering “funds of knowledge,” “we have interrogated many of the assumptions of a shared culture, and have chosen instead to focus on “practice,” that is, what it is that people do, and what they say about what they do” (p. 40).

This emphasis on household practices as a source of rich contextual information, as opposed to an attempt to quantify whole-group cultural practices mirrors Gutierrez and Rogoff’s (2003) desire to look at cultural differences as “repertoires of practice” instead of as “individual traits.” They write “treating cultural differences as traits makes it harder to understand the relation of individual learning and the practices of cultural community, and this in turn sometimes hinders effective assistance to student learning” (p. 19). They propose instead that “looking for cultural regularities will be more fruitful – both for research and practice – if we focus our examination of differences on cultural processes in which individuals engage with other people in dynamic cultural communities” and that “focusing on the varied ways people participate in their community’s activities, we can move away from the tendency to conflate ethnicity with culture” (p. 21). Gutierrez and Rogoff provide some suggestions to educators and researchers who embrace this approach including “To examine how aspects of participants’ community background cluster and how they change, it helps to treat them as a constellation of factors (because)

cultural research requires focus on the dynamically changing configuration of relevant aspects of people's lives" (p. 23).

Coming back to the idea of context-responsive teaching, as opposed to culturally-responsive teaching, we can see that the idea of responding to the individual, family, community and place-based contexts of students in teaching aligns well with the notion of moving "beyond" culture as articulated by Gonzalez (2005) , and the focus on looking at "repertoires of practice" as proposed by Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003). Locating the student within a continually evolving context of family, community and place recognizes the fluid and constantly evolving nature of culture as opposed to asking teachers to identify and respond to fixed and assigned cultural traits that may or may not reflect the lives experiences of students from varying backgrounds. One role of the context-responsive teacher, then, would be to learn to look for and attend to commonalities in the context-based backgrounds of her students and to build upon the more prevalent "repertoires of practice" shared among those in her class.

1.3 Necessary Habits of Mind for Context-Responsive Teaching

Before the description of context-responsive teaching progresses any further, we will pause to discuss some assumptions that are being made about teacher dispositions and the ways in which knowledge is gained in a meaningful manner. This portrait of context-based teaching assumes: a teacher who is committed to building and sustaining meaningful relationships with the students, families and communities in which she works; a teacher who is skilled as an attentive listener to others; a teacher who understands and respects the fact that people operate from multiple perspectives and possess diverse worldviews; a teacher who respects and is willing to learn from non-traditional knowledge sources; and a teacher who is comfortable with and committed to sharing power over the educational process with her students, with parents and with the wider community. Needless to say, it cannot be assumed that every practicing teacher possesses these dispositions. The ability to purposefully and respectfully learn about students and their context-based lives, though, requires that teachers at least be working toward a development of these habits of mind for reasons which will be articulated

throughout the following sections. These foundational conditions must be addressed and acknowledged in this description of context-responsive teaching, as the next chapter will consider teacher preparation for context-responsive teaching and will address strategies teacher preparation programs can take to stimulate the development of these dispositions. Each disposition will be discussed in the following section.

1.3.1 The importance of relationships.

In order for teachers to genuinely learn about their students and the contexts of their lives, they must develop an orientation toward the world and toward others (particularly those who are not like them, or did not grow up in contexts similar to those of the teacher) that is understanding of, and accepting of, differences. Children are not going to feel comfortable sharing information, nor are family or community members going to be willing to meaningfully collaborate with teachers if they feel as though their lives and worldviews are not valued in the teacher's eyes. The importance of developing and sustaining meaningful relationships as a foundation for successful teaching was noted by McDermott (1977), who wrote "Trusting relations are framed by the contexts in which people are asked to relate, and where trusting relations occur, learning is a possibility. Where trusting relations are not possible, learning can only result from solitary effort" (p. 199).

The centrality of positive and reciprocal relationships in promoting meaningful learning was documented extensively by Bishop and Berryman (2006) in the research leading to the Te Kotahitanga educational reform effort in Maori education in New Zealand. The researchers interviewed Maori students and extended family members, as well as the mostly white teachers and principals at the schools the students attended. They found that the most often cited reason for limited educational success for Maori students, as reported by the students and families, was a lack of positive relationship building between the teachers and the students:

All the students identified the relationships they had with their teachers as the most influential factor in their ability to achieve in the classroom. In acknowledging the importance of relationships, the students emphasized the

importance of teachers caring for them, having high expectations of them, knowing what students needed to learn, knowing how to lead students to this knowledge, and being able to manage classrooms in ways that supported their learning (p. 254).

In contrast, the teachers of the Maori students tended to place the blame for limited educational success on external factors, such as the home lives of the students:

The teachers as a group were less convinced that in-class relationships were of any great importance to Maori students' educational achievement, compared with the negative influences that they understood to stem from Maori students and their homes (p. 258).

Bishop and Berryman note that the students and family members who felt that poor relationships contributed to lack of educational success:

Tend to accept responsibility for their part in the relationships, and are clear that they do have agency, because they are active and capable participants in educational relationships. These (students and family members) also have a personal understanding that they can bring about change in the educational achievement of Maori students if more attention is give to relationships and interactions. It is significant that people who position themselves in this way are able to provide almost endless solutions to the problems, in contrast to the very limited solutions that those who position themselves (as placing blame elsewhere) (p. 260).

In summary, the authors note that “the key to solving the problems facing us all in education lies in the quality of the relationships that are constructed between teachers and students, in day-to-day classroom activities” (p.260).

In a recent article examining community-based school partnerships, the authors found the need to build meaningful relationships similarly important for collaboration between teachers, parents and community members (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). In examining the research, the authors found that “Schools that have higher levels of relational trust among participants have been shown to have a greater capacity to reform

themselves and improve their practice” (p. 2210). The authors looked at three diverse and successful sites of collaboration between schools and community-based organizations and found that “bridging relationships between parents and teachers and other school staff provides a basis for more meaningful collaboration (and mutual accountability) so that the school and home work together for the benefit of children” (p. 2223). They propose a “relational” approach to parent engagement that “builds relationships among parents as a basis for their collective participation” and see this relationship building as providing “the potential of schools to serve as institutional sites for social capital building” (p. 2226). In summary, the need for teachers to build positive and reciprocal relationships with students, parents, and community members and resources is well documented and will provide the foundation on which the practice of context-responsive teaching can be built.

1.3.2 The habit of listening.

Schultz (2003) articulates the importance of teachers learning to listen to their students, their classrooms, and to the larger contexts of the students’ lives, as well as listening for silences and “acts of silencing.” She promotes teaching with a listening “stance” that places the teacher as a learner who can respond to the voices of children, classrooms, and family and community contexts. Of this stance, she writes

Taking a listening stance implies entering a classroom with questions as well as answers, knowledge as well as a clear sense of the limitations of that knowledge. Such an approach suggests that teaching is improvisational and responsive to students. It requires confidence to enter into teaching as a learner as well as a knower. (p. 5)

Indeed, if a teacher wants to teach in a manner that meaningfully responds to the context of her students and their situated lives, she must develop the ability to receptively listen to the students, their families, their communities and the places in which they live. Authentic listening must become a habit of mind if the goal is to prepare teachers who are “committed to transforming teaching and learning by adapting their pedagogy to the

children and the contexts in which they teach” (Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur, 2008, p. 157).

1.3.3 Recognizing and respecting different perspectives and worldviews.

When a teacher listens to her students, their families, and the voices of the communities and places in which the students live, she must do so with a firm understanding that the upbringings, cultural backgrounds, and experiences of individuals shape their perspectives and “worldviews.” A teacher must also recognize that it is essential that one’s own worldview not be held as the standard by which other worldviews should be judged. Recognizing multiple worldviews and respecting and responding to them in a non-judgmental manner is a key disposition that teachers must hold if they are to successfully incorporate the worldviews of their students into their classroom practices. Schultz et al (2008) write

Prospective teachers enter teacher education programs with preconceived ideas about what it means to teach and to learn, and these ideas continue to evolve as they move into their own classrooms. Part of the task of teacher preparation involves helping new teachers learn from the students they teach so that their teaching can incorporate and respond to the students’ cultural knowledge and their academic and social strengths and needs. (p. 156)

In their own teacher preparation program, they note that their pre-service students are asked to “look beyond their own understandings at the same time that they examine their own histories and cultural lenses to uncover blind spots and biases” (p. 162).

Brayboy and Maughn (2009) discuss the importance of recognizing and respecting alternative worldviews, particularly Indigenous knowledge systems, in teaching and in teacher education. In examining different conceptions of knowledge, they write that in Indigenous knowledge systems

knowledge is not a commodity that can be possessed or controlled by educational institutions, but is a living process to be absorbed and understood. Again, we are struck by the fact that knowledge must be lived and is a verb. For many in Western knowledge systems, knowledge is a noun - rooted in things on the pages

of a book or possessions. It is often stagnant, maybe something so abstract as to not even be tangible. Knowledge from an Indigenous perspective is active. (p. 12)

Understanding that even the concept of knowledge can have different meanings to different people – teachers, students, parents, community members – is critical if teachers are working to incorporate knowledge from multiple contexts into their classroom practices, although the authors note:

The ways in which knowledge systems govern our lives - from how we value particular relationships to how we conceive of and deliver instruction on plant growth - may be difficult to see, especially if we are not familiar with knowledge systems other than our own (p. 18).

Although there are challenges to understanding that multiple perspectives and worldviews exist and must be validated in the educational process, it is necessary that teachers develop this “habit of mind” if they are to respond to contexts in an authentic manner.

1.3.4 Alternative sources and forms of knowledge.

In order for teachers to learn from their students, from families, and from the communities and places where their students live and go to school, they must be willing to embrace an inclusive view as to what constitutes “knowledge” and how and from whom “knowledge” can be learned. As mentioned in the earlier quote from Brayboy and Maughn (2009), knowledge is not, in everyone’s worldview, *fixed*. It is often subject to interpretation and can come in many forms. Consequently, teachers must be open to learning about many different things from many different sources. Teachers who consider “valid” knowledge to be only that found in textbooks or school curricula will have a challenging time teaching in a context-responsive manner. A context-responsive approach to teaching requires that teachers not only look to many alternative and non-traditional to incorporate into the curriculum, but also that they have an expansive definition of what is worth knowing and including.

Teacher educators at the University of Washington have recently been experimenting with having pre-service teachers complete fieldwork in community-based

organizations (CBOs) (prior to their classroom internships) as a possible approach to bridge the gap between teachers and the students they teach (McDonald, Tyson, Brayko, Bowman, & Shimomura, 2011). They list some of the goals of the community-based placements as intending to

- Give prospective teachers opportunities to develop a holistic and assets-based view of children and youth.
- Acknowledge education and learning as a process that occurs in multiple contexts.
- Place students, families, neighborhoods, and communities at the center of teaching and education. (p. 17)

The UW faculty note that “research shows that learning is enhanced when teachers bridge school knowledge with students’ “informal” knowledge” (p. 16). The preliminary findings in the experiences of pre-service teachers participating in these partnerships suggest:

Placements in CBOs, at times, enabled preservice teachers to engage with children in ways that turned the relationship of teacher-student on its head, situating children as capable knowers, and positioning teachers as learners. The ability of teachers to see and understand children as competent individuals with knowledge and expertise, potentially enables them to reach into and across difference in ways that is central to their ability to provide high quality learning opportunities to all students. (p. 41)

The implications for teacher preparation programs related to the work at UW will be discussed further in the next chapter, as it represents a possible pathway to the development in teachers of the ability to expand their understanding of what constitutes knowledge and where that knowledge can come from.

Warren et al. (2009) also provide support of the need for teachers to learn from alternative sources, in this case, parents and communities. They refer again to their proposed “relational” approach to parent engagement, stating that it “engages parents around their own interests and values and respects their contributions. In this process both

educators and parents grow and change, potentially forming a learning community together” (p. 2211). Barnhardt (2008) also advocates for the incorporation of knowledge from multiple sources, and describes the work of the Alaska Native Knowledge Network in developing the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Teaching which promote teaching that:

provide(s) multiple avenues for the incorporation of locally-recognized expertise in all actions related to the use and interpretation of local cultural knowledge and practices as the basis for learning about the larger world (p. 130).

Whether they are learning from their students, from families, from communities or from the natural environment surrounding the school, teachers must develop and maintain a willingness to recognize and validate multiple sources and forms of knowledge.

1.3.5 Power sharing.

Closely tied to the ability to respect and acknowledge different worldviews and the understanding that knowledge comes from and can take many forms is the teacher’s willingness to work towards power-neutral relationships with students, parents and the wider community. Warren et al. (2009), in examining relationships between teachers, parents, and communities, distinguish between what they refer to as “relational” power and “unilateral” power:

Relational power can be contrasted to unilateral power, which emphasizes “power over” others, the capacity to get others to do ones bidding. Educators who fear parent power are operating out of a unilateral power framework of winners and losers. Relational power emphasizes the “power to” get things done collectively. (p. 2224)

They articulate the benefits of sharing relational power with parents, stating that such an approach “recognizes the reality of potential conflict between parents, community leaders, and educators but invites them into a collaborative process that fosters the “power to” create solutions together” (p. 2224).

Bishop and Berryman (2006) also discuss the issue of power, and the need for teachers to establish more power-neutral relationships with their Maori students, stating

“it is important that teachers show respect for the power of the knowledge, experiences, and overall persona of Maori students in their classrooms. In other words, power-sharing relationships need to be developed” (p. 257). They note that of the teachers interviewed who had reputations for creating high quality educational experiences for their Maori students, the ability to “teach and interact effectively with Maori students in their classrooms was closely tied to their having positive, non-judgmental relationships with Maori students; seeing Maori students as being self-determining, culturally located individuals; and seeing themselves as being an inextricable part of the learning conversations, not as the only speaker, but as one of the participants” (p. 268). Teachers who seek to teach in a context-responsive manner must recognize the importance of standing on equal ground with their students, students’ families, and the wider community and be comfortable on a leveled playing surface.

1.4 Gathering Contextual Information: Sources of Context Based Information

Having outlined what, in terms of context, a teacher who endeavors to teach in a context-responsive manner should come to learn, and the dispositional foundations on which a context-responsive approach to teaching must be constructed, the question of gathering information will now be addressed. Who holds the knowledge that teachers should work from if they are to respond, in teaching, to the contextual lives of their students, and what forms does this knowledge take? It is important to return to the aforementioned question of “what constitutes knowledge” before examining possible resources, as knowledge in this context should not be considered fixed or stagnant. The list of sources that follows is constructed to respond to the fact that information deemed relevant and accurate one day might not be relevant the next, and charges the context-responsive teacher with routinely considering the context, source and relevance of any information gathered.

An overview of potential sources of information, the information these resources may offer, and the contexts in which the information might be shared follows, along with ideas for meaningfully integrating context-based information into the curriculum in both large and small ways, and some pedagogical approaches that align themselves well with

context-responsive teaching. This chapter will conclude with thoughts regarding context-based teaching in an age of context-free national educational mandates.

1.4.1 Learning from students.

The first, and most easily accessed source of information on the lives and contexts of students is naturally the students themselves. Most children, like most people, are happy to talk about themselves, their lives, and their interests if they are given the opportunity to do so in safe and non-threatening environments. It is important to remember that information will be shared most readily if students consider themselves to have safe and egalitarian relationships with their teachers, and they are also more likely to share information when they are in spaces that are more power-neutral than the classroom or school. For these reasons, teachers will be more likely to obtain insightful information from their students if they engage in discussions with them outside of formal instructional time. At a simple level, this could involve talking to them informally over lunch, or during recess duty. As a practicing elementary teacher, I often found that the most interesting information was shared with me by my students while we were out for walks through the neighborhoods or the woods surrounding the schools where I worked. When interacting with students, in both in- and out-of-school contexts, it is also essential to remember the habit of listening, as more information will be shared if there is more conversational space to fill. As the thoughtful contributors to the student advocacy organization and website *What Kids Can Do* (2003) suggest, teachers must “first ask, then listen.” They note “Encouragingly, listening to students does not depend on any particular expertise. Anyone who likes young people and values their opinions can do this work” (p. 2). In addition to learning about students and their lives through conversation, much can also be learned through the careful and non-judgmental examination of their work products (written documents, projects, etc).

1.4.2 Learning from parents.

Parents and family members are an obvious source of information about the lives and contexts of students. What are the best opportunities to *listen* to parents and learn about their lives, the lives of their children, and their hopes for their children’s education?

The foundational disposition of “power-sharing” discussed above is fundamental in learning from parents. As Warren et al. (2009) note “as teachers get to know parent leaders, they can develop a better understanding of family culture and a concrete sense of how parents can be assets to, not problems for, the school” (p. 2223). The development of a mutual understanding between parents and teachers requires a power-neutral relationship that encourages communication strategies that are “two-directional . . . they’re not just about how teachers can get information to parents; they’re also about how teachers can hear *from* parents about their hopes and concerns, receiving *from* them their insights and wisdom” (Davis & Yang, 2005, p. 6). Davis and Yang describe many such strategies in practice, and go on to say that “the strategies also aren’t just about how teachers can get parents to support the curriculum or support classroom life; they’re about how parents’ interests, skills, and insights can infuse the curriculum and classroom life” (p. 7). The authors offer an abundance of strategies for communicating with and incorporating parents into the classroom in a “two-directional” manner, as does Harvard’s Family Involvement Network of Educators (www.hfrp.org/family-involvement) and the Southwest Education Development Lab’s National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools (www.sedl.org/connections/). Additional strategies for incorporating parents into the curriculum through themed interview projects will be shared below.

Another strategy to establish relationships, foster communication and learn about the contexts of students’ lives is the ethnographic home visit approach employed in the Funds of Knowledge research undertaken by Gonzalez et al. (2005) and their collaborative group of teachers and researchers. This type of learning opportunity is characterized as different from the typical home visit made by teachers in that the participating teachers:

venture into their students’ households and communities, not as teachers attempting to convey educational information, as valuable as that may be, but as learners, as researchers with a theoretical perspective that seeks to understand the ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives. To accomplish this

work, we relied on a mix of guided conversations and interviews, a sort of ethnographic inquiry (p. 84).

In completing this kind of work, the authors note that “the principal task . . . is not primarily to elicit information, but to foster a relationship of trust with the families so they can tell us about their lives and experiences” (p. xi). McIntyre, Rosebery and Gonzalez (2001) describe the specific methods used to complete an ethnographic home visit (p. 100).

1.4.3 Learning from the school community.

Although there minimal research discussing opportunities to collaborate and communicate with both certified *and* classified school personnel as a method of learning about the contexts of students’ lives, employees within the school community constitute an often overlooked and undervalued rich source of knowledge. Non-certificated members of the school community, such as classroom aides, bilingual staff, custodians, secretaries, and other support staff are often members of the same communities that the students in the school come from, and many have long-standing ties to those communities and potential “funds of local knowledge” that could be tapped by teachers. School employees with community ties and histories could be looked to as useful sources of information on language use within the local community, community and school history, and “inside” information on the out-of-school lives of children and their families. Gaining access to this information, needless to say, requires the development of trusting and respectful relationships and an understanding and willingness to learn from alternative sources of knowledge. A crucial advantage of looking to members of the school community for context-based knowledge of students’ lives is that they are *accessible* – teachers do not have to even leave the school to gain insight into the local community.

1.4.4 Learning from community members.

The Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools (1998), in its Cultural Standards for Educators includes the following recommendations:

- Educators (should) utilize Elders’ expertise in multiple ways in their teaching

- Educators (should) maintain a close working relationship with and make appropriate use of the cultural and professional expertise of their co-workers from the local community
- Educators (should) promote extensive community and parental interaction and involvement in their children's education (p. 9-11).

Community members offer a wealth of resources for teachers to draw from in learning about the contexts of their student's lives. Critical issues in involving community members in the educational process are identifying individuals to collaborate with, contacting individuals and establishing trusting relationships with them, and determining how best to incorporate their knowledge into the classroom. Identifying potential community sources of information is typically a matter of asking those around you who might know such as students, parents, or other staff members at the school. A school provides a wealth of potential points of contact to others in the community, but again, gaining this information requires the establishment of collaborative relationships with those in the school community.

Strategies for collaborating with and learning from community members abound. Community members can be used as background sources of information for in-class investigations, they can be brought to the classroom for an interview or used as a resource, or visits can be arranged to bring the class out of the classroom to learn from the community member in his/her own situation and context. Teachers can also look for community members offering formal instruction on issues of local relevance, as a way to gain information on local history, economy, geography, and natural resources. Rogovin (1998) provides excellent ideas for locating and inviting in members of the community for classroom-based interviews to enrich or even form the focus of the curriculum. Additional strategies for incorporating community members into the curriculum as part of a theme-based inquiry project will be discussed below.

1.4.5 Learning from community organizations.

In addition to individual community members, teachers can also make good use of community organizations and businesses when considering ways to learn about and

integrate the local context. Local resources that can be tapped include (but are not limited to) community-based organizations, businesses near the school or those that serve a prominent role in the local economy, universities and colleges, governmental agencies, and museums and other attractions showcasing locally relevant information. Issues involving collaboration with local organizations are similar to those discussed in regards to collaboration with community members: identifying organizations to collaborate with, establishing relationships with them and determining how best to incorporate their community-based knowledge into the classroom. Much research exists on collaborative efforts between schools and community organizations, but there is little regarding the relationships individual teachers might make with local organizations and businesses.

One interesting example of an individual teacher's efforts to meaningfully collaborate with local organizations and businesses can be found in the description of a third grade "micro-society" curriculum project instigated by Sylvester (1994). In his chronicle of the development of "Sweet Cakes Town" inside his inner-city Philadelphia public school classroom, the students, over the course of the year, developed and ran their own banks, businesses, and community services. In order to do these jobs, the students looked to local neighborhood resources for guidance:

When William asked how much a store costs, I turned this question back to the class by asking them where we might go to find the answers. In the discussion that followed, we decided that we would take a walking trip to the soul food restaurant named "Ziggie's Barbecue Pit," which was located on the same block as our school. The next day, with Ziggie forewarned of the invasion, we set out to learn about starting a business (p. 312).

Sylvester continues that in January:

The students subsequently decided to add more businesses to Sweet Cakes Town. With each new proposal, we were propelled out of the classroom and into the neighborhood, visiting businesses and a factory, inviting visitors to be interviewed, collecting specimens from the neighborhood pond, and doing research at the public library (p. 312).

And later, he notes that “by the time students decided that the town needed a mayor, they were already in the habit of going to the source for their information. Philadelphia's Mayor Rendell graciously accepted the children's invitation and came to Sweet Cakes Town to be interviewed about his job” (p. 315). Sylvester’s willingness to collaborate with neighborhood businesses and organizations, and to seek local knowledge to contribute to the curriculum represents an example of the potential of teacher-community collaboration.

As a final note when considering community-based sources of contextual knowledge that could be of use to context-responsive teachers, it is wise to remember the value of local gathering places as well as local bulletin boards. Announcements posted at local coffee shops, post offices and stores can provide an excellent window into the goings-on of the local community and a context-responsive teacher would be well served to pause and examine them when frequenting these establishments.

1.4.6 Learning from local media.

Context-relevant information that helps teachers understand the situated lives of their students can also be gathered from local media sources. Websites of local organizations, agencies and businesses can provide useful contact information and often have links to resources that can be of great value to teachers and students when investigating local issues and topics. Local newspapers provide a daily or weekly overview of current issues concerning community members, as well as advertisements for local events and businesses. Local television news, radio stations and talk shows also offer insight into happenings and events in the community, as well as providing a glimpse of community-based opinions on a range of topics (some well-considered, others not.) A context-responsive teacher would be well served to tune in to these media resources as a source of both background information, and as a potential resource for theme-based investigations with her students.

1.4.7 Getting outside.

A final source for learning about the situated lives of students is simply to get outside. Taking a walk around the neighborhood surrounding the school (provided the

students come from the neighborhood nearby) is an easy and informative way to gather information on the context of students' lives. As a teacher on a military base that was located more than 15 miles from my home on the other side of town, I knew little about the daily lives of my students, 100% of whom were children of enlisted soldiers living on the base near the school. Walks around the school and base allowed me to see the apartments and condominiums my students lived in, and nearly always afforded me the opportunity to encounter one of my students (or another child from the school) outside in their yard, on the playground equipment, or riding around on their bike. Visits to the grocery store, bowling alley and gym on the base also helped me to learn more about the daily lives of the transient military population I worked with in my classroom. When I transferred to a school in a different part of town, off the military base, but still miles away from my own house, I checked the addresses of the students assigned to my class and walked and drove around the neighborhoods just to get a sense of where the kids were coming from and what parks and "hang outs" were nearby the school. It is a simple thing to do, yet one often overlooked by teachers new to a community.

Teachers who are committed to incorporating the local place-based context into their practices would also benefit from spending time in the more widely-defined outdoors in their area. Time spent exploring local natural landmarks such as lakes, rivers, forests and trails can provide teachers with a wealth of first-hand experiences and inspiration for curriculum integration. Walker-Leslie, Tallmadge and Wessels (1999) provide a succinct overview of strategies for teachers to learn about their local natural environment, both on their own and in conjunction with their students. They write "no video, no photographs, no verbal descriptions, no lectures can provide the enchantment that a few minutes out-of-doors can" (p. ii). The authors articulate strategies for learning about the outdoors through writing, nature journaling and observation, and learning to "read the landscape" and offer guidance on how to develop skills in all these areas. Context-responsive teachers can embrace opportunities to get outside, either alone or with their students, and develop their listening skills, as well as their understanding of how to learn from alternative knowledge sources (in this case, the land).

Finally, the value of maps in helping teachers learn about local contexts should also be mentioned. The internet offers a wealth of mapping resources, as well as off-line applications such as Google Earth. Many mapping websites allow users to superimpose different map “levels” on local areas, allowing viewers to see, for example, different land use areas, or property lines. The aerial satellite views provided by most on-line maps these days allow viewer to learn about local landmarks and points of interest and their distance from the school. Often, historical maps of areas can be overlaid with local streets allowing users to see the changes in local waterways and development.¹ On-line maps allow teachers to learn about the local context without even leaving the school but they are best used as a source of reference for planning in-person explorations.

1.5 Large and Small Acts of Context-Responsive Teaching

Having now looked at *what* it is teachers need to know about the situated contexts of their students’ lives, *how* they might gather relevant information, and the *foundational dispositions* context-responsive teachers should hold (or at least be working towards), we now turn our attention to perhaps the most crucial component of the definition of context-responsive teaching: what should teachers *do* with context-based information to positively impact the quality of the education they offer? What strategies can teachers use to, as Johnson (2002) puts it “connect schoolwork with (the students’) present reality, with their individual, social, and cultural circumstances today, with the context of their daily lives (so that they) are able to attach meaning to academic material and therefore retain what they study?”(p. 23).

The challenge of meaningfully integrating context-based information into classroom curriculum, and of adopting pedagogical structures in the classroom that best support a context-responsive approach to teaching has been seen as an area of difficulty for many pre-service teachers. Gonzalez et al. (1993), reporting on their “funds of knowledge” research state that “although all of the teachers are convinced that these funds exist in abundance, extracting their potential for teaching has proven to be an intricate process . . . developing a tangible, systemic link to classroom practice has been

¹ An example of the value of one such mapping program: When I overlaid a map of the current area around

more elusive” (p. 23). Similarly, Schultz et al. (2008) found, in their research following pre- and in-service teachers, that “It was far more challenging for teachers to understand how the assets and resources within the community and other dimensions of students’ lives were critical to shaping pedagogy and curriculum” and that “Most new teachers either overlooked these opportunities (to connect students’ live to the curriculum), or initiated them but found it difficult to follow through once they entered the classroom as full-time teachers” (p. 163).

Despite these obstacles, there exists a wealth of quality options and resources for meaningfully integrating context into the curriculum and for responding to multiple contexts in pedagogical practices. Some “larger acts” of context-responsive teaching (i.e. those that integrate context-based information in a significant manner) and “smaller acts” of context-responsive teaching will now be discussed, along with references to primary resources that support these approaches. Following that, pedagogical approaches and structures that closely align with context-responsive teaching will be described.

1.5.1 Larger acts of context-responsive teaching.

Larger acts of context-responsive teaching are typically those that involve multi-step, interdisciplinary curriculum projects that involve directly learning about or through a local context alongside ones’ students. These projects are particularly valuable to teachers in that they allow context-responsive teachers to gain information about their students’ lives, families, the local community and/or the larger physical places surrounding the school *while* teaching (as opposed to outside of the teaching day), thereby allowing them to gain contextual information while teaching in a context-responsive manner. Thematic based units use the local context as the vehicle for learning, and typically integrate many core academic skills including writing, reading, researching, conducting scientific experiments and real-world applications of mathematical concepts. This type of learning is often described in the literature on “place-based” education, such as the description provided by Knapp (2008):

The surrounding phenomena provide the foundation for interdisciplinary curriculum development and contain ecological, multigenerational, and

multicultural dimensions. Students and teachers are encouraged to cross the boundaries between the school and the community and become involved in a variety of constructive ways. Learners are expected to become creators of knowledge as well as consumers of knowledge, and their questions and concerns play central roles in this process.(p. 13)

There is typically no prescribed curriculum plan for context-based thematic units because they are, by nature, specific to the contexts in which they are taught. They usually involve what is often referred to as “project based learning,” which the *Edutopia* (2011) website (www.edutopia.org) defines as follows:

Long term and student centered, project learning is a rigorous hands-on approach to learning core subject matter and basic skills with meaningful activities that examine complex, real-world issues. Project learning helps students develop and retain useful, working knowledge of subjects that are often taught in isolation and abstraction.

Despite the fact that such units are “location specific,” there are many excellent templates that context-responsive teachers can look to in order to develop and implement their own context-based curriculum units in their classrooms. Some examples of high-quality templates or guides to creating thematic based local units include the following.

- The *Cityworks* curriculum, developed by an interdisciplinary team of high school teachers in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This semester-long curriculum has student investigate their neighborhoods “through interviews, research in local archives, and the creation of “artifacts” – maps, photographs, audiotaped oral histories, and three-dimensional models” and facilitates students as they “document their cities as they find them, and develop new visions of what their cities could be” (Steinberg & Stephen, 1999, p. x)
- McCall and Ristow (2003) offer ideas for building locally-based curriculum for upper elementary classrooms focusing on issues related to state history and local settlement patterns. The authors provide curriculum ideas for integrating family history with state history, learning about the First People in the state, exploring

diverse perspectives on becoming a state and on voting rights, and learning about state industries

- Rogovin (1998) describes how she created an entire elementary classroom curriculum based on interviews with family members and members of the wider community. Her book offers excellent tips on how to schedule and facilitate interviews in the classroom, as well as what to do with information gathered from the interviews and how to integrate language arts and other subject areas into interview-based studies.
- Two books offer elementary teachers guidance on how to develop thematic curriculum units examining local and family history. Hickey (1999) tells how to use family trees, family artifacts, and family storytelling, as well as how to examine local geography and landmarks, and how to use community resources to teach local history. Zemelman, Bearden, Simmons and Leki (2000) offer a guide for implementing a family history-based curriculum and for completing family interviews, with rich language-arts based components.
- The website *What Kids Can Do* (www.whatkidscando.org) offers several high quality resources for involving high school students in community-based research projects. On their website, teachers can find manuals for “Documenting Stories of Immigration in Your Community” and information on involving students in conversations and research projects on educational reform.
- The project MapTEACH allows older (middle and high school) students to engage in local place-based projects using geographic information science tools. Their website reports that MapTEACH “is an educational curriculum for middle and high school students designed to help them both (1) understand the physical and cultural features of their environment, and (2) use mapping technologies to enhance and portray that new understanding. As such, it emphasizes the integration of three focus areas: geoscience, local landscape knowledge, and geographic information science (GPS, GIS and remotely sensed imagery)” (MapTEACH, 2011).

- A context-based investigation of the moon can be taught using the book *Moon Journals: Writing, Art, and Inquiry Through Focused Nature Study* as a guide. The book offers a month's worth of writing and art activities to be completed in conjunction with an elementary class watching and recording observations of the moon and the local natural area (Chancer & Rester-Zodrow, 1997).

In addition to curricular materials that can be adapted to most locations and contexts, such as the ones listed above, another “larger act” of context-responsive teaching would be the development and facilitation of a project designed to address an issue in the local community. Such community-service based projects are also very specific to local areas and local needs, so there is no one-size-fits-all guide to integrating such a project into the curriculum. Sobel (2004) describes many such projects including descriptions of local community garden projects, water quality monitoring projects, and schoolyard enhancement projects. All of these are excellent examples of context-responsive teaching. It is important to emphasize, though, that context-responsive teaching need not be an all-consuming and resource-intensive calling. Large community-based projects are wonderful but also require a great deal of dedication and time on the part of the teacher(s) involved, and sometimes require grant or other external funding. Context-responsive teaching can also impact the curriculum using less time and less resource-intensive ways through “smaller acts” of context-responsive teaching which will be described next.

1.5.2 Smaller acts of context-responsive teaching.

Teaching acts that respond in various ways to the situated lives of students and the larger contexts in which they live can also occur in smaller ways within the classroom. These smaller, less time intensive and resource consuming actions can (and should) become part of a context-responsive teacher's repertoire of regular practices, and teachers should strive to incorporate these smaller acts on a regular basis. Smaller acts of context responsive teaching must also be part of a teacher's repertoire if s/he finds herself in a school site imposing stringent constraints on curriculum or pedagogy, an issue that will be addressed at the conclusion of this chapter.

One of the smaller acts of context-responsive teaching that can occur on a daily basis is the integration of local resources into curricular activities. This can be as simple as offering an example of a new vocabulary word using a point of reference in the context of the classroom or the community or creating a math story problem using one of the students as the basis for the problem. It could also involve using the classroom, school, or local community as the basis for an exploration of geographic concepts or a study of maps. The opportunities for small integrations on a regular basis are endless, but are contingent on both the teacher's willingness to look for such opportunities *and* on his/her knowledge of relevant context-based references to incorporate into the curriculum. This type of adjustment to instruction might well be best considered a "habit of mind" rather than an approach to curriculum.

Field trips, to locations both near and far from the classroom, can also be seen as small acts of context-responsive teaching. Any time a teacher makes an effort to take her students out of the classroom and engage in activities in the wider community, she is in some way engaging with and responding to the larger context. The extent to which field trips are integrated into the curriculum and how much the class can learn from them (alongside the teacher) often depends on the skills, organization and creativity of the organizer. Numerous resources exist to guide teachers in planning and implementing successful field trips, including the on-line "Teacher's Guide to Planning a School Historical Field Trip" at www.ourwhitehouse.org/fieldguidetecher.html, or the previously referenced book *Into the Field* (Walker-Leslie, et al., 1999).

Field trips need not be complicated, full-day affairs requiring permission slips and parent helpers. The areas within walking distance of a school typically provide a wealth of options and opportunities for short excursions with a variety of curriculum tie-ins. A K-8 charter school in Fairbanks with a place-based curriculum focus, the Watershed School, has developed a system of trails in the woods near the school where classes can be found on a regular basis involved in some sort of investigation. Trips on the trails are used for science observations, art lessons, writing inspiration, read-alouds in the woods, math activities, and sometimes just for a quick dose of fresh air and exercise. Teachers

have secured permission in advance for these daily outings and take the kids out on a planned and spontaneous basis, as the need arises to make connections between the curriculum and the local area.

Guest speakers from the school or larger community also offer an easy way to connect classroom learning to a larger context. Teachers can either seek out visitors who possess “expert” knowledge on a subject under investigation by the class, or simply accept an offer from a community member or parent to visit the classroom and speak to the class on a subject of relevance. Like field trips, though, visits from guest speakers can sometimes be of little educational value unless they are properly organized and followed-up with relevant discussions or de-briefings relevant to the academic content they are intended to enhance. A context-responsive teacher must possess the ability to facilitate visits with guests in a manner that maximizes the learning potential of the visit. Rogovin (1998) provides wise guidance in this area.

The integration of parents and families into the classroom, in both large and small ways, represents a context-responsive approach to teaching. Families can be involved in complex thematic-based curriculum units focusing on family history, community history, investigations of the workplace, etc. such as those described in the previous section. Parents can also be collaborated with in smaller ways, such as through the use of a well-designed two-way communication strategy. Davis and Yang (2005) and Vopat (1998) offer a host of ideas for collaborating with parents in ways that can positively impact the academic offerings in the classroom.

Teachers can also respond to the context-based lives of their students during the school year through the incorporation of activities and routines that encourage and allow their students to hear each other’s—and the wider community’s – different perspectives and worldviews. Several strategies that could be incorporated into the context-responsive teacher’s routine will be described.

Regularly scheduled class meetings can be held to both problem solve and to build community. Kriete (2002) and Nelson, Lott and Glenn (2000) offer information on how to institute regular class meetings and how to facilitate them (or have the students

take over the facilitation). Nelson et al. describe a format for creating and facilitating meetings in which students collectively address and trouble-shoot problems within the classroom, as well as share “compliments and appreciations” and discuss class plans. Kriete focuses on building classroom community by creating a predictable routine in which children are welcomed to the classroom and the tone is set for a productive and collaborative day. Both require that all students have an opportunity to have their voices heard in a respectful manner.

A variety of social studies themes can be addressed in the elementary classroom through the use of a teaching approach called either “Scottish Storyline” or “Storypath.” Both approaches allow students to take on an alternative “persona” and view the world through a different set of lenses, and both can best be summarized as follows:

The main feature that differentiates this approach from others is that it recognizes the value of the existing knowledge of the learner. Thus, through key questioning the pupils are encouraged to construct their own models of what is being studied, their hypothesis, before testing this with real evidence and research. The key questions are used in a sequence that creates a context or setting within the framework of a story. Together, learner and teacher create a scenario through visualization – the making of collages, friezes and pictures employing a variety of art/craft techniques. These provide a visual stimulus for the skill practice planned by the teacher (Bell, 2011, p. 4).

Faculty at Seattle University have created a high-quality set of Storypath units for teaching a variety of elementary social studies topics and an overview of the current offerings can be found at www.teachstorypath.com.

Other teaching strategies can be employed that encourage students to think and act or write from the perspective of someone else. Lindquist (2002) describes a variety of these strategies including having students write letters, journal entries, or newspaper articles from the perspective of another person from a different place or time, co-authoring “poems for two voices,” holding mock trials, and creating “biography billboards” (a faster alternative to a “living museum” project) (p. 97). All of these

strategies encourage students to consider the worldview and perspectives of others and also promote empathy for others not like themselves.

The National School Reform Faculty (www.nsrffharmony.org) and the School Reform Initiative (www.schoolreforminitiative.org) offer an abundance of activities that can be used with students (and adults) to encourage them to listen to one another and to consider – seriously – the perspectives and worldviews of others different from themselves. Both organizations have numerous “protocols” which the overview “Why Protocols?” describes as “guidelines for a conversation– which everyone understands and has agreed to – that permit a certain kind of conversation to occur – often a kind of conversation which people are not in the habit of having” (National_School_Reform_Faculty, 2012). The protocols all have different purposes and are designed for different situations, but they share the fact that they “create a structure that makes it safe to ask challenging questions of each other; it also ensures that there is some equity and parity in terms of how each person’s issue is attended to” (NSRF “Why Protocols”). Different protocols can be used to have students consider how they work in groups (“North South East and West” protocol), listen to each others’ opinions on a selected text (“The Final World” and “4A’s” protocols, among others), or consider their respective “circles of identity” and how those impact how they engage with others (“The Paseo” or “Circles of Identity” protocol). A context-responsive teacher would find a wealth of resources in the protocol collection, all of which actively encourage students to listen and to be listened to.

A final strategy that context-responsive teachers could employ to both listen to and learn from students’ voices is the conversational structure described by Cushman (2003). The question-based curriculum provides guidelines for facilitating safe and meaningful conversations with students around the themes of “personal connections to the teacher,” “expectations and motivation,” “learning inside the classroom and out,” and “classroom climate and management” (p. 2). Ideas for questions to ask students, as well as methods of respectfully gathering information on students can be found in the curriculum also.

1.6 Pedagogical Approaches Aligned with Context-Responsive Teaching

As a final component of this definition of context-responsive teaching pedagogical approaches that facilitate or encourage this type of teaching will be discussed. These approaches include: differentiated instruction; utilizing multiple forms of assessment; creating opportunities for student choice in curriculum, interaction and schedules; critically evaluating curriculum materials and textbooks; responding pro-actively and positively to language differences and linguistic backgrounds; and maintaining an instructional focus that promotes and requires higher-level thinking skills for *all* students.

1.6.1 Differentiated instruction.

As this chapter has established, children come to school with different ways of approaching and interacting with the world as well as different preferred styles of learning as a result of the communities, cultures and families in which they live. A context-responsive teacher must address these differences by presenting material in different ways. Tomlinson's books describe multiple ways to adapt classroom strategies depending on student readiness, interest, and learning profile (Tomlinson, 2003; Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). She defines each of these as follows:

Readiness is a student's entry point relative to a particular understanding or skill.

Interest refers to a child's affinity, curiosity, or passion for a particular topic or skill. *Learning profile* has to do with how we learn. It may be shaped by intelligence preferences, gender, culture, or learning style (1999, p. 48).

Tomlinson outlines numerous strategies for adapting classroom content, processes, assessment strategies and learning environments to meet the needs of individual learners. She emphasizes that "differentiation does not advocate "individualization." It is overwhelming to think that it might be the teacher's job to understand fully the needs of every single student. Feasibility suggests that classroom teachers can work to the benefit of many more students by implementing *patterns* of instruction likely to serve multiple needs" (2006, p. 89).

Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) list teaching patterns that cut across categories of students and benefit academic success for many learners. These teaching patterns include some of the instructional approaches and modifications a context-responsive teacher would want to incorporate into her repertoire:

1. Incorporate small-group teaching into daily or weekly teaching routines
2. Learn to teach to the high end
3. Offer more ways to explore and express learning
4. Regularly use informal assessment to monitor student understanding
5. Teach in multiple ways
6. Use basic reading strategies throughout the curriculum
7. Allow working alone or with peers
8. Use clear rubrics that coach for quality (p. 90)

The authors provide concise charts describing many ways to make adaptations to meet the individual needs of students.

It bears emphasizing that offering multiple options for assessments, and allowing students to “show what they know” in different ways is an essential component of context-responsive teaching. Banks et al. (2001) write “Teachers should adopt a range of formative and summative assessment strategies that give students an opportunity to demonstrate mastery (and) assessment should go beyond traditional measures of subject-matter knowledge and include consideration of complex cognitive and social skills” (p. 202). Villegas and Lucas (2002) note that “in diverse classroom situations, the job of assessing student learning is especially complex” and that

Culturally responsive teachers (should) offer students a variety of routes to demonstrate what they know about the topic of instruction. For example, they conduct informal observations of students in various contexts, examine work products as collected in portfolios, attend closely to answers to oral questions or comments during class discussions, and review written work (p. 106).

Consequently, it is imperative that context-responsive teachers understand and can create and use multiple forms of assessment strategies in their classroom.

1.6.2 Choice in the classroom.

Creating opportunities for children to make meaningful choices regarding the direction and format of their learning is another necessary component of context-responsive teaching. Providing students opportunities to make choices in the course of their learning day not only engages them in the learning process as they pursue topics that are interesting to them in ways that appeal to their worldviews and learning styles, but also allows them to develop the skills to make good independent choices. Chase and Doan (1996) describe the benefits of incorporating choice-making into the classroom.

We believe that the choices children are encouraged to make in our classroom lead to the development of autonomy. The children discuss their choices with each other and with their parents and teachers. They share their ideas freely, feeling confident that their words are of value to their peers. They understand that “Why?” is an essential question in decision making. They come to make decisions confidently” (p. 11).

Opportunities for students to make independent choices in the classroom are abundant, and the context-responsive teacher can gradually incorporate more of these occasions into the classroom routine. Students can be given choices as to which activities they want to pursue during the course of the day from a list of options. They can choose to work independently, with a partner, or with a small group to complete a task. They can help to determine the rules that will govern classroom behavior and the consequences for not adhering to those rules. Opportunities can also be created for children to choose the topics of their investigations in the curriculum, either within a topic or more broadly with individual research projects. Even small opportunities for choice-making, such as allowing students to read books of their choice during designated times of the day, can improve student engagement as they take responsibility for choosing books that are of interest to them and at the “just right” reading level. Tomlinson (2003) notes that opportunities to make choices in the classroom allow students to feel powerful, and “when the content and learning environment of a classroom make(s) learners feel powerful, they will likely come back for more power – it is satisfying to find themselves

becoming more powerful. If what goes on in the classroom appears to diminish learners' power, they will seek power elsewhere" (p. 17).

1.6.3 Critical analysis of resources.

Context-responsive teaching recognizes that students come from different communities, histories, and worldviews. They also must realize that the materials often made available to teachers as part of the curriculum reflect an inherent history and worldview that may or may not align with that of their students. Context-responsive teachers must be in the habit of constantly evaluating the materials they use to teach with a critical eye and they must teach their students to do so also. Villegas and Lucas (2002) write:

It is useful to think of the curriculum as a story. Like all stories, that told in the curriculum reflects the perspectives of the authors. In the case of the curriculum, those who hold power in society have the privilege to write the text. (Therefore) a central role of the culturally responsive teacher is to help students interrogate the curriculum critically by having them address inaccuracies, omissions, and distortions in the text and by broadening it to include multiple perspectives (p.102).

As will be discussed in the next chapter, teachers need to learn how to critically evaluate the literature, texts and curriculum materials used in the classroom and they must also, as Villegas points out, know how to find materials that "include multiple perspectives."

The organization Re-Thinking Schools (www.rethinkingschools.org) offers useful curriculum materials for teachers looking for ways to both expand their own, and their students' ability to critically evaluate resources and look for alternative perspectives. An example of one such resource is the Zinn Education Project (2011) (www.zinnedproject.org). The project seeks to "introduce students to a more accurate, complex, and engaging understanding of United States history than is found in traditional textbooks and curricula" using Howard Zinn's (2005) *A People's History of the United States*, which "emphasizes the role of working people, women, people of color, and organized social movements in shaping history." The project offers 85 free,

downloadable lessons and articles covering a panoply of topics in American history which encourage a critical look at traditional textbooks and curriculum materials.

1.6.4 Responding to linguistic differences.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one aspect of context that a teacher must respond to is the language and educational backgrounds of the students and their families. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009) in 2009 21% of children ages 5-17 spoke a language other than English at home, and the family linguistic and educational history plays a foundational role in student ability to achieve academic success. Elementary and secondary teachers must have the knowledge and skills to address the needs of English Language Learners (ELL) and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students within the context of their content area instruction. To adequately meet these needs, context-responsive teachers must first recognize that ELL and LEP students are not a homogeneous group and their individual language and schooling backgrounds will greatly impact the extent to which their language needs must be directly addressed in the classroom. Short and Echevarria (2004) write “We do English language learners a disservice if we think of them as one-dimensional on the basis of their limited English proficiency (and) like native English speakers, English language learners have differing levels of cognitive ability” (p. 13). Therefore, a context-responsive teacher must recognize and ascertain these differences and also have an understanding of the stages of second language acquisition so that s/he can determine the basis for classroom modifications.

There are many resources available to provide guidance on supporting English language learners in the regular classroom. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and the updated version of SIOP, Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) for language minority students both provide pedagogical strategies and structures that align with other elements of context-responsive teaching (Genzok, 2011; D. J. Short, Echevarria, & Center for Research on Education Diversity and Excellence Santa Cruz CA., 1999). SIOP provides a lesson plan checklist for teachers of ELL and LEP students that encourages the creation of lessons that build on the

background knowledge and skills of second language learners and emphasize the incorporation of targeted language objectives into all content area lessons (D. J. Short, et al., 1999, p. 10). Genzuk’s description of SDAIE includes a list of suggested techniques that “can enhance the provision of comprehensible input” for second language learners and also provides guidelines for identifying texts that support SDAIE instruction (2011, p. 14). The majority of recommendations made in the SIOP and SDAIE literature mirror those already identified as necessary to the repertoire of context-responsive teaching strategies (e.g. “facilitate a connection of focus concepts to student’ experiences, knowledge, and needs to know” and utilize “cooperative and thematic learning environments”) and therefore do not present an additional burden to the regular classroom teacher (Genzuk, 2011, p. 10). Literature on supporting the needs of linguistically diverse students, including Genzuk’s article on SDAIE, also emphasizes the need for teachers to respect the first languages of their students (“language and academic development are enhanced when a respect for and incorporation of a student’s primary language is included in the instructional model”) (p. 7).

1.6.5 Teaching for understanding.

The last pedagogical strategy aligned with context-responsive teaching is the need for teachers to plan a curriculum that emphasizes *understanding* and presents skills and knowledge in the context of higher level concepts. There are two main bodies of work that provide guidance on teaching with a focus on understanding: the *Teaching for Understanding* framework that evolved from Project Zero at Harvard University, and the *Understanding by Design* (UbD) framework developed by Wiggins and McTighe (Blythe & Associates, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Both approaches advocate a similar “backwards design” approach to the development of curriculum that follows three basic steps:

- (a) Determine what you want your students to *understand* as a result of the instruction, in addition to the knowledge and skills that will be targeted in the unit or lesson. Desired understandings are “important ideas or core processes

that are central to a discipline and transferable to new situations and that have lasting value beyond the classroom” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 25).

- (b) Determine the performance-based assessment task students will complete to demonstrate their understanding of the central concepts. The task should be as authentic as possible, meaning that it should be “designed to simulate or replicate important, real-world performances . . . in a realistic context with genuine purposes, audiences, and constraints). Criteria for an acceptable level of performance on the task should be articulated and shared with students in advance of completing the task.” (p. 25)
- (c) Plan activities and instruction and choose appropriate resources for teaching *based on* the desired outcomes and the culminating performance task (this step defines the “backwards” portion of the planning process, as most curriculum planning is done by first gathering resources and finding activities, and then putting together a series of lessons that incorporates all the components).

There are multiple benefits of a curriculum framework that focuses on understanding, and several reasons a context-responsive teacher should place teaching for understanding at the center of her pedagogical approach. First, a curriculum that focuses on understanding and central disciplinary concepts raises the academic bar and holds it high for all students. Banks et al (2001) write:

Schools should ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and to meet high standards.” The content that makes up the lessons student are taught influences the level of student achievement. Students who are taught curricula that are more rigorous learn more than their peers with similar prior knowledge and backgrounds who are taught less-demanding curricula (p. 198)

McTighe and Tomlinson (2006), in defining their beliefs about curriculum and diverse student populations, write “we do not subscribe to the practice of reserving meaning-driven, thought-based, application-focused curriculum for only a small proportion of learners. We have ample evidence that students whom we often think of as “low

performing” fare better with rich, significant curriculum” (p. 84). A universal focus on teaching for understanding ensures that all students have access to challenging curriculum that emphasizes the higher-order thinking skills necessary to achieve academic success.

An approach to curriculum that focuses on having students build understanding of central disciplinary concepts also aligns easily with context-responsive teaching in that the open-ended nature of the disciplinary investigations encourage and support the inclusion of multiple perspectives and multiple worldviews in the classroom. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) write “the UbD emphasis on “uncoverage” of meaning (vs. “coverage” of the content) arises from our awareness that understanding must be constructed by the individual. Differentiation reminds us that different individuals will construct meaning from their differing experiences, abilities and interests” (p. 28). A central component of both the *Teaching for Understanding* approach and the *Understanding by Design* approach is the use of “big” or “essential” questions to frame the inquiry. These questions present the content as something to be understood and interpreted from an individual perspective, rather than something fixed and pre-determined. As Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) note:

Young people rarely have epistemological awareness (i.e. an understanding of how knowledge has developed over time and is validated within various disciplines.) They tend to think of content knowledge as something that was just “always there” and that they must learn. One means of “uncovering” content, therefore, is to frame the content as the answers to questions or the solutions to problems. This approach provides learners with a glimpse into the origin and meaning of the content they are learning in a qualitatively different way than does a surface coverage of sterile facts (p. 110).

As an emphasis on understanding and respecting individual worldviews is central to the practice of context-responsive teaching, the partnership with teaching for understanding is clear.

Finally, an emphasis on performance-based, authentic assessments in the *Understanding by Design* framework represents yet another correlation between this approach and context-responsive teaching. Teaching for understanding advocates a “portfolio” of assessment strategies, both formative and summative, formal and informal, as well as culminating real-world based assessment tasks to have students demonstrate their understanding. This holistic approach to finding out what students know acknowledges their different approaches to learning and ways of understanding. The focus on authenticity in the final demonstration of understanding also corresponds with the integration of real-world contexts and place-based curriculum found earlier in this chapter.

1.7 Revisiting the Term “Context-Responsive Teaching”

Having now provided a detailed picture of what context-responsive teaching entails, this chapter will conclude by revisiting the term itself and considering the rationale for adopting this particular term to define this particular orientation to teaching. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the components of context-responsive teaching described here are derived from a variety of different bodies of knowledge on different approaches to teaching, including literature on culturally-responsive teaching, literature on place-based teaching, literature on differentiated instruction and literature on meaningful collaboration with families and communities. Figure 1.1 below illustrates the primary components of context-responsive teaching associated with each of these bodies of knowledge. It is important to clarify that the ideas listed in each circle are not necessarily exclusive to that particular body of knowledge, but represent some of the core ideas often referenced in the relevant literature and typically associated with the heading. For example, the idea of “using student, family and community context as a basis of curriculum” is often cited as a core component of culturally responsive teaching, so it is listed in that circle, but it can also sometimes be found as a component of the literature on collaboration with families and communities.

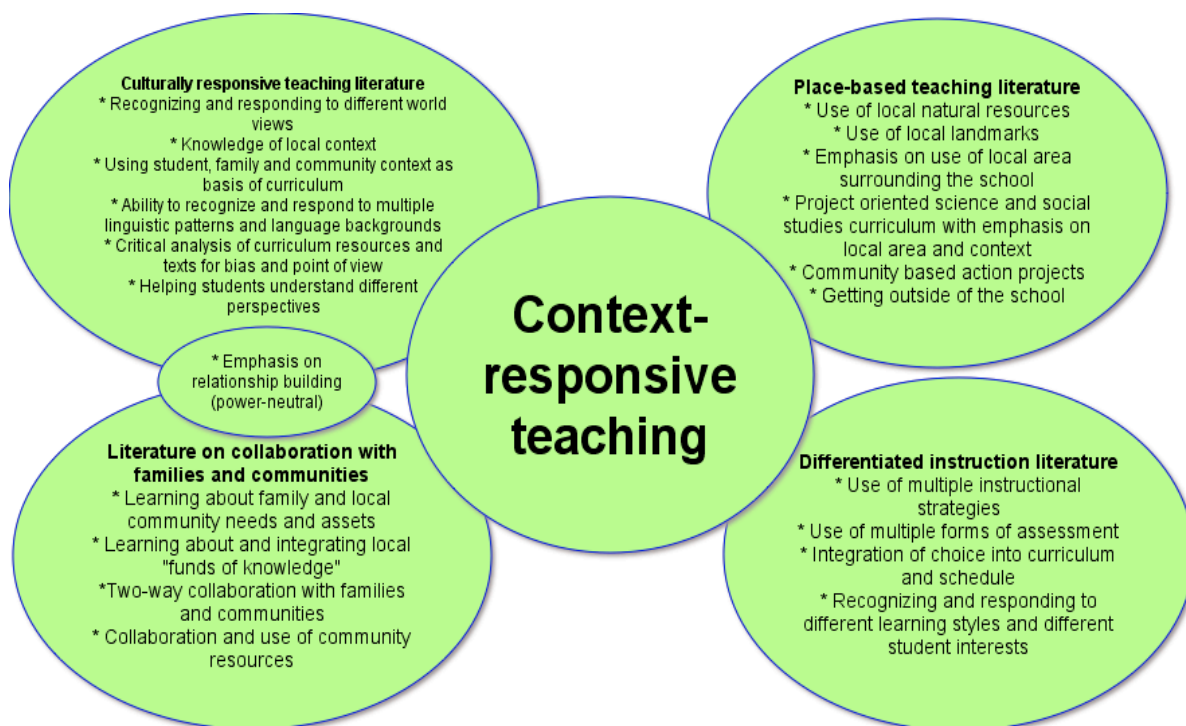


Figure 1.1: The literature base contributing to the definition of context-responsive teaching

The diagram above also demonstrates that context-responsive teaching is completely compatible with (indeed, largely derived from) culturally responsive teaching and, for that matter, place-based teaching, differentiated instruction, and meaningful collaboration with families and communities. Using the term context-responsive is not meant to diminish the concepts associated with culturally responsive teaching . . . it is intended to broaden the concept to include other related elements that are not always referred to when discussing culturally responsive teaching, but in fact are closely related in that they share a conceptual foundation of building on the pedagogical response to some aspect of the *context* of children's lives.

The use of the term *context-responsive* as a conceptual umbrella for ideas associated with culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching, differentiated instruction and collaboration with families and communities may also be justified by considering what each of the four sub-concepts *leaves out*. Much of the literature on place-based education leaves out references to family and individual backgrounds and

differences, as it places an emphasis on the integration of natural place and integrated community curriculum projects. Much of the literature on collaboration with families and communities leaves out references to individual student needs and differences, and how to address those needs in the classroom. Also, the incorporation of local physical place is not often seen as an important component of this body of knowledge. Much of the literature on differentiation leaves out references on to collaborative efforts outside the classroom with families and communities, or efforts that incorporate local places as the focus is on individualized student adaptations and modifications within the classroom.

The literature on culturally responsive teaching is the most inclusive of the ideas of context-responsive teaching, but also the least unanimous in consistent recommendations. Some literature on culturally responsive teaching practices includes information on meaningful collaboration with families and communities, while some does not. Some writers on culturally responsive teaching include information on differentiating to meet the needs of individual learners or different learning profiles, while others do not. Furthermore, outside of a small number of articles (Barnhardt, 2008; Gruenewald, 2008b), the literature on culturally responsive teaching rarely includes references to integrations of local physical place, or to larger community based curriculum projects.

The consolidated elements of context-responsive teaching also offer the benefits of addressing the majority of reasons listed as justifications for culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching, differentiated instruction and collaboration with families and communities. Although the arguments for each are multiple, some of the primary reasons given for each will be reviewed. Culturally responsive teaching is seen as a means of bridging the gap between the mainstream “culture” of schools and the backgrounds of a diverse student population, as a means of addressing a well documented “achievement gap” between white, middle class students and historically underserved populations in schools (B. Brayboy & Castagno, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2006; McIntyre, et al., 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). It is also seen as a way to address the gap between the backgrounds of most teachers (middle class, white) and the diverse student

populations they serve. Culturally responsive teaching is also considered essential in helping historically underserved students gain access to academic success *while* validating and maintaining their home and cultural knowledge, what Brayboy and Castagno (2008) call the “both/and” approach rather than an “either/or” approach” (p. 960).

A comprehensive justification for place-based teaching is described by Smith and Sobel (2010), who argue that the approach is needed to a) engage students by connecting education with their direct experience of the world b) enhance the long-term viability of democratic institutions by incorporating civic engagement into educational practices c) encourage an ethic of environmental stewardship and sustainability and d) promote local communities and places as a tangible point of departure for addressing the economic, social and environmental challenges of the future (p. 32).

Differentiated instruction is considered an approach to accommodate and attend to the individual needs, preferences, learning styles and worldviews of children, acknowledging that “people do learn, represent and utilize knowledge in many different ways” (Gardner, 1991, p. 244). It attends to the fact that human beings are “varied and complex” and that “failure to attend to that (fact) is likely to result in failure of the teaching enterprise for many, if not all, students” (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 84).

Powerful reasons for promoting meaningful collaboration with families and communities are made by Davis and Yang (2005) who report the following:

- Regardless of family income or background, students whose parents are involved in their schooling are more likely to have higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school.
- The more comprehensive and well planned the partnership between school and home, the higher the student achievement. (p. vi).

The multiple components of context-responsive teaching, as defined in this chapter, address most of the objectives of culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching,

differentiated instruction and collaboration with families and communities through the incorporation of elements seen as important to each individual approach.

1.8 Context-Responsive Teaching in an Age of Context-Free National Educational Mandates

In a final nod to context, it is important to not ignore the *contexts* in which many teachers currently find themselves working . . . that is, contexts that include the narrowing of the curriculum as a result of nationally-mandated standardized testing systems and the threat of external sanctions imposed by a failure to successfully prepare students to perform adequately on mandated tests, thereby leading schools to not meet the federal requirements of “adequate yearly progress.” Sanctions imposed on schools and teachers deemed as “relevant to the failure of the school” (language used in the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education act, subsequently named “No Child Left Behind”) often include a forced adherence to prescribed (context-free) curriculum guides and materials and mandatory regular assessments of student progress through (context-free) skills-based assessment tools. What are the implications for context-responsive teaching in such an environment?

As hinted at throughout this chapter, it is the view of this author that, as trying as these contexts may be for teachers, context-responsive teaching is still a viable *and imperative* approach, regardless of the external constraints in which one finds oneself. Schultz et al. (2008), write that “despite the current move towards standardization and mandates, we argue that there is always room for teachers to innovate and make decisions about how and what to teach” (p. 183). Throughout this chapter, a concerted attempt has been made to articulate strategies of context-responsive teaching that are both small and large to reinforce the argument that this approach to teaching can be enacted in both restrictive and progressive teaching environments. The enactment of a context-responsive approach to teaching in a restrictive environment, however, requires both a strong dispositional foundation, a commitment to meeting the needs of individual students, and an understanding of the larger forces impacting public schools. Schultz et al. (2008),

considering the challenges of pre- and in-service teachers negotiating their individual educational landscapes, write

Our role as teacher educators is to prepare new teachers to take on these challenges and to introduce them to formal and informal support systems to sustain them as they negotiate their teaching decisions during these first years of teaching. We need to talk explicitly with teachers during their pre-service and induction years about how to continually negotiate among competing beliefs and practices in order to find ways to reconcile them into a coherent and defensible set of practices to provide students with the best education possible. (p.184)

With this challenge and charge in mind, chapter two will now turn the discussion to pre-service teacher education, and the implications this chapters definition of context-responsive teaching has on how teachers are prepared.

Chapter Two: Preparation for Context-Responsive Teaching: A Literature Review

This chapter examines the literature base in the field of teacher education, focusing specifically on findings and recommendations relative to the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to enact context-responsive teaching, and the related experiential components of pre-service teacher preparation programs that will help teachers develop these practices. Hammerness, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) write “how one frames the learning-to-teach question depends a great deal on how one conceives of what needs to be learned and how that learning might take place . . . The design of effective learning opportunities needs to begin with a clear idea of what we want people to know and be able to do” (p. 360). Chapter 1 presented a comprehensive portrait of what context-responsive teaching encompasses in practice. To work backwards from that definition and determine the associated knowledge and skills necessary for context-responsive teaching, as well as the experiential activities that will help develop those skills and knowledge, I completed the tables that follow.

Table 2.1 below presents in the far left column the components of Chapter 1’s context-responsive teaching definition including what teachers need to know about students, families, communities and places, who they can learn this information from, specific larger and smaller “acts” of context-responsive teaching, the pedagogical approaches that align with context-responsive teaching, and the habits of mind context-responsive teachers should possess or be working towards. The second column in each chart articulates the corresponding pedagogical knowledge and skills related to each of these components, and the third column considers the experiential activities that a program might include to promote the development of the related knowledge and skills.²

² An additional fourth column was also completed in the original version articulating the ways in which teacher preparation programs should reflect the components of context-responsive teaching in their own practices and structures. Information from this column will be discussed and considered in Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations.

Table 2.1: Implications for teacher education derived from the Chapter 1 definition of context-responsive teaching

What to know (from definition of Context-Responsive Teaching)	What knowledge and skills need to be “taught” in the teacher preparation program?	What experiential or fieldwork program components can build this?
<p><i>About students</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students’ aspirations and motivations • Their preferred styles of learning • How they work in relation to others around them • Some of their hobbies, interests and passions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies to get to know students and their learning styles, and work preferences or habits • How to find out about kids’ hobbies, interests, patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out about kids and write up info on them, as well as how it impacts what you do in the classroom
<p><i>About families</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family histories of habitation and migration, • Family language acquisition and use, • Family education history • Family vocational history • Family goals for schooling and education of their children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to gather information on families in a respectful, non-intrusive manner • How to determine family goals for schooling • How different language and educational backgrounds impact student upbringing, and how one’s own background and experiences impact beliefs about teaching and learning • How social scientists current define and use the term “culture” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to find out about families without being intrusive, how to gather information on families and their “funds of knowledge”, how to interact with parents respectfully
<p><i>About communities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The history of habitation and migration in the community: who comes here and who leaves and why? • Languages spoken in the community and how are they used • The educational, social and economic history of the community • Who are influential members of the community • Controversial or challenging issues the community faced with • Where community members tend to gather • What community resources are available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where to go to find out about the community history, and why this information is important • How different language/ linguistic backgrounds and approaches impact school performance, and how to support English language learners and students with alternative linguistic patterns in the classroom • How to learn about important people and issues in the community and how it might impact the school or kids in the school • How to find where community members gather and why it might be important to go there • How to locate community resources for integration into the curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have interns find out some of this community context information and then figure out how to work it in to the curriculum in a meaningful manner, integrated with mandated curriculum/standards • Have interns get out in to the community, visit community hang outs and reflect on what was gained from the experience

Table 2.1 continued

<p>About place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local geologic and aquatic landmarks and their significance in the community Some local plants and animals as well as factors threatening their continued existence Other local natural resources and the ways in which they are being used by community members Weather patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who to talk to to find out local landmarks and their significance & how to connect with the curriculum How to learn about local plants, animals and geology, weather patterns and how to connect with the curriculum How to learn about local indigenous people and their uses of local resources – what to do with that information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have interns gather some of this info, or find out where to get the info, then connect it with the curriculum in a meaningful manner (actually teach it) and reflect on the connection
<p>Who teachers can learn from (from definition of Context-Responsive Teaching)</p>	<p>What knowledge and skills need to be “taught” in the teacher preparation program?</p>	<p>What experiential or fieldwork program components can build this?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kids Parents/families Other people who work at the school (classified AND certified!) Community members Local experts (broadly defined) Community organizations, businesses, agencies, museums/cultural offerings Local announcement boards at coffee shops, post offices and stores Internet, newspaper, radio, television news Walking around the neighborhood and surrounding areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People and places to learn information from (column on left) What kind of information can be found from each source What to do with that information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send interns out in the community to gather information from different resources – essential then to have them figure out what to do with it – how to connect with the curriculum

Table 2.1 continued

Larger acts of context-responsive teaching (from definition of Context-Responsive Teaching)	What knowledge and skills need to be “taught” in the teacher preparation program?	What experiential or fieldwork program components can build this?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic, integrated units based on the local context – examples follow • Cityworks • Teaching State History • Classroom interview based curriculum projects • Local, school and family history projects • Community based research project, e.g. immigration or history stories • Locally based scientific inquiry with the GLOBE project • Locally based geoscience and GIS projects (e.g. Map TEACH) • Moon journals • Community service projects to address a local need or issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to plan a thematic, integrated unit based on the local context • Exposure to high quality context-responsive curriculum resources (see list on left) – integrated into methods courses • How to arrange/ facilitate/ de-brief a classroom interview • Components of local, school or family history projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop, implement and reflect on a thematic, integrated unit based on a local context AND tied to local curriculum and standards • Practice setting up, facilitating and de-briefing an interview in the classroom • Know enough about the other larger-acts to feel comfortable trying them eventually
Smaller acts of context-responsive teaching (from definition of Context-Responsive Teaching)	What knowledge and skills need to be “taught” in the program?	What experiential or fieldwork components can build this?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of local resources into curricular activities • Field trips • Local walks around the area surrounding the school • Guest speakers • Two-way communication systems with parents • Class problem-solving and community building meetings • Storypath or Scottish Storyline units • Activities that involve students writing or performing from an alternative perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to locate local resources that connect with the curriculum • How to plan, arrange, facilitate and de-brief a field trip • How to plan a local walk and integrate local natural resources in to the curriculum • Outdoor management • How to find and organize a guest speaker • Two-way parent communication strategies – what are they? What are the options? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a lesson that connects a local resource to something in the mandatory curriculum • Plan, arrange, facilitate and de-brief a field trip (or do so in conjunction with your mentor teacher) • Take the kids out for a purposeful walk • Plan, facilitate and de-brief a guest speaker in the classroom • Participate in or facilitate a class meeting

Table 2.1 continued

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protocols (structured conversations) to examine texts or let kids listen to each other • Talking to kids about school and their lives outside of school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to facilitate a class meeting or a morning meeting • Types of activities for students to write or perform from an alternative perspective • What protocols are and how they can be used. How to have a productive conversation using a protocol. • What kinds of questions can be used to get kids to talk about their lives outside school – how to get them talking (without being too nosy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice two-way communication with parents and reflect on what was gained from it • Plan an activity that involves students working from an alternative perspective • Use protocols to examine student work, de-brief teaching and texts
Pedagogical approaches aligned with context-responsive teaching (from definition of Context-Responsive Teaching)	What knowledge and skills need to be “taught” in the program?	What experiential or fieldwork components can build this?
Multiple ways of teaching, multiple forms of assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on different types of ways to present material to students • Differentiation strategies • How to assess in multiple ways: formative, summative, formal, informal, authentic, performance-based assessment, rubrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating lessons that present information in different ways • Meaningful differentiation incorporated into lesson plans • Use and reflection on various types of assessment strategies
Choice within the curriculum and within the schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What it looks like to offer choice within the curriculum and options for doing it • The benefits and rationale for giving students choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an activity that involves student choice (in a meaningful way) and reflect on it.
Activities that involve critical analysis of curriculum materials and teaching resources (by students and teachers), and involve a broadened definition of what constitutes a viable “resource”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to evaluate curricular materials for bias • How to find and use primary source documents to teach subject matter • Ways to teach students to look at different perspectives and evaluate for bias 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically analyze curricular resources and reflect on what was learned in doing so and how it will impact future practices • Locate alternative resources to teach a text book subject area

Table 2.1 continued

Purposeful and positive responses to language and linguistic differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of steps of second language acquisition and how to determine in students • SIOP/SDAIE strategies for supporting ELL and LEP students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate an ELL or LEP student (informally) and discuss language acquisition level • Develop and teach a lesson using SIOP or SDAIE
Emphasis on teaching for understanding/high level thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to plan instruction with a focus on understanding: what is understanding? Use of Ubd or TfU curriculum framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and reflect on a unit with understanding as the focus. Develop an authentic assessment/performance task.
Necessary habits of mind for context-responsive teaching (from definition of Context-Responsive Teaching)	What knowledge and skills need to be “taught” in the program?	What experiential or fieldwork components can build this?
Someone teaching in a context-based manner needs to be committed to building relationships with STUDENTS and FAMILIES– also the importance of building relationships in general Someone who is going to teach context-based needs to be a skilled listener	<p>Strategies for building relationships with students</p> <p>Strategies for building relationship with families</p>	Some type of activity that involves building a relationship with a student or a family, along with reflection on what this enhanced relationship did to the act of teaching the child
Someone teaching in a context-based manner needs to understand multiple perspectives and worldviews	Structured discussions that encourage students to listen to each other respectfully (discussion groups, protocols, etc.)	Activities, such as CFG protocols, that require that you really listen to people different from you and hear their perspective. Activities that show interns that they each have different worldviews, as well as helping them recognize their OWN worldview and how it impacts their life and future teaching.
Someone teaching in a context-based manner needs to be able to learn from non-traditional sources	How to expand your definition of what constitutes a “knowledge source”	First hand experiences learning from a non-traditional source: a kid, a parent, an elder, a lower “status” community member, the land, etc.

Table 2.1 continued

Someone teaching in a context-based manner needs to be committed to working in power-neutral relationships	What it looks like to share power with students (class meetings, workshop approaches to teaching, etc.)	First hand experiences that neutralize power between the intern teacher and students – community based, or out of school, cultural camps, or putting teacher as learner. First hand experiences sharing power with students (facilitating a class meeting or an activity that promotes self-regulation in students)
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Using the information in the second and third columns as a guide, articles and books from the expansive body of literature on teacher preparation were then evaluated to determine where, and for what purposes, elements from the “knowledge and skills” columns and the “experiential components” columns were discussed and/or promoted as necessary elements of initial teacher preparation programs.³ The results of this review of context-responsive practices in teacher preparation will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter. References found to components listed in the “knowledge and skills” column will be discussed first, followed by a short overview of bullet-points in the column *not* found to be addressed in the literature. Next, experiential components needed to develop context-responsive teaching will be considered in light of the relevant literature and, again, those experiential components listed in the right hand column but *not* found in the literature will be discussed. The issue of dispositions or “habits of mind” necessary to enact context-responsive teaching will then be revisited with a focus on the ways in which proposed experiential program components might help future teachers build and develop these habits of mind. Finally, the question of where and how the preparation of context-responsive teachers fits into the larger picture of pre-service teacher preparation as whole will be discussed, including an examination of the knowledge and skills needed for context-responsive teacher in relation to those promoted

³ Although there are occasional references made to practices utilized or promoted for in-service teacher development, the emphasis in this dissertation (and therefore in the literature review) is on practices in pre-service teacher development, as there is a substantial difference between the structures, time constraints and learning contexts associated with pre-service preparation programs and in-service professional development practices.

in state and national standards for the preparation of teachers such as INTASC and the Alaska Teacher Standards.

2.1 Professional Knowledge and Skills Needed for Context-Responsive Teaching

In order for teachers to teach in a context-responsive manner, they must learn both *what* is important to know about the situated lives of their students as well as *how* to go about accessing that information. Once information is gathered about students' lives, their families, their communities, and the natural places where they live, pre-service teachers must be equipped with strategies for integrating this information into their curriculum and practices in a meaningful manner. Several key resources in the knowledge base address the ways in which pre-service teachers might come to know about context of their students lives and the communities they work in, *how* to gather that information and *what to do with the information* once it has been gathered. This section will examine the literature base in these areas.

2.1.1 Learning about students, families and backgrounds.

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) offer a comprehensive view of research based promising practices in teacher education. Each chapter in their edited book is authored by one or more prominent researchers in teacher education and collectively the anthology articulates what the research shows pre-service teachers should know and be able to do as a result of their preparation. In regard to learning about context and applying that knowledge in practice, the chapter on "Educating Teachers for Developmentally Appropriate Practice" espouses many strategies for learning about kids' learning styles, work preferences, habits, hobbies and interests and offers ideas about how to talk to kids in a way that elicits useful information, and also how to share power with students in the classroom (Horowitz, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005, p. 88). In the same volume, Banks et al. (2005) write:

The challenge of teaching diverse learners starts the moment teachers begin planning ways to connect their students with the subject matters they intend to teach. For this connection to occur, teachers must know their students – who they are, what they care about, what languages they speak, what customs and traditions

are valued in their homes. This suggests that teacher education needs to include a variety of opportunities for teachers to learn about their students and the communities from which they come. At the same time they must know how to continue to learn about their students because their students will continue to change for every class and every year (p. 264).

The chapter on developmentally appropriate practice cites as an institutional example of good practice the Bank Street College of Education where the teacher preparation programs require three courses on child development including courses titled *The Study of Children through Observation and Recording* and *Family, Child, and Teacher Interaction* (Horowitz, et al., 2005, p. 119). In an occasional paper series from the Bank Street College of Education, this focus is articulated in a reflection on the goals of the college's founder:

Studying children was (Lucy Sprague) Mitchell's fundamental route to designing educational environments, a crucial step in planning curriculum and all aspects of life in school. (Nager & Shapiro, 2007, p. 20)

Horowitz et al. (2005) discuss the need for pre-service programs to include systematic observation of children, writing "child observation is widely used to help teacher candidates learn how to examine and assess child development and learning with enough care and detail to guide instruction" (p. 120). Cochran-Smith (1995) also expresses the need for pre-service teachers to learn about their students lives, learning styles and preferences:

A perspective that is central to learning to teach in a culturally and linguistically diverse is *understanding children's understanding* or exploring what it means to know a child, to consider his or her background, behaviors, and interactions with others, and to try to do what Duckworth calls "give reason" to the ways the child constructs meanings and interpretations. (p. 511)

She goes on to write that "a major site for this kind of inquiry during the preservice period is observation and interview of the individual child" (p. 511).

In order for teachers to learn about their students they must also develop strategies for facilitating meaningful communication with them and encouraging instructive conversations. Villegas and Lucas (2002) refer to this need writing:

It is important to teach future teachers ways to learn directly from students. Prospective teachers can be encouraged to create opportunities for learners to talk about their goals and aspirations for the future and the role they see schools playing in bringing these plans to fruition, what they value and find interesting about the different school subjects, what they like and dislike about schools, and what they think about the school curriculum. Teachers-to-be can ask children to talk about their interests, hobbies, concerns, strengths, uses of leisure time, and favorite activities (p. 90).

In the chapter on Classroom Management in Preparing Teachers for a Changing World the authors discuss the need to develop a sense of community within the classroom, and the need to prepare teachers to develop this shared sense of purpose through activities that promote the inclusion of children's voices and shared ownership. The authors write:

An effective classroom learning community develops respectful relationships not only between teachers and students, but also among the students themselves. . . . Research suggests that learning is enhanced when teachers and students work together in "joint productive activity," which occurs when experts and novices engage in activities together and have an opportunity to talk about their work. (LePage, et al., 2005, p. 336).

They conclude the section on school and classroom community, writing "A classroom climate of trust, where students have opportunities to share their views without fear of being wrong, is essential to promote healthy student-to-student interactions" (p. 337).

To successfully enact context-responsive teaching, pre-service teachers must learn how to gather information on families in a respectful, non-intrusive manner, how to build relationships with families, how to foster two-way communication, and how to determine family goals for schooling. The Funds of Knowledge research team offer multiple strategies for learning about families through ethnographic home visits (Gonzalez, et al.,

2005; McIntyre, et al., 2001). The authors articulate how to prepare for and complete these home visits and ideas are presented on how to meaningfully use the gathered knowledge funds in the classroom. The basic structure of home visits advocated by Gonzalez et al. is to train teachers in a participatory, ethnographic research approach and have them visit homes of their students with an eye towards determining the assets, or “funds of knowledge” imbedded in every family and household. A central tenet of the approach is an attitude of reciprocity between what the teacher/researcher brings to the visit and what the family members contribute. Moll et al. (2005) write “reciprocity represents an attempt to establish a social relationship on an enduring basis” (p. 74). The authors write:

The teacher in these home-based contexts of learning will know the child as a whole person, not merely as a student, taking into account or having knowledge about the multiple spheres of activity within which the child is enmeshed. (p. 74)

In their experimentation and research on home visits the authors conclude:

We have learned that it is feasible and useful to have teachers visit households for research purposes. These are neither casual visits nor school-business visits, but visits in which the teachers assume the role of the learner, and in doing so help establish a fundamentally new, more symmetrical relationship with the parents of the students. (p.84)

While home visits have proven to provide teachers with extensive information about the home lives of their students, the authors admit “although (we) are convinced that these funds exist in abundance, extracting their potential for teaching has proven to be an intricate process” (Gonzalez & National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning Santa Cruz CA., 1993, p. 465). Helping pre-service teachers learn how to use the information gathered in these visits to enhance the educational experience and to foster meaningful connections with academic content is the next logical step in the preparation of context-responsive teaching and will be discussed further on in this chapter.

In the chapter on classroom management in Preparing Teachers for a Changing World, the authors touch on the need to help pre-service teachers learn how to communicate successfully and positively with parents and families. They note that “It is not difficult to convince new teachers that parent involvement is important; the difficulty lies in preparing teachers to work with diverse adult personalities in the context of schooling” (LePage, et al., 2005, p. 339). Some of the skills that new teacher must acquire include “finding ways to work with parents to enhance children’s learning; being aware of recent literature that provides strategies on how to work with parents and how to set up successful parent participation programs; and understanding children’s experiences outside of school” (p. 339).

In addition to learning about students and their home lives, there is much to be found in the literature in regards to helping pre-service teachers learn about language and linguistic patterns, as well as suggestions for helping them develop a complex understanding of culture and helping them better understand the individual lenses through which they view the world. The need for pre-service teachers to gather extensive knowledge and understanding of the specific needs of second-language learners and students with linguistic differences or limited English proficiency is reflected extensively in the teacher preparation literature. The Center for Applied Linguistics published a small volume entitled What Teachers Need to Know About Language that, alongside other information, articulates why teachers need to know about language, how best to help them gain this information, and how that knowledge should best impact future classroom practices (Fillmore & Snow, 2002). The authors of this volume advocate the inclusion of a minimum of two specific courses in the teacher preparation sequence:

Language and Linguistics: This course would provide an introduction to linguistics motivated by . . . language structure, language in literacy development, language use in educational settings, the history of English, and the basics of linguistic analysis.

Language and Cultural Diversity: This course would focus on cultural contrasts in language use, particularly those likely to be encountered in teaching and learning. (p. 40)

Preparing Teachers for a Changing World devotes an entire chapter to “Enhancing the Development of Students’ Language(s)” and articulates information that should be incorporated into pre-service preparation programs including the many uses of language, language use and development before, into and out of school, the acquisition of more than one language, and working with English language learners (Valdes, Bunch, Snow, & Lee, 2005, pp. 159-167).

In the 2008 Handbook of Research on Teacher Education a chapter entitled “Teacher Capacity for Diverse Learners” summarizes current thoughts on what pre-service teachers need to know about diverse learners. The authors write

Teacher capacity for diverse learners can be enhanced by the intersection of pedagogical content knowledge along with a complex notion of culture and learning. The importance of pedagogy is largely tied to an understanding of the cultural context in which students learn and grow, thus the importance of human development and cultural context is essential. (Howard & Aleman, p. 162)

In defining this “complex notion of culture and learning” the authors state that “culture represents a social system of accumulated beliefs, attitudes, habits, values which serve as a response to a particular set of circumstances” (p. 163). They argue that “educators need to understand that students bring diverse cultural and social capital to the classroom that is often drastically different from mainstream norms and worldviews and that differs greatly among members of the same ethnic group” (p. 163).

Milner (2010) asks the related question “What are some relevant conceptions that every teacher education program should include in its curriculum regarding diversity studies?” (p. 118). He proposes five important concepts to be addressed in teacher education programs including the myth of color-blindness, the idea of cultural conflict, the myth of meritocracy, deficit conceptions, and the impact of expectations on student learning (pp. 126-127). Building on the work of Banks’ (2006) multicultural reform

model Milner proposes that “teacher education students be prepared through a teacher education curriculum that practices transformation and social action and that simultaneously teacher education students be prepared to incorporate these practices and elements in their own P-12 teaching” (p. 127). Milner argues that the transformative and social action approaches to curriculum reform that are part of Banks’ model are the most powerful for teacher education and will therefore “assist teachers in developing the mindsets (transformation) and practices (social action) to address diversity in teacher education and also in P-12 schools” (p. 128).

Finally, in regards to learning about students, families, languages and (a broadly defined notion of) culture, much has been written about the importance of pre-service teachers recognizing and understanding their own backgrounds, biases and world views. Zeichner et al. (1998) list eight principles related to the curriculum and instruction components in a good multicultural program, one of which is “The program helps prospective teachers reexamine their own and others’ multiple and interrelated identities” (p. 168). The authors write:

Following self-understanding, prospective teachers need to reexamine their attitudes and beliefs about “others.” They need to receive in their teacher education program accurate information about the histories, contributions, and current status of the various racial, ethnic, and cultural groups that comprise our society. (p.189)

In a different publication Zeichner (2009) elaborates on this idea, describing a teacher preparation program at York University in Ontario that incorporates these types of activities:

Students in the program are asked to reflect on their own identities and how their experiences, beliefs, and worldviews shape them as individuals. Furthermore, the future teachers enrolled in the program are asked to examine the ways in which one’s personal and professional identities intertwine and influence one another. (p. 34)

Villegas and Lucas (2002) also describe teacher preparation practices that encourage this type of self awareness and self reflection:

Prospective teachers . . . can engage in exploring and articulating their sociocultural affiliations. One activity is for prospective teachers to locate themselves as members of different communities. . . Everyone identifies with a number of microcultures defined by such factors as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, primary language, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and geographic region. When prospective teachers are pushed to reflect on the differential social status of the various microcultures to which they belong, they recognize that differences among microcultures are not neutral and that some microcultures are accorded greater status than others (p. 126)

The literature agrees that self-examination is a critical component of preparation for context-responsive teaching, as is a critical examination of the word “culture” and alternatives for defining the multiple “repertoires of practice” that both students and teachers find themselves a part of.

2.1.2 Learning about communities and natural surroundings.

Strategies for helping pre-service teachers learn to gather information about local communities and community members, as well as ideas for incorporating that information into classroom practices is discussed in several sources. Zeichner and Flessner (2009) discuss a pre-service project that asks “those enrolled in the teacher education program to examine the resources, history, demographics, and community assets that surround the schools in which they are placed” (p. 36). Stachowski and Mahan (1998), discuss the need for pre-service teachers to “spend time in the local community, ‘outside school doors,’ in order to understand and appreciate how various community organizations and agencies serve the families of the children in their elementary and secondary classrooms” (p. 155). The article articulates several options for gathering meaningful information about the local community and reflects that as a result of community based field placements “the student teachers recognized that the surrounding community is an invaluable source of important learning outcomes, and . . . efforts to

include community members in classroom activities reflected their interest in and respect for their pupils' cultural background" (p. 160).

Villegas and Lucas (2002) also write about possible strategies for teachers to learn from the local community and from accessible community "experts":

Many paraprofessionals employed in urban schools reside in the same neighborhoods in which the students live. Their personal insight into the lives of the children could be a valuable resource to teachers who are not familiar with those communities. Other sources of cultural expertise for teachers might include those individuals who command respect in the community. (p. 89-90)

Villegas and Lucas also emphasize the need for teachers to simply get out of the school and into the community, stating "prospective teachers can also participate in community events, visit community centers and other agencies to learn about available services, volunteer time to help out in these settings, read local newspapers regularly, and frequent local businesses" (p.90). They describe an activity designed to get prospective teachers out in to the community:

To help them see the relationships between the schools and communities, they go in teams on "neighborhood walks" in different ethnic neighborhoods. Before their walks they make "concept maps" of what they expect to see in the neighborhoods, study city maps to plan their trips, are given tips on being "walking anthropologists," and are given specific tasks to complete while in the neighborhood. After completing their walks, they engage in structured activities to help them make sense of their experiences. (p. 139)

They conclude "direct experience is the best way for teachers to learn about the life of their students' communities" (p. 90).

Cochran-Smith (1995) discusses the need for teachers to learn about the communities in order to make connections between the lives of the students and the academic curriculum, stating "one of the most important things teacher education needs to do is provide opportunities for student teachers to learn experientially about students and their families and how to gain information from the local community and transform it

for pedagogical use” (p. 504). She describes a community inquiry project in which pre-service teachers closely observe “inside and outside school; interviewing teachers, students, parents, and other school personnel and community members; visiting community centers and action groups; and examining school documents as well as children’s work and other artifacts of teaching and learning” (p. 504). She lists some of the questions the pre-service teachers ask in their community inquiry interviews, including:

- What are the problems and priorities in the neighborhoods?
- What programs and groups are active in the community?
- What is a typical day like for you? (asked of students)
- What languages do you hear at school, at home? (p. 505)

In the project they also collect and consult school documents including “histories as well as literature from community and cultural centers in the surrounding neighborhoods, newspaper articles, and promotional information” (p. 505). In a similar community inquiry project described in Buck and Sylvester (2005) the teacher education students go one step further, developing “a rationale for a social studies curriculum that incorporates funds of knowledge that they came across in the neighborhood” (p. 216).

In an article on teaching through community contexts, Knapp (2008) describes a project he undertakes with pre-service teachers that allows them to “view the community through the lens of place-based education” and “reveal the learning potential of the site and personnel at that place” (p. 15). He takes the students to a local bookstore, where they ask questions and investigate the learning/teaching potential of the location, the intent being that if the students “came away from this experience with an attitude of excitement about the learning potentials of a bookstore, they would more likely plan a similar trip into the community for their students” (p. 16). He reports that the activity is typically successful in that it “prompted my students to view an ordinary community place as an extraordinary learning site and a source of interesting people who could teach them important things” (p. 16).

As a final example, Buck and Sylvester (2005) describe a community investigation activity that emphasizes the use of local knowledge and incorporates local history:

Students in our program are required to venture out into urban neighborhoods, to browse through corner stores, walk along the sidewalks, and map out residences, parks and businesses. They are paired with a community member whose race, class and history of personal experiences are most often markedly different from their own. They are expected to develop a relationship with the community liaison and to converse with others they meet along the way. They identify the buildings that relay the history of the neighborhood, city, and nation and the organizations that advocate for the community. (p. 220)

The teacher preparation program the authors work with also enlists the help of graduate students of history at their institution to “act as docents on a walking tour” of the local area. After the tour the pre-service teachers are asked to “research the history of their particular neighborhood and to place it within the larger socioeconomic history” of the city (p. 222).

Thoughts on how pre-service teachers might go about immersing themselves in the local “place” and learn about the environment surrounding the school, as well as how to meaningfully integrate this local knowledge into classroom practices can be found in several different chapters of Gruenwald and Smith (2008). Dubel and Sobel (2008) share several strategies used in pre-service teacher education at Antioch College in Maine including one in which they do a six week observation of a local tree as it changes color in the fall (p. 312). Through this project, which includes having the students “chart the color changes, do a series of whole tree and single twig and leaf drawings, and develop an investigation related to the tree’s preparation for winter,” the authors report:

We’ll also learn to identify 20 local trees, create service learning projects in the local Ecopark, work with a downtown historical museum to develop artifact-based programs for the fourth-grade history and geography curriculum, learn

about community treasure hunts, school audits, green buildings, and how to connect elementary students with homelessness issues. (p. 312)

In the same text, Cameron (2008) discusses an activity that requires students to “spend a day in the most urban place that was within an hour’s travel of their home (and to) prepare by reading material on sensing and understanding urban places” (p. 290). These types of investigations into the local community and history provide a rich foundation for understanding contexts and making connections with academic content.

2.1.3 Learning the pedagogical skills aligned with context-responsive teaching.

As is articulated in the Chapter 1 definition of context-responsive teaching, there are pedagogical strategies that align well with context-responsive teaching. A teacher preparation program that strives to promote context-responsive teaching should consider integrating and promoting these practices in their pre-service courses and assignments. Support for all of the pedagogical approaches that align with context-responsive teaching can be found in the literature on best practices in teacher preparation, most notably in Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005). Context-responsive teaching can best occur in classrooms that: employ multiple instructional strategies and multiple forms of assessment; emphasize teaching for understanding and/or higher level thinking; meaningfully integrate opportunities for choice into the curriculum and the schedule; incorporate non-traditional sources of knowledge and information and promote the critical analysis of curricular materials and sources.

The need for pre-service teachers to be able to present information through multiple instructional strategies is discussed in multiple sources. In an article on pre-service preparation for differentiated science instruction, Goodnough (2009) reports that activities focused on differentiating to meet the multiple needs of different students led pre-service teachers to “develop an appreciation for the varied conditions needed to support and enhance student learning” (p. 251). After developing differentiated materials, she notes that “over two-thirds of the pre-service teachers recommend the use of various principles, strategies, and activities such as student choice in projects, flexible class

groups based on interest, independent studies, and multiple-intelligence theory workstations” (p. 251). Zeichner et al. (1998) also state that “multicultural teacher education programs should assist prospective teachers to develop a repertoire of instructional approaches that include skills in direct instruction, inquiry methods, and cooperative learning” because, as they note “today’s student population is highly diverse [and] strict adherence to one type of teaching strategy will invariably disadvantage some students in a class” (p. 167-168).

The chapter of Preparing Teachers for a Changing World entitled “Assessment” reinforces the need for teachers to learn about a variety of assessment strategies and tools including “analysis of student work and learning; engagement in assessment design; examining motivation and learning and how they relate to assessment; and working with standards to design and evaluate assessments for accountability” (Shepard, Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Rust, 2005, p. 275). Villegas and Lucas (2002) reiterate this, explaining that preparation for context-responsive teaching should include exposure to “a classroom community that promotes the construction of knowledge, [where] students are given a variety of ways to display what they have learned. They show their knowledge by applying it rather than recounting it” (p. 120). The need for pre-service teacher to understand and have hands-on experience planning instruction with a focus on higher-level thinking and *understanding* is discussed in the chapter on “Educational Goals and Purposes” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005, p. 169). The authors state:

In terms of *educational purposes*, beginning teachers should have a conception about what is important to student in the content areas they teach based on social needs and expectations, learning standards, and research about the kinds of understandings that are necessary for transfer and for further learning. (p. 185)

The chapter on Assessment makes specific reference to having pre-service teachers learn a “backwards design” model of curriculum development such as the Understanding by Design model discussed in Chapter 1.

Rather than planning activities for lessons or units in isolation from thinking about assessment, candidates design an assessment plan as part of a unit or

curriculum plan. They learn to “map backward” from what they hope to accomplish to the design of culminating assessments that will measure these goals and the development or identification of ongoing formal and informal assessments to examine students’ initial knowledge and ongoing progress. Enacting the idea of “backwards mapping” reinforces the idea that all activity should connect to and build understanding, and assessment should deliberately measure and reflect progress toward those goals (Shepard, et al., 2005, p. 318).

The need for context-responsive teachers to learn strategies for incorporating student choice into classroom practices and curriculum is included in the design principles for multicultural teacher education outlined by Zeichner et al (1998), in the section stating that that “the program teaches prospective teachers how to change power and privilege in multicultural classrooms” (p. 169). The authors write:

Authority is redistributed by granting students the rights and responsibilities to help make decisions about what kinds of projects they may do, how they will demonstrate their mastery of information and skills taught, and participating as equally empowered partners in determining what their assessment will be.

Another simple but effective way to share power in classrooms is to allow students choice in the typical operational procedures. (p. 169)

In the Darling-Hammond et al. chapter on “Classroom Management” the authors also reinforce the need for pre-service teachers to incorporate opportunities for choice into their practices and to “learn how to create an academic environment in which students perceive themselves as being competent and having a measure of self-control” (LePage, et al., 2005, p. 334). Doing so, they write, acknowledge the fact that “individuals appear to learn best when they see themselves as engaging in learning behavior for their own internally generated reasons, because they want to learn, rather than to avoid punishment or gain rewards” (p. 334).

The need for pre-service teachers to learn how to evaluate curricular materials for bias, as well as how to teach students to look at ideas and events from multiple perspectives is discussed extensively in Villegas and Lucas, who write “a central role of

the culturally responsive teacher is to help students interrogate the curriculum critically by having them address inaccuracies, omissions, and distortions in the text and by broadening it to include multiple perspectives” (p. 102). Gay (2000) reinforces this need, writing “educators should be diligent in ensuring that curriculum content about ethnically diverse groups is accurate, authentic, and comprehensive . . .(and) curriculum designers should always use a variety of content sources from different genres and disciplines, including textbooks, literature, mass media, music, personal experiences, and social science research” (p. 117). Zeichner and Flessner (2009) describe a component of the pre-service education at one university where “the program asks students to examine how [ideological and political influences] have played a role in the construction of curricular materials and schooling practices” and where “future teachers are expected to examine formal and informal curricula in an attempt to uncover hidden messages that may be reinforce through the implementation of such materials” (p. 33). Finally, Gay (2000) discusses the need for teachers to tap into multiple primary sources when constructing curriculum that connects to the local community and the lives of the students, writing:

Students and teachers should become scholars of ethnic and cultural diversity, and generate their own curriculum content. They can do library research; conduct interviews and oral histories; participate in shadow studies; organize cultural exchanges; do site observations of ethnic communities and institutions; and collect personal stories covering a wide spectrum of individuals according to ethnicity, gender, age, generation, educational level, career, country of origin, and residential location. The information these inquiries produce can be used to context, correct, supplement, and/or replace existing textbook and mass media content. (p. 144).

Lastly, in regards to the knowledge and skills necessary to help pre-service teachers develop context-responsive teaching practices, preparation programs must expose students to high quality curricular materials that reflect the practices outlined in this section. Knapp (2008), when describing his pre-service teacher preparation class in teaching through community contexts, states “I wanted my students to leave this class

with an array of ideas about how to use community resources in their teaching as well as know where to locate other instructional materials for further reference” (p. 18). Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) also writes that “prospective teachers should be aware of major resources in their field and those that are in use locally, and how to find additional resources and critically assess what is available” (p. 189). In reference to some of the materials referred to in Chapter 1, this would include (for instance) exposure to curricular materials such as the *Storypath* series that allows students to experience events from different perspectives, or to the structured conversation protocols of the National School Reform Faculty.

2.1.4 Pedagogical knowledge and skills not discussed in the literature.

While much of the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively teach in a context-responsive manner are discussed in the literature on effective practices in teacher preparation, it is important to note that there are also components of Chapter 1’s definition of context-responsive teaching that are not addressed or discussed. Some of the knowledge and skills important to successful context-responsive teaching *not* mentioned in the literature base include the following:

- How to arrange, facilitate and de-brief a classroom interview or guest speaker: Although references are made to the need to locate and incorporate guest speakers in the classroom, there is little information on how best to facilitate these visits to maximize the benefit of guest speaker visits in the classrooms. Rogovin (1998) discusses strategies for facilitating interviews in detail, but incorporating this practice into pre-service preparation is not mentioned in the literature.
- How to design and teach a local, school or family history project: While mention is made to encouraging pre-service teachers to learn about school, family or local history, little reference can be found to ways to encourage pre-service teachers to adopt these practices in collaboration with their students. Hickey (1999) shows teachers strategies for doing historical investigations using local primary resources and interviews, but this type of practice is not mentioned in the teacher preparation literature.

- How to plan, facilitate and de-brief a field trip: Although it may appear straightforward, the ability to successfully plan and implement a meaningful and well organized field trip that connects with the academic curriculum is a skill many teachers do not possess. Little information can be found in teacher preparation literature regarding strategies for helping pre-service teachers learn these skills.
- How to plan and facilitate a local walk, and how to integrate information from local natural resources into the curriculum: These are other areas in which resources can be found that offer suggestions on how to best do these things (for example Walker-Leslie et al. (1999)) but little reference is made in the teacher preparation literature regarding the need for infusing the skills into the preparation program curriculum.
- How to manage students when they are *outside* of the classroom, either on a field trip or a walk or another outdoor activity: Broda (2007, 2011) has published two books on outdoor learning that include sections addressing managing children outdoors and in natural environments. Both contain useful information that could easily be incorporated into pre-service coursework on classroom management.

2.2 Experiential Activities that Support Context-Responsive Teaching

Acquiring the background knowledge, skills and pedagogical approaches to enact and support context-responsive teaching is the first step in pre-service teacher preparation. However, in order for new teachers to actually experience this type of teaching in practice, and to learn first-hand the benefits of not only *knowing* but *building on* the lives of their students in order to maximize their educational connections and experiences, teacher preparation programs must incorporate purposeful, carefully structured and mediated field experiences and opportunities for their students. References to these types of experiential components in teacher preparation programs can be found in a variety of resources. This section will examine activities referred to in the teacher education literature that help pre-service teachers learn about kids, families, communities and places; that help them determine meaningful ways to connect this information to

academic content when teaching; and that provide them with opportunities to apply the pedagogical strategies aligned with context-responsive teaching. The discussion will be prefaced by the comment that this appears to be an area of weakness in the literature, as there is a dearth of concrete examples of preparatory activities in the literature base. This shortage was noted by Lowenstein (2009) when she wrote “although much important theoretical work has been done in multicultural education . . . the actual practice of teaching and learning about issues of diversity in teacher education is more nebulous” and “research in teacher education classrooms remains in need” (p.178). The gaps in the literature will be identified at the end of this section.

2.2.1 Activities to learn about kids, families, communities and places.

References can be found in the literature to strategies developed at various teacher preparation institutions to help pre-service teachers get to know their students more intimately, and to develop their skills in “kid-watching.” A prominent example of such an activity is the child study project that forms a central part of the pre-service preparation curriculum at the Bank Street College of Education. The project is described by Roosevelt (2007) as a “contextualized practice that seeks to foster teachers’ capacity and inclination to produce generative understanding about children’s learning” and it involves a “semester-long guided inquiry into the strengths, educational needs, and worldview of an individual child” (p. 115). Some of the goals of the project, as described by Roosevelt, are to help pre-service teachers “learn skills and a stance of observation and description of children, with particular attention to children’s strengths and interests” and to “begin to . . . put their observations and hypotheses to concrete instructional use on behalf of the study children” (p. 120). As part of the child study process, pre-service teachers are asked to make observations and notes weekly throughout a semester, and approximately two-thirds of the way through the semester they must design a “learning occasion” that “builds on an observation-based estimation of a generative interest and/or an appreciable learning strength of the study child’s” (p. 125). In other words, in addition to simply learning about a child, the pre-service teachers are asked to use the information gleaned through the observations to enhance or supplement his/her academic learning. Horowitz,

et al (2005) describe a similar type of activity in the section on “The Child Case Study” in a chapter of Preparing Teachers for a Changing World.

Activities that allow pre-service teachers to learn about families and households have been previously referred to in relation to the Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti’s work with “Funds of Knowledge” (2005). The challenges, however, of helping pre-service teachers learn to make the connections between what they learn about families and the academic curriculum they endeavor to teach are referred to in an earlier quote and are reiterated by Schultz, Jones-Walker and Chikkatur (2008):

Despite the emphasis on drawing on the resources or assets of students, families and communities in the teacher education program and the many assignments designed to support these tenets, we found that, for the most part, teachers listened to the larger context of students’ lives in limited ways. It is even more difficult to support new teachers to identify community resources or students’ strengths, interests, and talents from their out-of-school lives, integrating them into their daily teaching practice. (p. 179)

The authors further note that “the stance of listening to the larger contexts of students’ lives is one that may seem contrary to the instructional practices emphasized by the school and the district with its focus on prescribed tests and core knowledge which may be distant from students’ lives” (p. 179).

Several articles in the literature base describe innovative field-based experiences integrated into teacher preparation programs designed to help pre-service teachers immerse themselves in communities they are not familiar and/or comfortable in. One such program is a mediated fieldwork experience described by Seidl and Friend (2002) pre-service teachers work collaboratively with members of the local Mt. Olivet Baptist church in a mutually beneficial partnership in which “the Mt. Olivet community provides support for teacher education students (and) university faculty work to connect the Mt. Olivet community with resources and expertise available through the university” (2002). In their fieldwork, the pre-service teachers “spend 2-3 hours a week at Mt. Olivet working with adults from Mt. Olivet in programs for children developed by the

community” (p. 424). Some of the activities they might be involved in include working with an extended care (after-school) program, working with teacher assistants to help children finish homework and plan and implement learning and recreational activities or working with a male-mentoring program in the church (p. 424). The authors note that equal status fieldwork experiences such as the one they describe have many benefits including the fact that they “place students not as helpers within a context, but as learners and participants in a community that is not essentially dependent on their service” (p. 424). They conclude:

the equal status internship requires that our students leave their cultural authority at the door. In becoming tentative learners in an unfamiliar cultural and political space, we hope they experience, to some degree, what it means to cross borders and to be humble in the face of the unknown (p. 426).

The importance of mediating and helping pre-service students process their experiences in their fieldwork is emphasized by the authors, who write “the necessary supports must be in place to help mediate these experiences if we are to help prospective teachers begin to develop multicultural competency and anti-racist commitments” (p. 426).

A similar type of mediated and community-based field experience has been developed in recent years as part of the University of Washington elementary teacher preparation program, and is described in an article on community-based organizations as field placements for pre-service teachers (McDonald, et al., 2011). The program is designed to “offer preservice teachers access to students’ out-of-school lives” and involves “partnerships with 11 organizations that serve diverse youth populations, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, neighborhood community centers, and culturally based programs” As part of their preparation program “preservice elementary teachers are placed in these CBOs for six hours per week for ten weeks” (p. 16). McDonald and colleagues describe the central purposes of community-based organization fieldwork experiences to include promoting:

(1) assets-based thinking, (2) a community orientation to teaching, (3) pre-service teachers *learning how to learn* about diverse children and communities, (4) a

broader conception of learning (one that recognizes learning as occurring beyond school walls), and (5) an ethic of service (p. 16).

McDonald et al. contend that “there is no substitute for the first-hand knowledge teachers gain from spending time learning about student’ personal and community cultural practices outside of school” and that experiences in community based organizations are particularly rich in opportunities to “put kids at the center, whereas practices in schools and teacher education often put instruction at the center” (p. 7). They conclude:

Placements in CBO’s enabled pre-service teachers to engage with children in ways that turned the relationship of teacher-student on its head, situating children as capable knowers, and positioning teachers as learners. The ability of teachers to see and understand children as competent individuals with knowledge and expertise, potentially enables them to reach into and across difference in ways that are central to their ability to provide high quality learning opportunities to all students (p. 17).

Mediated experiences such as those described by Seidl and Friend, and McDonald and colleagues support and align with the goals of context-responsive teaching.

A final example of an experiential activity that supports the development of context-responsive teaching skills in pre-service teachers relates to learning about and integrating the natural resources found in the areas surrounding school sites. Dubel and Sobel (2008) describe their efforts in a science methods class, wherein they “model science investigations that use materials and field experiences from (the local) backyard” (p. 314). Sobel writes that in his methods class he is “modeling a curriculum that follows the seasons here in New England, taking advantage of the warmer months to do natural science based on field experiences and, when that becomes prohibitive, doing physical science indoors using classroom materials” They also distribute “a survey that asks students to describe any required science topics in their internship classroom and to inventory any resources for connecting those science units to the school’s natural and cultural setting” (p. 314). These types of activities help pre-service teachers learn first-

hand how to not only learn about the local context but also how to connect that information with curriculum and student learning in a meaningful manner.

2.2.2 Activities to connect context to academic content.

A small number of references can be found in the teacher education literature to helping pre-service teachers learn to make connections between the lives of their students or the local community and place and the academic content of the curriculum. As referenced earlier, this is an area of challenge in teacher preparation programs although many references are made to the need to make these connections, such as Bransford, Darling-Hammond & LePage (2005) who note “the ability to make subject matter knowledge accessible to students—is developed by combining an understanding of content with an understanding of learners’ needs and perspectives” (p. 56). Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) point out that “the capacity to plan instruction so that it meets the needs of students and the demands of the content . . . is not something that most people know how to do intuitively or that they learn from unguided classroom experience” (p. 176). Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) state “as a result of service-learning experiences, teachers expressed a willingness to adapt curriculum and instruction to meet students’ needs or interests” (p. 418) but they do not provide additional information on how this adaptation might be taught or fostered. The most detail found on a pre-service activity that provided an opportunity to connect context to academic content came in the aforementioned article by Buck and Sylvester (2005). Following the neighborhood investigation described earlier, pre-service teachers use the information gathered to “inform the development of thematic social studies curricula for Social Studies Methods” (p. 215). The authors note that “development of a thematic curriculum unit is the culminating component (of summer coursework and) . . . putting this curriculum together allows students to put progressive theory into practice while maintaining responsiveness to local contextual factors” (p. 215). Few additional specifics are offered, though, regarding *how* the curriculum is developed or if it is actually used in a K-12 classroom. Information on how best to help pre-service teachers make meaningful connections between context and content is lacking in the teacher preparation literature base.

2.2.3 Activities that require the application of pedagogical strategies.

While the overall emphasis in the teacher education literature base is on knowledge and skills important in pre-service pedagogical education, some references can be found to specific activities and assignments intended to help future teachers practice these skills in real-world contexts. Information on teacher preparation activities related to the application of the context-responsive strategies of differentiated instruction, preparation of materials and lessons for English Language Learners and Limited English Proficient students, critical evaluation of curricular materials, and the creation of instructional units with an emphasis on understanding can be found in several sources discussed forthwith.

Grossman, McDonald, Hammerness & Ronfelt (2008) state that in preparing teachers “abstract knowledge of either students’ needs or ways to address them will not suffice; teachers also need opportunities to try out and refine practices that embody such knowledge” (p. 245). An effort to help students practice the skills of matching instructional strategies to the individual needs and developmental levels of students is described by Goodnough (2009) in an article describing a series of activities geared towards differentiating in ninth grade science. In collaboratively developing a differentiated science unit, Goodnough notes:

In addition to recognizing the differences among students, the pre-service teachers developed an appreciation for the varied conditions needed to support and enhance student learning . . . the need to have learning activities that reflect student interests and the importance of challenging students at an appropriate level (p. 251).

As a result of their experiences developing and implementing differentiated instruction, Goodnough reports that “over two-thirds of the pre-service teachers recommended the use of various principles, strategies, and activities such as student choice in products, flexible class groups based on interest, independent studies, and multiple-intelligence theory workstations” p. 251). The article provides an excellent example of the benefits of

including experiential activities that require the application of knowledge in preparing context-responsive teachers.

Specifics on how to help pre-service teachers learn to apply the knowledge they have learned on educating and adapting instruction for English Language Learners and students with Limited English Proficiency are lacking in the book What Teachers Need to Know About Language. Valdes, Bunch, Snow and Lee's (2005) provide some specific ideas regarding pre-service activities that allow for the application of knowledge in these areas (p. 163). A sample course project for an introductory linguistics course involving recording, transcribing, and analyzing a conversation between students is described, and the authors write:

For new teachers to attend to language consistently over the course of their careers, they must have modeled for them a consistent awareness of language by their instructors. They must . . . examine the kinds of oral and written proficiencies that are required for their students (1) to access textbooks and other written material; (2) to comprehend teacher explanations; (3) to participate effectively in group discussions; and (4) to demonstrate what they (the students) have learned in class, on classroom evaluations, and on formal assessments (p. 167).

Providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to practice creating and implementing lessons using the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) or its more updated version, the Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English model (SDAIE) is also recommended (Genzok, 2011, p. 156; Valdes, et al., 2005).

For pre-service teachers to learn the skills necessary to critically evaluate curricular resources and to respect and invite altering perspectives into the classroom, Villegas and Lucas (2002) recommend that pre-service courses model a “dialogic classroom community.” They describe this as one in which:

The participants, including the instructor, share the floor, show interest in each other's ideas, take responsibility for moving the dialogue forward, ask and answer

authentic questions, listen to each other, and provide and see examples and counter examples. (p. 118)

They contend that modeling such practices allows “learners to engage in meaning making, critical analysis, and democratic practice that affirms diverse views and experiences” (p. 119). Banks et al. (2005) also write that “culturally responsive teachers need to know how to develop a curriculum that takes into account the understandings and perspectives of different groups while also attending to the development of higher-level cognitive skills” (p. 251). They recommend that a pre-service education include “selecting material that is inclusive of the contributions and perspectives of different groups and that is responsive to the particular cultural context within which one teaches” (p. 251).

A final pre-service activity designed to practice implementing a pedagogical approach associated with context-responsive teaching is discussed in relation to developing units or lessons that focus on *understanding* of ideas (in addition to presenting knowledge and skills). Grossman et al (2005) state:

In order to teach for understanding, teachers need to have a sense of what understanding looks like in a particular subject matter domain. This suggests that teacher education will need to provide tools for the continued investigation of student understanding within the subject matter, so teachers continue to develop their knowledge of their own students (p.215).

In relation to providing more diverse and authentic assessment opportunities, Villegas and Lucas (2002) also call for teachers to “understand the limitations of standardized tests, (have a) commitment to using assessments that both give insight into students’ thinking and promote their learning, an ability to design authentic tasks that are consistent with the learning goals and appropriate to the students, and the skills to interpret and use the assessment results” (p. 106). Specific strategies for practicing the skills of designing instruction focused on understanding or utilizing diverse assessment strategies are not described in detail in the literature.

2.2.4 Experiential components not discussed in the literature.

In examining the experiential components of preparation programs that help teachers obtain first hand experiences with the practices and benefits of context-responsive teaching, it is important to point out that many such components are not referred to in the literature base at all. These components mostly align with the omitted knowledge and skills important to context-responsive teaching found not to be discussed in the literature base and include the following pre-service teaching activities and requirements:

- Facilitating an interview or a visit from a guest speaker in the classroom: Activities requiring pre-service teachers to actually locate a guest speaker and facilitate his/her classroom visit were not mentioned in the literature.
- Planning and facilitating a field trip or a local walk: Having pre-service teachers practice these activities as part of their preparation to become a teacher was not referred to in the literature on teacher education.
- Practicing two-way communication with parents: Specific activities that pre-service teachers could engage in to practice the important skills of communicating productively with parents were not mentioned.
- Planning an activity that requires students to work from an alternative perspective or orientation: While the need to promote, respect and incorporate alternative viewpoints both in classroom practices and in curricular materials was discussed, activities asking pre-service teachers to do this in practice either in selecting and using instructional materials or facilitating classroom discussions that encourage these perspectives was not found referenced in the literature.

Opportunities to employ all of these practices should be incorporated into a teacher preparation program that espouses context-responsive teaching. Chapter five will look to see if these practices are occurring in Alaska's teacher preparation program.

2.3 Supporting Context-Responsive Habits of Mind in Teacher Preparation

The development of the various dispositions or "habits of mind" necessary to enact context-responsive teaching outlined in Chapter 1 is referred to in various places in

the teacher preparation literature. Many of the experiential activities described above have as either a primary or secondary goal the enhancement of the following in pre-service teachers:

- A commitment to building **relationships** with both students, families and communities
- An ability to be a **skilled** listener and to listen to and understand **multiple perspectives and worldviews**
- A desire to **learn from non-traditional sources** and
- A commitment to work with others in a **power-neutral relationship**.

References to activities that encourage the development of these dispositions in teacher preparation will be discussed.

The centrality of possessing a commitment to, and ability to develop positive relationships with students, families and communities was discussed in Chapter 1. The Te Kotahitanga professional development model discussed in the previous chapter places a great deal of emphasis on both the importance of these relationships as well as on strategies to strengthen relationships between practicing teachers and their students and families. Part of the Te Kotahitanga professional development model includes a four-day “hui” (meeting) which teacher attended on a Maori marae (cultural gathering area). The project coordinators note that in holding the hui at the marae “not only were teachers getting to meet the researchers in a cultural setting, many were also having their first encounter within settings in which the Maori culture dominated rather than where it was marginalized” (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007, p. 121). The research team notes that one of the central goals of their multi-level professional development model is to “provide teachers with experiences that enable them to . . . actively engage with the means of bringing about positive change through altering the relationships they have with Maori students” (p.133).

In a similar vein, a central motivation for the Mt. Olivet fieldwork activity described earlier is to “find experiences sufficiently powerful to support students in deconstructing the messy tangle of racism, classism, poverty, sexism, and opportunity”

(Seidl & Friend, 2002, p. 422). The authors contend that “we emerge as beings through our interactions and relationships with others” and that “many people lack access to the very relationships that might help to create and nurture multicultural identities” (p. 422). The incorporation of opportunities to immerse pre-service teachers in situations and communities with which they are not familiar, but which allow them to interact meaningfully with the communities and people whose children they will teach appears to have a positive impact on the development of a personal commitment to build positive relationships.

The ability to be a skilled listener and the habit of hearing and recognizing the validity of multiple perspectives and worldviews is something that the literature also suggests can be a by-product (or primary goal) of experiential activities in teacher preparation programs. Indeed, the central aim of the teacher preparation program described in Schultz et al.’s (2008) is “to introduce prospective teachers to pedagogy and curriculum that is based on listening closely to students and their communities, hearing what they say, and acting on that knowledge” (p. 156). Towards that end, the pre-service teachers are encouraged to “listen to know individual students; listen to the rhythm and balance of the whole class; and listen to the social, cultural, and community contexts of students’ lives” Through a variety of experiential activities related to each of these three areas, the program encourages pre-service teachers to “develop deeper understandings of their students by listening closely to the larger contexts of their lives” and “look beyond their own understandings at the same time that they examine their own histories and cultural lenses to uncover blind spots and biases” (p. 160). The program coordinators note that:

In recent years there has been a growing interest in providing K-12 students with opportunities to add their voices and perspectives to their own education and to the education of prospective teachers. This work calls for a greater engagement of students in decisions that affect their own learning in the ongoing improvement of classroom practices, and in the preparation of new teachers (pp. 161-162).

Brayboy and Maughn (2009) also speak to the need for teacher to recognize alternative perspective and worldviews, writing:

It is imperative that all educators serving Indigenous peoples, whether they themselves are Indigenous or not, develop an awareness of the bases for Indigenous Knowledge System and production so they can support student learning in meaningful ways (p. 18).

They further assert:

It is not enough for teacher education programs to simply claim commitment to the training of Indigenous educators. They must also be able to see that the construction of knowledge is socially mediated and that Indigenous students may bring other conceptions of what knowledge is and how it is produced with them to their teaching (p. 19).

Programs such as the one described by Schultz et al. (2008) that include activities such as an in depth child study or “descriptive review” of a child, a close examination of multiple classroom management structures and their impacts on classroom community, and an emphasis on learning about local neighborhoods and populations and constructing curriculum, as well as modifying existing curriculum to better meet the specific needs of the students they are teaching appear to positively impact pre-service teachers’ ability to listen to, consider and respect multiple perspectives.

Closely related is the development of the habit of mind that seeks to learn from non-traditional sources. Neighborhood and community studies such as those described by Schultz et al. (2008) and Buck and Sylvester (2005) and the Funds of Knowledge home visits developed by Gonzalez et al. (2005) clearly promote an orientation that seeks to learn from sources outside of the classroom and outside of traditional academe. These experiential activities all focus on determining the assets of the local community and, as Buck and Sylvester (2005) write, “guide pre-service teachers through experiential meaning-making by directing them toward evidence that reservoirs of human strength and talent, as ready-made, untapped educational resources, do exist in communities” (p.

228). In their article on cross-cultural field placements, Stachowski and Mahan (1998) assert:

Important student teacher learning outcomes can come from a variety of sources—both the traditional and time-proven “educator” sources within the school, and those people in the broader community who generally receive little or no recognition in the literature on student teaching. Further, the contributions of community people are often deemed just as or even more significant than those learning outcomes gained through the classroom component of the student teaching experience (p. 158).

In addition to learning from non-traditional human sources, Dubel and Sobel (2008) and Cameron (2008) espouse the benefits of learning from the local natural resources. Dubel and Sobel, in their pre-service science methods course state:

One of our goals here is to expand the traditional conception of resources. Resources aren’t just the books in the library, the Internet, or the teacher’s guide. Childhood memories, the neighborhood park, students’ out-of-school experiences, the Historical Society, a grandparent, and the store owner are all resources we want our teachers-in-training to draw on. (p. 322).

Course activities such as the one described earlier in this chapter wherein the pre-service teachers visited a local bookstore and figured out how to integrate it into the curriculum help students experience the benefits of alternative resources first hand (Knapp, 2008).

Finally, teacher preparation activities that endeavor to promote the dispositions necessary for context-responsive teaching must provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to experience relationships that level the playing field between teacher and parent or students. Of course, the development of this disposition goes hand in hand with the others discussed above. Experiential activities that promote the development of this habit of mind (i.e. the desire to work collaboratively with families, communities, and students) are similar to those described above such as the Funds of Knowledge home visits, which take place in the homes of students rather than on school grounds. Other examples include the Mt. Olivet fieldwork activity (Seidl & Friend, 2002) and the

community-based organization fieldwork required of pre-service teachers at the University of Washington (McDonald, et al., 2011). In relation to the Mt. Olivet experience, Seidl and Friend write “equal-status, cross-cultural experiences place students not as helpers within a context, but as learners and participants in a community that is not essentially dependent on their service” (p. 425). They further find that “engaging in equal-status, peer relationships with adults requires developing a bicultural competency that we feel is critical to teachers who will need to build strong and positive relationships with parents, teachers of color, and other community members” (p. 425). In summary, community-based field experiences appear to serve multiple beneficial purposes in the development of the habits of mind necessary to teach in a context-responsive manner.

2.4 Context-Responsive Teacher Preparation and the World of Teacher Preparation

The issues discussed in this chapter – those related to teacher preparation for context-responsive teaching – naturally must be situated within the larger picture of teacher preparation in the United States. The question of how the specific preparation for context-responsive teaching fits into the whole picture of K-12 teacher preparation must be addressed, as must the role of teacher educators in preparing context-responsive teachers. We will begin by considering the issue of context-responsive preparation as a piece of the larger puzzle of successfully preparing teachers to teach academic content to a diverse student population.

2.4.1 Context-responsive teacher preparation as a part of a comprehensive pre-service program.

When considering the knowledge, skills, dispositions and experiences articulated as components of a preparation for context-responsive teaching, one must consider where these aspects “fit” in the fuller picture of a complete teacher preparation program. One way to consider the relationship between context-responsive teaching components and comprehensive teacher preparation is to look at the context-responsive components in relation to an articulated set of teacher preparation competencies, standards or outcomes. Most teacher preparation programs, including those in the state of Alaska, must align

their program curriculum and outcomes with one or more sets of established teaching standards. In the State of Alaska, state accredited programs are required to align their programs with the Alaska Department of Education’s Alaska Teacher Standards (1997) (or more recently the Alaska Beginning Teacher Standards), as well as with the standards set forth by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2008), and the associated program specific standards specified for different preparation programs (e.g. Association of Childhood Education International (ACEI) standards for elementary certification programs, or National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) standards for secondary English Language Arts certification programs). On a national level, there are two primary sets of standards that have been established relative to teacher preparation and measuring teacher quality: those established by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (2012) for teachers who wish to achieve a voluntary additional level of national certification in their content area; and those articulated by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (2011) and referred to as the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Model Core Teaching (InTASC) Standards . Because this dissertation focuses on teacher preparation in the State of Alaska and because the InTASC Standards are the most widely referenced in K-12 teacher preparation programs nationwide, the components of context-responsive teacher preparation articulated in this chapter will be examined in relation to these two specific sets of guidelines.⁴

The various elements delineated in the charts found earlier in the chapter were examined in relation to the eight Alaska Teacher Standards by looking to see where the knowledge and skills articulated in the second column of this chapter’s chart aligns with knowledge and skills articulated in the eight standards. The knowledge and skills necessary to enact context-responsive teaching aligns almost perfectly with the knowledge and skills articulated in standards one (philosophy of education and

⁴ The NCATE standards apply to an entire “unit” or school of education, including its structure and organization, finances, faculty recruitment policies, etc. and therefore do not serve as the best point of comparison. The individual program standards referenced by NCATE as well as the standards established by the NBPTS are different for each secondary program and between secondary and elementary programs and are therefore unwieldy to examine.

relationship to practice), two (developmental knowledge and developmentally appropriate practices), three (respect for individual and cultural characteristics), five (facilitation, monitoring and assessment of student learning), six (maintaining a positive learning environment), and seven (working as a partner with parents, families, and the community). The knowledge and skills articulated in the Alaska Teacher Standards *not* aligned with those necessary for context-responsive teaching fall primarily in standard four (knowledge of content area and how to teach it) and standard eight (participation in and contributions to the teaching profession).

There are ten InTASC standards and they are divided up into performances (things a teacher must do), essential knowledge (things a teacher must know) and critical dispositions. An analysis of the components of context-responsive teacher preparation in relation to the ten InTASC standards showed that between 60 and 70% of the performances, essential knowledge and critical dispositions articulated in the InTASC standards align with those described as components of context-responsive teaching. Similar to the alignment with the Alaska Teacher Standards, the performances, knowledge and dispositions that did not align were primarily in the areas of content area knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge and teacher leadership, collaboration and professionalism. Additionally, the InTASC standards contain several proficiencies related to the effective use of technology in instruction, an additional area that does not align with the components of context-responsive teaching.

These alignments with established sets of teacher proficiencies suggest that a preparation program that combines knowledge and understanding of *context* with knowledge and understanding of *content* area, and emphasizes instructional strategies for connecting both in meaningful ways in the classroom while fostering collaborative and professional teaching habits would provide a comprehensive preparation for successful teaching. Recommendations regarding how to use this information to better structure teacher preparation programs will be discussed in Chapter 6.

A final comment in regards to the inclusion of context-responsive teacher competencies in teacher preparation must be made. Although an emphasis on context and

the need to tailor and connect content to the situated lives of students and places may seem instinctively necessary to many in the profession of educating teachers, it is alarming to read of the recent development of teacher preparation programs that are attempting to train teachers without regard to the students they will teach or the places they will work. One such recent effort is a standalone college of teacher education in New York City called Relay Graduate School of Education, which seeks to prepare teachers through short instructional periods, each one devoted to one of 49 instructional strategies espoused by Lemov (2010) . The program provides instruction focused on “stuff that will help you be a better teacher on Monday” and advocates that “the techniques and strategies that (are being taught) are applicable to all settings and all types of kids” (Lemov, 2010). It is interesting to note that the index of Lemov’s book contains no reference to the word “student.” The notion that education can occur without regard to the individuals being educated flies in the face of context-responsive teaching and teacher preparation as it is hoped the research in this project will show.

2.4.2 The role of the teacher educator in context-responsive teacher preparation.

Several relevant observations can be found in the teacher education literature base regarding the role of the teacher educator as a mediator, a facilitator, and a model in order to effectively prepare context-responsive teachers. The role of mediation, particularly in regards to field-based experiences, is mentioned often in the teacher preparation literature. Zeichner and Flessner (2009) write in relation to the field-based experiences required in the University of Washington preparation programs that “the important element in these efforts to address a longstanding problem in teacher education is the careful mediation of the campus-based teaching in relation to the complexities of schools” (p. 42). Banks et al. (2005) reiterates this need, writing:

The occasion for guided reflection helps teachers make sense of what they have seen and heard and helps them to learn how to use their emerging knowledge to design curriculum and assessment materials appropriate to the students they teach. This time for guided reflection also allows teacher educators to be explicit about

the processes involved in learning from one's experience as foundational for the continued work of learning in teaching. (p. 266)

Thus in designing preparation activities to encourage context-responsive teaching it is necessary to include and thoughtfully structure extensive opportunities for guided discussions and reflections.

Relevant research can also be found regarding the importance of helping pre-service teachers learn to negotiate between their own schooling experiences and understandings, those they are learning about in their teacher preparation coursework, and the experiences and understanding they are gathering in their field-based preparatory components. A group of researchers at the University of Washington have examined the interplay between these often competing spheres of influence and identified five "filters" pre-service teachers employ at various time to help process the information they are digesting:

These (filters) included interns' history as students, their personal interests, their relationship to the source of the promoted practice, their own values as a teacher as projected into their future classroom, and their view of the "real world of teaching." (Nolen et al., 2007, p. 15)

In examining the implications various filters had on the pre-service teachers' motivations to employ new strategies and their attitudes towards trying new approaches, the research team found that:

Interns' identities as students and teachers, their relationships with other members of their multiple worlds, and the processes of negotiating practice with powerful others all shed light on why they choose to take up or dismiss a promoted practice, and how those decisions might change with future experience in teaching-learning contexts. (p. 15)

To help pre-service teachers process and negotiate their own willingness to try new approaches, the authors suggest that "it may be particularly important to help them use techniques for assessing and interpreting evidence of student learning and engagement that take the social context into account" (p. 33).

One such negotiation that cannot be ignored by teacher educators involves the contradictions between attempting to learn deeply about ones' students, their families, communities, and places where they live and the constraints placed on the work and time of teachers by external national mandates such as the adequate yearly progress requirements of No Child Left Behind. Schultz et al. (2008) consider the challenges of pre- and in-service teachers negotiating their individual educational landscapes and write:

Our role as teacher educators is to prepare new teachers to take on these challenges and to introduce them to formal and informal support systems to sustain them as they negotiate their teaching decisions during these first years of teaching. We need to talk explicitly with teachers during their pre-service and induction years about how to continually negotiate among competing beliefs and practices in order to find ways to reconcile them into a coherent and defensible set of practices to provide students with the best education possible (p. 184).

A teacher preparation program that promotes context-responsive teaching must directly and forthrightly acknowledge these contradictions and make the negotiation of competing beliefs a central component of the reflective elements of the program.

The final role of the teacher educator is as a model of context-responsive practices. Multiple authors reiterate the fact that it is important that we, as teacher educators, practice what we preach. Zeichner and Flessner (2009) write "teacher educators (must) exemplify and model the dispositions and practices that they hope their students will take up during their education for teaching" (p. 43) and Sleeter (2008) states that "preservice teachers learn more from multicultural courses that model and use the kinds of active instructional processes that work best in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, than from those that take a more didactic approach" (p.567). Specific recommendations regarding the large and small ways that teacher preparation programs can and should reflect the practices of context-responsive teaching as articulated in Chapter 1 will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The research project that forms the foundation of this dissertation seeks to gather information from multiple sources in order to find out more about the process and status of preparing educators to respond to their students' contextual lives in the state of Alaska. Context-responsive teaching is defined in Chapter 1 as teaching that acknowledges and responds to the students themselves, their families, their communities, and the larger physical places where they live. Chapter 2 examined the literature on teacher preparation to determine the "best-practices" to prepare context-responsive teachers. The research completed for this project seeks to ascertain to what extent teacher preparation programs in the state of Alaska are preparing teachers to teach children in a context-responsive manner. What program elements prepare future teachers to learn from, through, with and about the students, families, communities and places in which they work? What are preparation programs doing to help pre-service teachers learn how to integrate this information into their practices and curriculum in a meaningful manner? Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection strategies, the remainder of this dissertation endeavors to paint as rich a description as possible of what is happening, and then critically consider the gaps between what the current research base recommends and what is actually occurring. The goals of the research are to add useful information to the knowledge-base on preparing teachers who are predisposed to understanding and integrating the situated lives of their students, as well as to identify some of the current impediments to doing so, and to offer research-based recommendations for improving teacher preparation in these areas.

3.1 Methodological Foundations and Justification

The 2010 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association featured an overarching theme of *Understanding Complex Ecologies in a Changing World*. This theme quite accurately reflects the nature of educational research, and the need to keep the complexity of the issues being studied at the forefront of any research endeavor. Given that complexity, the mixed-methods approach employed in this project suitably fits the multi-dimensional nature of the research topic and questions. The

questions “*What are pre-service elementary and secondary teacher education programs in the State of Alaska doing to help future educators learn from, through, with and about their students, cultures, communities and places?*” and “*What are they doing to help them learn how to integrate this knowledge into their practices and curriculum in a meaningful manner?*” do not beg a single, one-dimensional response. The intent of this research is not to provide a single concrete answer to a specific query . . . instead, it is to examine the subject from several angles in an effort to advance the debate on what teacher educators can do to help future teachers better meet the contextualized educational needs of their students.

Greene (2005) has written extensively on the use of mixed methods in educational research. She writes:

A mixed method way of thinking seeks not so much convergence as insight; the point is not a well-fitting model or curve but rather the generation of important understandings and discernments through the juxtaposition of different lenses, perspectives, and stances; in a good mixed methods study, difference is constitutive and fundamentally generative. (p. 208)

This orientation supports the chosen research approach, as the intent is to explore the question from multiple angles, and thus data collection techniques that descend from both the quantitative and qualitative realms of research approach will be necessary and suitable.

Greene contends that mixed methods are particularly well-suited to the world of education because “educational programs are implemented in complex, real world contexts, with characteristics that are both unique to a particular context and shared across contexts” and she suggests that “with a mixed methods approach, cross-context patterns of regularity *and* within-site contextual complexity are *both* respected and engaged” (p. 210). The research focus of this dissertation as well as the context of the research reflects the suitability described by Greene in that the programs examined are both unique to their contexts (the individual communities they are based in) but also share a context (Alaska as a whole). The individuality of the programs is reflected

through interviews with teacher educators, while the shared contexts are considered through the broad dissemination of a graduate survey instrument.

The suitability of the mixed methods approach as well as the employment of multiple data collection strategies does not, however, absolve the researcher from recognizing and acknowledging the philosophical underpinnings that ground each of the individual approaches. The mixed-method approach employed in this project is *dialectic* in nature, meaning that the paradigmatic framework that each approach is derived from has been considered and that framework has impacted the ways in which each data collection tool has been used and how the data gathered through that tool has been analyzed. Greene and Caracelli (2003) write that a dialectic mixed methods approach reflects the belief that “all paradigms are valuable and have something to contribute to understanding; use of multiple paradigms leads to better understandings” (p. 96). They advocate an approach that recognizes, rather than overlooks, the underpinnings of each methodological approach, writing:

We express concern that by attending too little to philosophical ideas and traditions, mixed methods inquirers are insufficiently reflective and their practice is insufficiently unproblematized. There is merit in different paradigmatic traditions in that each has something valuable to offer to our understanding of our complex social world. If such differences are not attended to in practice, then the full potential of mixed methods inquiry will remain unfulfilled (p. 107).

Those paradigmatic traditions have been kept in mind when employing different data collection tools, and when using and interpreting the data gathered through each. The extent to which the underlying philosophical assumptions behind the qualitative and quantitative data impact both the data and its interpretation will be discussed after describing each of the tools.

3.2 Data Collection Group

3.2.1 Location.

This project involves elementary and secondary teacher preparation programs at the three public universities in the state of Alaska: University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA),

University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) (located in Juneau). There is only one other university in the state of Alaska that prepares teachers, a private college called Alaska Pacific University (APU) (located in Anchorage). APU was not included in the data collection group due to the challenges associated with obtaining names and contact information for their graduates. As a point of reference, over a five year span from 2001-2005, the four institutions together prepared 1261 K-12 teachers, with approximately 40% completing programs at UAA, 32% completing programs at UAF, 20% completing programs at UAS, and 8% completing programs at APU (Hill, 2007). More recent data on degrees awarded from 2007 to 2009 obtained through the University of Alaska Statewide Planning and Institutional Research (www.alaska.edu/swbir/ir/publications-reports) suggests that of the 580 teachers prepared at UA institutions over a three year span, about half received their certificates through UAA, with UAF and UAS each preparing around 25% of the total.

The K-12 teacher preparation programs at the three UA campuses share a few characteristics. One is that they all offer an undergraduate Bachelor's of Arts in Elementary Education degree (typically referred to as a BAE). The second is that none of them offer an undergraduate secondary degree program. All three programs offer either a post-baccalaureate K-12 licensure program or a Master's of Arts in Teaching (MAT) option for post-baccalaureate teacher certification in both elementary and secondary. Several of the programs are offered via distance-delivery as well as through face-to-face instruction. All three universities are currently accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. An additional quality that all three UA schools or colleges of education share is a stated commitment to preparing teachers for diverse populations. All three universities have an articulated mission and goals available on their website and each one has text related to issues of context-responsive teaching and teacher preparation

A final note can be made on the generalizability of the research findings in relation to the data collection group. Given that the scope of the research is limited to the state of Alaska, the findings will be specifically of value to teacher preparation programs in this

state. However, Alaska's preparation programs share characteristics with other university-based preparation programs across the United States, in that they prepare teachers for a teaching certificate that has reciprocity in most other states in the U.S., and in that they are required to maintain a positive accreditation status with the National Council on Accreditation of Teacher Education (soon to be known as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation). To the extent that the teachers prepared in Alaska and currently teaching in Alaska share characteristics with teachers being prepared and teaching in other parts of the country, the findings can be useful to anyone interested in context-responsive teacher education in the United States.

3.2.2 Program graduates.

This project examined two data collection groups: program graduates and teacher educators. A target population of 2006, 2007 and 2008 UA graduates was chosen in the hopes that the respondents would have had at least two years of teaching under their belt, but still have their teacher preparation experiences relatively fresh in their minds. The decision to include three years worth of graduates in the survey collection group was based on data showing that Alaska's three public universities collectively prepare roughly 200 elementary and secondary certified teachers each year, and on the average, approximately 50% of those graduates end up teaching in Alaskan public schools (Hill, 2007). Based on those numbers, a three-year span of survey recipients would mean a distribution group of around 300, which it was hoped would be sufficient in providing a statistically reliable group of survey respondents that was representative of the state's teaching population as a whole. Graduates who were *not* currently teaching or who were teaching out of state were not included in the data collection group due to the logistical difficulties involved in obtaining contact information for those individuals. Teachers teaching in Alaska who were prepared in programs outside the state were also not included, even though those teachers make up a large percentage of Alaska's teaching force. The reason for excluding this group was that the research focus was to look at preparation from both the perspective of the graduates and that of the program faculty, and including teachers not prepared in Alaska would open up the study to an examination

of countless teacher preparation programs outside of Alaska, which was beyond the scope of this research. Examining teachers who choose to leave Alaska, as well as examining the context-responsive preparation experiences of Alaskan teachers prepared *outside* Alaska (and the relevance of those experiences to the Alaska teaching context) both present rich opportunities for future research.

The names of 2006, 2007 and 2008 teacher certification recipients from UAA, UAF and UAS were obtained in collaboration with the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at UAA. Permission was obtained from the Deans at the three universities to include their graduates in the data collection group. A research associate at ISER used information from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development to identify the names and current school districts of approximately 400 certificated and currently employed teachers from the three universities who reported having graduated from UAA, UAF or UAS. The websites of the 50+ school districts in the state of Alaska were then visited to obtain contact e-mail addresses for as many of the graduates as possible. In all, the data collection group to whom the graduate survey was distributed ended up consisting of 325 teachers.

3.2.3 Teacher educators.

While the graduate data collection group provides a solid picture of context-responsive teacher preparation from the view of the graduates, a full portrait could not be obtained without talking to those *delivering* the preparation, the teacher educators themselves. As a teacher educator myself, I fully recognize that there can exist a marked difference between what we, as program faculty, *think* we are doing in relation to preparing our teachers, and what the program graduates actually come away with. To address this discrepancy, and in order for the research to have credibility and to enhance overall reliability and validity, including the voices of teacher education program faculty at each of the three UA institutions was essential.

To identify teacher educators to interview at each of the three universities, a letter was sent a letter to the Dean of each school or college of education describing the project and asking permission to include their programs, faculty and graduates in the research

project. After permission was obtained, the heads of the elementary and secondary preparation programs at each institution were contacted and provided with a description of the project. The department heads were asked to provide names and contact information for potential interviewees, and those individuals were then contacted directly. Requests for interviews were accompanied by a description of the project and a copy of the interview protocol. The relatively small size of the program faculty at each institution, along with the limited number of institutions being examined made interviews (rather than a survey instrument) the collection tool of choice for this data collection group.

3.3 Development and Pilot Testing of Data Collection Tools

Figure 3.1 illustrates the overall picture of data collection strategies, along with the results of each collection strategy and the interplay between the various strategies. The top row represents the data collection strategy used to gather information from program graduates. The bottom row represents the data collection strategy used to gather information from teacher educators. The graduate and teacher educator data sets have been examined and compared in relation to one another to look for themes and findings in relation to the literature base, as well as consistencies and inconsistencies between the perceptions of program completers and those of program faculty.

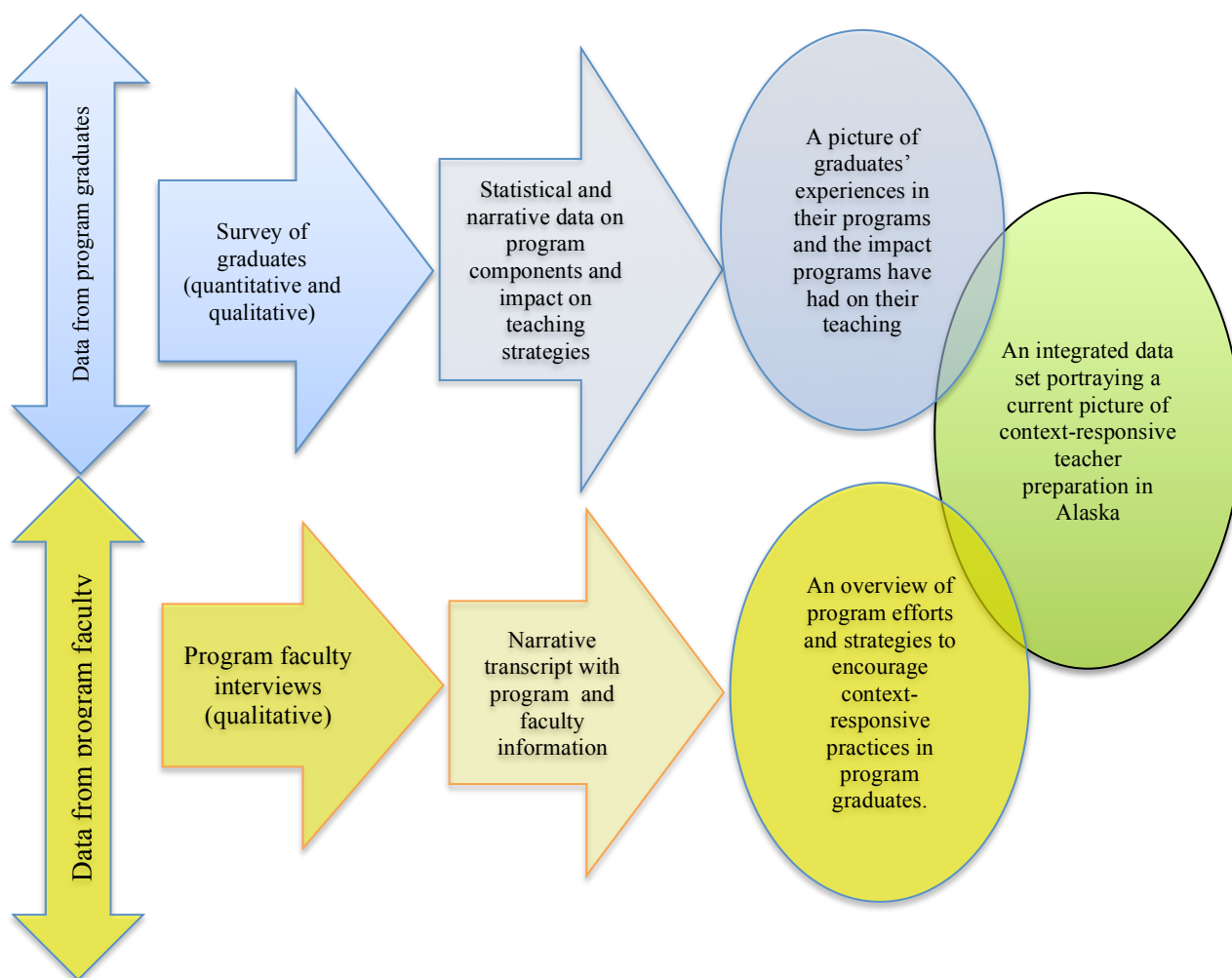


Figure 3.1: A sequential mixed-method research design

3.3.1 Development of the graduate survey instrument.

For the graduate data collection group, a survey instrument was chosen and subsequently developed as a way to provide an overall snapshot of the target population, as it would not be feasible for a single researcher to do individual observations or interviews with a large population as a method of painting a reliable broad-scale picture. The survey was developed and piloted over the course of the 2010-11 school year and distributed to the whole data collection group in April of 2011. The survey began with a set of questions to ascertain demographic information on the graduates as well as information on the school population with whom they were currently working. Next

followed a series of questions to determine what specific activities they engaged in as part of their teacher preparation program in regards to culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching, and differentiated instruction. Each of these three terms was defined for the survey respondents in order to improve instrument reliability and ensure internal consistency in the interpretation of terms. The definitions of each term were arrived at based on a review of the literature, and a succinct definition of each term was provided based on a consensus of definitions used for the terms. Next on the survey came a list of all the possible curricular or instructional components that might be included in a teacher preparation program as a strategy for preparing teachers in each of the three target areas, and respondents were asked to check off any of the strategies they recalled being a part of their program.

Next in the survey came a list of statements that respondents could either agree or disagree with, in regard to the effectiveness of preparation provided by their program in relation to culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching, and differentiated instruction. These questions were intended to allow the respondents to reflect on whether or not they felt their programs had adequately prepared them in each of the three areas. These closed-response questions were then followed by a series of open-ended questions asking about professional development activities respondents had participated in (post-initial certification) in the three defined areas. Respondents were also asked to identify the activity or activities they had engaged in, either as part of their teacher certification program or as professional development activities, that most contributed to their knowledge and understanding in the three areas. These questions were included to learn more about the strategies the graduates themselves found to be most influential on their practices, and included professional development activities post-certification in recognition of the on-going learning that naturally occurs as one enters and becomes established in the teaching profession.

The next section of the survey contained a series of selected-response questions designed to determine the extent to which the survey respondents employed practices associated with culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching and differentiation in

their classrooms. Phrases such as “I learn about my students’ lives outside of school, and the cultures of their families” could be replied to with All the Time, Sometimes, Occasionally, or Never. These questions were included so that in my data analysis phase a correlation could be potentially examined between the effectiveness of their preparation (as reported by the graduates) and the extent to which their practices reflect practices recognized as culturally responsive, place-based, and differentiated. Due to the questionable reliability of self-reported data of this nature, this aspect of data analysis did not end up occurring. However, the self-reported data on classroom practices was used in Chapter 4 to help determine the classroom practices graduates felt to be important in context-responsive teaching. Finally, the survey asked a series of three summative selected response questions regarding the respondents’ overall feeling on their preparation in each of the three areas, and asked for suggestions for strengthening teacher preparation in each of the areas. These final questions were designed to recognize the respondents’ opinions and status as practicing teachers and look to them for advice to share with teacher preparation programs.

3.3.2 Survey validity, reliability and pilot testing.

The first step towards strengthening the overall validity and reliability of the survey was to simply take the survey myself, using my own experiences in completing a post-bac teacher certification program as the basis for my responses. Completing the survey allowed me to recognize several areas that were worded poorly and/or needed to be sequenced differently. One consideration made at this stage was whether or not to expand the choice of options beyond just “agree” or “disagree” in the section reflecting on the effectiveness of preparation provided by their program. In completing the survey myself, I felt that some areas would best be characterized by a middle answer such as “to some extent.” However, I ultimately decided against adding this third area with the concern that it would be too easy to default to the middle on all the questions, and I would get better information with a dichotomous response structure. I next solicited feedback on the draft survey from members of my committee and a few colleagues in my own teacher education department in order to check for face validity and overall wording

and structure. Several more changes to the survey were made as a result of the feedback received at this stage, including revising some of the demographic questions to get more detailed information on school sites (e.g. expanding the number of options for describing the percentage of Alaska Native students at the school from three choices to four).

Before moving the survey from its paper-based format to Survey Monkey (the on-line survey tool chosen for survey distribution), I engaged in a “concept-mapping” activity to ensure alignment between my survey and my research questions and to strengthen overall content validity. Content validity, as defined by Gliner and Morgan (2000), addresses the question of whether “the content that comprises the instrument is representative of the concept that one is attempting to measure” (p.320). To check the alignment of the survey content and definitions with the research questions articulated for this study, I began by carefully operationalizing each phrase or component of my two research questions. I defined specifically what I meant by “*pre-service elementary and secondary teacher education programs in the State of Alaska*” (my data collection group), what I meant by the word “*doing*,” etc. I parsed apart the phrase “*to help future educators learn from, through, with and about their students, cultures, communities and places*” into sixteen sub-sentences (four each for *learn from*, *learn through*, *learn with*, and *learn about*, in relation to the four areas of *students*, *cultures*, *communities* and *places*) and defined what was meant by each of those sixteen sub-sentences. For example, to operationalize the phrase “*to help future educators learn through the community*” I rephrased it as “to help teacher education students learn how to incorporate local resources into the curriculum to enhance subject area teaching.” I then operationalized what it meant to help future educators learn to “*integrate this knowledge into their practices and curriculum in a meaningful manner.*”

This concept mapping exercise generated a list of sixteen different practices or teaching strategies that need to be reflected in the questions on the survey, along with a list of teacher preparation approaches that needed to be asked about as being elements of the respondent’s preparation program. The list of teaching strategies was summarized into six primary approaches, each of which was associated with a common practice in

culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching or differentiated instruction. The concept mapping activity led to adjustments in the wording on some questions in the survey section titled “Impact of Teacher Preparation Program on Classroom Practices” and the section describing current classroom practices.

In moving the paper-based survey to Survey Monkey, the formatting of several questions was adjusted to better utilize the question formats available in the web-based application. Based on a suggestion in the Survey Monkey “help” documents, the demographic questions were moved to the end of the survey so that the respondents finish off with an easy set of questions. The survey, along with the complete research protocol, descriptions of the data collection tools and research participation informed consent forms were submitted to the University of Alaska Fairbanks Institutional Review Board in the fall of 2010 and a letter of exemption for project was received in December of that year (included as Appendix D).

With the pilot survey finally ready for distribution, potential participants in the survey pilot study were identified who represented a similar demographic, but who were not part of my defined data collection group. The pilot survey was distributed to twenty recent 2009 and 2010 graduates of the UAF elementary teacher education program who were at the time teaching in Alaska. While this sub-group was not a mirror of the full data collection group (because they are all elementary teachers, and they are all UAF graduates), they represented a group that shared most of the data collection group’s characteristics (UA grads, currently teaching in Alaska) and their contact information was easily accessible. Also, everyone in the pilot study group had been a former student of mine in two or more elementary education courses at UAF and I felt that that personal connection would increase the likelihood that they would respond to the survey request in a timely fashion. Had I completed any data analysis on the pilot study data or attempted to draw any conclusions from their responses, it would, indeed, have been a biased sample. For the purposes of piloting the survey instrument, however, they were a useful and representative group. I sent out an e-mail describing my project, making sure they knew participation was optional, and asking the twenty individuals to consider taking the

on-line survey. Eleven respondents chose to complete the survey over the course of a ten day response period.

Once the pilot survey was closed, a request was sent out to four individuals who I knew had completed the survey based on the option to enter e-mail addresses at the end of the survey, asking them to give me honest and useful feedback on the survey instrument itself and the process of completing it. This group was asked to respond to the following questions:

- a. Approximately how long did it take you to complete the survey. Did you do it all at once or over several sessions/days?
- b. Was the information provided on the purpose of the survey and the information on "informed consent" (i.e. your rights in relation to taking the survey/not taking the survey) clear? If not, what confused you?
- c. Did you experience any challenges with accessing or navigating through the survey? If so, what were the difficulties?
- d. Did any of the terminology confuse you? If so, what terms were unclear and/or confusing?
- e. Did any of the questions confuse you? If so, which ones?
- f. Any other suggestions or feedback in regards to the survey

From the responses to these questions I learned that the survey took approximately 20 to 25 minutes to complete, and that these respondents found the information clear and the survey easy to navigate. One respondent said that she would have liked more options than Agree or Disagree on the question asking about "Impact of Teacher Preparation Programs on Classroom Practices." Given this feedback, along with my own earlier concerns with this same issue, the range of responses available on those questions was broadened to include Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

The final step of the pilot process consisted of examining the survey data generated by the 11-17 respondents (data was recorded for six individuals who started, but did not finish, the survey so it was included in the pilot data report). A PDF summary of the data was downloaded from Survey Monkey and examined from a descriptive

standpoint. In examining the pilot data, the question was considered “To what extent does the survey generate the information needed to answer the research questions?” I looked at the data and determined that the survey data provided me with the following information:

- The types of activities respondents engaged in in their education program related to culturally responsive teaching, place based education, and differentiated instruction
- Some materials used to address these topics in pre-service education programs
- Some assignments given to address these topics in pre-service education programs
- Graduates’ opinions about the extent to which their program adequately prepared them for learning from, about, through, with students, communities and the places they teach
- Graduates’ opinions about the direct impact of their program on their skills and knowledge of culturally responsive teaching practices, place-based teaching practices, and differentiated instruction
- Self reported information on graduates’ classroom practices relative to culturally responsive teaching practices, place-based teaching practices, and differentiated instruction
- Professional development activities that have occurred or are occurring in districts relative to culturally responsive teaching practices, place-based teaching practices, and differentiated instruction
- Activities that strongly contributed to teacher growth in culturally responsive teaching practices, place-based teaching practices, and differentiated instruction
- Graduates’ thoughts on strengthening teacher preparation in culturally responsive teaching practices, place-based teaching practices, and differentiated instruction
- Demographics on teacher education graduates and their current school sites

This data was deemed to be sufficient and the official survey was distributed in April 2011 to 325 practicing teachers across the state of Alaska. A copy of the survey as it was distributed is attached as Appendix B.

The survey collector was left open for approximately three weeks, during which time multiple friendly requests were sent out to encourage participation and completion. A fifty-dollar gift card was promised to one lucky survey respondent as an incentive for completion and was, indeed, rewarded. The final number of respondents was 168, for an overall return rate of just over 50%. Demographics of the survey respondents, along with a comparison between the respondents and the complete data collection group are presented in Chapter 4. A discussion of data analysis strategies follows this description of the data collection tools.

3.3.3 Development and pilot of the teacher educator interview protocol.

Teacher educator interview questions were developed and piloted in July of 2010 with a member of a UA teacher preparation faculty. In advance of the meeting questions were articulated that it was hoped would elicit *specific* information as to what the UA teacher education program was asking of and teaching its pre-service teachers in relation to learning from, through, with and about their students, cultures, communities and places. Questions were also included to learn about the ways in which students were asked to *apply* that information in the context of an actual classroom. Additionally, questions were included to find out what events or situations or learning experiences in the teacher educator's career had led to the beliefs s/he held in regards to preparing context-responsive teachers.

The pilot interview provided useful information in regards to all three lines of questioning. The interviewee discussed her background and experiences that had led to her current position, as well as experiences that helped shape her views and opinions on the subject. She also articulated much useful information on the teacher preparation program and various components designed to help pre-service teachers learn from, through, with and about their students. Additionally, she described several activities and assignments required of pre-service teachers in the program that helped them practice

their skills in connecting content to their lives of their students. In reflecting on the appropriateness and usefulness of the questions asked in the pilot interview, overall the interview protocol was able to successfully shed light on relevant issues in context-responsive teacher preparation. One addition was made to the interview protocol, which will be discussed below in the section on “Challenges in sequencing.” A copy of the final interview protocol is attached as Appendix C.

The pilot interview, along with all the subsequent interviews, was recorded using a digital voice recording application (called Griffin iTalk) installed on an iPad. The application produced a high quality sound recording that proved to be easy to review for transcription purposes and was easily convertible to .wav files that can be played on most digital devices. The application also came with a corresponding program that allowed the interviews to be transferred wirelessly from an iPad to a laptop, thereby providing a secure location for storage.

Between September and November 2011, ten interviews were completed with teacher educators from UAA, UAF and UAS. Seven were completed face to face in either Fairbanks or Anchorage, and three others were completed via Skype. Four of the interviewees were from UAA, four were from UAF, and two were from UAS. The following transcription excerpt reflects the challenges I encountered recruiting interview participants from UAS:

Interviewer: I haven't heard back from any of your colleagues.

Interviewee: They think you're a spy.

Interviewer: I am definitely not a spy.

Interviewee: And I said, "I don't think so." But see, now you're going to get vetted by me.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, maybe you can go back and tell them I'm completely harmless.

Interviewee: Yeah, I will.

Nevertheless, I only ended up with two participants from that institution.

During the interviews, the faculty members were informed of the survey that had been distributed to their graduates and were given a copy of the survey data from their own program's respondents, as well as a summary of the statewide responses in their preparation area (elementary or secondary). After the interviews were transcribed, the transcriptions were e-mailed to the interviewees and they were asked to ensure that they had been accurately represented. All but one interviewee responded to the e-mail and said that the interview was accurate but that they were embarrassed by their speech patterns. This process presumably positively impacts the overall reliability of the interview data, as the interviewees were able to confirm that what was heard and transcribed (and consequently used in data analysis) was what was actually said.

Overall issues of validity – the extent to which, as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) put it, “a method investigates what it purports to investigate” were further addressed by examining the data created by the interviews and survey combined (p. 246). The data generated by the two collection tools was examined in relation to the strands of inquiry in the research project as a whole. This analysis helped to determine that 53% of the questions on the data collection tools were *directly* related to the research question, in that they asked graduates and program faculty to specifically describe the strategies employed in teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to learn from, through, with and about their students, cultures, communities and places, and to help them learn how to integrate this knowledge into their practices and curriculum in a meaningful manner. 25% of the questions asked for background and/or demographic information on either the graduates and the contexts in which they were teaching, or on the teacher educators or teacher education programs. Approximately 14% of the data collection components asked the graduates and teacher educators to reflect on the quality of their teacher education and/or preparation program, while a final 8% asked both groups to offer suggestions for improving teacher preparation in the future. This distribution of inquiry strands appeared appropriate for the study, and reflected the desired emphasis of the research. Validity and reliability issues for the project as a whole are also addressed through the use of multiple data collection strategies. The multiple data collection

strategies ensure that the issue is not being viewed through a single lens, but instead is being examined from multiple angles.

Referring back to the employment of a dialectic approach to the mixed-methodology of this project, there are a few ways the foundational worldview of each data collection technique has impacted its actual use. The survey as distributed reflects a post-positivist worldview, as this approach to data collection reflects many of the characteristics of this viewpoint described by Creswell (2009) (e.g. “Data, evidence, and rational considerations shape knowledge. In practice, the researcher collects information on instruments based on measures completed by the participants” (p. 7)). This post-positivist worldview is reflected in the fact that it is assumed in the data analysis that the numerical survey data collected is an accurate reflection of the views of the survey respondents and that conclusions can be made based on an analysis of these data. However, this assumptive worldview also accounts for the fact that the survey data in which survey respondents self-report on their own classroom practices is *not* reliable as there are numerous threats to the validity of such a data reporting strategy.

The interviews reflect a constructivist worldview in that they intended to “seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). The information gathered through the interviews must be viewed through this lens, acknowledging the role of the interviewer as well as the roles and contexts of the individuals being interviewed. In conducting “semi-structured life world interviews” the intent was to understand a subject “from the actor’s own perspective and describe the world as experienced by the subject” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 26). The questions developed were designed to not only gather factual information about practices in the teacher education programs with which the interviewees worked, but also to hear about their own personal education and life experiences contributing to their growth as context-responsive teacher educators. For this reason, questions were included in the interview protocol asking about their backgrounds and experiences as a teacher educator and about the life experiences they may have had that led them to the views they held on context-responsive teaching. The intent of these

questions was to place the interviewees in context and recognize their own life experiences in shaping their views on the topic being investigated.

3.4 Changes Made During the Data Collection Process

Several modifications to the data collection tools and process were made throughout the duration of this project. During the initial conceptualization of this research project, I considered attempting to look for a correlation between the quality of context-responsive preparation and a teacher's overall impact on student achievement. My committee and I decided, however, that this would be a difficult correlation to measure given the multiple factors that contribute to overall student achievement, the question of what strategies to use to measure student achievement, and the difficulty of establishing causality between teacher preparation in one particular area and student performance. Consequently, an examination of the impact of teacher preparation on student learning outcomes is not a component of this study.

Several other modifications were made to the data collection plan once the research was underway. In my initial research plans, I hoped to complete interviews with a wide variety of individuals relevant to the research questions including teachers, teacher educators, community members, non-traditional sources of knowledge who held expertise on local communities and places, etc. The realities of organizing and completing so many interviews with such a wide variety of individuals quickly set in and I realized that I needed to place some firm boundaries on my data collection group. I had also initially intended to complete follow-up interviews with small groups of graduates following their completion of the survey. However, the interview participants would self-select themselves and therefore be a biased sample, so I did not follow through on those interviews.

The next modification made to my data collection process was to not complete a comprehensive document analysis from the three universities. The initial research plan included the collection and analysis of documentation (syllabi, program requirements, etc.) from the three studied universities. Again, the realities involved in gathering and analyzing this information directly led me to this decision, as I comprehended how much

data I would already have as a result of administering the survey and completing the interviews. This decision was also impacted by a discussion of the limitations of examining teacher preparation programs through documentation as articulated by Zeichner and Conklin (2008) who said

Much of the research on teacher education programs that we reviewed . . . relied on documents about programs and on statements from teacher educators rather than on first hand examination of programs in action. Relying on these secondhand sources to understand the characteristics of programs could cause problems because of the gaps that often exist between how programs are described and what they actually represent when implemented (p. 283).

While a thorough analysis of program documentation would no doubt add an extra level of understanding to the investigation, the voices and thoughts of the graduates themselves provided a lively counterpoint to the information provided by the program faculty.

3.5 Challenges in Sequencing

The project modification that had the greatest impact on the data collection and (more significantly) analysis arose as a result of unforeseen dilemmas in sequencing the data collection and the development of a conceptual framework for data analysis. The focus of the project was defined in the fall of 2009 and in order to complete research on human subjects it was determined that an application would have to be made to the institutional review board (IRB). In order to apply to the IRB, a data collection plan must to be firmly in place and the data collection tools must be developed and submitted for approval. The survey instrument and interview protocol were subsequently developed and submitted in the fall of 2010 in order to facilitate data collection in the spring of 2011. When the data collection tools were developed, I had not yet fully completed a comprehensive review of the literature, although I had enough background to have a general idea of where the project was headed and what I wanted to ask of the graduates and teacher educators.

In the late spring of 2011, *after* distributing the final survey to the graduates, but *before* interviewing the teacher educators, I completed a thorough review of the literature

and developed the concept and definition of context-responsive teaching presented in Chapter 1. This literature review led me to recognize and articulate four primary areas of context-responsive teaching: culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching, differentiated instruction, and collaboration with parents, families and communities. In developing the survey instrument, I had asked questions on three of these four areas, but not on the topic of collaboration with parents, families and communities. Consequently, the data collected from the graduate surveys does not specifically include information on this topic like it does on the other three components of context-responsive teaching. However, many graduates made references to program components that involved preparation to collaborate with parents, families and communities.

Because I had fully articulated the definition of context-responsive teaching prior to completing the interviews with the teacher educators, I was able to share that definition with some of them and solicit a more complete picture of teacher preparation relative to *all* of the aspects of context-responsive teaching, including opportunities offered to pre-service teachers related to collaboration with parents, families and communities. I was also able to refer to the term “context-responsive teaching” in my questions and ask what their thoughts were regarding the necessity of understanding and incorporating context when teaching. The shortcoming in my data collection that arose as a result of poor sequencing provided a valuable lesson on the importance of completing a thorough literature review and developing a full conceptual framework *prior* to developing and implementing data collection strategies.

3.6 Data Analysis

All in all, the graduate survey instrument generated 914 narrative comments in addition to the statistical data. The interviews, collectively, provided nearly five hours of recordings and generated around 100 pages of transcription. Suffice it to say the project provided plenty of data for analysis! The conceptual framework for the research project developed and articulated in Chapters 1 and 2 provided the framework for the data analysis that is presented in Chapters 4 and 5, and the conclusions and recommendations articulated in Chapter 6.

Atlas TI, a software program designed for qualitative data analysis, was used to analyze, code, and thematize all of the interview data and the narrative survey data. The survey data was divided into four documents based on the section of the survey it had been entered into. The four documents were labeled: A) Materials and activities remembered from programs (207 comments); B) Beneficial activities from professional development (in-service learning) (165 comments); C) Most beneficial activities from program pre-service learning) (310 comments); and D) Suggestions for improving training (232 comments). Each of the interviews was loaded as a separate document, but all the qualitative data (from both interviews and survey comments) was housed in one “hermeneutic unit,” the term used by Atlas TI to describe a project “container.” Clumping all the data together in one unit allowed me to use codes across both types of data and also pull data from different codes from all sources, thereby allowing me to easily combine the presentation of data from both the graduates and the teacher educators.

Once the data was organized and loaded into Atlas TI, I developed the initial broad codes I would use to organize the data. At this stage, I went through the data (both survey comments and interview transcripts) looking for information that would align with a major component of Chapter 1 or 2. In relation to Chapter 1, I looked for references to what teachers need to know about context, who to learn the information from, larger and smaller acts of context responsive teaching, dispositions necessary to enact context responsive teaching, and “real world” issues related to enacting context responsive teaching. In relation to Chapter 2, I looked for references to the knowledge and skills needed for context-responsive teaching, references to experiential or fieldwork components to support the preparation of context-responsive teachers, and references to teacher preparation issues, programs and practices in relation to larger issues in teacher education.

After using these broad categories as a point of departure for analysis, I then reflected on the content of the comments and transcripts, and looked for emergent themes in each of the broader areas. Table 3.1 is a list of codes used in analyzing the graduate

survey comments along with the frequency with which they were applied.

Table 3.1: Code frequency table for graduate survey

Name	Grounded
✘ In-service learning	97
✘ Experiential activities	74
✘ Informal learning experiences	66
✘ Pre-service learning	57
✘ Specific courses	57
✘ Specific materials or content	53
✘ Specific activities	34
✘ Program organization	29
✘ Project not applied in classroom	29
✘ Continuing education	27
✘ Professional development	27
✘ Orientation of teacher ed program	23
✘ Specific people	15
✘ GRAD real world issues	11
✘ Lesson plan requirements	9
✘ GRAD teacher prep components	6
✘ Practice based assignments	5
✘ GRAD suggestions for improvement	5
✘ Culturally repsonsive teaching activities	4
✘ Differentiation teaching activities	4
✘ Learning from non traditional sources	4
✘ Place based teaching activities	4
✘ Facilitated UA activities	4
✘ GRAD prof dev activities	1

Table 3.2 displays the codes applied in the initial analysis of the interview data, and the frequency with which they were applied.

Table 3.2: Code frequency table for teacher educator interviews

Name	Grounded
⊠ TE teacher prep components	46
⊠ TE application of CRT activities	33
⊠ TE defn of CRT	17
⊠ TE dispositions	17
⊠ TE personal growth	16
⊠ TE what to know about context	14
⊠ TE effective programs?	14
⊠ TE real world issues with CRT	12
⊠ Teacher prep issues	11
⊠ TE suggestions for improvement	6

When presenting data in the following three chapters, information coded as relevant to a particular section was generated as a report in Atlas TI. For example, when discussing the issue of experiential or fieldwork components described as part of the teacher preparation program in Chapter 4, a report of graduate comments coded as “Experiential activities” would be generated along with a report of interview quotes coded as “TE (teacher educator) application of CRT (context-responsive teaching) activities.” Once these reports were generated, they were then analyzed for internal themes and sub-coded with as many codes as themes emerged. For example, some of the sub-codes generated when analyzing the aforementioned documents were *immersion programs, community research projects, interviews, community based fieldwork, field trips, alignment of standards with local resources, teaching a context-responsive unit or lesson*. While the development of the broad codes was reflective of the structure of the conceptual framework, the development of the sub codes within each section was very much organic, emerging from the data itself. The two approaches to coding are reflected in Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), who write

Coding can be either concept driven or data driven. Concept-driven coding uses codes that have been developed in advance by the researcher, either by looking at some of the material or by consulting existing literature in the field, whereas data-driven coding implies that the researcher starts out without codes, and develops

them through readings of the material (p. 202).

The information relevant to the broad topics found in the conceptual framework of Chapters 1 and 2 are presented in an integrated fashion, with comments from both the teacher educators and the graduates.

The numerical survey data was downloaded from the Survey Monkey site and appropriate graphs were generated to accurately display the information. All of the numerical data presented in this dissertation is descriptive. No higher-level statistical analysis was done on the numerical data. The descriptive data summarizing the characteristics of the survey respondents is included in Chapter 4. The remaining descriptive numerical data (summaries of responses to selected-response survey questions) is scattered throughout Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and is presented in the section where it has the most relevance. Chapter 4 examines the data for congruence between the definition of context-responsive teaching in Chapter 1 and graduates' and teacher educators perceptions of what constitutes context-responsive teaching in practice. Chapter 5 endeavors to paint a current and holistic picture of context-responsive teacher preparation in the state of Alaska. Chapter 6 presents conclusions and recommendations relative to context-responsive teacher preparation.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The foremost ethical consideration I have faced in my research has been my role as an “insider” in the subject matter I am studying. As may have been intuited by now, I am currently a faculty member at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in the elementary teacher preparation program. I have worked with the UAF School of Education in some capacity since 1999, and was also a mentor teacher of UAF elementary pre-service interns for six years, while working as an elementary school teacher in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. The advantages of this unique perspective are articulated in a book devoted to issues of completing work-based research. Costley, Elliott and Gibbs (2010) write:

As an insider, you are in a unique position to study a particular issue in depth and with special knowledge about that issue. Not only do you have your own insider

knowledge, but you have easy access to people and information that can further enhance that knowledge. You are in a prime position to investigate and make changes to a practice situation. You can make challenges to the status quo from an informed perspective. You have an advantage when dealing with the complexity of work situations because you have in-depth knowledge of many of the complex issues (p. 3) .

In addition to these advantages, the close proximity a work-based researcher shares with her subject requires ethical vigilance, as there are more opportunities for research bias.

Costley et al (2010) write

Several research traditions can put forward a criticism of work based projects in relation to their use of insider-led research. That is because of the issue of the subjective nature of researching your own practice, where they may be a lack of impartiality, a vested interest in certain results being achieved and problems concerning a fresh and objective view of data (p. 6).

In order to stave off these criticisms, the authors recommend “. . . careful attention to feedback from participants, initial evaluation of data, triangulation in the methods of gathering data and an awareness of the issues represented in the project” (p.6).

I have attempted throughout this project to continually reflect on my stance when considering the information I have gathered about my institution and other institutions in the state. I have also been mindful of the potential my research has to be seen as an evaluative comparison of the programs of the three institutions, and have worked actively in both my analysis and writing to reflect my desire to *not* pass judgment, but to use the information gathered to help inform future practices. Towards this end, I have removed any individual references to specific universities, communities and schools from all referenced data, and I have not distinguished between practices at one institution in relation to those at a different institution. Again, the goal of this project has not been to compare practices at different institutions, but instead to look at the practices at the three universities collectively in order to see trends and commonalities in program practices,

and to look at what *we* as teacher educators in the state of Alaska, are doing to prepare future teachers for context-responsive teaching practices.

In order to maintain transparency in my data collection and analysis, I have attempted to work collaboratively and cooperatively with the primary constituent group being studied, that is to say, the teacher educators themselves. When interviewing teacher educators I made sure they knew their comments would be anonymous and that I would not be comparing the three institutions in my research. I also provided them with institution-specific survey data along with statewide survey data from either elementary or secondary programs (depending on the program affiliation of the interviewee). I also intend to share a complete copy of my dissertation with all of the teacher educators interviewed in this project to demonstrate that I have been faithful to my pledge to refrain from evaluation.

We will now turn to the presentation of data and findings from the two data collection sources.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings Part One

The next two chapters will present findings from survey data and completed interviews. Data from both sources are presented concurrently, organized in relation to the component of the analysis framework developed in Chapters 1 and 2. This chapter will first present an overview of the demographics of the survey participants and interviewees. It will then examine the elements of context-responsive teaching as seen through the eyes of program graduates (all currently practicing teachers) and teacher educators. Chapter 5 will provide program graduate and teacher educator's perspectives on strategies for preparing teachers for context responsive teaching practices, and Chapter 6 will integrate and compare recommendations and suggestions from graduates and teacher educators with those found in the literature.

4.1 Survey Participant Demographics

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a total of 166 graduates of University of Alaska teacher preparation programs completed the survey titled "Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska." The respondents were distributed evenly between the three universities, with roughly 33% each having completed their teacher certification at Fairbanks, Anchorage and Juneau. The targeted population had completed a certification program in 2006, 2007 and 2008 and the percentage of respondents from each of those years was 36%, 30% and 20% respectively. An additional 15% indicated that they had completed their certification program in a different year from those listed, suggesting that the data obtained from ISER was not entirely reliable as it contained respondents who had also received advanced degrees during that three year span (e.g. M.Ed. or M.A. degrees in education related areas). 47% of the respondents had an elementary certification and 43% were secondary certified, while less than 10% said they had a certification in an "other" area, presumably special education, music, or art.

Survey respondents reported that they were currently teaching in 25 different districts across the state of Alaska, with the largest numbers coming from Anchorage (34%), Fairbanks (15%), Mat-Su (13%) and Juneau (11%). A total of 19% came from districts that could be categorized as REAAs (Regional Education Attendance Area) or

rural. The majority of respondents (73%) reported having had taught for five or fewer years, while 15% stated they had taught for nine or more years, suggesting again that the data obtained from ISER contained a wider swath of graduates than anticipated.

As for the population of students and communities served by the survey respondents, 55% came from communities with a population greater than 30,000, while another 28% came from Alaskan communities with 4000-30,000 residents. The remainder (17%) taught in communities with fewer than 4000 people, with 8% reporting a community size of less than 500. 72% of the communities graduates responded from were on the road system (defined as being accessible to Canada via highways), while 27% were accessible only by airplane or boat.

The income level of the students being served by the respondents was categorized as “predominantly low income” by 36% of the survey completers, as “predominantly middle or high income” by 14%, and as “a mixture of low and middle or high income” by the remaining 50%. At 12% of the respondents’ schools the population of Alaska Native students was 50% or greater, and the Alaska Native population was between 15 and 50% at the schools of another 32% of the teachers. The non-Caucasian population at the schools (including Alaska Native students) was between 15 and 50% at 48% of the schools and was over 50% at another 24% of the schools. Students classified as “Limited English Proficient” (LEP) constituted between 15 and 50% of the population at 19% of the respondents’ schools, while 25% of survey completers estimated that more than 15% of their students spoke English as a second language. Finally, only 55% of the teachers responding indicated that their school had met the Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks mandated by No Child Left Behind in the previous academic year.

4.2 Survey Respondents as a Representative Sample

The extent to which the survey respondents can be considered a representative sample of the entire group solicited for survey completion can be determined by comparing some of the above statistics to those of the group as a whole. The final list of e-mail addresses to which the surveys were distributed consisted of 142 graduates of UAS programs (39% of the total group of 364), 126 UAA graduates (35%) and 96 UAF

graduates (26%). Considering the fact that the survey respondents were equally split between the three universities, this suggests that UAF graduates are slightly over represented in the survey results. A possible reason for this is that many of the UAF graduates knew me personally and therefore may have been more likely to complete the survey.

Of the 364 teachers receiving the survey, according to the data from ISER and the domain names of their e-mail addresses, 67% were teaching in urban districts (Anchorage, Mat-Su, Fairbanks or Juneau) while approximately 21% were currently teaching in areas that could be categorized as REAAs or as rural. In comparison, as stated above, 72% of the survey respondents came from the four larger urban districts, while 19% came from REAAs or rural areas.

As for the demographics of the schools represented by the teachers completing the survey, according to the State of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development 2009-10 Report Card to the Public, the K-12 school population in Alaska is 23% Alaska Native and 46% non-Caucasian. The overall percentage of students classified as low-income in Alaska is 36%, and 11% of the Alaskan student population is considered "limited" in their English proficiency (Alaska_Department_of_Education_and_Early_Development, 2010). These numbers are somewhat difficult to compare with those in the survey respondent group as they consider the school population as a whole rather than the populations within individual school sites. However, the fact that the survey respondents indicated that they were teaching in diverse schools serving diverse populations suggests that they are representative of teachers across the state of Alaska. Additionally, the EED website states that in 2009-10 about 40% of Alaskan schools were not meeting the benchmarks for Adequate Yearly Progress, which is close to the 45% of survey respondents reporting that their schools had not made AYP. Overall, there are no glaring discrepancies that suggest the answers of the survey respondents are not an adequate representation of the sample group as a whole.

4.3 Interviewee Demographics

As mentioned in the previous chapter, eleven teacher educators from across the state were interviewed for this project. Of the interviewees, five were faculty members at UAF, four were on the UAA faculty, and two were on the faculty at UAS. Six of the interviewees worked primarily with the elementary certification programs at their institution, and four worked exclusively with the secondary programs. One interviewee worked with both the early childhood program and the elementary certification program. All but two interviewees reported having had extensive K12 classroom experience before entering the field of teacher education (five or more years teaching in a K12 classroom) and five held a doctoral level degree in their field. As a point of interest, seven of the interviewees were female and four were male, and three of the four male interviewees worked with the secondary program at their university.

4.4 Graduates and Program Faculty Define Context-Responsive Teaching

The remainder of this chapter will examine data from both the survey and interviews in order to paint a picture of how teachers and teacher educators define and construct context-responsive teaching. As the term “context-responsive teaching” was not used in the surveys, and was introduced in only a few of the interviews, data was examined in relation to responses to questions on the four main components of context-responsive teaching. Responses relative to the areas of culturally responsive teaching practices, place-based teaching, efforts to collaborate with families and communities and strategies for differentiated instruction are included in this section.

4.4.1 Teacher educators reflect on what to know about context.

As part of the interview protocol, teacher certification program faculty were asked to offer their thoughts regarding the necessity of understanding and incorporating context when teaching (defined to them as students lives and families, communities, local resources and natural places), and they were also asked what, about context, they thought it was important for teachers to know. Responses included references to the need to know the local educational and community history, how the school system works, language backgrounds, the values and priorities of the local community, the culture of the

community (defined broadly, or in some cases, not defined at all), the interests and situations of the students, and the teachers' own personal backgrounds and biases.

Several teacher educators mentioned the need to know about the histories of the communities and people with whom they would work. A course on educational history and community relations was described as discussing "the recognition that you can't just walk into a classroom and look at the students and say "Oh, this is what all the students need," without knowing where they're coming from and the culture and community from which they come." Also mentioned was the need, particularly in Alaska, to understand "the system of school and the missionaries" as well as "the history and infrastructure of education in the state and the community." An elementary faculty member remarked "in Alaska, that's particularly important because a lot of our communities did not even have schools, and there were no opportunities for parents or grandparents to even go to school." A need to understand the larger educational context was also discussed, such as when a teacher educator remarked, "If you as a teacher do not understand who sets the curriculum requirements, who sets the assessment requirements, the testing requirements, the hiring and firing requirements, you can't advocate for your students in ways that are going to be meaningful." Another remarked "we encourage them to look at all facets of the way the system works as far as within the school, within the district."

Multiple references were made to the need to know either the values, priorities or culture of the local community and a few suggestions were provided as to how that information might be obtained. "I think it's important to understand the language and culture that they may be coming from" said one faculty member. She continued "It's also important to know from the sense of the community about what they value." This was echoed by another who stated that it was important to know "the community that you're in, know what their expectations are and their philosophy." Another added:

We need to understand that there are huge differences in values, in families, in how people relate to their families, how they relate to the land, their spiritual backgrounds - we have lots of kids in Alaska who come from very strong

religious backgrounds. We need to respect that, but we can hardly respect it unless we know and understand something about that.

The importance of understanding the community was articulated by one faculty member who said “I don’t see how one can be effective - you might be minimally effective, but certainly not to the extent that you could be - unless you know what your families and communities priorities and interests are.” To obtain this essential information an educator stated “I think our students need to feel comfortable to ask elders to come to the classroom and how to advocate for getting more of that cultural component that’s often neglected in our classrooms” while another offered “my definition would be bringing the resources of the community, families, and students into the classroom, as well as taking the students out into the community. And so it’s kind of a two-way street.”

Several specific references were made to the need to know about language issues and the linguistic backgrounds and home lives of the students. An educator remarked:

You need to know what the first language is -- you don’t need to speak it, but you need to understand what language is spoken by kids in your class (and) you need to know non-verbal communication - that’s a huge piece in almost every cultural group. We have different ways of communicating.

Although there were few specifics regarding exactly *what* it is important that teachers know about their students, the need to *know* the students was mentioned several times. “You’ve got to connect with the kids, you’ve got to relate to the kids” said one teacher educator, while another commented “Having a warm interest in your students is pretty important.”

Finally, several teacher educators commented on the importance of teachers to know and understand *themselves* first in order to best know and understand their students:

I think, number one, they need to know themselves as a socio-cultural being. I think absolutely teacher-educators have to do our own work first or we’re just in that very stale model of, “I know what you need and I’m going to fill your bucket.” All the power dynamics that go into that and the disrespect I think is inherent in that.

Another educator commented “knowing your family, knowing your background, where you come from is really important.” Speaking specifically to the context of teacher preparation in the state of Alaska, a faculty member stated

The traditional model of education is, you know, we’re raised in a town and we go to university and maybe leave town for a while and come back, but we typically teach within the context of our own lives. And that’s not the case when you get into rural Alaska because most of the teachers are outsiders, looking from the outside in.

Some of the strategies the interviewees conveyed as to how to best help pre-service teachers learn about these faceted elements of context will be presented in Chapter 5.

4.4.2 Teacher educators reflect on pedagogical approaches aligned with context-responsive teaching.

In response to the same two interview questions mentioned in the previous section, the interviewed teacher educators explained several practices that they felt were aligned with or an essential part of teaching in response to contextual factors. Some of the approaches or strategies mentioned include connecting content with the lives of students, exploring communities and getting to know families through interviews and home visits, getting students outside of the classroom and into nature, facilitating meaningful discussions with kids, communicating with parents pro-actively, and utilizing differentiation and the Understanding by Design approach to curriculum design.

One teacher educator remarked that making connections between the content of the curriculum and the lives and contexts of the students “gets away from the rubber stamp curriculum that they may be given to teach and forces them to use a creative way of looking at it through the lens of their students’ lives.” Another stated:

If learning is really going to take place, (teachers) need to relate it to their own lives and to their own families and to their own context. And I think one of the problems that we traditionally had in years past is especially when you’re teaching in rural villages and the context of the class is, for lack of a better term, the great white dead dudes of European ancestry, it’s pretty meaningless to

somebody in a remote village where they don't even have paved streets or lights or stoplights or automobiles.

The need to get to know the community and to determine the resources and assets available that might be integrated into the curriculum was articulated by a faculty member who said:

The whole purpose is to try to get (pre-service teachers) out of deficit model thinking and into more of an assets model thinking. So you don't do a community study to go out and figure out what's wrong with the community and how it's hurting the school. You go out to say, "So what's here that the school could be tapping into that they're not? What are the strengths in this community, in the culture, that we're just ignoring and losing?" We're really trying to get the students to start thinking about what are the kids bringing to schools that we're not utilizing because we've got our deficit blinders on.

Another faculty member discussed the practice of "schools where they had the teachers go out and start walking through the community and visiting parents' homes." He went on to say that, in "every place where they did that, academic achievement went up. Parents became more involved in the school. All of a sudden, it wasn't adversarial, but it was more of a collegial relationship."

In addition to getting outside and into the community, another program faculty member conveyed the need to get kids out into the natural environment:

If we've separated ourselves so much from the natural world and this world, really, that sustains us that, unless we take the time as teachers to help students understand the importance of being a part of the natural world, being in it, looking closely, examining the trees and the plants and looking at animal behavior and all those sorts of things, unless we do that, no one's going to care. Why would you care about it?

She wondered, during the interview, "Why aren't we outside? Why aren't we helping students to appreciate the natural world, our environment, because our environment's a part of who we are. It sustains us."

The need to talk meaningfully to kids, and to communicate proactively with parents were both mentioned as being important strategies in context-responsive teaching. A faculty member stated:

I personally believe that it's essential to learn as much as you can about each of your students. And personally, I find that doing a focused philosophical dialogue in the classroom a couple times a week, two or three times a week, in a regular elementary classroom or as often as I can, is essential to learning about the students. It's when students are able to talk about the things that are important to them, the things they believe in, the justification for those things, that we really come to know them and understand them.

In regards to communicating with parents, a teacher educator commented “I think an important part . . . is making sure that our student teachers communicate with the families.” She continued, stating that the program she worked with needed to “make students more aware of how important it is to communicate with the parents. Not only for the negatives, not only for the discipline issues, but just informing them what’s happening in the classroom.”

Finally, the use of differentiated instruction techniques and curriculum designed using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework were both mentioned as important components of a context-responsive teaching approach. One teacher educator stated

For too long we’ve treated kids like in the old factory model, like they were pieces coming in and that they were uniform. And they’re not. I mean, every student that crosses the door is an individual, a unique individual. And each one has both needs and assets. And you’ve got to figure out, so how am I going to make use of this to help this kid learn?

In a similar vein, another educator related:

I really believe that differentiated instruction, I think that’s critical. You know, it drives me nuts to go to a classroom where a class of 25 are taking the same spelling test when you’ve got students that are banging their heads trying to get

one word right and five other students who know every single word before the words are even given to them.

In tandem with a differentiated approach, the same faculty member advocated for the UbD curriculum design approach stating “I really believe in teaching and creating units with the Understanding by Design model, creating units where they’re meaningful for students and of interest to them as long as it’s within the standards.” As will be discussed at the end of this chapter, many of the approaches advocated by teacher educators are mirrored in the definition of context-responsive teaching articulated in Chapter 1.

4.4.3 Teacher educators reflect on dispositions associated with context-responsive teaching.

The importance of certain dispositions or habits of mind in adopting a context-responsive approach to teaching was articulated in many different ways throughout the interviews with the teacher educators. In some instances, program faculty discussed dispositions in relation to their own growth and development as a context-responsive teacher educator, while in others they discussed the importance of helping the future teachers they prepare develop a particular world view or new habit of mind that they felt was important to a context-responsive approach.

Several program faculty mentioned the need to promote a non-judgmental approach that recognizes and values different world views and perspectives, and that welcomes learning and knowledge from non-traditional sources. One educator stated that in one of the courses she teaches they discuss “the fact that your values need to be put outside the door sometimes. If you can separate yourself from any kind of a judgment, you’re so much better off.” Another spoke of a classroom approach to classroom observations that emphasized “making good inferences based on what they’re seeing and trying to move away from their own prejudices and other ways that -- other kinds of thinking that actually causes them to jump to conclusions about children.” An elementary program faculty member related:

I like to talk with students about the fact that differences that are visible - differences in clothing, differences in language, what people eat, dances that they

do, music that they listen to, only amount to some of the kinds of differences. We need to understand that there are huge differences in values, in families, in how people relate to their families, how they relate to the land, their spiritual backgrounds.

In relation to the preparation for teaching in the Alaskan context, one educator stated that she uses a book of readings by Alaska Native educators because “A lot of these students have really no awareness of what Alaska native life is like and what the perspectives and points of view might be. So that's a really great eye opener and a great way to talk about what it means to be different and who's different.”

A teacher educator who had recently spent time in rural Alaska working with a group of pre-service Alaska Native teachers discussed the eye opening experience she herself had when she realized that perhaps her and her colleagues approach to preparing teachers was not meeting their students' needs:

When you look at what teacher education tends to do, we bring people of color and different cultures into teacher education programs and then basically turn them into Western teachers, and then send them back out into the community and wonder why they're not effective. One of our faculty came back (from a rural community) and said, “You know, I was standing in front of the class, talking to them.” And she said, “I suddenly realized that all my life, I have assumed I know what the kids need to know, and their job is to get it from me.” And she said, “And I'm looking at this class, thinking these people know stuff I don't.” And she said, “So now we ask -- we make the statement, ‘Here's what I typically teach for this course and here are the objectives for the course. What am I forgetting or what would you like to add to this?’” And then they start co-constructing how that would look.

The same interviewee related that an Alaska Native pre-service teacher had told her, in response to being asked if she could “teach who she was,”

After some thought she said, “You know, not really because you bring me into this classroom with the whiteboard and the chairs and everything that's in this

room.” And she said, “It’s a Western room. It’s not really who we are as a (Alaska Native) people.” And she said, “I’d have to go outside to really teach that.” The anecdotes shared by this particular educator suggest that she believes it is important for alternative world views to be incorporated into teaching and into classroom practices, along with a dispositional approach that see the value in these alternative points of view.

The other habit of mind mentioned by several teacher educators as being essential to a context-responsive approach to teaching was the ability to listen and establish a community of trust with students, families and communities through the building of meaningful relationships. One interviewee stated that the most important component of a context-responsive teaching approach was “connections with students and relationships with students.” He went on to say that “students need to feel comfortable in a classroom, they need to feel safe . . . they need to know that you really care about them, need to know that you know what you’re talking about. Just developing a relationship with the students, I think, is probably number one.” Another educator stated “a huge part of context is trust. And so if students don’t have any trust in the instructor or the teacher, then learning is going to be difficult at best.” Finally, a third noted that if you could. . .

. . . approach everything from that particular standpoint where your point of view is respected, you know that you have a voice that is going to be heard, not just by the teacher, but by the other students in the classroom . . . you begin to develop a community of trust where you can actually be sincere learners.

These habits of mind and dispositions discussed by teacher educators align closely with those included in the definition of context-responsive teaching presented in Chapter 1.

4.4.4 Graduates reflect on their own context-responsive practices.

The survey of graduates provided a few opportunities for graduates to reflect on their own classroom practices and the extent to which they felt they were enacting elements of context-responsive teaching. One section of the survey offered a list of ten different classroom practices often associated with a culturally-responsive, differentiated, or place-based approach to teaching as asked the survey respondents to indicate if they

engaged in these practices *routinely*, *sometimes*, *occasionally* or *never*. A summary of those responses can be found in the figure 4.1 below.

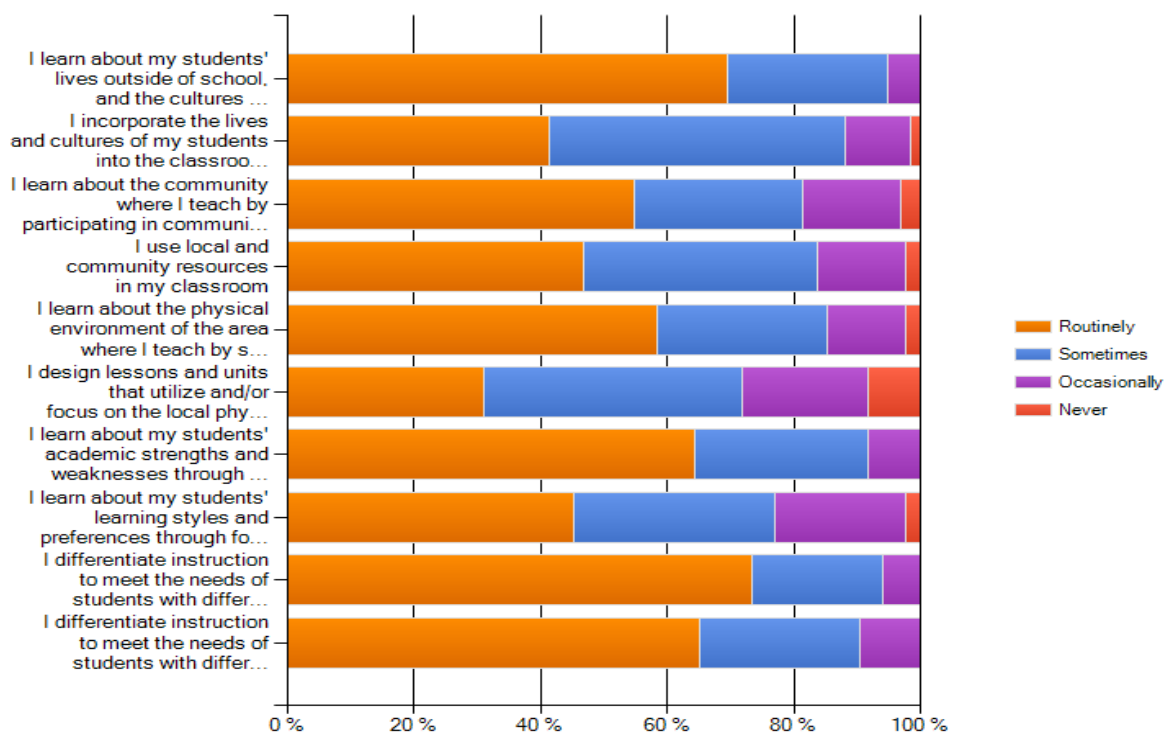


Figure 4.1: Context-responsive teaching practices engaged in by graduates

While the data presented in the chart above is of questionable reliability, as it is the responses of individual teachers reporting on their own classroom practices, it can be presumed that most of the UA graduates surveyed engage in many of the practices associated with culturally responsive teaching and differentiated instruction. The data show that, overall, teachers appear to be more likely to “routinely” learn about their students’ lives and cultures, communities and the physical places where they work than they are likely to proactively incorporate this information into their classroom practices. Of the various aspects of context the teachers are likely to incorporate into their classroom practices, the physical environment is the *least* likely. In regards to differentiation, the teachers are more likely to assess and make accommodations for their students varying academic needs than they are for their different learning styles or preferences.

The chart of responses presented above provide a picture of some of the context-responsive practices teachers engage in in their classrooms, and the extent to which they engage in these practices. In a different area of the survey the graduates were asked “Do you have any suggestions for teacher education programs to better prepare future teachers in (either) culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching or differentiated instruction?” Altogether, the respondents provided 232 answers to this inquiry. Their responses can be examined to get a sense of what *they* feel is important knowledge to possess in order to teach in a context-responsive manner.

4.4.5 Graduate thoughts on what needs to be known about context responsive teaching.

The suggestions of the graduates were clumped in to three main categories: specific courses they felt would be beneficial to support or enhance their context-responsive teaching practices; specific activities they felt would be useful; and specific materials or content they recommended be used. Analyzed collectively, the recommendations cover three main subject areas plus a host of other miscellaneous topics. Recommendations that appeared thematically (i.e. more than two respondents mentioned the subject area) will be discussed.

The need for additional courses, activities and experiences in differentiated instruction was expressed by multiple respondents. More than thirty separate comments were made in this area. Many graduates commented on the need to learn more about differentiated instruction in general, writing comments such as: “More ideas on how to differentiate instruction.” Some said that they’d like to know more about assessing and differentiating for different learning styles:

Learn all you can talk with others about different learning styles and how people in those learning styles learn best. Help students get to know how they learn best and always be willing to learn. Be flexible and assist students, if you find they are not understanding the topic change the way your teaching it.

Others referred to the need to differentiate to meet multiple ability levels in the classroom:

I was not adequately-at all-taught how to realistically differentiate teaching like I do now. Classroom management is key and teaching routines and behaviors so you can work with small groups-that was NOT covered when I went to school-very rude awakening when I got my own full time classroom!

Several expressed that they would have liked to have seen more first hand examples of differentiation in practice:

Teach a class in JUST THIS. Have an entire course set up like a real classroom with mock students. Have teachers do actual lessons and teach a lesson with scenarios that reflect an actual classroom where the learning speeds are vastly different. Recognize that many of us are put into multiage classrooms and the age range can be 3-4 years. Ask experienced teaches what are the resources they use - have mentor teachers help with this.

I wish I had had more hands on experience in exactly what a differentiated classroom might look like when a teacher is using a basal reading program; I also would have loved more experience and practice using centers in my classroom; since my student teaching was in an ability-grouped intermediate classroom, I did not have much practical exposure to differentiation or the use of centers.

Comments were also made regarding the real life need, but also the real life difficulties in meaningfully differentiating:

Putting it into practice is extremely difficult when you have groups of 25-30 students....ideas and experiences that are not incredibly time consuming for the teacher would be helpful...also how to frame it in the classroom so that you aren't hearing cries of "no fair."

Overall, the graduates' comments suggest that they feel differentiating instruction to meet the multiple needs of students from differing backgrounds is an essential part of context-responsive teaching, and should be a strong focus in the preparation and continuing education of K-12 teachers.

A second area of focus in the graduates' comments centered around the importance of both understanding the backgrounds of students and their communities, and on acknowledging and incorporating multiple world views and perspectives in the curriculum and in pedagogical practices. Comments were made regarding content graduates felt was important in this areas such as:

- Take the class Issues in Alaska Native Education from Paul Ontugook
- Keep mandating Alaska Studies courses
- (Require a) course in Culturally Responsive Teaching taught by an expert
- Have a guest speaker come in from Alaska Interior Native Educators to talk about learning styles

Graduates also made suggestions about specific activities they thought would be of value to future educators in encouraging a non-judgmental attitude in the classroom, such as this one:

While "social justice" can create politically charged discussions, I think it is important for oneself to put themselves in different shoes geographically, economically, and culturally. I think videos can be pretty valuable, as well as class discussions. I think it is important to give university students a better idea about the implications of socioeconomic in education, too.

Another graduate commented in the same vein "The exposure of teacher's own biases is powerful. Then, perhaps a broad look into the cultural practices of the well represented ethnicities in the US." Several commented on the need to broaden the definition of "culture" in discussing students' backgrounds and alternative perspectives, saying things like

Create assignments that require teacher ed students to reflect on their own culture and the assumptions that go with them. Have ed students create lessons that clearly reflect their understanding culture in all forms, not just racial/ethnic.

Graduates conveyed their beliefs that an understanding of both their own backgrounds and biases as well as the backgrounds of their students was an important part of context-responsive teaching.

The third major topic in the graduates' comments centered around the subject of place- and community-based teaching practices, the importance of connecting content to the lives of the students and of inventorying and using community resources. Some asked for a specific class on place- or community-based education with comments such as "I would suggest a place based class as part of the MAT program" and "I think offering a class that relates directly to the community and its history would be a great offering. Along with that, getting out into the community and exploring the unique history would be beneficial." Others made a plea for more experience with place- or community-based teaching in action:

- Student teachers should be required to incorporate a placed based lesson into student teaching. I did one with mapping and it helped me gain a thorough understanding of the concept and I have incorporated the concept into my teaching quite a bit in the last two years.
- Actually require them to create a place based unit and to carry it out, not just plan it on paper. You learn by doing--ha, place-based!
- Have teacher ed students participate in a place-based lesson/unit so they can actually see and experience how it works, don't just talk about it and expect students to "get it."
- More concrete examples of how real teachers do place based teaching in the classroom
- Incorporating more hands-on activities during certification. I would have loved an entire hands-on course where we actually participated in a place-based project created by someone else to model what an effective program might look like
- Show how LOCAL teachers are using resources in their communities.

Graduates also said they would like to know more about how to connect the district content with the lives of their students:

Have teacher prep programs more up on what programs (SRA, Harcourt, etc.) are taught and how you can incorporate (place-based education) WITH those programs that you are required to teach.

One commented that s/he felt it was important to “expose new teachers to how to take fieldtrips.” Overall, the graduates’ comments suggested that they would have liked to have had more first hand experience with place- and community-based teaching and would like to see how it looks in practice.

Finally, the survey respondents commented on a few other areas worthy of mentioning that they felt were important parts of the knowledge needed to teach in a context-responsive manner. A few mentioned the need to know more about strategies for working with English language learners (“I wish I had left the university knowing how to assess children and respond to the needs of low-income learners and English Language Learners.”) Two comments were made in relation to promoting parent involvement (e.g. “Focus more on promoting parent involvement”). Another couple of comments were made regarding knowledge of assessment strategies, such as “We learn how to assess students, but never specifics on how to apply this to our curriculum.” These additional comments reflect other areas practicing teachers feel are important components of a context-responsive teaching approach.

4.5 Discussion on the Alignment Between Data and the Definition of Context-Responsive Teaching Presented in Chapter One

When the elements of context-responsive teaching, as discussed and reported by the graduate survey respondents and the interviewed teacher educators are compared to the research and literature based definition of context responsive teaching articulated in Chapter 1, much consistency can be found. The definition presented in Chapter 1 draws from the literature base of culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching, differentiated instruction and family, community, and school collaborations. The graduate survey data questioned teacher certification graduates in relation to their preparation and practices in three of the same four areas: culturally responsive teaching; place-based

teaching; and differentiated instruction.⁵ The interviews with teacher educators asked about pedagogical practices that had teachers learning *about, from, with or through* their students, their families, and the communities and places and what their thoughts were in regards to the necessity of understanding and incorporating context (students lives and families, communities, local resources and natural places) when teaching. When comparing the elements of context-responsive teaching discussed by graduates and teacher educators to the research-based definition of context-responsive teaching from Chapter 1, few elements were overlooked or not mentioned.

The definition of context-responsive teaching presented in Chapter 1 (and also included in summarized chart form as Appendix A) includes information on what teachers need to know about students, families, communities and place; who teachers can learn from; larger and smaller acts of context-responsive teaching in classroom practice; pedagogical approaches aligned with context-responsive teaching; and necessary habits of mind for context-responsive teaching. Ideas about how, where, and from whom this information can be gathered is also discussed in Chapter 1. Both graduates and teacher educators emphasized the need for context-responsive teachers to know their students, families, and communities well, and offered suggestions as to how to gather this information. There were few references made to the need to know and understand local places and natural environments by either the graduates or the teacher educators, although as data in Chapter 5 will show many teacher educators felt place-based knowledge *should* be included in preparation programs, and many graduates had suggestions on how this learning might occur. Knowledge and understanding of the local natural place consistently took a back seat in the data to knowledge of the human environment (communities, families, students) when teaching, although Chapter 6 will show that graduates and teacher educators would like to understand and incorporate place more.

Many references were made, mostly by teacher educators, to the habits of mind necessary to enact context-responsive teaching. The need to have good listening skills, to

⁵ As discussed in Chapter 3, the decision to add parent, community and school collaborations to the definition of context-responsive teaching was not made until after the survey had been distributed.

develop strong relationships, to learn from non-traditional sources, to share power with students, parents and community members in learning environments, and to recognize and respect multiple perspectives and world views was mentioned in many interviews. Recommendations in Chapter 6 will also show that graduates value and respect these dispositions, and are looking for more opportunities to develop them in their pre-service certification programs.

The scope of the data makes it difficult to accurately assess the extent to which graduates are utilizing context-responsive practices in their own classrooms, as the data on their classroom practices was self-reported and therefore lacking reliability. Comments made on the survey, along with references made by teacher educators regarding elements of their context-responsive pre-service preparation (discussed in the next chapter) suggest that while efforts are being made to connect the contextual lives of the students to the academic content, this is an area of teaching that is still being developed. References in Chapter 1 show that extensive curriculum resources exist to help teachers enact context-responsive teaching in both large and small ways. However, graduates still appear unsure as to how to best make connections between context and content, even though they know it is important. Recommendations presented in Chapter 6 will show that the ability to *apply contextual knowledge in the classroom* is an area of need in teacher preparation programs.

Finally, in comparing the definition of context-responsive teaching with the understandings of data collection group, comments from both graduates and teacher educators suggest that the pedagogical practices aligned with context-responsive teaching are being promoted in preparation programs and are practiced by some teachers. References were made to the value and need for differentiation, the use of curriculum focused on understanding, the practice of purposefully and positively responding to language and linguistic differences, and practices that encouraged self-reflection and critical analysis of resources.

Chapter 5 will look in depth at the graduate survey data and teacher educator interviews to find out what teacher certification programs are doing to help prepare teachers for the context-responsive practices described in this chapter and in Chapter 1.

Chapter Five: Presentation of Findings Part Two

What are pre-service elementary and secondary teacher education programs in the State of Alaska doing to help future educators learn from, through, with and about their students, families, communities and places? What are they doing to help them learn how to integrate this knowledge into their practices and curriculum in a meaningful manner? This chapter will examine the data collected in this research project in an attempt to create a portrait of context-responsive teacher preparation in the state of Alaska today. Statistical and narrative data from the survey of graduates of Alaska's teacher preparation programs will be examined as will the data from interviews of teacher educators. Practices and resources mentioned in both sources will be evaluated relative to the description of context-responsive teacher preparation painted from the review of literature on teacher preparation in Chapter 2. Data from both sources will be presented and examined concurrently. The chapter will begin by examining evidence of practices and resources discussed by graduates and teacher educators that provided the knowledge and skills necessary to enact context responsive teaching. Next, the data will be examined to look for evidence of preparatory practices and activities that incorporate experiential components, that ask pre-service teachers to apply the knowledge gained from experiential components in the classroom and/or that require pre-service teachers to make connections between local resources and the district curriculum. Graduate experiences with post-certification professional development activities that contributed to their growth in context-responsive teaching will then be considered. The chapter will conclude by looking at graduate and teacher educators thoughts and comments regarding the larger issues of context-responsive teaching in the "real world" and broader issues in teacher preparation.

5.1 Teacher Preparation for Context-Responsive Knowledge and Skills

5.1.1 Activities and materials to learn about students, families, language and worldviews.

As the focus of this research project was on determining the activities and materials pre-service preparation programs in Alaska are currently using to help future educators learn from, through, with and about their students, families, communities and places, a good number of questions on the graduate survey addressed this topic specifically. Graduates were given a list of thirteen different ways various topics may have been integrated or addressed in their preparation program and asked to check all that applied to their program experiences. The response summary to each of these questions is presented and discussed below. Figure 5.1 shows the activities graduates reported they engaged in related to **culturally responsive teaching** (defined in the survey as “Teaching that acknowledges, incorporates and affirms the diverse racial, ethnic, economic and linguistic characteristics of the students in the classroom”).

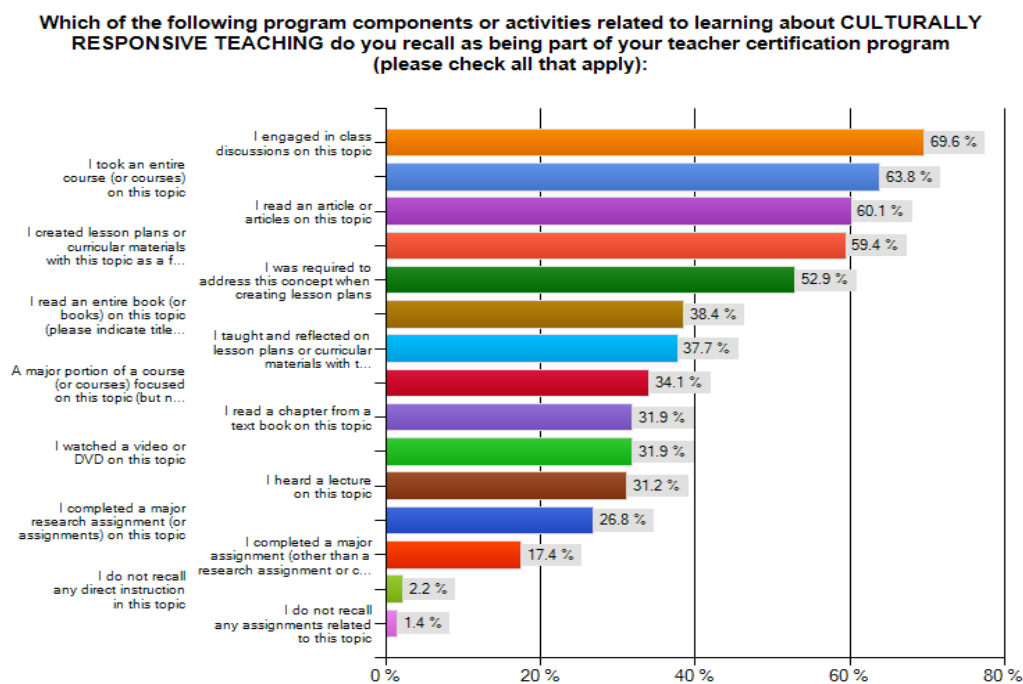


Figure 5.1: Culturally responsive teacher preparation activities

As is clear from the bar chart, nearly 70% of the respondents reported having had engaged in a class discussion on culturally responsive teaching. Additionally, over 60% reported having taken an entire course on the topic. 60% stated that they had created lesson plans or curricular materials with this topic as a focus, and 53% said that they had to address cultural issues when creating lesson plans or other curriculum. As far as materials used to teach the subject area, 60% said they read an article or article(s) on culturally responsive teaching and about 40% said they read an entire book on the subject. DVDs, videos or lectures were used to address issues of culturally responsive teaching in 30% of the respondents preparation programs. 27% of the respondents stated that they completed a research project related to culturally responsive teaching. The fact that twice as many respondents stated that they had been required to apply the ideas of culturally responsive teaching in lesson plans or curriculum construction rather than simply researching the topic suggests that the preparation programs are making an attempt to encourage pre-service teachers to be culturally responsive *in their classroom practices*. Only 2% of respondents stated that they did not recall any direct instruction or assignments related to the topic of culturally responsive teaching.

The survey of graduates also asked a series of thirteen questions regarding the extent to which various aspects of context-responsive teaching practices had been addressed in their preparation program. Table 5.1 summarizes the percentage of respondents stating that they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that a component of culturally responsive teaching had been addressed in their program.

Table 5.1: *Culturally responsive knowledge and skills in teacher preparation programs*

Questions on specific culturally responsive knowledge and skills addressed in teacher preparation programs	% responding agree or strongly agree
My teacher preparation program adequately prepared me to teach in a manner that meets the diverse interests, needs and backgrounds of the students I currently teach	75
I was taught how to learn about my students, their backgrounds, and their cultures	80
I was taught how to design and implement instruction that incorporates the lives of my students, their backgrounds, and cultures	73
The skills and information I learned relative to CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING directly impact my current classroom practices	72

The percentages of respondents stating that their preparation program had adequately prepared them to teach in a manner that met the diverse interests, needs and backgrounds of the students they currently teach, that they were taught to learn about their students, their backgrounds and their cultures, and that they were taught to design and implement instruction that incorporates the lives of their students, their backgrounds and their cultures is relatively high. A strong majority (72%) also report that the information they learned on this topic in their preparation program has directly impacted their current classroom practices. This confirms the data presented in the earlier bar chart suggesting that most graduates feel that the topic of culturally responsive teaching has been adequately addressed in their programs. As Chapter 6 will demonstrate, however, the graduates still have *many* suggestions for improving their preparation in this area.

The narrative responses of graduates on the topic of culturally responsive teaching, wherein they provided specific information on resources they recall being used or activities they recalled having completed offer a more complete picture of the culturally responsive teaching components included in their preparation. The graduates named twenty-three different specific books or other materials that they recall being used in their teacher preparation programs relative to culturally responsive teaching. The most

commonly cited resource was video presentations on culture by Father Michael Oleksa, a Russian Orthodox Priest and expert on cross-cultural issues who has been in Alaska since 1970. According to his website (www.fatheroleksa.org) his presentations are “devoted to a discussion of cultures and how they effect us all, how our own culture focuses on certain aspects of reality and neglects others.” Ten separate respondents cited the videos as having been used in culturally responsive instruction. The next most common material (cited by six respondents) was brochures and information on Alaska’s Cultural Standards and culturally responsive practices published by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (www.ankn.org) (Alaska_Native_Knowledge_Network, 1998). Five others cited the late Dr. Oscar Kawagley’s book *A Yupiaq Worldview: A Pathway to Ecology and Spirit* (2006) as having been used in their preparation program to address issues of cultural responsiveness, and another five listed the title *Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K 12 Anti Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development* (Lee, 1998). Nineteen other titles or specific resources were cited once by individual respondents.

Forty-eight narrative comments were made describing major assignments or projects graduates remembered having completed related to culturally responsive teaching. The most commonly cited activity was preparation of a lesson plan or unit related to an aspect of Alaska Native culture (ten respondents), although it was not stated whether or not the curriculum was actually taught to a group of students. Eight respondents stated that they had to “write lesson plans addressing this” or “incorporate culture into lesson plans.” One respondent specified that “for every lesson plan I created during my student teaching I was required to list the Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools.” Several graduates mentioned that they had completed a group project investigating an Alaska Native region and/or cultural group and others referred to completing a “cultural project” although it was not clear what the parameters of that project might have been. A few graduates recalled having completed an activity that required them to reflect carefully on their own culture and/or consider the cultural perspectives of others. Some examples of this include, “We brought show & tell items to present as a project; items we felt were culturally essential to our lives.” and “A power

point about my community and the cultural diversity here/not here.” Other activities mentioned include a regional history paper and an assignment on “how language acquisition influences later literacy skills.” Several other activities or assignments were mentioned in the narrative responses describing activities graduates considered addressed the subject of culturally responsive teaching which will be discussed in the next section on place-based teaching as they fall more appropriately under that heading.

Teacher educators from the three universities described a variety of activities that were designed to help pre-service teachers learn more about students, families, and language backgrounds, or that were designed to help them reflect on their own backgrounds and worldviews. As the discussion in this chapter is attempting to separate out activities that provide background knowledge and skills from those that incorporate first-hand experiences or require an application of knowledge in a real world context, the program components described in this section will be limited to those focusing on context-responsive knowledge and skills.

Teacher educators from across the state made reference to activities in their programs designed to help pre-service teachers learn more about their students, and created to provide opportunities for intern teachers to consider future interactions and relationships with parents and families. One educator described an activity where, “I have them put together a resource file that includes a student contact form so that they can find out contact information on the students, but also get to know their kids a little bit.” Another described an observation activity where “they observe an ESL student or whatever they’re interested in learning more about. And it kind of helps them get a range of activities beyond one student, but get a feel for a specific interest or a unique interest other than just the average span.” A few described activities that consider parent communication and collaboration such as the development of a classroom management plan which had to include information about communication with parents, or a requirement that they complete a parent conference. One educator described such an activity thusly:

With parent conferences, we spend time talking about families and parents and how you might get at what parent expectations are, what kind of support parents can provide at home or do provide at home, what's their communication with their student. And then what's their experience of the students learning? We spend some time looking at those kind of pieces. And then they do their parent conference, which is a very traditional either arena style or face to face kind of mini-appointment while you wait outside the door style.

Another teacher educator mentioned a family interview that pre-service teachers are required to complete, which they then de-brief in class through a half-hour presentation and a reflection paper.

Teacher educators described a variety of activities designed to help pre-service teachers reflect critically on their own worldview or cultural lenses. One described a course she teaches that focuses on this:

It's a philosophy course, basically, but the way I teach the course, I look at how a student goes about, how a person goes about looking deeply into their own beliefs and their own belief systems; how do you analyze, how you critically evaluate that, how to make sure that your moral self is congruent with your beliefs. How you understand yourself as a person so that you can then move to be a good understander of others.

The same teacher educator also mentioned that she has the students learn ethnographic techniques of observation . . .

so that students begin to learn how to move from direct observation of details, description, to making good inferences based on what they're seeing and try to move away from their own prejudices and other ways that -- other kinds of thinking that actually causes them to jump to conclusions about children, about the teacher, about teaching itself.

In the same vein of helping pre-service teachers think more deeply about alternative worldviews and consider things from alternative perspectives, several teacher

educators discussed resources that provided a window into opinions and experiences with schooling and education through a different lens. One stated:

We're using "Alaska Native Education: Views From Within," and we use this book, actually, in several courses . . . because a lot of these students have really no awareness of what Alaska Native life is like and what the perspectives and points of view might be. So that's a really great eye opener and a great way to talk about what it means to be different and who's different.

Another interviewee stated:

I've just started using "Privilege, Power, and Difference" (by) Allan Johnson who's a sociologist, white, male, and talks about privilege. I used an excerpt of that to try and provoke awareness of privilege, the idea of privilege, that it's not something you can give up, it's not something you opted into. If you are a person of privilege, you need to recognize what that privilege is. And you need to recognize that privilege comes at a cost and that it always, you know, comes at a cost to somebody else. So if I am privileged in some way, it's costing somebody else in another way.

A teacher educator from a different institution described a similar program component:

We have the philosophical and social context of American education which has an emphasis on Alaska Native education as well. And we use the Nieto book which I think is excellent in terms of helping students walk in some different shoes. There are a lot of personal accounts from students who are of different race or ethnicity and they discuss their experience in school and what was hard, what was good, what worked for them in terms of teaching, what worked for them in terms of content.

Teacher educators appear to be making concerted efforts to help pre-service teachers consider their own backgrounds and worldviews and to also give them opportunities to view the world from a different perspective through readings, reflections and activities.

The need for pre-service teachers to understand issues of language acquisition, linguistics and language use was reflected in several comments made by teacher

educators. One teacher educator said, “We definitely look at SIOP and talk about everything from having objectives on the board to paying attention to the quietest kid in the class, because that’s the one that needs your help the most.” Another described an activity to help pre-service teachers learn about body language, stating “Students are videotaped in another class in the fall. And that is real meaningful for them when they see what their facial expressions are throughout the class, that they realize how the slightest emotion on their face can transfer judgment.” At another institution, an educator said “We have Foundations in Literacy and Language Development (where) we're trying to get students thinking about emergent language with ESL students. So if a student comes in from anywhere, including villages where English is a second language, then we can be more mindful of what that's like for a student and how that works for a student.” A faculty member from yet a different institution stated “We have a linguistics course which does focus on place-based because you’re looking at maps of why people in certain areas are using one language instead of another and what are the boundaries, and what are the barriers that have prevented people from working more closely with one another.” All three institutions appear to place a high value on the need for pre-service teachers to learn about language acquisition, linguistics and language usage and have incorporated activities and requirements related to these topics into their pre-service programs.

5.1.2 Activities and materials to learn about communities and places.

Figure 5.2 shows the activities graduates reported having been included in their program relative to **place-based education**, defined in the survey as “teaching that is connected to and/or derived from the local environment and community in which the school is located.”

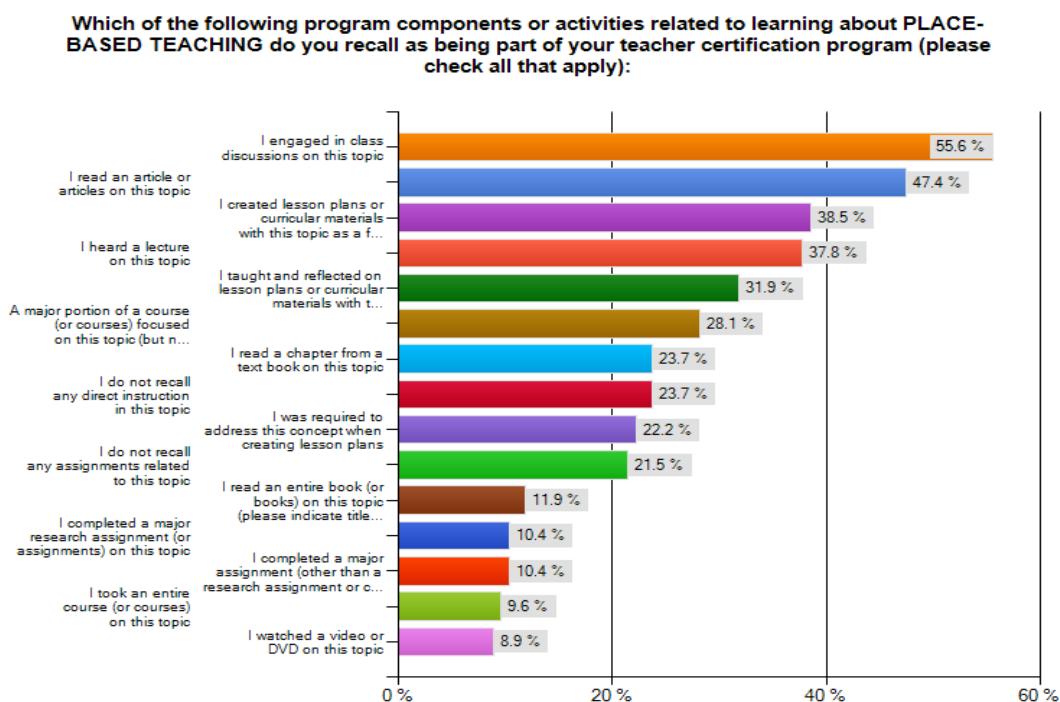


Figure 5.2: Place-based teacher preparation activities

The bar graph demonstrates that although nearly half of the graduates engaged in a class discussion or read an article on place-based education, only 10% report having taken an entire course on the topic. This figure stands in comparison to the 64% who reported having taken a class on the topic of culturally responsive teaching. Approximately a third of the graduate responders said they had created place-based lesson plans or curricular materials, and slightly less than a third reported that they had actually taught with and reflected on place-based curriculum materials. 22% of the graduates reported that they did not recall any direct instruction in place-based teaching.

The survey asked the graduates if they agreed or disagreed that various practices associated with place-based teaching had been addressed in their preparation programs. Table 5.1 below shows that roughly 60-70% of the graduate respondents felt that their program had taught them how to talk to students, parents and community members to find out what is important and valued in their minds, how to learn about the community and local environment where their school was located or how to connect the community they were teaching in to the curriculum of their school. These figures are lower than those

pertaining to culturally-responsive knowledge and skills learned in the pre-service programs.

Table 5.2: *Place-based knowledge and skills in teacher preparation programs*

Questions on specific place-based knowledge and skills addressed in teacher preparation programs	% responding agree or strongly agree
I was taught how to talk to students, parents and community members to find out what is important and valued in their minds	64
I was taught how to learn about the community where my school is located, in order to better teach my students	76
I was taught how to learn about the local environment where my school is located, in order to better teach my students	67
I was taught how to connect the community I am teaching in to the curriculum of my school	63
The skills and information I learned relative to PLACE-BASED TEACHING directly impact my current classroom practices	56 (16% said they did not learn about this topic)

As the last question on this table makes clear, only half of the graduate felt that the knowledge and skills they had learned relative to place-based teaching directly impacted their classroom practices, while 16% responded that they did not learn about the topic at all (a figure aligned with the bar graph on place-based components of preparation programs). It is important to note, however, that many respondents discussed and referred to program elements designed to help them learn about and make connections with the local community in their responses to the questions on culturally responsive teaching. Although the survey defined “place-based teaching” as teaching derived from the local environment *and* the community, it appears as though most of the graduates considered preparatory activities that pertained to only the local environment when responding to the place-based set of questions. This does not suggest that their categorization is wrong, simply that the statistical responses above may only reflect the extent to which the natural environment is incorporated into pre-service preparation activities and not place as a whole, including *community*.

When reporting on the materials and resources used in their preparatory programs that they considered related to “place-based education” the graduates named only one book consistently: Place-Based Education by David Sobel (2004). No other books were named by title, although some Alaska specific websites were mentioned such as the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (www.ankn.org) and www.alaskool.org. Activities designed to have pre-service teachers learn about local communities, develop lessons connected to the local area or familiarize themselves with place-based curriculum materials were described in responses to the questions on place-based teaching as well as those on culturally responsive teaching. Eleven references were made to projects designed to learn about local communities, with example descriptions being “I created a PowerPoint presentation about our local cemetery with the focus on what it told about our community” or “We created a slide show that gave a tour of what types of homes, businesses, and other facilities were within our school’s boundaries.” Several references were made to an activity where the students “broke into groups and chose an AK Native group and village within that area. We then created an interdisciplinary set of lesson plans that were meant to be particular to that area.” One respondent expressed that s/he completed “lesson plans for an imaginary village, imaginary children (and) it was a “major” assignment in that it took a lot of time but was not a “major” part of my actual education.”

Thirteen respondents on the graduate survey indicated that they had created a unit or lesson plans based on the local area as part of their teacher preparation program. Some of the topics mentioned included salmon, relocation of Alaska Native people, Fairbanks history, intertidal bio-geography in coastal Alaska, local plants of Juneau, petroleum refining and products, the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta, Juneau wetlands, the history of fishing in Kodiak, and local tides. It was not clear if the lessons or units were then taught to K-12 students or if they were for hypothetical use. Several other place-based activities were mentioned including interest-based maps of the local area, GIS activities, a “place-based education plan” (specifics were not provided), and an art project on Alaskan artists.

A few graduates also mentioned having been exposed to place-based curriculum materials such as Project Learning Tree or Math in a Cultural Context.

Interviewed teacher educators made many references to activities designed to help pre-service teachers learn about local communities, contexts and the local natural environment. Many program faculty mentioned courses, activities or assignments that involved gathering information on the local community and/or incorporating that information into a curriculum unit. Some descriptions include:

There's this school community study and it has several parts. To develop familiarity with school, community, business, other organizations; identify physical characteristics to cultural influences; identify resources within a community; identify outside-of-school organizations, and patterns of activity that might influence students.

We do a school-communities study, where you get to know the demographics of your school and community.

-- it's basically a community study course, where we engage the students in looking not just at their school, but looking at the school and saying, "And what is the important part of that school in terms of where the culture, the socioeconomic, and all of that together?" It's part of the recognition that you can't just walk into a classroom and look at the students and say, "Oh, this is what all the students need," without knowing where they're coming from and, you know, the culture and community from which they come.

Other teacher educators described similar activities that asked pre-service teachers to investigate both the local community and the physical and natural places around the school. Some examples of activities designed to help students learn about the local place include:

They also create a sense of place assignment, in which they create a Google Earth map of their school and the local environment around it that has components that

are directly in line with the social studies, looking at the local historical landmarks, natural landmarks, animals that live there, possible walks, and integrating that environment and cultural and economic factors into the curriculum.

“How Well Do You Know Your Place?” I will be using that with my students. I just think it's very telling for them -- to just simply create an awareness of how much they don't know about place. I'm using the (list of questions) on how well you know place and how well do you know your culture.⁶

In our social studies course, the students develop assignments that help them learn about the context of their own community but they share that with others in the class.

Interviewed teacher educators also described assignments that required pre-service teachers to either work individually or in groups to develop curricular resources with connections to the local community or that integrated local resources. Example of those project descriptions include

The other thing is they do a big unit, multicultural unit, that's interdisciplinary. And they are supposed to represent one culture of Alaska. So that, if they have a preference, they can choose for whatever region of Alaska, cultural region they'd like to go for. And they can even pick any site within that region. So if they're looking at the northwest Arctic area or the coastal area, they could choose Kotzebue, Point Hope, Barrow, Atkasuk, anywhere that they think they'd want to look at. And then they design their unit around something that would be specific to that community.

In their general methods class, they do have a place-based assignment. They have to integrate local resources. And they develop that and they teach it as an in-class

⁶ This is a reference to the list of questions in the 1988 article by the Scollons

model of teaching within the context of that class . . . they're teaching it in front of the other interns.

We've made a really strong effort to have science classes in which students connect their learning about chemistry, geology, biology to the place where they are. You learn about it in different ways depending on where you are. The geology of the land and rivers where you are. Not as much as we would hope comes from our science classes, but we do have some excellent science instruction.

In relation to teaching pre-service teachers about community and place, teacher educators also spoke about the ways in which *they* incorporated local resources, history and contextual information into their own teaching or program requirements. Some examples of this include:

(In this class) we had people coming in from small villages to talk to us, a couple presentations there, people would realize what role the community plays in different places besides here. That was part of the goal with having speakers come in that have lived in villages, or hail from villages, so that they understand the support that you can garnish in a community and what you need to be aware of.

“Issues in Alaska Native Education” is another course that they need to take.

The degree includes many components that wouldn't be found in many other places to ensure to the best of our ability that students who complete our programs have an understanding of the context of education in Alaska, the history of education in Alaska, and the current situation relative particularly to rural Alaska. The largest minority population we have is Alaska Native students, and there is no place other than Alaska where you can come to know and understand Alaska Native people and Alaska Native students. So our curriculum includes a number

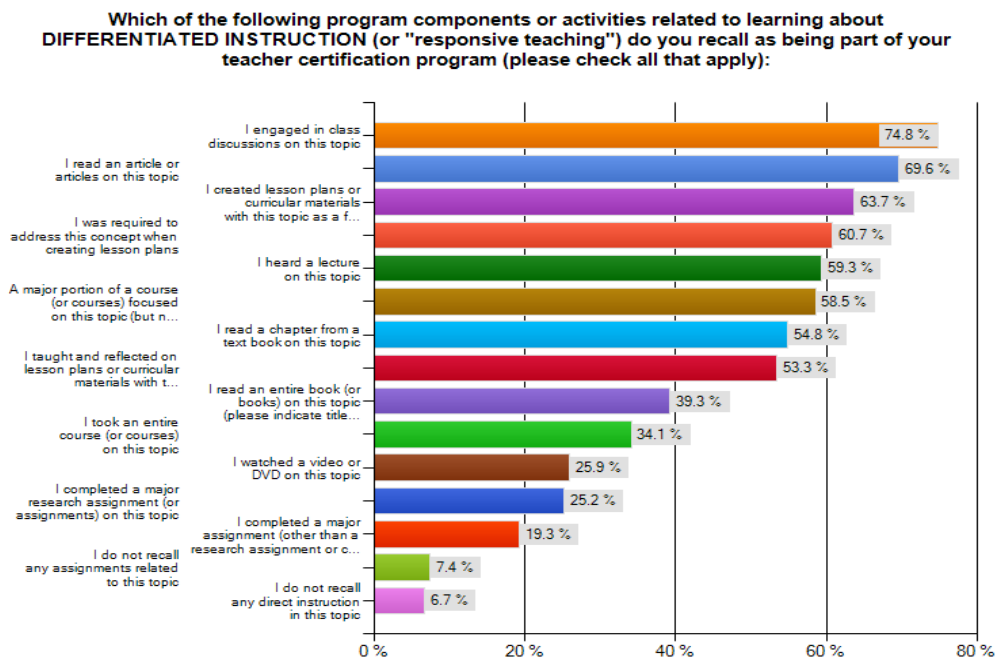
of course that focus specifically on the Alaskan context and embedded specifically in our education courses, there is Alaskan context in all of them.

Even in our intro to ed courses, students have to bring in and include things about their own community and their own school context in some of their assignments. I guess I should also state that something that we've made a very strong effort to include in our courses is an understanding of the concept of place-based education. That you simply can not and should not teach and deliver the same curriculum regardless of where you are in the state of Alaska. There are significant differences, and there is absolutely no reason for teachers and our interns to not use materials and develop assignments and assessments that are relative meaningful and authentic for the place in which the students are living. Finally, although many teacher educators felt they had components of their program that allowed their students to learn about the local community and school context, two commented that they felt their programs really did not include much information about the local natural environment. When asked if there were activities in their program that required students to find out more about the natural environment, one responded "Not really. And we kind of talked about it . . . three years ago," while another said "I can't think of that specifically. It is very possible that they might have some (science) lesson plans or something that are just somehow connected to their environment there. But as something in general for the entire program, I can't think of anything right off."

5.1.3 Activities and materials to learn about pedagogical approaches associated with context-responsive teaching.

Figure 5.3 shows the activities graduates report having participated in relative to **differentiated instruction**, defined in the survey as "Teaching that responds to different levels of student readiness, interests, and learning styles or preferences through modifications to curricular content, classroom processes and procedures, the use of different forms of assessment, and the classroom environment."

Figure 5.3: Differentiated instruction teacher preparation activities



As Figure 5.3 demonstrates, although only 35% of survey respondents report having taken an entire course devoted to the topic of differentiation, 59% stated that the topic of differentiation was a major portion of a course or courses taken during their teacher preparation. Only 7% stated that they did not receive any direct instruction in differentiation as part of their teacher preparation. A majority of respondents (70%) indicated that they developed differentiated lesson plans or curricular materials, while 60% reported that they had to address differentiation as a component of their lesson plan writing. Forty percent of respondents stated that they had read an entire book devoted to the topic of differentiation as part of their teacher preparation, approximately the same amount as reported this in regards to culturally responsive teaching.

In the comments that followed this question, eight respondents cited a book by Tomlinson as the text they had read on differentiation. Two others referred to the Understanding by Design curriculum framework as a resource related to differentiated instruction, and four other specific titles were mentioned once. As for activities that graduates reported having had completed related to differentiated instruction, seven

specifically said that they were required to include a plan for differentiation in all of their lesson plans, making comments such as “All of the units and lessons that I created had differentiate instruction components. I always had to write up, how I was going to respond to their readiness, interests and learning styles.” One followed up that comment confessing “In all honesty, there was a paragraph that I just cut and pasted most of the time about giving slower students more time and trying to assign extra work for students who completed work more quickly.” Five students said that they wrote a paper on differentiation, and another six reported having created differentiated curricular materials but not having used the materials in a classroom with K-12 kids. Six indicated that they had created a lesson plan or unit that required differentiation for multiple ability levels stating, for example, “read, analyzed and designed ways to use a wide variety of literature to support readers at all levels.” Another seven survey respondents described activities or assignments that incorporated differentiation for different learning styles. Examples of this included “read a book as a class and used a variety of strategies to understand it” and “I had to create various lessons and units related to the different learning styles of a myriad of students.” One respondent included in this section a reference to the Understanding by Design curriculum framework, stating “We did tons of lesson plan assignments and their creation was based on the framework of backwards design and differentiated instruction.”

As with the other topics covered in the graduate survey, several questions specific to the knowledge and skills associated with differentiated instruction were included. The percentage of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that these skills had been included in their preparatory program are reported in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3: *Differentiated instruction knowledge and skills in teacher preparation programs*

Questions on specific differentiated instruction knowledge and skills addressed in teacher preparation programs	% responding agree or strongly agree
I was taught how to assess the different academic levels of my students	73
I was taught how to determine the different learning styles of my students	72
I was taught how to adapt my instruction to meet the different learning styles and academic levels of my students	72
The skills and information I learned relative to DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION (or “responsive teaching”) directly impact my current classroom practices	79

As the numbers show, nearly 80% of the respondents felt that their teacher preparation in differentiated instruction directly impacted their current classroom practices in this area. Around 72% of the survey respondents felt that they had been taught through their program how to assess different academic levels and learning styles, and that they had been taught how to adapt their instructional practices to meet the diverse needs of their students.

In their interviews, several teacher educators made reference to some of the pedagogical approaches associated with context-responsive teaching, including differentiated instruction, curriculum development emphasizing student understanding, and the use of multiple assessment strategies. On the subject of differentiation, one interviewee stated:

We do a really highly developed differentiated lesson as one of the projects. And they have to differentiate in terms of either the objectives, the activities, the materials. They really have to be separate assignments, three levels of assignments or learning style, but they have to differentiate. And we use the Tomlinson text for that.

Another said:

With our seniors, they're taking a curriculum design and differentiated instruction course their senior year. And I feel that's very important, that differentiated instruction. You know, everyone comes in at a different level and they learn at different levels, so the differentiated instruction, I feel that I'm really trying to make my students understand the importance of differentiating their instruction in a classroom.

On the subject of curriculum design, the same interviewee stated:

I feel that the Understanding by Design model with Carol Tomlinson, Jay McTighe, Grant Wiggins, I feel that that is such an important method of teaching our students to make it meaningful. The Understanding by Design model is so critical, having essential questions, (and) a backwards design model.

An interviewed teacher educator also described a portion of a culminating assignment in the preparation program, a teacher work sample, as including requirements for differentiation:

The final piece of it is that they reflect on three students: one who did well, one who did sort of as expected, and one who was disappointing. And that's interesting for them because then they're supposed to look at that and talk about what would be the next step or how would they do it differently. So they have a lot of practice in this differentiation.

The interviewed teacher educators did not make a significant number of references to program components emphasizing pedagogical approaches aligned with context-responsive teaching. The reason for this is not likely to be that these approaches are not included in programs, rather that the interview protocol focused on program components relative to learning about students, families, communities and physical places rather than on associated pedagogical approaches.

5.2 Experiential Components of Context-Responsive Teacher Preparation

Having now examined the survey and interview data to learn more about the components of Alaska's teacher preparation programs designed to help teachers acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to teach in a context-responsive manner, attention

will be turned to the program components that give pre-service teachers the opportunity to learn about context first-hand and/or apply this knowledge in the classroom with K-12 students. To learn more about the field-based and experiential components that help prepare context-responsive teachers, narrative survey data describing program components was reviewed along with the transcribed interviews with teacher educators. This section will describe elements of teacher preparation programs that provide first hand field-based experiences (most outside of the classroom) learning about kids, families, communities and places; components that require pre-service teachers to apply this knowledge in the classroom; and components that require pre-service teachers to make connections between the mandated academic curriculum and the local context.

5.2.1 Field-based experiences learning about kids, families, communities and places.

The graduate survey comments on program components contain approximately ten comments related to field-based activities allowing pre-service teachers to learn about kids, families, communities and places. Graduates refer to community research projects that required forays into the neighborhoods surrounding schools, requirements to attend community events and interview or interact with elders in the community, and teaching activities that centered on having students share information on themselves and their families. Three comments were made in reference to having participated in a “rural practicum” wherein the pre-service teachers spent up to two weeks in a small Alaska Native community not near their own community. As the references to these activities were made in the comments section of the on-line survey not much detail was included about the components or parameters of the experiences.

Teacher educators also described several field-based experiences, and as they were interviewed, provided more detail than the graduates. Several described projects requiring pre-service teachers to venture out into communities to gather information such as this:

If it’s not place-based, its nothing out there (in rural Alaska). And we have cultural liaisons who are community members that really are mentors for the

intern teachers. And we partner with them. I have had assignments where I ask students to drive around their neighborhood, do the bus route of their students and go to their churches and that sort of thing.

An innovative community-based project was described by one teacher educator in detail:

We're having them develop handbooks around language families. In our community, there's 90-some languages. And now they've got notebooks for about all of them. In the notebooks you had things like, so, who are the cultural leaders in this community? Who are the respected elders? Who do I need to go to if I've got a question about religious holidays? Who do I go to if I'm having trouble getting students to school? And where are the places that the kids hang out? What kinds of activities are they involved in? After school and on weekends, what does their life look like? Who do I call to come into the school who's volunteered to come in at a moment's notice and serve as a translator? As well as they create things -- what we call them are refrigerator sheets. So you find somebody to translate bus schedules, the current school calendar, contact information for the school, instructions on what to do about absences, all that kind of stuff that they need to know. You get it translated so that when a kid shows up, you can hand them that in their native language so they can take it home and hang it up on the refrigerator. But all of that means going out and collecting that information. And the hardest part for getting through to the students is you can't just go to one person. They don't seem to understand that there are divisions within the Hmong community. Just because everybody's coming from the Sudan doesn't mean that they're all in the same tribal groups or have the same affinity for each other. And so it's those nuances that are also important.

Another teacher educator described a project in her Families and Communities class that required students to partner with a local community organization:

Interviewee: In the past, I've worked with -- this year we're doing Salvation Army Family Center. What else have we worked with? We've worked with the preschool on campus, which there's some diversity. You know, they're faculty

and student children. I've worked with Indian Ed, and an after school program for the school district, which was a really great experience. Who else have we worked with? A local Cooperative Preschool.

Interviewer: So what do the students do in that assignment with those organizations? They develop an event? What kind of an event?

Interviewee: An event that could be around parent education. It could be around literacy. It can just be like a fall carnival. But the whole point is just to connect with families and just really realize how important a component that is to becoming a teacher.

A home visit requirement was also described by the same teacher educator, who said There is also a component of that class is family interviews. And they are to conduct two separate family interviews, and hopefully a diverse family structure or families that have children with special needs, try to go for diversity. Two family interviews just so they get to know another family's structure and feel some empathy for those parents.

Another program asked the pre-service teachers to interview a teacher to get a better idea of what is involved in teaching social studies. The teacher educator who described that assignment said "That's been very revealing. You know, we get those who say, "I don't have time in my day to teach social studies," and social studies is an add-on, and those who say, "I don't teach social studies because everything we do is social studies and it's all about the social-emotional learning."

Several interviewed teacher educators also described activities or program components that allowed pre-service teachers to work in diverse situations or to find out more about the backgrounds of the students they were teaching. One stated that they had recently moved towards requiring a more diverse fieldwork experience in their culturally responsive teaching course, stating "It's a seminar course with a practicum in a school of diversity. So the diversity can be socioeconomic, so it could be a Title 1 school, could be ESL, could be just a super integrated classroom." Another described a classroom profile assignment that asks students to "take a class that they're in and they actually have to find

out the demographics about the class and look up records for the students and this type of stuff to really find out, you know, what is the makeup of the classroom here.” In a course on classroom management, another teacher educator asks the students to “assess what the community expects of the school in terms of discipline.”

Five different teacher educators from four different programs (secondary and elementary preparation programs at two institutions) described aspects of a rural practicum program component. Their descriptions include the following:

The rural practicum is . . . probably the most meaningful thing we do. It certainly shows that there’s different ways to look at education besides a large high school. Students are coming in the spring, late spring, so there’s been two-thirds of a year ahead that’s preceded their visit. And what happened prior to that? And why are teachers teaching the way they are? Just the whole how do you discuss practice with fellow teachers is huge. And our interns feel a bit intimidated out there. I wish it was a visit where a mentor went or a supervisor went with them just so you can kind of help facilitate the intern’s question asking. Because they tend to feel like their questions might not be appropriate when sometimes they just need to be rephrased, or maybe they are appropriate.

Up until this year we've actually had funding to place students in field experiences in rural Alaska to give them a sense of place. It's very difficult if you haven't been out there to really envision what the reality might be like for the children out there. So it's been very good. The students have responded quite positively to that.

Up until this year, we had, through a federal grant, a rural visit program, which some of our students, probably about 18 students a year in both the elementary and the secondary program, would go spend two weeks in a rural village and work in the schools out there. And then when they came back, they would do presentations to the rest of the students. And that was important to help students

understand, because even in (a large city) you've got a number of students who are coming from rural sites and moving into town.

One of the things that I haven't mentioned is we have a rural practicum. We do everything we can to encourage our interns to spend a week-long practicum in a remote, rural village so they get a firsthand experience of what that is like. We do prioritize people, those who have any kind of an inkling that they might be taking a job in rural Alaska, we push them the hardest to do this. And then those who think they might never do it, if they're able to go on -- if there's room available and they have the desire to go. It's an intensive, 24-hour a day for an entire week experience that they get in the rural practicum because they're eating, living, breathing the culture while they're there. I think that is a huge component.

An instructor in a class a few years ago had the (rural practicum) students create blogs, and so we were constantly updated with the postings that were going on in those villages, the experiences that were going on in those villages, it was eye-opening for faculty. Because, you know, we'd always heard the anecdotes when they came back, but when you're getting kind of that daily dose and it's real-time, I think it has a greater impact. And we saw attitudes that were life-changing.

I also want to mention, I forgot that one of the pieces we have that isn't required - I wish we could require it - is a rural practicum, where students spend time out in a remote rural community and that is one of the most powerful learning experiences that students have and I wish we had the money to provide that option to everyone.

All of the above quoted interviewees felt strongly about the positive value of a rural practicum and wished there was funding available to make the experience available to all of their program participants and not just those who were inclined to teach in rural areas. Another theme of the educator's comments on the structure of their rural practicums was

that they would have liked to have beefed up the faculty mediation and de-briefing elements of the practicums, but that there was not always funding available for university faculty to accompany the pre-service teachers to the rural sites (nearly all of which are located off the road system).

5.2.2 Hands-on experience with context-responsive curriculum.

A handful of graduates and several teacher educators described program components or assignments that required pre-service teachers to create and teach curricular materials that were in some way connected to the local context. Several teacher educators also discussed their program's attempts to closely align their coursework with the field-based experiences of their pre-service teachers and provide them with hands-on opportunities to apply the information they were obtaining in their university classes. Some of the comments that graduates made suggesting they had both created *and taught* in a context-responsive manner include the following:

When I did my student teaching, I was middle school science in a coastal Alaska community. It was easy for me to do an intertidal bio-geography lesson using GIS technology. This is one example of many place-based lessons I did while in teacher education.

We did an art project about Alaskan artists and took a trip down to a local museum. We also did a science unit on tides. Students observed local tides and we studied local Native beliefs about tides.

While several other comments were made about place-based curriculum or unit development (as mentioned in earlier sections) it was unclear whether or not the respondents had had an opportunity to use the materials with K-12 students.

Several activities that required pre-service teachers to not only develop but also *teach* context-responsive curriculum were described in the interviews with teacher educators. One teacher educator described an innovative local artist project in her methods class:

We have a local artist project assignment, which occurs throughout the semester. They work in groups to go interview and meet with a local artist. And then they meet with that artist, they see their work, and they interview them. They have a bunch of interview questions about the process of their work and how they're inspired and what kinds of things fuel their creative process. So they learn about art making from the artist. And then they have to create an artist lesson for their kids that's age appropriate that's based on either the creative process that the artist uses and/or inspired by their work, but not a copy of it. And then they teach it and they share how it went with the whole class so everyone gets to learn those ideas. And then they also send their PowerPoint presentation to the artist so they know what happened.

Another teacher educator described a place-based social studies unit that the pre-service teachers design and teach, stating "they create and teach a week-long or more social studies unit that integrates where it connects to their students that they are working with in their internship year." A teacher educator from a different program, when asked about curriculum derived from the local area, commented "We do lots of units, but to my knowledge, no one asks them to do a unit that is necessarily local. I mean, it depends on how local you're talking about."

A number of comments were made by teacher educators about their on-going attempts to integrate the material presented in their courses (regarding context-responsive approaches, and content area knowledge) with the field-based experiences offered in their programs. Some of these comments follow.

We now have field experiences attached to at least ten of our courses so the students are in the schools, connecting what we're learning in the schools with what's actually happening in the schools, coming back then to classes with questions or projects or ideas that they can then discuss from a point of -- from an informed point of view because they are actually in there, struggling, for a lot of the time.

So we really work hard at connecting the theory and the practice, if that makes sense. And the program structure lends itself to that. And a lot of that is done in our content methods class, you know, here's what we saw, here's what we should do about it, we do something about it, and we come back and talk about it.

There's also a lab component to the two Math for Elementary Teacher courses that are intended to help deepen the pre-service teacher's understanding of the mathematics, but also get a sense of how this might work in a classroom.

The other thing that the elementary ed is doing is we're now beginning to do placements in Title I schools, where kids get more learning with and through classrooms with kids in Title I programs. But we're also putting them into ELL programs and situations. Not as much as I'd like. I mean, it's typically only a couple of visits, but they all need to be exposed to ELL students, so we're trying to make that an active part of the process.

Virtually every class, not all, but many of our classes have practica experiences. And so our interns then get hands on first-hand experience in the classroom, primarily observing initially and then teaching and co-teaching and mirror teaching and doing all those other kinds of activities that real teachers do.

They have, of course, hypothetical exercises in class that deal with these kinds of things, but I guess the ones that are really where the rubber meets the road are the work samples and units that they develop. So in their general methods and in their content methods classes the first semester of their practica year, they do a work sample that is essentially taught to one class, a week-long unit. I think it's basically a minimum of five lessons. And so it has various components that are required.

We've worked very hard to make sure that our classes are not lecture classes, in fact they are not and they haven't been for many years. They are courses that provide not just opportunities for fieldwork in real classrooms, but they provide opportunities for students to work with one another. There is lots and lots of small group work, and requirements that students work with people who are different from themselves.

This series of comments provide evidence that teacher educators in Alaska are actively working to help their graduates practice the skills and knowledge presented in the university coursework in a real-world manner . . . with real kids, in real schools. Assignments are being connected to the classrooms where the pre-service teachers are completing their fieldwork and are designed to provide them with the tools necessary to apply their knowledge and skills in a meaningful manner.

5.2.3 Aligning academic content with the local context.

While requirements that pre-service teachers create curriculum derived from or tied to the local community offer examples of preparation programs encouraging what Chapter 1 referred to as “large acts” of context responsive teaching, several comments from the graduate survey and the interviews with teacher educators also provide evidence of attempts to promote “smaller acts” of context responsive teaching among pre-service teachers. Specifically, graduates and teacher educators mentioned activities in their coursework that required an alignment between district curriculum and the local context, and evidence of having taken students on field trips.

Teacher educators discussed a few assignments or program requirements that indicated pre-service teachers were being asked to make connections between the academic content mandated by the local district and the contexts of their schools and their students' lives. One interviewee remarked:

In our full time student teaching requirements, we have students demonstrate that they've made lessons relevant to their particular group of students, but that's not enough. In the science courses, students have to use local resources and they do develop hands-on science units. Some of them relate very directly to the students

and to the community and the school issues and topics that are real important to that community. But not all of them do.

Another discussed connections interns are asked to make between math content and the students:

The week of math teaching, that's specific to their situation. And we talk about particularly the differentiation and how the cultural standards are addressed in there: in both of those assignments, how this reflects who their students are, where their students are, and why the mathematics should be important to them.

At a different institution, a teacher educator discussed the ways in which they asked pre-service teachers to connect their lesson plans to students' lives and needs, stating and reflecting:

We developed our own lesson plan template that we ask all the students to use for this program, and I think they use it in the other elementary programs too. And it's a typical lesson plan, but there are two questions at the end. One of them is "What do you do to differentiate in this lesson?" And the second one is "How do you address the cultural context in this lesson?" Now, having said that, we start them at the very beginning, always thinking about those questions. It's pretty weak, but they do. It drives me crazy because like in the differentiate question, they'll say, "Teacher will give extra help if needed."

Another teacher educator stated:

So we've got curriculum that we've developed that we require that focuses on the Alaska Native context, a pedagogy that supports that, and we've made a very strong effort in the last several years to develop an assessment program that allows students to develop plans - lesson plans and unit plans - that are meaningfully connected with their community, with where they live. And if it's their community around their school in our urban area, they have to pay attention to that, and if it's their community out in a rural area, that has to be integrated.

These efforts were reflected in the survey comments of several graduates, six of whom mentioned that they had completed assignments that required that they align the

curriculum with the local area or with specific student needs. Three survey respondents reported that they had taken their students on field trips as part of their pre-service preparation, a requirement that was discussed in one interview with a teacher educator who said:

The interns have to organize a field trip from beginning to end and actually establish a purpose for the field trip and teach toward it prior and have some kind of activity during. And then make sure that there's some kind of follow-up on it in the classroom after the field trip. So that's interesting because we have people choose to do everything from social justice kind of issues to some things that are just team building, like hiking and ice skating, things like that.

These comments reflect the fact that teacher preparation programs in Alaska are helping prepare future teachers to make both small and large connections between the academic content and the lives of their students, the local community, and the larger natural places where they work.

5.3 Discussion on the Alignment Between Data and the Chapter 2 Literature Review

The review of literature in teacher education presented in Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive picture of research-based knowledge, skills and strategies to effectively prepare context-responsive teachers. When the Chapter 2 information is compared to the data gathered on context-responsive teacher preparation in the state of Alaska, it is clear that elementary and secondary preparation programs across the state are making strong efforts to incorporate the “best practices” described in teacher education research. Survey data and comments from graduates, along with information provided by teacher educators in transcribed interviews contain numerous references to the same knowledge and skills needed for context-responsive teaching, and the same experiential components to support the preparation of context-responsive teachers discussed in Chapter 2. Although most of the information presented in Chapter 2 is reflected in the research data, there are a few components of context-responsive teacher preparation that were not mentioned.

The literature on preparing context-responsive teachers suggests that preparation programs should include opportunities for pre-service teachers to evaluate curricular

materials for bias. Neither the graduates or the teacher educators mentioned that this subject was addressed in their program, or offered examples of activities allowing pre-service teachers to practice this in a real-world context. However, this does not mean it is not occurring . . . for example, I can think of multiple activities and opportunities given to students in the elementary preparation program I work with that ask pre-service teachers to evaluate curriculum resources and to critically investigate all forms of media, but none were mentioned in the interviews with my colleagues or in the survey respondents of our program graduates. Also, many of the less significant knowledge and skills associated with context-responsive teaching, such as how to find and work with guest speakers, how to manage students outside of the classroom, and how to organize a local history project were not mentioned in the research data. These were also topics for which little literature was identified, although they are skills necessary to effectively teach in a context-responsive manner. Neither the graduates or the teacher educators made references to activities requiring pre-service teachers to practice these types of activities as part of their certification program. These areas were the only ones not reflected in the data, suggesting that Alaska's teacher educators are aware of current "best practices" and are actively working to reflect them in their elementary and secondary certification programs.

5.4 Professional Development Activities Related to Context-Responsive Teaching

Although the focus of this research project is on pre-service teacher preparation, a series of questions on the survey of graduates asked the respondents if, following completion of their teacher certification program, they had participated in any professional development activities (courses, workshops, in-service presentations, reading, etc.) related to culturally responsive teaching, place based teaching, or differentiation. They were asked to describe any relevant activities in a text box. The resulting 160 comments were thematized to determine what topics were being covered, the format the professional development activity took, and whether they were formal or informal learning experiences. That information will be briefly summarized, as it sheds additional light on the question of how best to equip teachers for context-responsive teaching, and what districts across the state are doing to help teachers gain skills in these

areas.

Twenty-seven respondents listed some type of continuing education they were participating in external to the school district where they were employed. Fifteen indicated that they were enrolled in, or had completed education related Master's degree programs that had activities, readings, or assignments relative to aspects of context responsive teaching. Another five stated that they had obtained, or were in the process of obtaining an additional teaching endorsement outside their original certification area, such as a gifted and talented or a special education endorsement, that involved coursework relevant to context-responsive teaching. Another seven graduates stated that they had taken a graduate level course on a topic mentioned on the survey.

Ten survey respondents, when describing post-certification activities that had contributed to their professional development in areas of context-related teaching described experiential activities they had participated in since receiving their certification. Three stated that they learned additional context-responsive skills "on-the-job," making comments such as "Taught in the bush which is the best way to learn culturally responsive teaching." Five other graduates listed self-initiated approaches they took to improve their context-responsive teaching skills, making comments such as "I attend local cultural events and workshops and do reading" or "I visit our local National Park office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Fish and Game when weather is nice." Two graduates stated that following completion of their certification they had participated in the Rose Urban/Rural Exchange, a program that allows Alaskan teachers from urban districts the opportunity to "learn, work and play at an Alaska Native summer culture camp" (www.roseurbanruralexchange.org).

The graduate survey respondents made over a hundred references to specific topics encountered in school-district sponsored post-certification professional development activities that they felt related to context-responsive teaching. Table 5.4 below lists the topics mentioned in order of frequency.

Table 5.4: Professional development relative to context-responsive teaching

Professional Development Topic	# of times mentioned
Differentiation (not subject specific)	24
Place-based or indigenous science topics	14
ESL, ELL or SIOP	13
Alaska Native specific topics	11
Cross-cultural communication or culturally responsive teaching	11
Differentiation in language arts	8
Place-based teaching	7
Group work, Kagan, cooperative classroom management	7
Arts integration to appeal to multiple learning styles	6
Response to Intervention (RTI)	5
Learning styles (sponsored by Alaska Interior Native Educators)	4
Special education topics	4
Social justice issues	3
Assessment	2
Gender	2
Other: Technology, minority leadership, Math in a Cultural Context	1

The data presented in this table demonstrate that districts across the state are presently placing a strong emphasis on providing professional development opportunities in the area of differentiation. When all of the topics related to differentiation are combined (differentiation, differentiation in language arts, arts integration, RTI, learning styles, special education, and gender) it adds up to more than half the professional development that graduates felt addressed issues related to context-responsive teaching. Language and culture issues (ESL, ELL, SIOP, cross cultural communication, culturally responsive teaching, social justice) constitute about 25% of professional development topics in context-responsive teaching, and place and Alaska specific topics (place based science, place-based teaching in general, Alaska Native specific topics) make up about 30%. It is difficult to draw any significant conclusions from this data, as it is a very small snapshot of what is going on across the state, and because it was not a focus of this research project or of the survey. It can be said, though, that both the quantity and diversity of professional development opportunities focusing directly on issues specifically related to

context-responsive teaching (issues of language and culture, place-based subjects, and differentiated instruction) suggests that these are areas of emphasis and importance in districts across the state of Alaska, and that districts are looking for ways to bolster teacher knowledge in these subjects.

5.5 Competing Issues in Context-Responsive Teaching and Teacher Preparation

Having looked at the current state of context responsive teacher preparation through the eyes of teacher educators and program graduates from Alaska's elementary and secondary certification programs, this chapter will conclude by considering the reasons teachers offer as to why they *don't* consistently teach in a context-responsive manner, as well as the explanations provided by teacher educators as to why context-responsive teaching is not always addressed as comprehensively in pre-service preparation as most say they'd like it to be.

In their comments on the graduate survey, six respondents cited the constraints of their district's mandated curriculum as an impediment to context-responsive teaching. Some sample comments of this nature include "Our mandated curriculum allows minimum time for this," "Real world canned curriculums make choice in any of these small," and "I find this to be the most challenging area because of the mandated curriculum programs and pacing guides required by so many districts." One graduate commented "Tell (future) teachers to be prepared to be told that they cannot teach anything but language arts and math (core) if students are at a low level," while another discussed the constraints of the curriculum, stating "I teach at a Title 1 middle school; I'm also a minority male. I must deal with district text and novel selections made by middle aged Anglo-Saxon women and then "sell" the titles to minority (largely poor) middle school students! It's a tough sell!"

Several teacher educators echoed the concerns about constraints made by mandated curriculum, speaking both in regards to the constraints experienced by participants in their programs and their own earlier experiences teaching in K-12 classrooms. One teacher educator described how s/he helped pre-service teachers think about the extent to which mandated curriculum did or did not fit the needs of all of the

students, stating:

One of the things that we certainly talk about in a methods course is that the adopted text or other curriculum resources you have are resources and you would expect to shape the text or whatever curriculum resource you have to meet the needs of the students. One of the analogies I've used is, "How many of you have gone into a bowling alley with some friends and then you go and try to find a bowling ball that fits your hand that you can use?" And people nod. And say, "Okay, how many of you found a ball that just fits perfectly?" And most people have never found a ball that fits perfectly. I say, "Well, the reason is that they're designed so they can sort of fit everybody, so they really don't fit anybody very well." The textbooks and commercially available materials are like that, where they're intended to be usable by just about anyone, but they are not going to be an exact match for any particular classroom, any particular place. So the forced march through the book is just not going to work. You may get away with it some of the time, but not all the time. So you expect to supplement and shape these things, but be able to make sure that you have a very good reason for doing that because if the textbook is laying to the side and the principal comes in and she wants to know what you're doing, you need to be able to explain that.

Another recounted an observation s/he had completed of an intern teaching in a small community, stating:

When I observed a wonderful intern, she did a great job of combining community with her class. I still saw her feeling very restricted to teach textbook. You know, a textbook certainly has its place. But she didn't realize the value of community resources in relation to the textbook and definitely could have maybe brought it home to the kids a little more by examples and by including people from the community more. But she certainly tried.

A different teacher educator conveyed the belief that school curriculum had become more constrained in recent years, stating:

Years ago, there used to be more flexibility with that, with teaching with an

Understanding by Design model. Like I feel there was more flexibility in school districts in the past before the whole push with making it tiered. You know, you've got standardized tests that we've got to take now, so that really does take out some of the creativity of teaching. So my belief is that if you're teaching in a data-driven instruction model, you have to -- as a teacher, you have to allow yourself wiggle room.

These comments from teacher educators suggest that they not only recognize the constraints placed on teachers asked to use district mandated text books and curricular materials, but they are also trying help the interns learn to work within and negotiate these constraints.

Graduates and teacher educators mentioned a variety of other reasons for not teaching in a context-responsive manner, or for not providing solid preparation for context-responsive teaching. A few graduates spoke to the limitations of the school day and challenges of class size, saying "putting it into practice is extremely difficult when you have groups of 25-30 students....ideas and experiences that are not incredibly time consuming for the teacher would be helpful" or "time is just so limited in a teacher's world." Two respondents said they felt they lacked administrative support to teach in a context-responsive manner, saying "Wish administration supported this more." Both teacher educators and graduates addressed the concern that pre-service teachers were not always able to see context-responsive instruction in practice as part of their preparation program, due to difficulties with fieldwork placements. Two graduates remarked that they would have liked to have had more experience and practice using context-responsive methods in their student teaching experience. Interviewed teacher educators spoke more in depth about the challenges of finding internship placements that would model context-responsive practices. One said:

Some students are in placements that are less than ideal. It's unfortunate but that's part of the learning process as well so we've tried to make the best of it and have the students -- they're doing reflective journals so they're doing the note-taking, the note-making we have turned into a reflection journal, so that as they look at

what the notes are or the experiences they've had in the classroom, they're translating that to, not only their own interpretation, but also connecting that to what we're doing in class and to their future practice. So they say "I observed this. This is not how I would do it because..." and then they explain why they believe this is not a way that they would adopt. So at least it can be a learning experience even if it's not the most ideal placement.

Another teacher educator from a different institution repeated these concerns, stating:

Because we're a relatively small program, placements are sometimes limited, particularly with certain disciplines. And placements sometimes dictate that you don't get that kind of mixture of students that you would like. Sometimes we have very limited choices as far as who our mentors are. We tend to use the same ones a lot because they're, number one, willing; and number two, they have expertise and they're good at what they do. Other teachers are unwilling to take on the burden that comes with taking on an intern.

Both graduates and teacher educators also referred to the hesitations pre-service teachers sometimes have to try new approaches and techniques in their classrooms. One graduate wrote "It's hard enough when you first start teaching to get a lesson plan together that rocks... let alone begin to split it up... seems like (differentiation) is a strategy for teachers that have taught four or more years to begin to play with." Teacher educators noticed that pre-service teachers were sometimes willing to work with and try new ideas in their university classrooms, but were less likely to put them into practice in their fieldwork: "And you know, I tell them, "Okay, so this is the lesson where you really have to do this." And they do it, but my goodness, it's so seldom that I see a follow-through in that in their student teaching." Another commented:

I know that they teach (universal design) in the special ed class, so they're all familiar with the concept. But when they're actually in the classrooms, I just don't see that much differentiation. Most teachers don't do that much. And if somebody were to say to me, "What's the weakest thing in your students?" that's what I would have to say. It's the general differentiation.

Another teacher educator expressed the hesitation his students conveyed when being asked to venture out in to local neighborhoods and communities to learn about the context and population:

We were talking about this last week, giving examples of schools where they had the teachers go out and start walking through the community and visiting parents' homes. And (the students) said there'd be some areas that it'd be dangerous to go into, gangs and all that stuff. I said, "Oddly enough, yes there are gangs, but they usually don't prey on teachers." I said, "You do have to be aware of where the boundaries are and not get into border areas and stuff like that." If we just sat around and say, "Oh, well that's not safe," or, "This isn't a good environment," we're missing it. And every place where (schools) did that, academic achievement went up. Parents became more involved in the school. All of a sudden, it wasn't adversarial, but it was more of a collegial relationship.

The apprehension some pre-service teachers show in trying new ideas and/or enacting context-responsive practices reflects the work discussed in Chapter 2 on "filters" pre-service teachers employ when considering whether or not to employ new practices in the classroom. Nolen et al. (2007) found that teachers typically consider new practices in light of their own history as students, their personal interests, their relationship to the source of the promoted practice, their own values as a teacher as projected into their future classroom, and their view of the "real world of teaching" (p. 15). When presenting pre-service teachers with context-responsive activities and pedagogical strategies, it is important for pre-service teachers to remember that they will not always be embraced immediately, as the worldview and "filters" the pre-service teachers consider the practices through may not always align with the ideas presented. Mediating these various (and potentially competing) ideas and influences is again seen to be a crucial component of context-responsive teacher preparation.

One concluding area is worth discussing in relation to the question of why context-responsive teacher preparation is not always as robust as both teacher educators and graduates report they would like it to be. That is the context-responsive knowledge,

skills and experiences of the teacher educators themselves. Multiple teacher educators discussed their own efforts, or efforts of their colleagues, at professional development for *themselves* in context-responsive practices and expressed a desire and need for teacher educators to continually re-evaluate their own practices and beliefs. At one institution, a faculty member reported:

We had about six members of the faculty go down to an equity alliance conference. And the whole purpose of it was we've been talking about culturally responsive for two years, about two and a half, and it's time to start putting things into action. And this is the direction we need to go.

At a different institution, a teacher educator echoed the need for teacher educators to *themselves* be familiar with the contexts the pre-service teachers are and will be working in, stating:

We've also made a real effort to make sure that our faculty have experiences in rural areas. We've been able to have faculty who are willing and interested in supervising students in remote rural locations, and this has added a tremendous amount to faculty knowledge and better understanding of students in rural areas, both elementary students and the interns with whom we work. And that is certainly a priority in hiring, I guess that's another piece that's real important. The criteria that we use for hiring is that, first of all, you must have classroom experience. We learned many years ago that that's a huge priority for us, otherwise we don't have credibility with our interns or the schools with whom we're working. But the more experience they've had in diverse settings, the better prepared they are for our teacher education program.

At a different preparation program, a faculty member discussed the challenges of working with and coordinating adjunct and part-time faculty, saying:

Because some clinical faculty are part-time we really make a huge effort to bring in the new people, develop the relationships among everyone, because I found that if we're going to move forward, I mean, dealing with teacher educators, you know, it's like herding cats because everybody has their own idea and their own

agenda. So I've taken those relationship ideas and kind of taken it to a different arena in working with faculty.

Comments from teacher educators suggest that they themselves realize they must model the habits of mind and practices of context-responsive teaching if they hope to successfully prepare them in these areas. The interview suggest that many teacher educators are actively reflecting on their own worldviews and professional practices and adjusting them to better reflect the type of teaching they'd like their students to emulate. Among the conclusions and recommendations presented in Chapter 6 will be suggestions for ways teacher educators can model context-responsive teaching in their own practices with pre-service teachers.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations

Having heard from Alaska’s teacher educators and graduates of Alaska’s elementary and secondary teacher certification programs, what conclusions can be drawn regarding the state of context-responsive teacher preparation in Alaska? What recommendations can be made to improve preparation for context-responsive teaching? This chapter will present summary data from graduates and interviews regarding the current quality of context-responsive teacher preparation, and will offer recommendations for strengthening practices for individual teacher educators, for program content and activities and for program structure and organization. Recommendations will be based on the collected comments of graduates and teacher educators, as well as on the comparison between what the data show is currently occurring in Alaska’s universities in relation to what the literature recommends as “best practices.”

6.1 The Status of Context-Responsive Teacher Preparation in Alaska

6.1.1 Graduates reflect on context-responsive teacher preparation quality.

The following three graphs display graduate survey respondents opinions as to whether or not they “wish they knew more,” “think they know enough” or don’t need to know about culturally responsive teaching, place-based instruction and differentiated instruction.

Figure 6.1: Summary evaluation of preparation in culturally responsive teaching

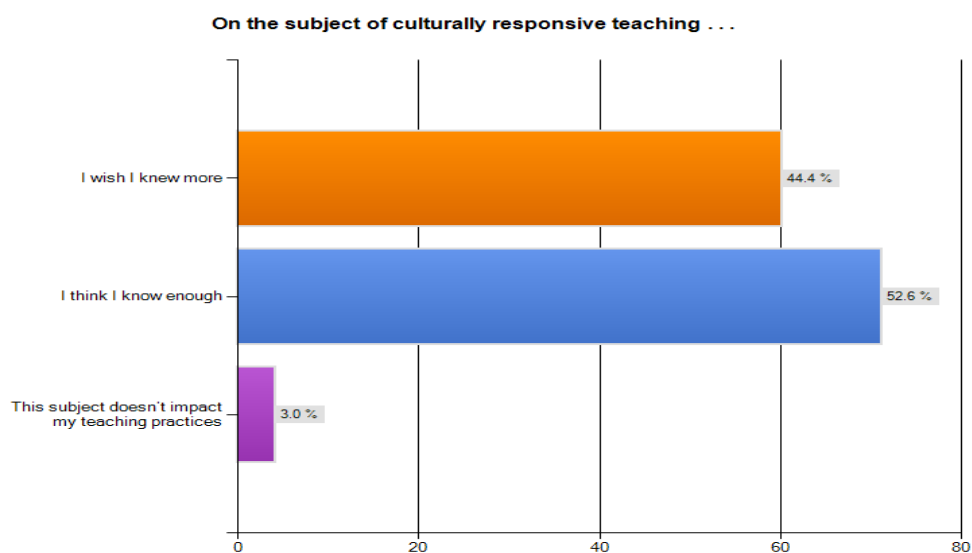


Figure 6.2: Summary evaluation of preparation in place-based teaching

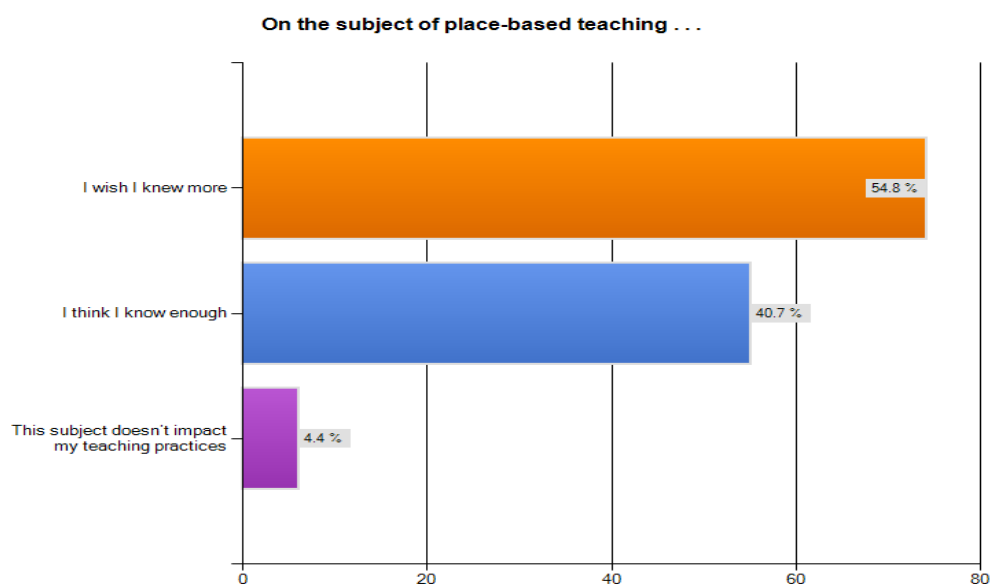
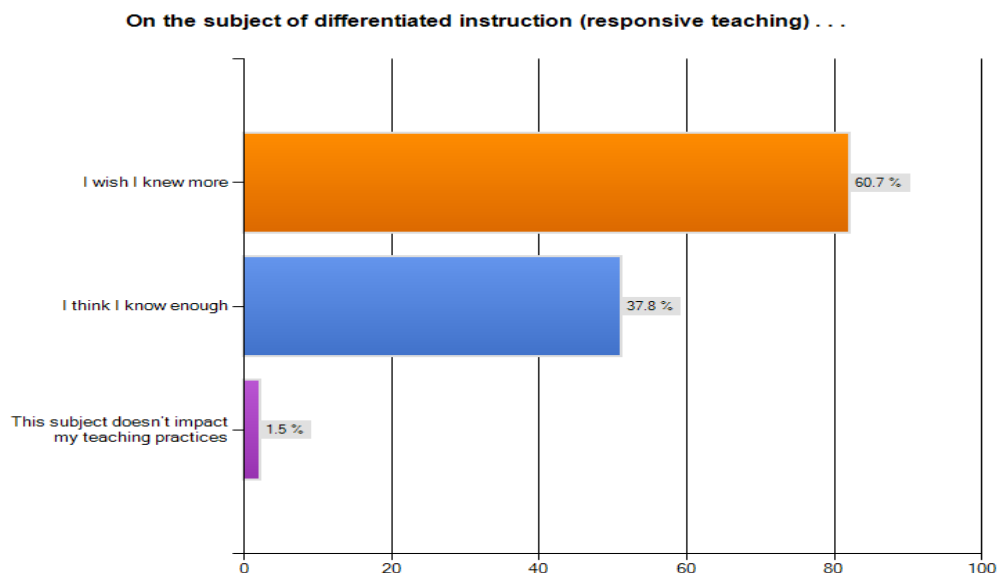


Figure 6.3: Summary evaluation of preparation in differentiated instruction



An analysis of these bar graphs provides corroboration for several themes that have presented themselves over the course of the data analysis in chapters four and five. Overall, graduates of Alaska’s teacher preparation programs feel most confident about the education and preparation they have received in areas they associate with culturally responsive teaching. As a reminder, on the graduate survey culturally responsive teaching was defined as “Teaching that acknowledges, incorporates and affirms the diverse racial, ethnic, economic and linguistic characteristics of the students in the classroom.” 53% of the graduates reported that they felt they knew enough about this topic, although 44% said they wished they knew more. Of the three topics listed, differentiated instruction rose to the top as the area that the most graduates felt they’d like to know more about, and only 1.5% responded that this was not an area that impacted their teaching practices. Clearly, differentiation is an area that practicing teachers find important to understand and 61% felt they still had more to learn in this area. Placing a high priority on differentiation in pre-service teacher education was reflected in a comment from a graduate who said:

(Differentiation) is what I feel is the most important aspect of the educational process. Sure, we need to be cognizant of the communities and cultures around our schools, but when the student is in the classroom and the book regarding the history of their culture is too hard to read, what then? Get educators to address the learning styles and levels of the students *first*, then the cultural and place-based instruction will have a greater impact on the overall education of the student.

One teacher educator, when reflecting on the experiences in her background that had led her to believe in the importance of responding to context when teaching, pointed to her original training in individualized education stating:

My undergraduate work and degree was in speech pathology, which in retrospect I've thought many times was a good way to help me move in to the field of education and teacher education because what I learned through that experience working in both clinical situations and in public schools made it very apparent to me that you could not work with students as a group, they were not all going to learn at the same pace. You find out what kids' individual strengths are, their needs are and you work with them from that perspective. You don't ever plan to work with even a group of 5 as a group. Everything we did was designed to understand where kids were coming from individually, so I came out of quite a different preparation program than people who became teachers back then (that was a long time ago), but teachers were prepared to do things with groups as a whole. I was never part of that.

The desire to know more about differentiated instruction is also reflected in the fact that 86 survey respondents offered suggestions for improvement in this area, compared to 79 comments on improving preparation in culturally responsive teaching and 68 in place-based instruction (most of these responses are discussed in chapter four).

Graduates expressed a strong interest in knowing more about place-based education practices and would like to see this topic addressed more in their pre-service preparation. Fifty-five percent said they wished they knew more about place-based

teaching, and only 4% said that this was not a topic that impacted their teaching practices. In their narrative suggestions for improvement in this area, seven responded that it just was not included in their preparation program and they would like it to be. This number stands in contrast to the two who commented that their program did not include instruction in culturally responsive teaching practices, and the fact that zero respondents indicated that they had not been exposed to differentiated instruction.

6.1.2 Teacher educators reflect on context-responsive teacher preparation quality.

Near the end of the interview protocol with teacher educators, they were asked “Do you feel that the program you work with does an a) okay b) solid or c) outstanding job of teaching future educators to learn from, through, with and about their students, families, communities and places?” Interviewees had a variety of responses to this question. Only one respondent felt they did an outstanding job, while another said “I wish I could say outstanding but I don’t think I can at this point.” Two responded that they felt their programs did a “good” or “really good” job, while another two said they did “okay” but there was room for improvement, and one more said the program was “between solid and okay” in their context-responsive preparation. On the overall quality of the context-responsive elements of their programs, two others said that this was “not a real strength” and that they “could do a better job.”

More than one teacher educator, in reflecting on the overall quality of their context-responsive teaching preparation, referred to their shortcomings in the area of actual *application* of knowledge in the classroom. Some commented that they felt their fellow faculty members had awareness of the issues of context-responsive teaching but had not yet made the leap to fully integrating those issues into their instruction. One said:

I think we've worked very, very hard to help our faculty become more self-aware and more aware of what it means to be culturally responsive but, frankly, I don't know how much of that is actually translated into the classroom. And so I could say probably we're doing okay but we have a lot of room for improvement and we have some ideas for improvement as well, for doing some work out of texts, using

that sort of thing to help faculty be more comfortable about integrating it into the actual classroom, classes that they're teaching.

Another commented:

We've had the aha moment. We've had the, "Wow, we need to do something," moment. But now we're working towards what's that going to be. And this is the critical part. I mean, it's one thing to sit there and say, "Wow, we need to do something." The harder part is to say, "And what's that going to be?" So that's where we are. I think we're okay. I think our students come out of the program with a little better understanding of what it means to teach and live in Alaska, but it could be a whole lot better. So maybe in a couple years I can say solid.

Two others addressed issues of context-responsive teaching in their university courses, reflecting on the opportunities provided for pre-service teachers to experiment with these practices in real-life contexts. One said:

I think we talk about the issues well. I think we dipstick a little bit. We coerce students to dipstick a little bit and try different projects that relate to communities and to kids' homes. But we don't go very far there. I think we need to get outside the box a little bit and really just examine our practice. And how can we tweak it? Every year, we should be analyzing it.

Another responded:

A lot of what we teach at the top is theoretical, generic, so you can get the big ideas and then apply them to your own situation. And that's the task I've always taken. It's to provide a theoretical overview, and then it's your job to make that apply to the situation where you are teaching. So I think we do a good job of that given the context.

At a different institution, a teacher educator commented:

As far as our pre-service educators working with their families of students, in the classroom where they can bring in the families, that community partnership, that component of it is -- I think we could do a better job. I think I could do a better job with that than what I do. I think having role models and the cultural standards,

I think we don't do a very good job of teaching that in our prep programs and within the school district.

One of the teacher educators who felt the program he worked with did a “really good job” described the program’s approach in comparison to an institution he had previously worked at, stating:

Contrasting it to my prior intuition where I was before, which had a very kind of typical rigorous, state-accredited program in a different state, we're just light-years ahead of that other institution both in terms of what (a colleague) mentioned with providing opportunities to get students, pre-service teachers into a very different community. And another thing is that there's a thread through the program about this. And this thread of differentiation and the fact that, for our students here in this program, whether they've been to a village or not, they know they are around people and are in class with people who are from these different kinds of places. So I think all of our students come out of the program with this very valuable understanding that not everybody is from a place or from experiences like mine.

Overall, the teacher educators, like the graduate respondents, felt that the area of context-responsive teaching was an essential component of teacher preparation and one that they were definitely making a direct attempt to address in their programs, but was also an area where they felt their practices could be strengthened.

6.1.3 Preparation for context-responsive teaching in relation to the literature.

The issue of an alignment between context-responsive teacher preparation in Alaska’s pre-service elementary and secondary certification programs and the research-based practices espoused in the literature on teacher preparation presented in chapter two was briefly addressed in chapter five. Overall, the majority of research on the knowledge, skills and experiences best shown to prepare teachers for context-responsive teaching is reflected in Alaska’s pre-service preparation programs. Most notably, teacher educators appear to recognize and value the importance of experiential and fieldwork abilities in developing both the knowledge, skills *and* dispositions necessary to enact context-

responsive teaching. However, the extent to which these experiential components have been developed and implemented in Alaska's programs, *and* the extent to which they are appropriately and purposefully mediated by program faculty is unclear. The next section will present recommendations for improving pre-service preparation in context-responsive teaching, and will show that both graduates and teacher educators feel that more opportunities to try context-responsive approaches *in the context of a real classroom* are greatly desired.

6.2 Recommendations for Strengthening Context-Responsive Teacher Preparation

An analysis of graduate survey comments and teacher educators responses to the question of "*What do you think your program could do better to prepare future educators to learn from, through, with and about their students, families, communities and places?*" leads to nine recommendation to strengthen preparation in context-responsive teacher preparation. Additional recommendations can be made to teacher educators and programs when the definition of context-responsive teaching presented in chapter one is considered in the light of "we must practice what we preach." Recommendations will be presented in two sections: recommendations for individual teacher educators and recommendations for program curriculum, experiences and organization.

6.2.1 Recommendations for individual teacher educators.

Recommendation One: Model the teaching practices you espouse.

The need for teacher educators to model the practices they espouse was articulated by several different graduates in their suggestions for program improvement. Some comments were general, as in "show examples of (context-responsive teaching) in their own college level classes" or "pre-service education staff that walk the walk." Other comments specifically addressed the teaching approaches used in their preparation program stating, for example, "most of what we learned was not modeled by teachers, but just taught the old lecture style, and it was not absorbed very well. Most students complained." and "When teaching about place-based teaching, make sure it is a place-based class." A few commented that they would like to see their classes be held more "in context" commenting "teacher prep programs methods courses (should) be taught in

classrooms,” and, “Isn’t it ironic that the program teaches us about place-based instruction by putting us in a classroom at the university?” Two comments were also made that “current professors need to participate more in the schools so that their knowledge is more current and authentic.” On a similar note, if teacher educators are to promote context-responsive teaching they too should use the pedagogical approaches aligned with context-responsive teaching, including the following:

- Make sure courses include alternatives to lecture: group work, projects, hands on activities.
- Emphasize understanding rather than memorization of ideas for a test. Plan courses with understanding as a focus.
- Critically analyze curricular materials used in teaching. Be creative when choosing resources for instruction.
- Use multiple forms of assessment: projects with rubrics, formal and informal, summative and formative.
- Use authentic performance tasks.
- Allow opportunities for choice in coursework – choosing partners, topics, readings, ways to respond, etc.

Recommendation Two: Use community resources and get out into the community

Sixteen graduate respondents discussed the need for context-responsive preparation programs to find and utilize community resources and to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers (and their instructors) to get out into the local community and place. Comments regarding the use and integration of community resources into pre-service programs included:

- Provide workshops involving elders
- Get elders or local native artists to come into the classroom and provide content area examples. Have Native leaders come and discuss how teachers can be culturally responsive. I think there need to be different perspectives provided.

- Research districts and communities in the state. Research the culture within the communities in the district.
- Have elders come in and talk with upcoming educators on what they would like to see in their child's teacher.
- Think more locally, focus more on local dynamics/politics (in addition to broader, cultural-studies themes).
- More presentations by elders. Fewer books. Talking with real people brings these ideas to life. Reading books is not helpful, even with case studies. Real people and real students is how you learn to be culturally responsive.
- Conversations, presentations and meetings with real people - experts here in our town - help with place-based teaching.

Other recommendations were made regarding the ways in which pre-service teachers could better get to know the communities where they were working and teaching. Some comments include:

- Spend more time with local Native events and groups, whether it be ceremonial or educational.
- Require students to attend community "happenings" and lectures on the local community.
- Learn or experience village values and cultural activities.
- Get teachers out into the local environment, partner with scientists, field experts, do more field sessions.
- I think more hands on learning about the communities we are to be teaching in needs to be addressed as sometimes districts will drop a teacher off in the middle of nowhere to teach and they will not have any idea where they are, who they are dealing with (culturally speaking) and the impact of the surrounding area on the educational process.
- Provide opportunities to attend various local events.
- Visit a local correctional facility.

One respondent summed up the recommendation that context-responsive teacher preparation require that students get out into local communities, by saying “Go outside sometimes!”

Following this theme and extrapolating additional lessons for teacher educators based on the definition of context-responsive teaching presented in chapter one, a few more recommendations relative to using community resources and getting out into the community can be offered.

- Use pre-service teachers as resources. Have them share family histories or education histories. Know who makes up the student body at the university: who are the students? Traditional vs. non traditional, military, Alaskan, rural, urban, religious, non-religious, etc.
- Visit fieldwork locations. Talk to parents of kids at fieldwork schools. Talk to kids in fieldwork schools. Know about the school districts the students are being prepared to work in
- Know about language acquisition patterns and how to support ELL in pre-service programs, especially Alaska Native language speakers.
- Read the newspaper, listen to the radio, watch the news. Know what is happening around town.
- Find out about the natural environment (plants, animals, birds, geology, climate) in the local area.
- Be familiar with local indigenous groups and their cultural traditions
- Be aware of local and community resources and incorporate them into activities (local experts, local community organizations, businesses, resources)
- Incorporate outdoor/place-based projects into methods classes.
- Take pre-service teachers out of the classroom on field trips and walking trips.

The value of integrating community resources and of making an effort to understand and interact with the local community is reiterated in the stories of several teacher educators who said these activities contributed strongly to their *own* development

as context-responsive educators. One discussed the first hand experience she had working with a service learning program, stating:

I started service learning projects that I did with my students. I was working with second and third graders. That kind of idea was a pretty powerful one as far as engaging in community needs and helping the kids see how what we do in school can relate to outside their classroom doors. It also brought in a lot of parent volunteers, which is pretty neat.

Another teacher educator recounted her experiences using community resources and making connections with the community in her own elementary classroom, explaining

We also did two big projects throughout the year as far as having community and school related. And one of those was in the spring, we replicated the community in the school. My fourth through sixth graders took care of the post office. And so we had to go over to the post office multiple times. We had regular appointments with the postmaster, postmistress. And she taught us everything that they do when they run a post office. And the kids just loved it. They learned so much. And then they ran their own post office and they had to figure out how we were going to date letters and how we were going to replicate what was in the real post office. I think the junior high kids took care of the corporation office, and so they learned a lot there. And it was just a lot of fun. It really got the community involved. And then we did a rotating presentation for community members, so everybody got to see all the different sections and the whole process.

Another teacher educator described the impact doing home visits had on his development as a context-responsive educator explaining:

We actually had to go visit parents in their home, and I started to do home visits. Very uncomfortable, but that began to get me to think about and see what the home life for my students is like. And that started it.

The stories shared by teacher educators affirm the recommendations made by graduates regarding the importance of using community resources and getting outside the university and school environment in pre-service teacher education. As one graduate noted “Hands-

on learning is engaging for teachers as well as students.” A desire to learn from multiple sources and respect different worldviews and to incorporate non-traditional resources also reflects two of the habits of mind necessary to successfully enact context-responsive teaching.

Recommendation Three: Recognize the importance of relationships and honesty

Several other habits of mind necessary for context-responsive teaching are also reflected in the recommendation for teacher educators to recognize the importance of building relationships and practicing honesty with their students. One teacher educator, when discussing his own growth as a context-responsive teacher educator, told of his gradual understanding of the power of relationships in the educational experience:

Maybe the first five, ten years (of teaching), I didn't think much past the boundaries of the classroom and didn't realize and understand the importance of the relationship with students and this kind of thing. . . .But when I came here (to Alaska) I saw a totally different side of things from a different way. There was a big push on mentoring about 15 years ago or so . . . all kinds of things with mentoring and, you know, it really raised to the forefront in my mind, this whole relationship idea. And I saw it happen with our student teachers . . . they would have mentor teachers and I saw the difference it can make. And to some extent, I saw it around with faculty here. So I guess maybe I was kind of a skeptic for a while but then I just saw evidence that, yeah, this is really important.

A few graduates made comments in the survey that they would have liked their instructors to have been more honest in discussing the current context of education in Alaska. One said “focus less on historical culture and more on the current state of affairs” while another said that they’d like “a little more ‘truth’ in teaching about certain areas” and stated a lack of knowledge about the community history in the rural community she or he ended up teaching in.

While the recommendation to “build relationships” as a teacher educator can appear nebulous, one can look to the definition of context-responsive teaching for some

ideas on how best to accomplish this. Many of the practices listed in the definition of context-responsive teaching can be used by teacher educators to build stronger and more productive relationships with the pre-service teachers with whom they work. Some ideas include:

- Find out about the students' lives, backgrounds, and interests. Create assignments that find out about their lives and backgrounds.
- Listen to the students – give them time to respond in class and pay attention to what they have to say. Talk with them and connect with them outside of class time. Find out what they do on the weekends. Be aware of what is happening at the university that students might be involved in.
- Complete ice-breaker activities or protocols that help you learn about them; Build community within classes and among pre-service teachers.
- Don't teach as though you know everything. Let your students teach you too. Minimize the extent to which you exert power over the students.
- Observe pre-service teachers during group work and pay attention to their written work.
- Create open communication systems with pre-service teachers.

Another practice that can contribute to positive relationship building and promote honesty in teacher preparation is for teacher educators to actively help pre-service teachers recognize and negotiate between the “filters” discussed in chapter two. As Nolen et al. (2007) describe, pre-service teachers must constantly consider and filter all new practices in light of their own history as students, their personal interests, their relationship to the source of the promoted practice, their own values as a pre-service teacher, and their view of the “real world” of teaching. An emphasis on honesty and relationship building between teacher educators and pre-service teachers will facilitate the constructive consideration of the impact these various filters have on the decision to try different and unfamiliar context-responsive practices.

Recommendation Four: Practice transparent teaching

A final recommendation for individual teacher educators, one which has been hinted at previously in this dissertation, is that they practice what can be referred to as “transparent teaching.” The idea of transparency aligns with the need for honesty discussed above and reflects the need for teacher educators to be explicit in their practices. One interviewed teacher educator explained this clearly, stating:

I think that it’s easy to make the assumption that because we’re modeling what we hope that students will do with their own elementary students, that this will happen and I don’t know if we’ve been direct enough in doing that. I think that it would behoove us to be more direct with our students in saying “in this assignment we are asking you to gather information on every child in your class at the beginning of the year, and to track information on every child throughout the year, and when you’re at parent teacher conferences to add to the depth and breadth of knowledge about your students, their family and their community.” I think maybe what we need to do is to say “this is what we EXPECT you to do.” So although I think we do practice many of the things that we expect our students to do with their elementary students, we probably should be more direct about it.

Research discussed in chapter two reflects the need for teacher educators to explain to pre-service teachers the rationale and motivation behind program requirements and structures. Particularly if teacher educators are, themselves, employing context-responsive practices it will be instructive to pre-service teachers to have those practices explicitly and directly pointed out as examples of context-responsive teaching in action. Transparent teaching, where students are informed *why* they are doing *what* they are doing also reflects a commitment to honesty and relationship building in the teacher preparation process.

6.2.2 Recommendations for Program Curriculum, Experiences and Organization

Recommendation Five: Offer more opportunities for hands-on practice and more opportunities to see context-responsive practices in action.

As the data presented in chapters four and five demonstrate, most surveyed graduates and teacher educators expressed confidence in the fact that many attributes of context-responsive teaching were being addressed in their teacher preparation program. In regards to program curriculum and program experiences, a few graduates commented that their program did not include content relative to some parts of context-responsive teaching. When offering suggestions for improvement, two respondents said that their program needed to include information on culturally responsive teaching, while seven said they wished place-based education had been addressed and incorporated in their preparation, making comments such as “It would be nice to have place-based instruction as a component of our culturally responsive course. Perhaps it was and I am forgetting but clearly more of it is necessary if I don't recall anything.” The lack of inclusion of place-based teaching knowledge, skills or experiences mimics the earlier data showing that, of the three aspects of context-responsive teaching reflected on in the graduate survey, place-based teaching was addressed the least. For the most part, however, it appears as though teacher preparation programs are on track in offering exposure to the knowledge and skills necessary for context-responsive teaching.

An analysis of the suggestions for improvement offered by graduate survey respondents leads to the conclusion that while Alaska’s teacher preparation programs may be offering adequate exposure to the ideas and practices associated with context-responsive teaching, graduates are desiring more opportunities to try these practices out in real-world situations, and would very much like to see examples of them in practice. Twenty-four separate suggestions were made asking for inclusion of opportunities to practice skills with kids, or to see expert teachers applying context-responsive practices in the classroom. On the need to be provided with opportunities to practice new strategies in the classroom as part of their preparation, graduates said:

I learn by doing so I would suggest incorporating the concept into methods somehow. I feel like you have to try something to really know what it is and you have to keep doing it to get better at it.

Teachers need to have more experience of how to relate to native communities. Once they are sent out, they need to be already knowledgeable about how to treat the locals and value their culture.

I believe my program did an excellent job of raising the awareness of this practice but not the application or realistic use. Again, it would be helpful to know how to incorporate this in a Title 1 school where time and choice is limited.

I understand the theory (of differentiation) but have difficulty with implementation with different academic levels.

I think the classes on differentiation should be taught during student teaching so they can be applied. A research assignment, possibly interview-based, would be great so that student teachers could find out in a practical sense how differentiation is done. Techniques of assessing, finding student placements, and adjusting instruction accordingly should be explicitly taught.

I think I was well-trained to do this in theory, but the practice of doing this with 30 freshmen in a class is a whole other matter.

On their desire to see real-world examples of context-responsive teaching in practice, graduates commented:

(Context-responsive teaching) is about teachers learning to work outside the box. I'm not sure how you teach this to someone other than through good modeling.

I felt like what we did in some of my classes was a token effort towards this, whereas other classes made it meaningful and true differentiation. Having positive exemplars and good modeling by effective teachers would be helpful.

Show how real live classroom teachers use differentiation in action.

I think learning more about (place-based education) and seeing it in action would be most beneficial. A whole charter school is now founded on this philosophy, and I would suggest visiting and seeing it in action.

Have more exposure to teachers with these practices, invite more outside speakers to come in, bring it to life, and not just with books.

Find really good teachers to model (context-responsive teaching). It seemed in my program that those with mentor teachers who were good at this excelled; those without them did not.

I think using Tomlinson as a require reading, and more modeling of lessons that are differentiated, so pre-service teachers can see what it looks like in the classroom.

Program graduates clearly feel they would benefit from more opportunities to see context-responsive teaching in practice, as well as assignments that asked them to try these practices in their own fieldwork and student teaching experiences.

The power of including hands-on practice and real-world examples of context-responsive teaching in teacher preparation programs is brought to life through the stories of several teacher educators, recounting the experiences that enhanced their context-responsive orientation to teaching. One interviewee spoke of her exposure to context-responsive teaching at an earlier elementary teaching job, stating:

One of the private schools I taught in was a Reggio-inspired school. It was government funded and so we would have real high SES and then real low SES. And Reggio was very much about family involvement, and really at first it was kind of scary to me because most of my undergrad was really kind of content oriented. So this whole family thing, getting families involved, it was kind of

scary. But I'm telling you, born again. Because once you go there, it's just so rich and so amazing.

Another recounted his work with a math curriculum research project that allowed him to pilot new strategies with K-12 kids, explaining:

It became clear that if you want to develop good curriculum and make it usable by teachers, you assume that teachers would need to adapt this to meet the needs of kids. And doing some of the pilot teaching myself, it became pretty clear that if you want kids to learn mathematics from understanding, then you need to be ready to meet them where they are, not where you think they should be, and that doing that places a lot of -- I mean, the curriculum is helpful and sort of is a good foundation, but the teacher is going to have to be able to build on that to make it accessible to kids.

A different teacher educator, when asked how she had developed her context-responsive approach to teaching, said:

I'm a hands-on person. I like -- I don't know, I have an art background and an outdoor background and a hands-on background. I'm not a teacher manual person. I never understood that as working. I like to create things on my own, and I was never very good at teaching things the same way each year. So I guess I like to create my own stuff and that really worked pretty well.

Context-responsive teacher preparation programs need to maximize the connections between ideas presented in the university classroom and opportunities to try the ideas with K-12 kids, as pre-service teachers need first hand exposure to the practices in order to feel comfortable enough to try them on their own. Integrating videos or observations of exemplary practices also provides pre-service teachers with concrete representations of what (often new and unfamiliar) practices look like in action. Teacher preparation programs should identify and collaborate with local teachers and schools who model various aspects of context-responsive teaching.

Recommendation Six: Provide opportunities for immersion in other cultures or environments.

A strong theme that emerged from both the graduates and teacher educators suggestions for improvement of context-responsive teacher preparation related to a desire to incorporate and/or require an immersion experience in a different culture or community. Chapter five included references to a “rural practicum” being offered as part of some of Alaska’s pre-service certification programs. Not all universities offered this, nor are all able to require participation from all of their pre-service teachers. The ability to offer pre-service teachers the opportunity to visit a rural community, most often one “off the road system” was contingent on funding, typically from external sources. However, the impact these immersion programs had on those who participated in them appeared to be significant, as it helped them to experience a different context first hand and led many towards the development of the habits of mind necessary to enact context-responsive teaching. Twenty different survey respondents commented that they felt a rural practicum or similar type of immersion experience would enhance context-responsive teacher preparation. Some of the comments made include:

I would love a semester long teacher exchange program. This would be the optimum training.

Immersion in a different culture or some teaching in a classroom that is culturally different than the teacher with supervision and advice of the current teacher.

If new teachers are going to be prepared to teach in rural Alaska, especially those from outside of Alaska, they need to be immersed in Rural Alaska. They need to student teach where they are going to be placed!

Learn or experience village living and the people.

More opportunity for immersion in the cultures. There is no better learning environment.

Send each and every UA student into the bush to experience village life.

Visiting a rural community gives upcoming educators a greater understanding to what students may be used to.

Not sure how much you can teach. Experiences are critical in understanding and gaining foundation information regarding various cultures and what is typical.

Rural practicum is imperative. Until you are in the village, you don't truly understand the differences. Interviews/panels with non-white educators to help pre-service teachers understand the learning/cultural differences.

Send future teachers out to villages for one week to observe and instruct as part of the program.

Just visiting these villages around Alaska and getting a sense of what it's like to be out there. Also attending camps around Alaska for credit.

Interviewed teacher educators also extolled the benefits of providing an immersion or rural practicum opportunity for pre-service teachers. When offering suggestions for improving their programs, three commented that they felt requiring participation in a rural practicum would be of value. One commented:

I think when they spend a week in a real community, they sure come back with a lot. And I don't think anything can even mirror that experience for them. But I think, you know, the fact that we prepare them with the pedagogical foundation before they do that is crucial. So if there's any way that they could all experience that in a way -- even a short version of that, I think that that changes their perspective even more. So somehow they're immersed in a culture other than their own for a sustained amount of time.

Another teacher educator expressed strong support for including a mandatory rural practicum experience, but also expressed concerns with funding such a requirement, stating:

I would love to have funding available to have our students interact more with the students who are not here (on campus), or to have more opportunities for exchanges between rural students and (on campus) students. I think there's almost no substitute for being in a different place and having to think really carefully about your priorities, and what you assume is just a natural way of doing things - that's not true, that's what you know. We have a lot of young, white women in our program who haven't had the opportunities to travel as much as I would have hoped they'd had. And I would think that more exposure to other people . . . and I don't know how much we could build that in to our program unless we were certainly more well funded.

A teacher educator from another program also remarked "I think it would be neat to have some type of a camp training or little workshops . . . looking at curriculum examples of place-based education and how the curriculum could be implemented into the community and their place." The comments from teacher educators and graduates provide clear evidence of the need for some type of an immersion program in preparation programs designed to encourage context-responsive teaching.

The long-term benefits of experiencing a different culture or community through immersion in the community can be heard through the comments of one teacher educator, who explained the origins of his context-responsive outlook on teaching as coming from a student teaching experience on in Arizona. He stated:

I did my student teaching and got my master's degree and teaching license in Arizona. And that was kind of a unique experience. I taught at (a local high school) and I had really disparate classes. I taught some classes that were primarily Native Americans. They were Hopi and Navajo Indians. I taught AP English. So I mean, there was just -- and the interesting thing about that was that the Indians, the Navajos and the Hopis, were boarded at the time. This would be

in the -- I guess it was the early 70s and they lived on the reservation. Their families lived on the reservation. They would go home on the weekend and then they would come into town and they had like these dorms where they were boarded. I was pretty naïve and I was just trying to get through the program as much as anything else. but it was kind of an eye-opening experience for me because, first of all, just the cultural disparity between their culture and mine, the whole thing about eye contact and proximity. And they were very shy and reserved in class. And they oftentimes weren't there on Mondays because they would go home for the weekend and something would come up. And so I learned a lot from that experience.

This teacher educator's story demonstrates the long term impact working in a different context with students from backgrounds very different from your own can have on the development of context-responsive habits of mind. It is important, however, to remember the crucial role faculty facilitation and mediation plays in the successfulness of these types of immersion programs, as pre-service teachers must be provided opportunities to "de-brief" and to reflect constructively on the experiences and questions they encounter in these programs.

Recommendation Seven: Provide more exposure to diverse populations in pre-service coursework and fieldwork.

Multiple graduates and several teacher educators, when offering suggestions for improving context-responsive pre-service teacher preparation, addressed the importance of exposure to students from diverse backgrounds and other pre-service teachers with background different from their own. A desire to complete fieldwork in schools with diversity in terms of language, socio-economic status, ability, and ethnic background was reflected in several comments on the graduate survey. Some suggestions include:

It would be great if we could interact with different cultural groups more, especially those of us in (urban areas), I'd love to go to a village or have help accessing local elders.

Actually offer a diverse teaching cohort to help us understand how to better teacher students from their background and culture.

Have foreign students in the program share their experiences.

Maybe a two week internship in a special education environment.

All interns have different experiences--it would be nice for students to have to do a stint in classes that are VERY diverse. Mine weren't.

Put student teachers in Title 1 schools. That is where most new teachers will end up teaching. In my case I student taught at (a non Title 1 school) and then came to a Title 1 school for my first job. It was total culture shock on every level.

Several teacher educators also expressed a desire to expose students in their programs to a wider variety of fieldwork contexts and to increase the extent to which pre-service teachers could learn from each other's experiences. One articulated a desire to increase opportunities for her "off campus" (rural) and "on campus" (urban) intern cohorts to communicate, stating:

I've tried (combining the two groups) for the last session when they share their projects. And I do it mostly for the on campus students, actually. And they get to see all the different cultural things going on in the different communities. That's not always possible because we have large classes now. But yeah maybe there's a way that we could have them -- I've had them talk on discussion boards more and interface that way and learn from each other. Yeah, but actually looking at our off campus students as a resource for our on campus students to broaden their horizons, however we can do that.

Another teacher educator, when reflecting on her program, said "We just don't get people out enough, looking at different schools. I think that's the one recommendation I'd have."

Teacher preparation programs should critically consider the sites they assign for fieldwork experiences and attempt to provide as much diversity as possible in these placements, given the constraints placed by local districts and schools.

The benefits of exposure to diverse populations, both in pre-service fieldwork placements and within pre-service teacher cohorts can be seen in the stories of several teacher educators reflecting on the origins of their own context-responsive practices. When asked how her orientation towards context-responsive teaching developed, one interviewee said:

I grew up in a very, very small town in Washington state on the border of an Indian reservation. And it was also an agricultural community, so there were a lot of migrant children. And growing up with Native American children and migrant children, I don't know, I guess I had a real empathy for differences. And then I married a military guy and we traveled all over the United States. Also my mom's family came from a very low socio-economic background, and the stories that my mom would tell about humiliation and struggle as a child. I was the first -- I'm a first generation college student, so that really resonated too. I went from this little, tiny town to state university and I was lost. And I didn't know the structures and I felt so other. And then being a military spouse and my own children, trying to fit in. And that's the negative and the positive, having exposure to all these different cultures and geographies.

Another told of the impact of an early teaching experience in an east coast inner city, explaining:

Another big part of what shaped what I brought to UA was the experience of working in inner city schools in (urban east coast) with kids who were primarily African Americans, and who I was initially told had speech difficulties, speech challenges, and as I learned back then, to work with a very different population than I grew up with in (the mid west), I learned that these were not deficits, they were differences from mainstream Middle America talk, they were what came to be known as Black English. And that helped me learn to know that there are many

many ways of talking, of communicating verbally and non-verbally which are not initially visible, which do not in any way suggest that that is a deficit - it is an additional way that they have of communicating.

At another institution, a teacher educator recalled her experiences working with a very diverse population as a K-12 teacher in a different east coast city. She described her efforts at place-based education with a class where she “had 45% impoverished kids out of my 28 students, seven Ethiopians, seven Salvadorian students, an Asian student, my white students, English as a second language who have only been in the country a couple years. Their parents, when you go down -- you drive to the school I was teaching at and you see yellow taxis all around. The parents were Ethiopian taxi drivers with several jobs.” Discussions with these teacher educators suggested that these experiences with very diverse populations had strong impacts on the extent to which they valued the role of context in their students’ lives and saw the need to connect the academic content of the curriculum to the lives of their students, the families, the local community and the places where they worked. Working purposefully with people (both students and peers) who are not like you and who possess different worldviews appears to help develop many of the dispositions and habits of mind associated with context-responsive teaching.

Recommendation Eight: Broaden the definition of “culture” in culturally responsive teacher preparation.

A final recommendation for improving program curriculum and practices relative to context-responsive teaching voiced by multiple graduate survey respondents is for teacher preparation programs to expand their definition of “culture” when discussing culturally responsive teaching to include *all* the diverse populations in Alaska, including the Alaska Native population. Several survey respondents expressed a desire for programs to not limit their “culturally responsive” focus to just Alaska Native groups stating, for example:

Have a class specifically dedicated to (culturally responsive teaching) that incorporates not just teaching to Alaska Natives. There are many other cultures and communities that create our classrooms.

Focus on all cultures, including socio-economic.

Broaden the scope of culturally responsive so that it does not just refer to Native students.

The program is heavily Alaska Native centered. Alaska is much more diverse.

Focus more on discovering/understanding kid-culture, not just divisions based on ethnicity.

Don't limit it to Alaska Native education. In front of me now I have black/African American students, black Puerto Rican students, Native students, Filipino students, Japanese, Colombian, etc.

There is a lot of focus on meeting the needs of Alaska Natives, however, rarely were the MANY cultures of (our community) discussed.

It's hard... we focused a lot on Alaska Native students, which is great, but here we really have a small sample of the world.

The abundance of graduate comments on this subject, and the fact that this issue was *not* reiterated by any of the interviewed teacher educators points to an area in preparation that should perhaps be revisited in Alaska's teacher preparation programs. One graduate reflected "I also think that our students see diversity differently than we do. It's just part of their world... sometimes I wonder if we aren't addressing this topic through an outdated paradigm?" The suggestion that teacher preparation programs expand their definition of "culture" in culturally responsive teaching . . . or revisit the term "culturally responsive" entirely returns us to the discussion of culture in chapter one. Teacher educators should, perhaps move towards preparing future teachers to understand and

respond to the multiple “repertoires of practice” that children live in and bring with them to school (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 19), rather than provide information specific to a particular group (in this case, the Alaska Native population which in itself is exceptionally diverse).

Recommendation Nine: Provide a more coherent approach to preparation for context-responsive teaching.

The final recommendation regards how best to address the matter of context-responsive teacher preparation within the larger framework of teacher preparation as a whole. The chapter two analysis of components of context-responsive preparation in relation to the knowledge, skills and dispositions required of a fully prepared teacher, as defined by the InTASC standards and the Alaska Teacher Standards led to the conclusion that a preparation that adequately addressed all the elements of context-responsive teaching, combined with preparation adequately addressing content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge would provide a comprehensive teacher preparation. One interviewed teacher educator conveyed the relationship between preparation for content and preparation for context, stating:

When I went through teacher preparation in the mid-70s, looking back on what I know now, they maybe started to hint around at some of those (contextual factors) that you just mentioned but that was not the mindset of people when I went through. And of course, I was secondary so, you know, I just had this narrow content focus and the world revolved around, you know, math. But as I've been in education more and so forth, I mean, everything you said there makes total sense. I mean, you've got to connect with the kids, you've got to relate to the kids. Our society is changing so much that we have different cultures and so forth and they view things differently so, yeah, all those things are hugely important.

Given the overall consensus conveyed by both graduates and teacher educators alike on the importance of preparation for context in teacher certification programs, how might programs improve the coherence of their efforts to prepare teachers for both *context* and *content*?

The question of overall program coherence has been examined in some of the research on effective teacher preparation. Sleeter (2008), in looking at an article titled *Preparing White Teachers for Diverse Students* notes:

Case studies have found programs in pre-dominantly White institutions to provide disjointed preparation for diversity and equity, dependent on the interests of individual professors rather than on a comprehensive conception of preparation for excellent teaching in racially diverse contexts. Some topics recur in several classes (such as textbook bias), while others are not addressed at all. (p. 562)

To avoid this disjointed approach to context-responsive preparation, a coherent program-wide approach could be taken wherein the program faculty *as a whole* inventoried its practices relative to the components of context-responsive preparation listed in chapter two and determined omissions and overlaps. The faculty could then think collectively about the best ways to address the incongruences between their practices and those required for context-responsive teaching and determine how to adjust their program to better prepare their graduates.

When considering the multiple components of context-responsive teacher preparation the question arises of how best to structure their inclusion. Is it better to devote a course or courses to issues of context and offer them in addition to the courses on content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge? Or is it more valuable to infuse the idea of context throughout the preparation program? The issue of an “add-on” approach versus an “infused” approach is one discussed in the literature on teacher preparation, particularly in relation to preparation for culturally responsive teaching. On the subject, Cochran-Smith (2010) writes:

One of the most important things we have learned about teacher education for diversity in the US is that these issues cannot simply be lumped together into one course, such as “the diversity course” while the rest of the courses are left intact. Rather issues of diversity must be integrated and infused throughout all coursework, including courses about teaching mathematics and biology. This also

means that addressing issues of diversity must be the responsibility of every teacher educator, not simply those designated as experts in this area. (pp. 10-11)

The argument for an “infused” approach to context-responsive preparation makes sense as context-responsive practices themselves are infused into so many aspects of a holistic approach to teacher preparation. However, the fact that some aspects of context-responsive preparation are often covered very effectively (for example the culturally responsive components) while others are sometimes not even included (for example the place-based components) suggests that a more focused approach to addressing elements of context in teacher preparation might be beneficial. As most programs require at least one class in multicultural teaching, culturally responsive teaching or cross-cultural communications, and most also require a class in classroom management and organization, and many also require a course related to communicating with and collaborating with parents, families or communities, and nearly all require a class in child development perhaps all of these courses could be lumped together into a more coherent sequence around the various components of context-responsive teaching. For example, a series of three courses on context-responsive teaching could be developed, one looking at responding to students, one looking at responding to parents and families, and one looking at responding to communities and place. These courses could occur prior to or concurrently with methods courses covering content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, and would focus on helping pre-service teachers gather the skills and knowledge necessary for context-responsive teaching. Such a sequence would ensure that all aspects of context-responsive teaching were covered thoroughly, and would also provide coherence and recognition to the importance of context in teaching.

This type of “add-on” approach, although relegating context-responsive practices to their own sequence of courses, would not absolve content-area (methods) instructors from incorporating context-responsive teaching and experiences into their courses. Methods courses would provide critical opportunities for pre-service teachers to integrate the practices discussed in their context-responsive course series into the academic curriculum. The content-area instructors would be the ones to help the pre-service

teachers make the tangible connections between content and context, providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to employ both large and small acts of context-responsive teaching, and they would also be responsible for promoting the pedagogical approaches aligned with context-responsive teaching.

The process of faculty-based program evaluation and program reconfiguration requires faculty buy-in of both the definition and value of context-responsive teaching practices, so a faculty must first arrive at that consensus before moving on to adopting and adapting practices. Sleeter (2008) writes:

Well-planned, coherent programs can make an impact that persists beyond pre-service preparation. By coherence, I mean two related things. First, the faculty and cooperating teachers who work with pre-service students share norms and a vision regarding the purpose of education, the nature of teaching and learning, and the nature and value of equity and diversity. Second, this vision guides planning a teacher preparation curriculum and set of experiences that intentionally build pre-service students' conceptual foundation and pedagogical skill (p. 562).

This suggests that in order to make a lasting impact on the teachers they educate, a faculty must first look at the definition of context-responsive teaching and make adjustments to it before they then consider the knowledge, skills and experiences they can and should include in their preparation program. Asking a teacher preparation faculty to sit down and hash out a collective definition of “good teaching,” even in just the realm of *context* and not *content* is a tall order but it can be done. Just as we ask teachers to form professional learning communities or critical friends groups to strengthen their practices and talk meaningfully about their teaching, we, as teacher educators should do the same as a first step towards strengthening context-responsive teacher preparation.

6.3 Limitation of this Study and Directions for Future Research

The generalizability of the findings in this research project are constrained by the fact that the data collection group was limited to teacher preparation programs in the state of Alaska. Alaska has its own unique characteristics and context that may or may not be analogous with other areas in the “lower 48.” While the small size and small number of

teacher preparation programs in the state provide a manageable boundary on the scale of the study they also create limitations in the extent to which the finding represent, and can therefore be applied in other contexts. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Alaska's pre-service institutions share similarities with institutions across the United States that are NCATE accredited and preparing teachers for a teaching license that is transferable across 50 states. This study, however, does not suggest that what is being done in Alaska's universities is representative of teacher preparation across the United States, nor do any of the findings in relation to the literature review on teacher education practices suggest that we are much different. The focus of the project was on Alaska and therefore the findings are of particular interest to teacher educators and education policy makers and stakeholders in Alaska, but there do not appear to be mitigating factors specifically limiting the findings to the state of Alaska alone.

There are many research directions to pursue that would extend the findings in this study. The development of a tool for observing teacher practices relative to context-responsive teaching would be valuable in providing depth and richness to the definition of context-responsive teaching, and would also allow for research examining the preparation for context-responsive teaching in relation to the actual practices enacted by program graduates. Such research could be used for teacher education program evaluation and improvement, as program faculty could observe their graduates practices and refine their own practices based on what graduates are actually doing in the classrooms. Combining that type of inquiry with the graduate feedback on preparation programs provided in this study would allow programs to make data-driven program improvements.

Additional evaluation of the data gathered in this project could shed light on the differences in context-responsive teacher preparation in elementary vs. secondary programs, and in on-campus vs. off-campus pre-service cohorts. The presence of data in the data collection group from several graduates who completed their pre-service education outside of the target years (i.e. prior to 2006) would also allow for a comparison of current teacher preparation practices in relation to those of a decade ago to

see if there are noticeable differences. Finally, looking at the extent to which context-responsive practices are included or promoted within the different disciplinary methods courses would also be a useful activity for program evaluation and improvement.

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Appendix A: A definition of context-responsive teaching

What to know
<p><i>About students</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' aspirations and motivations • Their preferred styles of learning • How they work in relation to others around them • Some of their hobbies, interests and passions. <p><i>About families</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family histories of habitation and migration, • Family language acquisition and use, • Family education history • Family vocational history • Family goals for schooling and education of their children <p><i>About communities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The history of habitation and migration in the community • Who comes here and who leaves and why? • Languages that are spoken in the community and how are they used • The educational, social and economic history of the community • The current community context of schools and work • Who are "important" members of the community (and how "important" is defined by community members) • Controversial or challenging issues the community is currently faced with • Where community members tend to gather (including where students go in the community outside of school time) • What community resources are available <p><i>About place</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local geologic and aquatic landmarks and their significance in the community • Some local plants and animals as well as factors threatening their continued existence • Other local natural resources and the ways in which they are being used by community members • Weather patterns

<p>Who teachers can learn from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids • Parents/families • Other people who work at the school (classified AND certified!) • Community members • Local experts (broadly defined) • Community organizations, businesses, agencies, museums/cultural offerings • Local announcement boards at coffee shops, post offices and stores • Internet, newspaper, radio, television news • Walking around the neighborhood and surrounding areas
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<p>Larger acts of context-responsive teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic, integrated units based on the local context – examples follow • Cityworks • Teaching State History • Classroom interview based curriculum projects • Local, school and family history projects • Community based research project, e.g. immigration or history stories • Locally based scientific inquiry with the GLOBE project • Locally based geoscience and GIS projects (e.g. Map TEACH) • Moon journals • Community service projects to address a local need or issue

<p>Smaller acts of context-responsive teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of local resources into curricular activities • Field trips • Local walks around the area surrounding the school • Guest speakers • Two-way communication systems with parents • Class problem-solving and community building meetings • Storypath or Scottish Storyline units • Activities that involve students writing or performing from an alternative perspective • Protocols (structured conversations) to examine texts or let kids listen to each other • Talking to kids about school and their lives outside of school
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<p>Pedagogical approaches aligned with context-responsive teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple ways of teaching, multiple forms of assessment • Choice within the curriculum and within the schedule • Activities that involve critical analysis of curriculum materials and teaching resources (by students and teachers), and involve a broadened definition of what constitutes a viable “resource” • Purposeful and positive responses to language and linguistic differences • Emphasis on teaching for understanding/high level thinking
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<p>Necessary habits of mind for context-responsive teaching</p> <p>Someone teaching in a context-based manner needs to be committed to building relationships with STUDENTS and FAMILIES– also the importance of building relationships in general</p> <p>Someone who is going to teach context-based needs to be a skilled listener</p> <p>Someone teaching in a context-based manner needs to understand multiple perspectives and worldviews</p> <p>Someone teaching in a context-based manner needs to be able to learn from non-traditional sources</p> <p>Someone teaching in a context-based manner needs to be committed to working in power-neutral relationships</p>
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Appendix B: Graduate Survey Instrument

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

Survey information and informed consent

1. You are being asked to complete this survey as part of a research study about strategies for preparing culturally responsive and place-based teachers in the State of Alaska. My specific research questions are “What are pre-service elementary and secondary teacher education programs in the State of Alaska doing to help future educators learn from, through, with and about their students, cultures, communities and places? What are they doing to help them learn how to integrate this knowledge into their practices and curriculum in a meaningful manner?”

The goal of this study is to learn what the three main teacher preparation programs in the state include in their programs relative to the areas of culturally responsive and place-based teaching, from the perspectives of both the teacher educators and graduates of the programs. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a graduate of one of Alaska’s teacher preparation programs.

Please read this consent form before completing the survey.

RISKS AND BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY:

The risks to you if you take part in this study are minimal as your identity will not be connected to your survey responses. There are also no direct benefits to you for agreeing to participate in the discussion, although upon completion of the survey, you will be given the option to enter your e-mail address for a drawing for a \$50 gift certificate to Amazon.com.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The data derived from this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications but your responses will not be individually identified. Your survey responses will not be associated with your name and all survey data will be aggregated when presented.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY:

Your decision to complete this survey is voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not to take part in the study. If you decide to complete the survey you can stop at any time or change your mind and ask to have your responses removed from the data. No matter what you decide, now or later, nothing will happen to you as a result.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS:

If you have questions about the survey or the study, please contact me at abkenaston@alaska.edu or call me at (907) 474-6898. If you have questions or concerns

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the UAF Office of Research Integrity at 474-7800 (Fairbanks area) or 1-866-876-7800 (toll-free outside the Fairbanks area) or fyirb@uaf.edu.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT:

I understand the procedures described above. By pressing the AGREE button below, I agree to participate in this study. Choosing NO THANKS will exit you from the survey.

AGREE

NO THANKS

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

Navigating this survey

Here are some helpful tips when completing the survey:

-You can complete part of the survey and then come back to it later

-You can preview the survey by responding to the questions quickly, and then you can go back and change your responses before you submit the survey

-There are some short answer questions that "force" a response, but if you want to skip them, you can just put some characters in the text box and the survey will allow you to move on to the next question. Of course, I will certainly appreciate it if you choose to write some responses!

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

Teacher certification program components

The first three questions ask you to consider which (if any) elements of your teacher preparation program addressed the topics of culturally responsive teaching, place-based teaching and differentiation (also called "responsive teaching.") Read the definitions of each of these topics before responding to the questions. The definitions are stated again on each page.

Here are the three definitions:

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING: Teaching that acknowledges, incorporates and affirms the diverse racial, ethnic, economic and linguistic characteristics of the students in the classroom

PLACE-BASED TEACHING: Teaching that is connected to and/or derived from the local environment and community in which the school is located

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION (also called "responsive teaching"): Teaching that responds to different levels of student readiness, interests, and learning styles or preferences through modifications to curricular content, classroom processes and procedures, the use of different forms of assessment, and the classroom environment. (Modification of definition by Carol Ann Tomlinson in Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom, 2003, ASCD)

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

Program components: Culturally Responsive Teaching

Use the following definition of "culturally responsive teaching" when considering your teacher preparation program components:

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING: Teaching that acknowledges, incorporates and affirms the diverse racial, ethnic, economic and linguistic characteristics of the students in the classroom

2. Which of the following program components or activities related to learning about CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING do you recall as being part of your teacher certification program (please check all that apply):

- I took an entire course (or courses) on this topic
- A major portion of a course (or courses) focused on this topic (but not the whole course)
- I heard a lecture on this topic
- I read an entire book (or books) on this topic (please indicate title(s) in the box below, if remembered)
- I read an article or articles on this topic
- I read a chapter from a text book on this topic
- I engaged in class discussions on this topic
- I watched a video or DVD on this topic
- I completed a major research assignment (or assignments) on this topic
- I created lesson plans or curricular materials with this topic as a focus
- I taught and reflected on lesson plans or curricular materials with this topic as a focus or a major component
- I completed a major assignment (other than a research assignment or curriculum assignment) with this topic as a focus (please describe the project briefly in the box below, if remembered)
- I was required to address this concept when creating lesson plans
- I do not recall any direct instruction in this topic
- I do not recall any assignments related to this topic

3. Name of books or other media used in instruction on this topic:

4. Description of major assignment or project completed related to this topic

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

Program components: Place-Based Teaching

Use the following definition of "place-based teaching" when considering your teacher preparation program components:

PLACE-BASED TEACHING: Teaching that is connected to and/or derived from the local environment and community in which the school is located

5. Which of the following program components or activities related to learning about PLACE-BASED TEACHING do you recall as being part of your teacher certification program (please check all that apply):

- I took an entire course (or courses) on this topic
- A major portion of a course (or courses) focused on this topic (but not the whole course)
- I heard a lecture on this topic
- I read an entire book (or books) on this topic (please indicate title(s) in the box below, if remembered)
- I read an article or articles on this topic
- I read a chapter from a text book on this topic
- I engaged in class discussions on this topic
- I watched a video or DVD on this topic
- I completed a major research assignment (or assignments) on this topic
- I created lesson plans or curricular materials with this topic as a focus
- I taught and reflected on lesson plans or curricular materials with this topic as a focus or a major component
- I completed a major assignment (other than a research assignment or curriculum assignment) with this topic as a focus (please describe the project briefly in the box below, if remembered)
- I was required to address this concept when creating lesson plans
- I do not recall any direct instruction in this topic
- I do not recall any assignments related to this topic

6. Name of books or other media used in instruction on this topic:

7. Description of major assignment or project completed related to this topic

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

Program components: Differentiated Instruction

Use the following definition of "differentiated instruction" (also called "responsive teaching") when considering your teacher preparation program components:

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION (also called "responsive teaching"): Teaching that responds to different levels of student readiness, interests, and learning styles or preferences through modifications to curricular content, classroom processes and procedures, the use of different forms of assessment, and the classroom environment.

8. Which of the following program components or activities related to learning about DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION (or "responsive teaching") do you recall as being part of your teacher certification program (please check all that apply):

- I took an entire course (or courses) on this topic
- A major portion of a course (or courses) focused on this topic (but not the whole course)
- I heard a lecture on this topic
- I read an entire book (or books) on this topic (please indicate title(s) in the box below, if remembered)
- I read an article or articles on this topic
- I read a chapter from a text book on this topic
- I engaged in class discussions on this topic
- I watched a video or DVD on this topic
- I completed a major research assignment (or assignments) on this topic
- I created lesson plans or curricular materials with this topic as a focus
- I taught and reflected on lesson plans or curricular materials with this topic as a focus or a major component
- I completed a major assignment (other than a research assignment or curriculum assignment) with this topic as a focus (please describe the project briefly in the box below, if remembered)
- I was required to address this concept when creating lesson plans
- I do not recall any direct instruction in this topic
- I do not recall any assignments related to this topic

9. Name of books or other media used in instruction on this topic:

10. Description of major assignment or project completed related to this topic

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Impact of Teacher Preparation Program on Classroom Practices (Page 1 of 2)

Respond to the following statements about your teacher education program by selecting either agree or disagree.

11. My teacher preparation program adequately prepared me to teach in a manner that meets the diverse interests, needs and backgrounds of the students I currently teach

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. I was taught how to learn about my students, their backgrounds, and their cultures

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. I was taught how to talk to students, parents and community members to find out what is important and valued in their minds

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. I was taught how to design and implement instruction that incorporates the lives of my students, their backgrounds, and cultures

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. I was taught how to learn about the community where my school is located, in order to better teach my students

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. I was taught how to learn about the local environment where my school is located, in order to better teach my students

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. I was taught how to connect the community I am teaching in to the curriculum of my school

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

Impact of Teacher Preparation Program on Classroom Practices (Page 2 of 2)

Respond to the following statements about your teacher education program by selecting either agree or disagree.

18. I was taught how to assess the different academic levels of my students

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

19. I was taught how to determine the different learning styles of my students

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

20. I was taught how to adapt my instruction to meet the different learning styles and academic levels of my students

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

21. The skills and information I learned relative to CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING directly impact my current classroom practices

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree
 n/a I did not learn about this topic

22. The skills and information I learned relative to PLACE-BASED TEACHING directly impact my current classroom practices

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree
 N/A (I did not learn about this topic)

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

23. The skills and information I learned relative to DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION (or “responsive teaching”) directly impact my current classroom practices

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- N/A (I did not learn about this topic)

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

Classroom Practices

Think about your current classroom practices when responding to the following statements.

24. Please choose the response that best characterizes your current classroom practices

	Routinely	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never
I learn about my students' lives outside of school, and the cultures of their families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I incorporate the lives and cultures of my students into the classroom and curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I learn about the community where I teach by participating in community events, spending time in the community, and visiting with community members (outside of school)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use local and community resources in my classroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I learn about the physical environment of the area where I teach by spending time outdoors, and by learning from others who know the local environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I design lessons and units that utilize and/or focus on the local physical environment in my community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I learn about my students' academic strengths and weaknesses through formal observations and assessment (as opposed to informal observations)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I learn about my students' learning styles and preferences through formal observations and assessments (as opposed to informal observations)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students with different academic ability levels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students with different styles of learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska**Professional Development/On-Going Learning**

Please consider the professional learning experiences you have had SINCE completing your certification program when answering the following questions

25. Since completion of your teacher certification program, have you participated in any professional development activities (courses, workshops, in-service presentations, reading, etc.) related to CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING? If yes, please describe briefly below:

26. Since completion of your teacher certification program, have you participated in any professional development activities (courses, workshops, in-service presentations, reading, etc.) related to PLACE-BASED TEACHING? If yes, please describe briefly below:

27. Since completion of your teacher certification program, have you participated in any professional development activities (courses, workshops, in-service presentations, reading, etc.) related to DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION and/or “responsive teaching?” If yes, please describe briefly below:

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska**Activities with a significant impact on your practices**

Please consider both your teacher certification program AND any on-going learning experiences you have had since receiving your certification when answering the following questions

28. What activity or activities have you engaged in, either as part of your teacher certification program or as professional development activities, that have MOST contributed to your knowledge and understanding of CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING practices? Please describe below.

29. What activity or activities have you engaged in, either as part of your teacher certification program or as professional development activities, that have MOST contributed to your knowledge and understanding of PLACE-BASED TEACHING practices? Please describe below.

30. What activity or activities have you engaged in, either as part of your teacher certification program or as professional development activities, that have MOST contributed to your knowledge and understanding of DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION and/or “responsive teaching” practices? Please describe below.

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

Thinking about the future . . .

Please share your ideas to help Alaska's teacher preparation programs strengthen their programs

31. On the subject of culturally responsive teaching . . .

- I wish I knew more
- I think I know enough
- This subject doesn't impact my teaching practices

32. Do you have any suggestions for teacher education programs to better prepare future teachers in CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING practices? Please share your ideas below.

33. On the subject of place-based teaching . . .

- I wish I knew more
- I think I know enough
- This subject doesn't impact my teaching practices

34. Do you have any suggestions for teacher education programs to better prepare future teachers in PLACE-BASED TEACHING practices? Please share your ideas below.

35. On the subject of differentiated instruction (responsive teaching) . . .

- I wish I knew more
- I think I know enough
- This subject doesn't impact my teaching practices

36. Do you have any suggestions for teacher education programs to better prepare future teachers in DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION and/or "responsive teaching"? Please share your ideas below.

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

Teacher Demographics

You're nearly done!

37. Check the institution where you completed your teacher education (certification) program

- University of Alaska Anchorage
- University of Alaska Fairbanks
- University of Alaska Southeast

38. Check the year you completed your teacher education (certification) program

- 2006
- 2007
- 2008
- Other (please specify)

39. What is your certification area?

- Elementary
- Secondary (please specify endorsement area(s) below)
- Other (please specify below)

Endorsement area(s)

40. Select the district where you are currently employed from the drop down menu

41. How many years have you been teaching for this school district? (select number from the drop down menu)

42. How many total years have you been teaching, since you received your teaching certificate? (select number from the drop down menu)

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

43. Do you teach at a charter or magnet school?

Yes

No

If yes, please specify charter or magnet:

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

School Population Demographics

Consider the demographics of your entire school (not just your classroom) when responding to the following questions. This is the last page of questions.

44. Is the population of the community where you work

- Greater than 30,000
- Between 4,000 and 30,000
- Between 1000 and 4000
- Between 500 and 1000
- Less than 500

45. Is your community (check all that apply)

- On the "road system" (i.e. you could get to Canada via highways)
- Accessible only by air or boat
- On the marine highway system

46. Are the economic backgrounds of the students served in your school best categorized as

- Predominantly low income (most qualify for free or reduced lunches)
- A mixture of low income and middle or high income
- Predominantly middle or high income (most do not qualify for free or reduced lunches)

47. Is the Alaska Native population at your school

- Between 0 and 15%
- Between 15 and 50%
- Between 50-75%
- Over 75%

48. Is the non-Caucasian population at your school (including Alaska Native)

- Between 0 and 15%
- Between 15 and 50%
- Between 50 and 75%
- Over 75%

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska

49. What portion of your school population do you estimate qualify as having “limited English proficiency” (LEP)?

- Between 0 and 15%
- Between 15 and 50%
- Over 50%

50. What portion of your school population do you estimate speak English as a second language?

- Between 0 and 15%
- Between 15 and 50%
- Over 50%

51. To the best of your knowledge, did your school meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind legislation during the 2009-10 academic year?

- Yes
- No

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska**BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE!**

52. Do you have more thoughts and ideas about these subjects? Would you be willing to participate in a 30-45 minute individual or group interview on this topic? If you are interested please hit the "yes" button below and enter a contact e-mail address.

Follow up interviews will take place via audio conference or Skype in the late spring or early fall of this year. You will be contacted to set up a mutually agreeable time. Thank you for considering this option!

YES! I'D LIKE TO TALK MORE. I have entered my e-mail address below.

No, thanks!

Contact e-mail address

Culturally responsive and place-based teacher preparation in Alaska**THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND EXPERTISE!**

YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS MUCH APPRECIATED.

OPTIONAL: If you wish to enter a drawing for an Amazon.com \$50 gift card, please enter your e-mail address below for contact purposes. A random drawing from all entries will be held at the end of the survey collection period.

Your e-mail address and/or identity will not be connected to your survey responses in any way.

53. (OPTIONAL) E-mail address for entry into Amazon.com gift card drawing:

Email Address:

Appendix C: Questions for interviewing teacher educators

Introduction: *The focus of my research for my doctoral project is “What are pre-service elementary and secondary teacher education programs in the State of Alaska doing to help future educators learn from, through, with and about their students, families, communities and places? What are they doing to help them learn how to integrate this knowledge into their practices and curriculum in a meaningful manner?”*

I would like to visit with you to discuss some of these questions from your perspectives as teacher educators in Alaska. We’ll talk about both your experiences with the programs you work with as well as your own opinions and thoughts as an individual in the profession. Our conversation should take no more than 45 minutes. I will be recording the conversation and transcribing it at a later date. (explain and sign consent form)

- *What role do you play in the teacher education program at your institution?*
- *What do you consider to be the primary components of the teacher ed program that you work with that focus on having pre-service educators learn **about, from, with or through** their students, their families, and the communities and places where they are doing their internship?*
- *What program components ask pre-service teachers in your program to apply the information they learn in the previously described activities to their internship, or another “real-life” situation? Can you describe these requirements?*
- *Speaking as a teacher educator what are your thoughts as to the necessity of understanding and incorporating context (students lives and families, communities, local resources and natural places) when teaching?*
- *What do you think it is important to know, and what should teachers do with that knowledge?*
- *Tell me a little bit about your background as it relates to your work as a teacher educator . . . for example, where did you get your training, what kinds of schooling experiences have you had, what body of knowledge do you pull from when you do your work?*
- *Can you think of specific experiences that you have had as an educator that have led you to form the beliefs you have on this subject?*
- *Do you feel that the program you work with does an a) **okay** b) **solid** or c) **outstanding** job of teaching **future educators to learn from, through, with and about***

their students, families, communities and places? What do you think they could do better?

- *(Additional questions related to specific program components or requirements)*

Appendix D: IRB Exemption Letter



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Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

December 3, 2010

To: Jean Richey, Ph.D.
 Principal Investigator
 From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB
 Re: [177323-1] Investigating Alaska's Teacher Preparation in Place, Culture and Community

Thank you for submitting the New Project referenced below. The submission was handled by Exempt Review. The Office of Research Integrity has determined that the proposed research qualifies for exemption from the requirements of 45 CFR 46. This exemption does not waive the researchers' responsibility to adhere to basic ethical principles for the responsible conduct of research and discipline specific professional standards.

Title:	Investigating Alaska's Teacher Preparation in Place, Culture and Community
Received:	November 1, 2010
Exemption Category:	2
Effective Date:	December 3, 2010

Minor changes required:

1. Consent form: "... you will BE asked..."
2. Focus group script should include a statement on respecting other's rights to privacy regarding discussion contributions.
3. Suggest including "If you permit, I would like to record this interview so that..." on interview script.
4. On protocol form: Proposed start date of 11/1/10 should be revised and one typo in Data Storage section on data maintenance; "years" is missing after "seven".

This action is included on the December 9, 2010 IRB Agenda.

Prior to making substantive changes to the scope of research, research tools, or personnel involved on the project, please contact the Office of Research Integrity to determine whether or not additional review is required. Additional review is not required for small editorial changes to improve the clarity or readability of the research tools or other documents.