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## COMMUNITY TEACHERS AND THE PREPARATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY

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### **Abstract**

*The current context of special education classrooms across America is that of an increasing demographic complexity. There is a disproportionate representation of historically marginalized groups (HMGs) in special education that (re)emphasizes a disconnect between those students, their families, and schools. Coupled with a predominantly White middle-class teaching force not being prepared to effectively teach these students, it furthers the marginalization of HMG special education students. Using a feminist-standpoint theoretical framework, the authors put forward a rationale for special education teacher preparation programs to partner with community teachers working in community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve HMGs. The authors contend that this type of partnership results in pre-service teachers being better prepared to address both the demographic complexities and the disconnect between families and schools.*

### **Community Teachers and the Preparation of Special Educators: A Case Study**

The current context of special education in public schools is that of intersections between immigration status, race, class, and culture of students in public schools with a predominantly female, White, middle class teaching force, which has created a *demographic imperative* (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Garcia & Cuellar, 2006; Yates, 2008;) that special education teacher preparation (SETP) needs to address. Cochran-Smith et al. (2004) state,

Documented and disseminated over a number of years, evidence for the demographic imperative includes statistics and other information in three areas – the diverse student population, the homogenous teaching force, and the “demographic divide” (Gay, 2000; Hodgkinson, 2000, 2002), or the marked disparities in educational opportunities, resources, and achievement among student’s groups that differ from one another racially, linguistically and socioeconomically. (p. 4)

Identification and placement in special education among White students has decreased by 14% while that of non-White has students has increased by 14% (Yates, 2008). Linked to the demographic imperative in special education, students from historically marginalized groups (HMGs) tend to receive their education in more restrictive special education settings than their White peers and are given more socially stigmatizing labels (e.g. Emotional Behavioral Disabilities, Mental Retardation) (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; De Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006; Dunn, 1968; Ferri & Connor 2005; Losen & Orfield, 2005; Obiakor & Utley, 2004; OSEP, 2005). Eighty percent of current pre-service teachers are White, middle class females with little to no exposure with regard to the lives and experiences of

students from HMGs when they reach the classroom (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005; Sleeter, 2008).

Families from HMGs have higher rates of withdrawal and passivity in school-based decision making and planning, are less involved in IEP meetings and offer fewer suggestions to the IEPs, have limited knowledge of the special education service entitlements, and are underrepresented in traditional schooling activities (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, A. 2005; Kim & Morningstar 2007. Significant empirical evidence exists highlighting the disconnect between special education students and families from HMGs, and teachers, administrators (Artiles, Ruedda, Salazar, & Higerda, 2005; Harry & Klingner 2006; Losen & Orfield, 2005; Meyer, Bevan-Brown, Harry, & Sapon-Shevin, 2006). Scholars have urged the SETP field to offer more programming in pre-service preparation to address this disconnect (Ford, Obiakor, & Patton, 1995; Harry, 2008; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lawson, 2003; Meyer, Bevan-Brown, Harry, & Sapon-Shevin, 2006; Shealey, Lue, Brooks, & McCray, 2005; Xu, 2006).

This paper will present an overview of the current status of SETP and how it has a role in the issues discussed in the previous paragraph. This overview is followed by the presentation of the need to include community placements in SETP as a way to begin to increase preservice special education teachers' knowledge and skills to address the demographic imperative and disconnect between schools and HMG families and students. The later will be done using the Feminist Standpoint theoretical framework (Hartsock, 2004) and a case study.

### ***Special Education Teacher Preparation***

As a field, special education has historically emphasized the development of effective, scientifically based instructional and behavioral interventions for students with disabilities (Gould, 1981; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Osgood 2008; Sindelar, Brownell, & Billingsley, 2010; Skritic, 1995). This emphasis directly influences how special education teachers are trained and their exposure to students who are served in special education.

The Medical Model and Behavioral Psychology provide the underlying foundations by which special education operates (Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri, 2008; Skritic, 1995). Both of these models, historically, have a strong emphasis on intervention, and they both follow the logic of locating what is "problematic" or "deviant" within the child. These models pay little attention to the whole child, which overlooks the role(s) that families, communities, relationships, as well as historical and social systems play in the child's identity, access, and success. This evaluation is then followed by treatment of the "symptom" or "deviancy" with a predetermined intervention that has been shown to be effective with that particular symptom. Less attention is given to other issues that students and families may be facing, the role of historical and systemic issues and/or supports, and strengths that students and families bring with them to schools (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Sailor & Skritic, 1996; Skritic, 1995). The increased professionalization and specialization of special education (Sailor & Skritic, 1996) has been influenced by the medical and behavioral models, which has led to a strengthening of a focus on instructional and behavioral intervention research and development rather than addressing the core issues that lead to the disproportionate representation of HMG students in Special Education and the disconnect between schools and their families (Blanton, 1992). This strengthening has directly influenced the types of pre-service programming and experiences provided to future special education teachers.

SETP is a direct product of these models and currently places a strong emphasis on transmitting discrete sets of specific knowledge and skills to pre-service special educators in the areas of assessment and interventions (Gould, 1981; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Osgood, 2008; Sindelar et al., 2010; Skritic 1995). That is identification of the *symptom* and predetermined *treatment*. These pre-service teachers are typically provided fieldwork experiences in public

schools where they are expected to replicate and adhere to those specific foci (Blanton, 1992; Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2006). When assigned to their field practicum as part of their pre-service training, they are partnered with experienced special education teachers who function as mentors and who have typically received similar training. By placing pre-service teachers in a situation that replicates what their mentor teachers experienced, it results in pre-service teachers developing the same skills as their mentor teacher did. As related to special education, this results in the honing of assessment and intervention skills. Although these skills are important, there is little attention given to the knowledge and skills needed to work with special education students, their families, relationships and the communities where these students live (Campbell-Whatley & Gardner, 2002; McIntyre, 1996; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008; Webb-Johnson, Artiles, Trent, Jackson, & Velox, 1998).

Over the last two decades, a cadre of special education scholars have pressed the field of special education, and SETP, to move beyond this narrow focus on instructional and behavioral intervention (e.g. reliance on the medical and behavioral models) (Campbell-Whatley & Gardner, 2002; McIntyre, 1996; Trent et al., 2008; Webb-Johnson et al., 1998). These scholars call for the development of a different approach towards special education pre-service teacher training in order to integrate topics and experiences related to the issues experienced by students from HMGs in special education (Trent et al., 2008; Webb-Johnson et al. 1998).

### ***The Inclusion of Field Experience in Community Organizations***

Placement of preservice teachers in community organizations that serve HMGs has an established presence in the teacher education literature, with the focus of this research being the increase of preservice teachers' exposure to historically marginalized communities before they enter the classroom (Bondy & Davis, 2000; Boyle-Baise, 1998; Burant & Kirby, 2002; Gallego, 2001; Gallego, Rueda, & Moll, 2005; McDonald & Zeichner, 2008; McDonald et al., 2011; Seidl & Friend, 2002; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). Only one SETP research study has focused on the placement of pre-service teachers in a community based organization (CBO) that serves historically marginalized families (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005). In this study, preservice special education teachers participated in a reading mentor program in a large urban housing project with African-American students and families. Based on this experience, the participants in the study, preservice teachers, reported an increase in their knowledge of and identifying skills that could influence their effectiveness in working with HMGs. Additional scholarly work in special education exists in relation to partnering with CBOs, but it is more conceptual in nature in that all of these scholars argue for partnering with CBOs and the staff that work in them with little actual research completed in relation to implementation and outcomes of CBO placements (Chiang & Haddidian, 2007; Edgar, Patton, & Day-Vines, 2002; Obiakor & Utley, 2004; Parette, & Petch-Hogan, 2000; ). Another special education scholar, Ford (2006), provides a framework for culturally responsive partnerships with historically marginalized communities. The literature in special and general education in regards to community placements/service learning highlights the types of CBOs to place pre-service teachers in and the importance of these types of partnerships (Howland, Anderson, Smiley, & Abbott, 2006; Koonce & Harper, 2005; Olion, 1980). Little analysis is done on the people who work in these organizations that will directly mentor the pre-service teachers. This idea is central to this paper e.g. placement in CBOs is important but we also need to know the qualities of the people in these organizations that SETPs may seek to partner with.

The following section provides a rationale for SETP programs to partner with CBOs – specifically the Community Teachers (CTs) within them – to better prepare special education teachers to work with demographic complexities in schools as well as to begin to address the disconnect between schools and families from HMGs being served.

### ***Feminist Standpoint Theories***

*“The worldviews of those with privileged positions are taken as reality, while the worldviews of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential” (Delpit, 2006, pg. xxv).*

In this section we will present the feminist standpoint theory (FST) and how it provides rational to include field experiences with CTs in CBOs. We provide five case studies of CTs that offer insights into the potential they offer SETP to address the experiences of HMG and disconnect between schools and these families and students. Using FST, we offer an approach to better prepare special education teachers by incorporating CTs with differing standpoints, to help pre-service special education teachers to move beyond the dominant discourse (e.g. the medical and behavioral models).

Harding (2004), Hill Collins (1986), and Lugones (1994, 2003) and others have developed the framework for and work from a feminist standpoint theory. A *standpoint* is the place from which individuals view the world and develop an understanding of how it works (Harding, 2004). The standpoint of some, like White western males, is privileged and taken as the representation of how all society functions. Or, in the case of special education, the medical and behavioral models are taken as representative of how disabilities work in school and society, at the expense of non-dominant standpoints. People’s standpoints influence how they socially construct the world. Membership in a social group affects people’s standpoints and the privilege or oppression created by their membership generates differences in their standpoints. The oppression of women, and other social groups, leads to their standpoint, and it causes their narratives to be ignored or subsumed into the larger narrative that is prevalent in the dominant western, White, patriarchal society (Collins, 1986, 2004; Harding, 2004; Hartsock, 2004; Smith, 2004;). This narrative is subjective and not an accurate representation of all groups and individuals in society (Collins, 1986, 2004; Harding, 2004; Hartsock, 2004; Smith, 2004). Harding (2004) calls for “strong objectivity”, which is where the perspectives of the marginalized and oppressed individuals (who also exist in groups) can help develop more objective accounts of the world. Ultimately, this type of objectivity can lead to the recognition of oppression and, in turn, promote equality. The standpoint feminist theorists (Collins, 1986, 2004; Harding, 2004; Hartsock, 2004; Smith, 2004) argue that in order to more objectively understand society, and ultimately work towards equality, the standpoints of those left out of the larger narrative, like women and other marginalized groups, need to be heard and incorporated into the narrative of how society should be structured. Standpoint feminists argue that it is actually the standpoints and narratives of women and oppressed groups that provide the “real” story of society. Until HMGs are heard, oppression will not be addressed (Collins, 1986, 2004; Harding, 2004; Hartsock, 2004; Smith, 2004). In the next section we discuss some specific scholars’ theoretical positions within the feminist standpoint theory.

#### *Patricia Hill Collins, outsider within and interlocking nature of oppression*

Collins (1986, 2004) presents two concepts in her theoretical development, which are useful in understanding how CTs can assist in helping preservice special education teachers understand the issues that historically marginalized students and families face in relation to special education in schools and the United States’ (US) society in general. The first concept is the “outsider within” and the other is that oppression works in an interlocking nature (Collins, 1986, 2004).

The “outsider within” aligns itself with the standpoint theorists in that it values women’s standpoints to more accurately describe how society functions. Collins moves beyond the other standpoint feminist theorists by arguing that it is the standpoint of women of color, African American women in particular, that are the most informative when attempting to understand

society and tyranny. Collins refers to African-American women as “the outsider within” and that their knowledge of how oppression works and is enacted is vital in overcoming the oppression faced by all groups in the US. That is, their standpoint is not accepted as part of the dominant group narrative but African-American women have to work within this narrative. They have a better understanding of how the dominant group creates inequalities and continues its oppression. The “outsider within” can be used to recognize and counteract injustice. As special education scholars Harry, Kalyanpur, and Day (1999) state:

Without focusing on cultural knowledge and the importance of pluralistic perspectives in education, the possibility of negative outcomes for students of color due to clashes between the culture of the special education and family cultures is omnipresent. (pg. 24)

The second concept Collins (1986, 2004) provides is the interlocking nature of oppression. This concept is particularly valuable in regards to the fact that historically marginalized students and families in special education are facing multiple oppressive factors due to the students being labeled as disabled, a group that society has traditionally marginalized. Oppression due to one group membership can interlock with other marginalizing group memberships such as culture, race, socio-economic status, immigration status, and/or religion. It is also important to illuminate the idea of interlocking oppression, as special education has historically argued and fought, that if society or those in positions of power give an individual access and choice that equality and justice will be achieved. Individuals’ choice and access is directly influenced by their group affiliations and are interlocked with the opportunities that their group affiliations provide or deny them (May, 2009). Multiple group memberships – such as being identified as Hispanic or African American, having a disability, or being LGBTQ for example – can lead to oppression and inequities in society. Membership of multiple groups can create a nuanced and more complex experience of oppression on an individual versus when only one group affiliation that results in oppression is given attention (Young, 1991).

Unfortunately, SETP has primarily focused on the student and family’s membership to those with disabilities at the expense of other parts of their identity. The student or family may be additionally marginalize or privileged due to other parts of their identities. The relationship of the individual to a group is not accounted for in the special education focus on the individual, which is a product of the permeation of the medical and behavior model. If we want to address the complex and interlocking nature of oppression, which feminist theory can help us develop, then the concepts of justice and equity need to move beyond focusing only on the individual and incorporate how individuals exist in groups and experience oppression due to the group affiliation.

Collins (1986, 2004) argues that if we foreground or focus on and attempt to deal with one form of oppression (e.g. disability), we fail to account for other oppressive forces in society that are interlocking and influence the outcomes for the individual and groups who are experiencing multiple forms of oppression. We also fail to understand how their experience is part of the greater narrative of other oppressed groups and individuals in society.

*Maria Lugones, thickening and transparency*

Maria Lugones (1994, 2003), another standpoint feminist theorist, helps us understand the issues of multiple oppressions. She argues that when we foreground one form of oppression, like disability, we then make it “thick” or hold them to carry more weight while ignoring other group identities that could influence their behavior or experiences. That is when we focus in a single socio-cultural marker like race we foreground or thicken this and lose the ability to account for other markers of difference. In making this form of oppression thick, we lose the ability to recognize the power of the interlocking nature of oppression that is occurring and how it acts on

the individual and group. When we are able to look at all the forms of oppression working on a person as transparent and can see the relationships among the multiple oppression forces due to sociocultural makers, we are then able to find commonalities along different groups and the injustices they face. This helps us avoid essentializing groups and their experiences (May, 2009).

SETP foregrounds disability and moves to address the social inequities of “all people with disabilities” as a homogenous group (McDermott & Varenne 1995). Through this focus and by ignoring the thickening of oppression to instead focus on the construct of who is “able” or ableistic notions (Gould, 1981; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006; McDermott & Varenne 1995), we have missed the opportunity to understand how other oppressions (e.g. racial inequities, heteronormativity, classism, language) work in an interlocking nature on the students and families in special education. By attempting to understand the complexities of oppression and its relativistic nature, it also allows us to create meta-narratives, inclusive of non-dominant standpoints, to create opportunities for greater social justice. Knowing how oppression works in an interlocking way is relevant in SETP and in order for teachers to understand these relationships when working with historically marginalized students and families.

### *Case Study*

In this section, we will discuss the layered vision that underserved, marginalized constituents (e.g. CTs) bring to the discussion of pre-service training, the importance of their social location, and the keys to feminist standpoint theory that can develop our awareness of the need to support pre-service teachers’ understanding of the political and social locations of special education students.

### *Methodology*

The case studies presented in this section were developed as part of a study conducted in the University of Washington’s Elementary Teacher Education Program in Seattle, Washington. The original study explored the impact of placing pre-service elementary teachers in CBOs that predominantly served historically underserved groups in Seattle’s Metro region (See McDonald et al., 2011). The pre-service teachers were required to spend 60 hours over an academic quarter in an assigned CBO. The pre-service teachers, in addition to this placement, had assignments to complete as well as a weekly seminar that paralleled their placement. John Delport, interviewed the five CTs and had additional conversations with them specifically in regards to their understanding and experiences in relation to special education.

The information presented in this paper includes sources from the broader study’s qualitative data collection including interviews, informal meetings, and social gatherings. In addition to the interviews, additional personal communication (which included emails, conversations, and field notes) occurred with several of the CTs. Josaline<sup>1</sup>, one of the CTs profiled in the case studies, and John Delport, first author (Delport), engaged in direct special education advocacy work in a local middle school on behalf of a family in her organization. The student, on whose behalf Josaline and John Delport advocated, had been expelled due to a behavioral incident, but this had been done without the correct adherence to special education law and student and family protections.

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<sup>1</sup> NOTE: Pseudonyms are used to preserve the identity of the CBO and its staff. In addition the CBO’s mission included online source is not cited for the same reason.

### ***Design of study***

Data was collected over a three-year period. A total of five CTs participated, and they were selected using convenience sampling. Where the topic of special education came up during the interview process, or in conversations with them at other data collection times (e.g. after observation of preservice teachers in their experience) they were included for the case study.

The interview data included in this case study were analyzed for themes in relation to the knowledge and skills offered by these CTs to pre-service special education teachers within the context of the HMGs they serve. Specifically interview data, and field notes used data reduction techniques which included: (1) categorizing and pattern matching – with special education or related terms included in specific statements, (2) data displayed through matrices, and (3) concluding drawing and verifying. In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are not a linear process, but are a simultaneous activity (Creswell, 1994). Following the transcription of the interviews, data were analyzed and coded. Miles and Huberman's (1994) data reduction techniques were used to analyze the data. The data reduction techniques included: (1) categorizing and pattern matching, (2) data displayed through matrices, and (3) conclusion drawing and verification. A coding scheme involving key words, abbreviations, and numbers to mark passages was used (Ryan & Bernard, 2009). In addition to the interview data, personal interactions were noted and included in the a second round of analysis. Demographic, educational, and other personal information that helped develop the profile were accessed in the same way as the qualitative data described above. All of the profiles and themes were shared with the CTs to be "member checked" (Creswell, 1994) once completed. Each CT was emailed a copy of the profiles and findings for authenticity.

In the next section of the paper, we provide: (1) a more detailed profile of the CTs, (2) information on the knowledge and skills that they offer pre-service special education teachers, and (3) a rationale for pre-service special education teachers to be placed with the mentor teachers in the CBOs, who use the broad outlines of feminist standpoint theory presented earlier.

### ***Community Teacher Profiles***

All of the CTs described in the following section worked in CBOs that serve historically underserved students, families, and communities. All of them had some tertiary-level coursework or higher degrees in education or related fields. In addition, they had worked in their CBO for at least four years, and they were members of and identified with the communities (e.g. Latino, African American, and Vietnamese) they served.

This section provides a profile of the five CTs and explores their potential in providing a point of view or stand point that SETP can use to increase the knowledge and skills to pre-service special education teachers to work with HMGs. All of the CTs want the preservice teachers entering the schools to be more prepared to address the issues and needs of students, families, and communities from HMGs in special education. The interviews and stories presented reflect an authentic truth that is missed when taking up the medical or behavioral models/dominant standpoint in relation to special education, with specific interest paid to the injustice and oppression they have already operated within because of their gender, race, and status within the community.

#### *Josaline*

Josaline is an African-American woman who worked in the after-school program at the Ubuntu Service Center (USC). The Ubuntu Service Center is a national organization that has been in existence for over one 100 years. Their mission as an organization is, "...to enable African Americans to secure economic self-reliance, parity, power and civil rights." She has been

at USC as the after-school program director for four years and been involved at USC for over five years. Since 1998, she has been involved in media literacy education with children. She became involved at USC during her summer school programming as a media literacy teacher and did this for two years. A position then become available and she chose to continue at USC full time.

Prior to the USC position, she worked in after school programs teaching media literacy. She worked as a media literacy teacher at a middle school for five years that served a high percentage of historically underserved and low-income students. Before entering education, Josaline worked as a media consultant for the department of public health. She also had a career as a television and radio reporter before she took time off to be a full-time mother. She completed a bachelor's degree and majored in education, and psychology, and she also earned a minor in English.

During an interview, Josaline shared that there was a student in her program from Somalia identified—as having a disability. She felt this student was not being educated to her potential in the special education program where she had been placed. Josaline, from her stand point as an African-American woman, is more attuned to the dialectic at play in this situation. She is able to share a collective identity with the student and see her situation through the ‘double-vision’ needed to effect change, according to standpoint theory (cite). After the initial interview, Delpont reviewed the student's special education paperwork and classwork samples. Josaline and Delpont additionally visited the student's school and met with the special education teacher. During this period, from the interview and after the visit, the student was accused of misconduct at the school, was suspended, and faced criminal charges of arson. A process of advocating for the student and attending meetings at which Josaline and Delpont advocated for the family and worked with them to better understand what had happened and what their legal rights were was engage in after this occurred. Josaline also helped in securing legal counsel for the student. Ultimately, the student was found to be “not guilty” in a court of law for the incident related to her suspension. Josaline is still actively engaged in this case, working with the student and family as well as the school where the student is placed. She shared that she feels many African-American students and immigrant students in special education are mislabeled and do not get an adequate education.

### *David and Bihn*

David and Bihn both work at the Vietnamese Community Place (VCP) in Seattle. The VCP's mission is, “...to empower the Vietnamese community to succeed while bridging, preserving, and promoting cultural heritage.” The VCP has been a resource to the Vietnamese community in the greater Seattle area for 40 years. The VCP offers a wide range of services, which include after school and youth programming. Both David and Bihn work in the education division of VCP. Neither of them had directly worked with the public school or in special education system, but their intimate knowledge of cultural ideas around disabilities and mental health issues adolescents face are valuable to pre-service special education teachers.

Bihn is the Director of the Educational Division at VCP. Bihn is a Vietnamese American whose family immigrated to the US when he was a child. He has worked at VCP for five years. After completing a master's degree in social work, he took a year off to work for a non-profit organization in Vietnam where he taught English. Upon his return, he joined AmeriCorps and was placed at VCP. During an interview, Bihn recalled his own experience as a college student. He explained that he began as pre-med because, “Well, a lot of Vietnamese kids or a lot of Asian kids are pushed to become doctors and lawyers and businessmen and so on...[but that]...after a while I was like, ‘Uh, I don't think we need any more doctors.’ And so I got into social work, which is a pretty unusual field for a Vietnamese person to go into” (Bihn, personal communication, August 9, 2010). He says he was drawn to social work because he wanted to help people and it seemed like a good way to do it. Bihn's reflections on his culture's expectations of

his choice of careers illustrate the standpoint theory that all attempts at knowledge and ways of being are socially situated (Harding, 2004).

Binh argues that Vietnamese youth are often underserved when it comes to mental health issues but he sees them as prevalent in Vietnamese culture. He also shared about the mother of a child with an intellectual disability who had asked him to help her connect with other parents. He helped the mother make the connections and this mother is still involved with the parental support network that VCP offers. He also talked about how in Vietnam, and in the Vietnamese-American community, disabilities are seen as a shameful reflection on the family and, therefore, families “deal” with the students at home. Within the Vietnamese community, having a disabled child is seen as the family’s fault and it is viewed as a deficiency within the family.

David is one of the directors of the educational department at the VCP. He identifies as Native American and Caucasian. He has been working at VCP for five years. David is fluent in Vietnamese and has traveled to Vietnam. In college, he completed work-study in a Native American education program for three years. His mother, who is Native American, inspired his involvement in Native American Education. While growing up, his mother fostered Native American students in her therapeutic foster care home (David, personal communication, July 8, 2010). David completed a master’s degree in teaching. During his undergraduate years, David’s studies focused on Vietnam and Southeast Asia. He also spent some time teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at a CBO in the international District of Seattle.

David had a friend who knew Binh and that was how he came into contact with the VCP. He shares that he was, “...tired of working in construction and I decided to do something closer to my degree or at least what I was interested in” (David, personal communication, August 9, 2010). He felt that the VCP offered him a way to engage in what he had studied. He was also interested in language and how people learn language. David is a product of the Seattle Public Schools and the higher education system, and he believes that having been in these two contexts in Seattle gives him an advantage when working at VCP.

David stated he believes Asian Americans were significantly underrepresented in special education, and the data supports his claim (OSEP, 2007). He argued that cultural issues might result in Vietnamese families having a reduced desire to engage with the special education system and preferring to keep their students in need of services at home. He pointed out that his knowledge was limited to Vietnamese families and not all Asian-American families, a specific standpoint within this group. Later on in an interview, David revisited the question asked about special education and Vietnamese families. He shared that he had looked into the Vietnamese word for *disability* and found that its direct translation was “there is something not right with that person.” He thought, like Binh, that in the Vietnamese culture disabilities are seen as a shameful reflection on the family and that the disability of the child is a punishment placed upon the family for previous family members’ deviant behaviors. He further discussed how depression and mental health are typically not conversations engaged between Vietnamese youth and parents. Parents would typically not acknowledge this in themselves and their children, in turn, would not seek out assistance.

### *Jessica*

Jessica is a Latina in her mid-thirties who immigrated to the US many years ago. She works at Casa Community Center (CCC), which works predominantly with the Hispanic community in a large urban metro area. CCC’s mission is to be, “...a voice and a hub for Seattle and MLK county’s Latino community as we advocate on behalf of our people and work to achieve social justice”. CCC has a range of services and resources that they offer to the community including childcare and after-school programming. Jessica has worked at CCC for 12 years and started off in the early childhood program when her daughter was enrolled in it. Her work progressed at the different age levels as her daughter progressed through the program.

When her daughter attended public school, she also attended CCC's after-school program. The after school program caters to elementary-aged students. Before working in childcare, Jessica was a waitress. She has been running the after-school program for several years. She initially obtained a Child Development Associate certificate, then an associate's degree in early childhood education. She also obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in early childhood education through a distance learning degree program. She has a desire to continue her studies and obtain a master's degree in education, but financial burdens prevented her from do so.

During her interviews, Jessica was asked if she had worked with any students that were receiving special education services at school. She shared that over the course of her time at CCC, she had worked with several students and their families that were in special education. She also shared that she and CCC had been engaged in some advocacy work on behalf of a Latino student and his family with regards to what they perceived as the school not treating the student and family fairly. She also discussed a time when she had noticed a Latino student who was having a hard time behaviorally and emotionally and she had arranged a meeting with the parents and the child's teacher to talk about the issues. The child was assessed at school and found to be eligible for special education services. All the subsequent meetings, for this student, were held at CCC. The situation mentioned in the previous sentences is a case where the subject's "double vision" was used to help several students who might have been neglected by a system, which its established by the dominant view of society e.g. White, western, male.

#### *Yolanda*

Yolanda identifies as Latina and immigrated to the US from Mexico in 1995. She works at a Jackson Community Center (JCC) on the south side of Seattle. JCC serves a large Latino population from the surrounding areas as well as other cultures and races. JCC offers after-school programs and other services to the community and is overseen by the Seattle Parks and Recreations Department. There was no specific statement of purpose available online or posted publicly like with the other organizations where the CTs in the case studies worked. Yolanda is different from the other CBO staff profiled in that her CBO is not defined as a culturally-based CBO; rather, it is defined as a community center. The distinction means that the JCC operates using local government funding for its programs and facilitates. Yolanda lives in the community that is served by this CBO, and she took her first English class shortly after immigrating to the US. She used to come to the park that is alongside the JCC with her young child but did not enter the building due to fear of not being able to interact with the staff there. After some time her English Language Learner instructor at JCC also helped her get a job with Seattle Public Schools. She was also given a part-time job in the JCC after-school program, so she split her time between the two jobs. She has worked at JCC for 10 years in the after school program of which she has been the director of it for nine years. (Yolanda, personal communications, June 8, 2010) Yolanda began working at JCC because she felt it was a good way for her to help the community. When she was working part time, she noticed that the program was not as organized as it could be, so she spent time creating a curriculum and programming that better served the students.

During an observation of a JCC field trip, Yolanda spoke with the Delpont about the students served at JCC who were in special education at their respective schools. She mentioned that it was hard to determine how many were in special education because it was a taboo subject in the Latino culture. She then shared that a Latina mother, whose child was at JCC, had come to her for help. Her child was found eligible for special education services and the school district had recommended him to be medicated. Her child's pediatrician prescribed the medication. The mother was not happy with this recommendation, but she was not sure how to advocate for her child at the school and tell them that she would prefer alternative interventions to medicating her child. Yolanda went to the school with the mom and they attended several meetings to discuss the problem. The mother and Yolanda worked with the teacher to develop a plan to help the child.

Yolanda included this plan in her work with this child and others at JCC. The child was taken off the medication and, in Yolanda's opinion, was doing well without the medication.

### ***Important Themes Across Community Mentor Teachers***

All community mentor teachers interviewed had engaged with the special education system or had an understanding of the issues students and families in their CBO's face in regards to disabilities in US. public schools. Their position and work puts them in a place to be a strong advocate for the students and their families. This strong position to engage in advocacy, as FST would argue, is due to their outsider within position.

All of the community mentor teachers interviewed have been involved with their CBO for 4-12 years, and they all have been working with historically underserved students and families for more than five years. This experience allows them to have a more in-depth and contextualized understanding of the communities and constituencies that they serve compared to school based mentors, and SETP programs, and to have a standpoint that is not aligned with the dominant point of view (e.g. medical and behavioral model), which provides preservice teachers with an alternative viewpoint. The CTs standpoint includes the social and educational issues that they face, as well as the strengths they possess. All of the CTs shared a cultural identity with the constituencies that they serve, except for David. His background growing up in a Native American family and intimate knowledge and acceptance by the Vietnamese community makes him a strong ally for this particular constituency. In addition, David and the other CTs have personal experience that helps them understand the social and educational issues that historically underserved students and families face. As a group, they will all have faced oppressions due to their group membership or affiliation. Data from the interviews and observations of these CTs show that they have a nuanced conception of diversity (McDonald et. al., 2011) that warrants mention in that it allows them to provide more nuanced knowledge and skills and exposes pre-service teachers to the complexity of diversity and varied cultural perceptions of education and educational services. These nuanced understandings are developed through relationship building between the CT's and the families/students they served. Through relationship building CTs are able to advocate for behavioral and academic interventions that are relevant to the student behaviorally and academically that alter the environmental events through antecedent strategies and foster a positive teacher-student relationship that ultimately promote acceptable classroom behavior and prevent problems both on the classroom and individual level (Kern & Clemens, 2007).

All of the CTs shared that they wanted to work at the CBOs to help and advocate with families from historically underserved groups. Their entry into working at the CBOs varied from convenience to wanting to be part of helping the constituencies served by the CBO. The interview data revealed that all of them view an important aspect of their current roles in the CBOs is to work as advocates or mediators between schools and the constituencies that are served in their CBOs. They additionally view their roles as advocates and mediators for the families with regard to non-school issues they may face, like immigration status and access to healthcare and housing.

All have completed degrees that are relevant to the field of education and are working with students and families. Yolanda though has not completed a degree at this time. Their educational background has given them expertise, which benefits the constituencies they serve and allows them to be better advocates. This knowledge of schools, early learning, and social work (to name a few) equips them to better advocate and mediate with schools on behalf of the students and families they serve.

*CTS as "outsiders within"*

The CTs profiled align with the “outsider within” description and thus are better equipped to advocate for, and represent the standpoint of, historically underserved students and families. Their standpoints and narratives expressed from within their cultural location also support this concept. Their “outsider within” status as non-Whites allows them to better assist schools and universities to understand the lives and narratives of historically underserved students and families. This, in turn, can help in the development of better interactions and educational experiences between these families and SETP. The “outsider within” status of the CTs, accompanied by their academic background in education and related fields, gives them the knowledge of how schools work and thus they can better locate and incorporate students and families from HMGs narratives. They can serve as a powerful mentor to pre-service special education teachers and can also provide the important knowledge of multiple cultures and the skills to work with families from HMGs in special education.

*Interlocking systems of oppression; thickening and transparency*

The demographic imperative and longstanding disproportionality of HMGs in special education supports the need for a more complex understanding of justice and equality, as already described. Oppression is a complex problem, which cannot be looked at from a singular precipitating factor such as disability, or by looking at a single symptom such as institutional bias or disability. The CTs intimate knowledge of the students’ and families’ multiple group memberships and how these may marginalize them provide a unique and important learning opportunity for pre-service special education teachers.

Employing the theories of Collins (1986, 2004) and Lugones (1994, 2003) allows a new type of understanding to be engaged in by special education teacher pre-service preparation. The contextualized understanding of the students and families and the desire to work as advocates and mediators shows that the CTs are well equipped to engage in work with historically underserved students and families in special education and provide this knowledge and skill to pre-service special education teachers. They are a resource that pre-service special education teachers need to authentically serve students and families from historically underserved groups.

The prevalent medical model, which derives from a dominant society perspective, often exacerbates the disconnect between teacher and student/family the teacher is seeking to serve. Standpoint theory, which posits that knowledge is socially situated; that marginalized subjects e.g. the CTs profiled, are better situated to help develop experiences and insights for pre-service special education teachers, that are formulated out of the CTs outsider status; and that their experiences and knowledge of work can be the starting point of preparing to work with HMGs. Therefore, these CTs provide a place in which pre-service teachers in special education can be exposed to a layered vision of HMGs. The CTs bring this knowledge and experience to pre-service training, and the importance of the CTs social location, can open pre-service special education teachers to an understanding of the political and social locations of students and families from HMGs. This can allow them to develop knowledge and skills that help students and families from HMG connect with and work more closely with pre-service special education teachers when they enter their future classroom.

### **Conclusion**

*“In academics we are more interested in finding a microphone when we should be looking for hearing aids to be able to hear the voices of those that are marginalized in our society” (George Lipsitz, personal communication, March 13, 2009).*

The dominant standpoint with SETP of the medical and behavioral models and its narrow focus interventions and replications, and the dominance of White middle class standpoint, the

CTs can be the “hearing aids” for pre-service Special Education teachers. These “hearing aids” can help the preservice teachers understand the standpoints of students and families in order to begin developing the knowledge and skills related to these constituents. Special education teachers, as well as SETP programs, often lack the necessary knowledge and skills needed to serve historically marginalized communities that they are supposed to be serving. The standpoints of HMGs may often be left out or subsumed into the dominant standpoint, and the narrow focus remains on intervention and the disability, and CTs allow SETP programs to address this. Delpit (2006) gives specific advice for educators when working with historically underserved groups:

We educators set out to teach, but how can we reach the worlds of others when we don’t even know they exist” (pg xxvi); ...but all teachers must revel in the world outside the classroom community... in education, we set about solving educational problems as if they exist in a vacuum. (p. 93)

These CTs offer SETP an opportunity to move beyond the “vacuum of schools” and better “reach the worlds of others” and incorporate, hear, and act on the narratives that are provided by CTs. The narratives and voices of historically underserved groups need—to be incorporated into the story of special education to help overcome the negative outcomes that these communities often encounter. CTs provide pre-service teachers with an invaluable opportunity to learn from mediators, who can serve as a bridge to the communities they will serve when they become certified as Special Educators.

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