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## Learning to Teach for Social Justice: Context and Progressivism at Bank Street in the 1930's

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### Abstract

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This is a historical case study of the role of contexts in the education of progressive teachers and learning to advance social justice through teaching. The case focuses on how progressive education, progressive schools, and progressive ideas in the US, primarily during the 1930's influenced a very distinctive program, The Cooperative School for Teachers, which became Bank Street College of Education, in New York City. And in turn how this program came to influence what progressive teacher education could be about. This paper addresses how students at Bank Street developed a sense of relationship between the need to understand and influence the social context of their future students and how to foster and advance social justice. Bank Street's approach to teacher preparation framed how progressive teachers should be prepared by offering models for how teacher education can help teacher candidates learn about contexts different from their own and connect the micro context of the classroom to address social challenges and inequities.

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**Keywords:** Educational Contexts, Progressive Teacher Education, Social Justice, Learning to Teach

### 1. Introduction

We believe that a teacher's job is not only in the classroom. That while a teacher's primary responsibility is to help children grow and develop to the best of their potentialities, she has a responsibility also for the kind of world these children are growing up in. She cannot ignore the influences outside the classroom that are shaping children's lives. And so the students at Bank Street spend a portion of their time working with local community agencies on some of the pressing problems in our neighborhood... This year we are continuing our effort for a low-income housing project. We are working with Greenwich House on their health program. We are cooperating with a public school in their after school recreation activities and we are running a Saturday Play group for neighborhood children. (cited in Grinberg, 2005, p. 33) The above quote is a hand-written internal report by a group of student teachers at the Cooperative School for Student-Teachers (CSST), which became known as Bank Street College of Education, in New York City in the 1930's. These student teachers developed a commitment to understand and influence the social context of the children who might become their own future students. This paper presents a historical case study of a progressive teacher education program with particular attention to issues of context and learning to teach by learning "the world" and advancing social justice through their own teaching. In short, learning to teach meant also to learn to work for social justice and teaching was conceptualized as a form of social justice. Social justice is elusive and could mean multiple things to multiple people. However, for the this paper, grounded in the particular perspective of Bank Street, social justice is the exercise of altering the contextual arrangements that historically, socially, culturally, and economically have operated to limit living conditions and educational opportunities for disenfranchised groups, by actively engaging in reclaiming, sustaining and advancing equity, equality, and fairness through personal and educational relationships, particularly through progressive teaching (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002).

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Therefore, the preparation of the student teachers incorporated understanding contexts by engaging in observations, human interactions, educational experiences, data collection, analyzing and reflecting these data and experiences and designing potential teaching environments in addition to advocacy and participation. In this paper the concept of “context” refers to the milieu --interactions with the surrounding environment that shape individuals, as in the case of school classrooms, as well as the condition of the life of communities by the social, cultural, economic, and political conditions under which such experiences and interactions take place. As well, not only Bank Street designed such curricula, but also specifically prepared teachers to serve progressive schools and to engage in progressive teaching by incorporating the children and school contexts. In their view, progressivism entailed understanding the contextual environments of teaching and learning in different schools and communities. The program provided teachers with the tools to teach according to their progressive concepts by engaging both in classroom practices, and by engaging in and with the local communities where schools were geographically located, as illustrated in the above quote from the students’ report. Such approach is in contrast to what historically has been the pattern in many communities, particularly those historically marginalized and dispossessed, of schools becoming colonial institutions oblivious of the social and cultural contexts (Spring, 2007; Price & Grinberg, 2009). There was an interest and concern with the social conditions in which children grow and the program incorporated activities and experiences that will not only enhance such understanding, but also that will engage future teachers in working to advance social justice. As one faculty member at Bank Street summarized their credo about the relationship of education and context, “We were in education because we thought there was a way to make a better world” (Biber, 1975, p. 15).

## **2. Method**

Drawing on archival documents, including institutional memos, class syllabi and particularly by utilizing previously collected oral histories by students and faculty, this paper considers how the faculty thought about the meaning of context in the preparation of progressive school-teachers and what they did to prepare teachers for these schools. In preparation for this study we explored archival material located at the Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, and at The Bank Street College of Education Library, New York. The materials included catalogues and course descriptions. In addition we analyzed a set of “Oral Histories” from students, staff, and faculty, which contain transcribed interviews done during the 1970's.

### **2.1. Social History Stand-point**

This work presents a social history stand-point thus is interested in the narratives of those who participated and were actors of the phenomena discussed, similar to what qualitative researchers named an “emic” research approach in which the preoccupation is with vices that have been silent by the privilege of institutional focus. In educational terms Bank Street provides a case to illustrate what Clifford (1980) pointed as missing in the literature: “...the pronounced disposition to place educational history in the context of impersonal social forces and such mass movements as modernization, bureaucratization, and professionalization further diminishes the persons whose experiences is the stuff of history” (p. 143). Furthermore, in this same essay she suggested that: “There are no histories of classrooms, of which I am aware, and school and college histories (institutional histories) say virtually nothing in a systematic and analytical way about life in schools” (Clifford, 1980, p. 144). Reinforcing this view that calls for research that describe and analyze practices and meanings provided by the actors in historical events, Finkelstein (1992) contends that: “Focusing on the analysis of structure rather than process, prescription rather than practice, and ideology rather than consciousness, historians of education had unknowingly concealed private processes from view” (p. 284). In what follows, the paper will describe Bank Street’s background, then it will discuss social context and progressivism and it will explain the program, including conceptual perspectives and coursework experience as it relates to the issue of context and teaching for social justice. In this paper we will also address possible tensions in this program at that time.

## **3. Describing Bank Street in the 1930's**

Bank Street is a well-known institution among practitioners and progressive educators. The program was formed in 1930 and its participants at the time shaped the institutional culture, its norms, meanings and ideas, which are part of the traditions and ethos on which Bank Street rests as an effective place for the preparation and development of progressive practitioners (Antler, 1987; Ayers, 1988; Black & Blos, 1961; Gordon, 1988; Grinberg, 2002, 2005).

Explaining progressivism, Antler (1987) asserted that Bank Street “believed that the classroom could become the model for a new collectivism, integrating self-expression with larger social goals” (Antler, 1987, p. 307), while Grinberg (2005) argued that Bank Street approach to progressive teacher education conceptualized that “teachers should not just understand childhood or social context but that teachers and schools should act upon the context to alter social injustice” (p. 102). The program provided a structure for the student-teachers’ experiences of their own learning, making them the subject matter of study, while making connections between learning about children, about the self, about the world --the social context of schools and communities where students live-- and learn about schools including curriculum design tailored for the developing child. This program was initiated as a joint effort between the Bureau for Educational Experiments (BEE) and a group of progressive private schools. The Bureau was created and directed by Lucy Sprague Mitchell in 1916 with the purpose to do research on childhood and education. Edith Gordon (1988) reports that in 1929 several meetings took place at the BEE library between leaders of private progressive schools “to discuss their mutual interests and problems” (p. 205). These directors asked Sprague Mitchell to develop a progressive program to prepare teachers for their own schools. In their experience, traditional teacher preparation programs didn’t prepare the type of teachers that could meet their schools’ needs and, for instance, the director of the progressive City and Country School, stated that she preferred to hire teachers without teacher training programs rather than hire teachers with such preparation (Grinberg, 2005). She argued that regular preparation narrowed teachers’ minds so much that they had to be re-educated (Winsor, 2/24/75). Furthermore, a progressive education journal stated the following: Certainly, the normal schools and teachers colleges, with an occasional conspicuous exception, are not sending out the teachers that are needed, though they may eventually do a better job if they can ever extricate themselves from the “principles of education,” methods courses, and other impedimenta that clutter up the educational baggage-car. (Editorial, 1931, p. 280) Among the progressive and experimental schools that participated in some of these meetings, were Walden School, City and Country School, The Ethical Culture School, and the Nursery School, which was the school located in Sprague Mitchell’s house and that years later became the nursery school at Bank Street (Grinberg 2002, 2005). Mitchell not only had interest in developing this program, but also had the resources and experience to organize it (Antler, 1982, 1987; Gordon, 1988). Because its new building was located at 69 Bank Street, the institution was informally called by the name of the street.

### 3.1. Faculty Members

These faculty were a selected group of mostly women who were highly educated, motivated, and who shared similar elite social, cultural, educational, and political backgrounds who were immersed in the bohemian life of the Greenwich Village in New York City (Liston & Zeichner, 1990) and who frequented some of the same cultural spaces, such as active participation in The New School for Social Research events (Grinberg, 2005). Lucy Sprague Mitchell, the key faculty member and the main force behind the organization was educated at elite places as were most of the faculty members too (such as Radcliffe College, Smith College, Columbia University, the Art Institute of Chicago, Moscow Art Theater, or The New School). This suggests that there is a connection of a strong common culture of shared experience, part of the same systems --a similar liberal education, similar places, similar professors, similar social class background, similar friends, similar values, and similar expectations. Furthermore, many of the directors of the partnering schools, as well as some of the teachers in these schools not only shared that context background, but also they taught in the program. Many graduates of Bank Street were hired by these cooperating schools, which ensured a level of coherence between what the student brought with her from the program and the expectations of the school about the type of teacher they wanted. Considering these practices of self-selection we are facing a situation of social reproduction: Bourdieu (1988), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), and Bourdieu and Hacquant (1992) described the educational system as the principal institution controlling the allocation of status and privilege in contemporary societies. Schools represent the primary institutional setting for the production, transmission, and accumulation of the various forms of cultural capital that Bourdieu (1988) defined as “cultural goods”: schemas of appreciation and understanding internalized by individuals through socialization.

### 3.2. Students

Students were carefully selected --mostly women who had some college education and in many cases had already obtained college degrees, and who graduated from similar institutions to the ones attended by faculty members (Grinberg, 2002, 2005).

Analyzing the admissions’ process provides understanding about the type of students that the program had in mind: On the positive side we are on the alert for prospective students with intellectual curiosity, some emotional insight, a profound interest in children, sustained physical and mental vitality, and awareness of social problems.

We seek students who are somewhat on to themselves and the world in which they live. Students whose standards are well developed, non-crystallized and who dare try to learn for themselves. (Annual Report, 1934-35, p. 2)

### 3.3. Program

Mitchell and her colleagues offered at Bank Street offered an intensive one-year curriculum for college graduates who were mostly interested in teaching young children (two to thirteen years of age), which expanded what at the time was conceived as learning to teach (Grinberg 2002, 2005). Furthermore, research supported their project as summarized in a report published in "Progressive Education" (Bonner 1929, p. 111):

The teacher-training institution should develop in teachers:

- Scholarship or cultural background.
- A progressive conception of education
- An inquiring, creative, constructive, open-minded attitude.
- An understanding of behavior means of growth and needs of children.
- Training in the techniques of teaching under... progressive guidance.

At Bank Street this translated into four curricular dimensions: (a) learning about the self; (b) learning about the world; (c) learning about children; and (d) learning about "school" work. In what follows we shift the focus to the dimension of learning about the world as it connects the social, cultural, political, and economic contexts of local, national, and global communities with specific curricular and pedagogical aspects of learning to teach at Bank Street (Grinberg 2002, 2005).

## 4. Progressivism and Social Context at Bank Street

In a memo to her colleagues, Eleanor Bowman, a faculty member, asked the following questions, How much of an influence we can be unless we ourselves feel strongly enough about a new society to be willing to take part in building it. Isn't this influence an important factor in the learning process? Will we develop social attitudes in students unless we ourselves have a philosophy strong enough to be doing something about the condition of the world? (1935, p. 1) Bowman's concerns were about being actively involved in changing social arrangements that perpetuated injustices. She wanted these social commitments and actions to be part of the student teachers' experiences while she also wanted to model activism to the students at Bank Street. From this standpoint what was taught and experienced at Bank Street emphasized teaching as a form of social activism (Grinberg, 2005).

### 4.1. Dewey's Influences

Bank Street faculty and the program curriculum had a particular understanding of the meaning of progressive practices. The influence of Deweyan views that advocated for schools and for teachers to be active agents of social change advancing social justice permeated the Bank Street program. As Westbrook (1991) stated, "I would then place Dewey with the radical wing of progressivism...His own alliances were formed... with those elements of the labor movement committed to workers' control" (p. 189). Dewey's perspectives on the child and the curriculum, on the role of framing educational experiences in a developmental way and on the importance of a scientific approach (1902/64, 1903/64, 1904/64, 1938), influenced the program to focus on the connection between schools and the social environment --Dewey's influence expanded through his role as a Board member at Bank Street and as a personal friend of Lucy Sprague Mitchell (Antler, 1987). Also, Mitchell and Dewey shared the idea that a community centered social agenda is a crucial element for sustaining democratic life since formal education alone might not be enough: By the eve of World War I, Dewey was more fully aware that the democratic reconstruction of American society he envisioned could not take place simply by a revolution in the classroom, that, indeed, the revolution in the classroom could not take place until the society's adults had been won over to radical democracy. (Westbrook, 1991, p. 192) In Bank Street language it meant that, "[There is] Evidence that the experiences which determine the educational development of the child are not confined to the school but relate equally to the whole amount of experiences outside the school--in the home and elsewhere" (Curriculum Plans, 1935, pp. 3-4). This embraced an experimental and a constant reflective and critical attitude. In 1931 Lucy Sprague Mitchell wrote in the journal "Progressive Education" that: To promote the development of personal powers, we propose to treat the student teachers as we should treat children--only on a higher age level.

We propose to give them a program of "experiences" in exploring their local environment which will sensitize them to this environment, quicken their powers of observation, enlarge their "intake" by making more active their senses and their motor life. The study of the environment, as we plan it, will be based upon fieldwork. We hope our students will explore not only the geographic world in which they live, but also the cultural and social-economic world. (pp. 252-3)

#### 4.2. Action and Social Justice

As well as Bowman's questions suggested, Mitchell also argued that teachers should not just understand childhood or social context but that they should act upon the context to alter social injustice (Grinberg, 2005). There was a strong concern with the social and economic contexts in which children grew up and the influence of these contexts on the teaching job especially since the 1930's were particularly hard economic times and such approach was an educational response to the devastating social impact of the Depression. As discussed above in this paper, social justice is explained as acting, mostly through educational practice and social action, to alter the contexts that have worked to limit living conditions and educational opportunities for disenfranchised groups, by reclaiming, sustaining and advancing equity, equality, and fairness (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002). So much so that these concepts were experienced through the central course in the program labeled "Environment," which did much to promote the kind of learning to teach in which social context interacted with knowledge to teach (Grinberg, 2002). The course focused on learning the local and larger systems in which communities were immersed vis-à-vis social, geographical, and economic characteristics. It was used also for learning to teach social studies, for learning to do research, and for learning first-hand social issues (Grinberg, 2002). Students studied the school community (neighborhood) and systems where they were placed for practice teaching. During the first part of the course, each student investigated, observed, conducted interviews, and used other sources of information like statistics, articles, and magazines (Grinberg, 2005). They collected data about food, housing, everyday routines of people, businesses, institutions, and life conditions. These experiences enabled the making of conceptual connections about social and material relationships in the community and the influences on the school setting.

By the end of this fieldwork, students organized in study groups and concentrated on a contemporary social issue for the community. Study groups analyzed the data collected about historical, geographical, cultural-ethnic, and economic backgrounds of a local community (Grinberg, 2002). Then they focused on how to use this knowledge for teaching children: "On the trips around New York, apparently we were also thinking about children's trips; what they would see" (Tarnay, 1975, p. 10). Towards the end of the year there was a field trip to the "coal areas" of Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and to Washington DC. Students learned about geology and animal life, about social conditions, workers' unionization, government, and also about teaching implications. The trip required a careful preparation including students developing their own questions to investigate, and it provided for a experience with some social issues outside of the New York area: "We had lots of background on that place. We met a lot of miners. We all became members of the bootleg miners union. They were striking. They had flooded and closed some mines." (Schonborg, 1976, p. 13). After exploring the mining and rural areas, during the Roosevelt presidency, they went to the nations' capital to better understand social policy and its implications for education (Grinberg, 2002, 2005). Because of the personal relationship between Sprague Mitchell and Eleanor Roosevelt, it was possible to have her as a guide (Cohen, 1975), "Roosevelt was with us and introduced us to, probably -the Department of the Interior or the Department of Labor or both, so that we could question the officials as to what was done for and with the miners' condition." (Killan, 1976, p. 11).

The focus was on building connections and to integrate the experience with thinking and acting upon their commitments in meaningful and concrete ways: "But that was only the beginning of our trip! After that we had to put it into drama form, play form, art form, letters to the editors form, letter to our constituents. Everything" (Killan, 1976, p. 11). This is a way of implementing what faculty members at Bank Street structured about the role of experience in learning to teach: student-teachers experienced what children may experience. According to Grinberg (2002), becoming aware, evaluating, analyzing, and thinking about how to build the connection for teaching is what made this a learning experience: Our final was a question which we had to answer... "Can human nature be changed?" The class was broken up into a number of committees, which I think you could choose to be in.

The committees had to look at different aspects of this; for example, some were looking at the biological and some were looking at it from the point of view of psychology, some politically, and some sociologically... Then we spent at least two days in which each committee reported on what it had uncovered about this question, "Could human nature be changed?" And at the end of the whole thing there was a resounding "yes!" --complete agreement. As though a Bank Street group would come up with any other answer than that! (Cohen, 1975, pp. 30-32)

#### 4.3. Theory and Practice Contextualized

Barbara Biber (1975), an influential faculty member in the program, described the conception of educational theories and practices as culturally and socially contextualized (Grinberg, 2005). In addition, school lectures, discussions, and field experiences reinforced the need for more perspectives on the social and political contexts, We got all involved in the whole issue of unions and unionization and social justice and we went around with social workers to see what it was like to live in tenements. We did all kinds of trips and all kinds of experiences in the environment of New York. I remember walking down to the river from Bank Street and looking at the West Side Highway, which was then new. (Kerlin, 1975, p. 3) The progressive conceptualization that teachers should be grounded in the understanding of social contexts and that they engage in social activity as part of their roles as future teachers involved (1) developing habits of the mind through structuring meaning within the content of study; and (2) controlling of the body in space and time through structuring practices. The conditions brought upon by the Great Depression, in addition to the struggle of labor unions to gain influence, permeated the curriculum because the faculty at Bank Street saw teaching as part of a larger movement for social change advancing democracy and social justice (Grinberg, 2005).

Randolph Smith, another faculty member, remembered;

I was also very much concerned in those days, as I think many of us were, with the directions in which America was going ...We had a good strong labor organization in this country and we were going to help strengthen its fabric in democratic ways... There was a lot of social ferment in those days and concern about the problems of the Depression. (Smith, 8/25/75, pp. 32-3) In the following section we will further discuss the relationship of context to teacher education in the case of Bank Street by looking at some aspects of the curricular structure.

### 5. Curricular Structure

Our aim is to help students develop a scientific attitude towards their work and towards life... help students develop and express the attitude of the artist towards their work and towards life. To us this means an attitude of relish, of emotional drive, a genuine participation in some creative phase of work, and a sense that joy and beauty are legitimate possessions of all human beings, young and old. (Sprague Mitchell, 1931, p. 251) Faculty members trusted and respected the intellectual and creative capacity of the students as reflected in the curriculum content. As "The Students of the Cooperative School 1934-35" (1935) wrote: "None of us is leaving Bank Street with a packet of ideas neatly sealed and ready to be pigeon-holed. We all have the feeling that given the Cooperative School as a springboard, there is no limit to where one can leap" (p. 2). The concept was that teachers could not be provided just with a set of techniques, they had to develop the powers to reinterpret their own practices and validate and challenge their own constructions of meaning and knowledge, which included the understanding that teaching is about shaping the context in favor of social justice (Grinberg, 2005). In other words, the best education a teacher can get would enable the fostering of inquiry and reflection, as well as passion for life-long learning and commitment to social justice. The program lasted one academic year, from October to June. During this year students took classes while simultaneously engaging in practices of teaching, where the prospective teacher was in a classroom every week for the whole year from Monday to Thursday (Grinberg, 2002, 2005). Course-work started on Thursday evenings and continued on Fridays and Saturday mornings (Catalogue, 1933-34). Practice teaching occurred parallel and in connection to the course-work. Faculty summarized their viewpoint about discreet units of instruction and coursework as follows, The close relation which the Cooperative School curriculum undertakes to maintain between theory and practice, course-work and classroom experience, inevitably makes somewhat artificial any arbitrary division of the curriculum into discreet courses. In fact, in order to reduce such arbitrary dividing lines to a minimum, the course schedule itself is consciously organized so that courses which are closely related in content and purpose are scheduled at contiguous periods.



(Outline, 1937, p. 16) Working closely with the schools, the program prepared teachers who enjoyed children, who knew the world in which children lived and understood their socio-economic contexts (Grinberg 2005). Knowing the children's world encompassed a broad understanding of the different systems, their interconnections and their influences to understand the whole child.

This required that teachers immerse themselves in scholarship, cultural knowledge, an understanding of children, and foster inquiry, creativity, and open-mindedness. Furthermore, teachers should know the world in which children live and understand the social, political, and economic contexts which condition the environment in which children grow and develop, because: [E]xperiences which determine the educational development of the child are not confined to the school but relate equally to the whole amount of experiences outside the school --in the home and elsewhere-- by which humans beings undertake to satisfy their basic needs for food, clothes, houses, health, economic security, satisfying social relations, recreation, and creative expression. (Outline, 1937, pp. 3-4)

### 5.1. Learning about the Self

An important dimension of the curriculum focused on the development of the person (Grinberg, 2002, 2005). Courses such as Dramatics, Music, Dance, Shop, or Design Workshop, were spaces to enrich and develop emotions and sensitivities, In the Dance and in Dramatics we became aware of our bodies as vehicles of expression, of the subtleties in the curve of the little toe, and of the hypnotic possibilities of a voice from the diaphragm. Mr. Pearson (art) allowed us no preconceptions about design as we played a little grimly with line, color and mass. Those of us who had never written a note before emerged from Music with not only a whole song of our own composing but also words to go with it, and much better ears for D and D sharp. (The Students of the Cooperative School 1934- 35, 1935, p. 2) The process of engaging in creative art was important because it was assumed that it will help the student-teacher better understand what children experience when engaging in these activities and to value the importance of emotion, sensitivity, and creativity in the growth of the child (Grinberg, 2005). For instance, the course on Dramatics, taught by Charlotte Perry, made explicit that its content will cover methods that could be of use for different ages and for different types of school or groups (Catalogue, 1933-34). Learning to teach implied learning about the self also because personal and social qualifications of the teacher would determine the nature of the relationships built in the classroom and in the school community (Grinberg, 2002). The study of these relationships was influenced then by contemporary psychoanalytic approaches in education, which advocated for self-exploration and introspection (Biber, 7/14/75). Thus, the program was concerned not just with providing opportunities to nurture the sensibilities of the prospective teacher and understanding of the cultural and social systems, but also with providing rich personal experiences, You hoped that you could help the students see how they as people were relating to this profession. What in their background really led them to it, what in their background supported it, where their greatest satisfactions were, where there were problems that could be worked out. (Biber, 8/13/75, p. 13)

An example of Bank Street's commitment to critically reflect on these relationships was the "Advisory" class, in which students explored their own social perceptions. This was a vehicle for reflection on experiences in and out of schools. This self-exploratory approach was incorporated in the personality class taught by Elizabeth Healy, which become known as the Advisory class (Grinberg, 2005). In the large group discussion with Miss Healy most of us were able to say--probably for the first time in our lives --what we really were thinking; and we learned that we were neither so bad as we had feared nor so good as we had hoped; and, what may be more important, that the other person had fears and hopes not so very different from our own. Nor were these meetings limited to our interest in ourselves; every meeting included children; as a matter of fact, we are willing to swear that no other class had ever integrated their entire experience so beautifully. (The Students of the Cooperative School 1934-35, 1935, p. 1) The connection between learning the self and learning the world was manifested by the expectation that Bank Street students define their own social perspectives and the expectation that the prospective teachers will engage in social, community, and political activities outside the school for the improvement of social conditions. This was another way to advocate in favor of children beyond teaching by influencing the larger social context in which children grow (Grinberg, 2002). These progressive teachers educated at Bank Street had a set of programmatic experiences that enabled them to develop the skills to actively engage in shaping the conditions and environments of their own practices and that of their students.

## 6. Tensions

Most students at the CST were from an elite background in terms of socio-economic upbringing. They had cultural capital and the program strengthened it. Cultural capital refers to cultural “instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 488).

This worked well for teaching in the progressive schools of the time, but the obvious tension for these prospective teachers could be if they had to teach children from a different background in spite of the intense preparation to understand and address context in cultural, social, economic, and political terms by engaging in concrete curricular design (Grinberg, 2005). The expectation of avoiding such tension was by requiring the self-exploring class on “Personality.” In addition, the active participation in the cultural life of the Village helped to further explore potential cultural capital and social class contradictions, as a student recalls, “Then there were quite a few plays that were coming out about the blacks and their place in society...See, we were deeply moved by the ethnic groups, but we still had not mingled with them” (Killan, 1976, p. 31). Ethnic diversity highlighted tensions with the dominant cultural capital within progressive circles regarding teaching and the personality of the teacher. Expressing passion, feelings, and strong emotions were perceived among progressive educational circles as a drawback for a teacher. These types of feelings implied too much influence and too much direction in the child's learning. For example, Grinberg (2005) reported that Jewish teachers in some progressive educational groups were perceived as too passionate and resolute (Cohen, 1975), which might cause to be too influential for most children: “She said, ‘I must warn you, there is not a demand for Jewish teachers in this field.’ That was true then” (Kandell, 1975, p. 3). In understanding the children's world, a teacher will have to consciously move away from what seems to be relatively safe into risky situations, from the known and familiar to the uncertain, from privilege class background to solidarity with the dispossessed, from assumed expectations in terms of roles because of gender or ethnicity or race to a defiance of the deemed as normal by challenging behaviors, alliances, and social affiliations—an act of transgression. This group of people, almost all of them women, had other choices in life based on their educational and social background (Grinberg, 2005). However, they took risks because they chose to be “educated.” They chose to attend an alternative institution and to become a teacher. They chose to engage in teaching and social activism, and in teaching as a form of social activism.

Although, because the study of how some groups lived their poverty and alienation was a subject matter, it could have elicited an elitist view on what to do and how to change the lives of the poor. However, they were well aware of this potential tension. As Dewey perceived, the language of middle-class benevolence often betrayed a view of the masses as inert material on which reformers might work their will, and he called instead for a reconstructed conception of helping others which enlisted their full and willing participation in the provision of social welfare. (Westbrook, 1991, p. 185) Consequently, faculty members at Bank Street emphasized the importance of listening to the voices of the alienated. For example, becoming members of labor unions was a form of solidarity with the dispossessed. In spite that could be argued that they were studying the lives of poor people because they wanted to validate their own political perspectives, there was an authentic interest in understanding children and their social context (Grinberg, 2005). At least one notorious Bank Street graduate, Claudia Lewis, went on to teach for several years to the mining areas at the Highlander School (Lewis, 1946). It is important to note that during the first years of the program, the teaching credential that Bank Street provided was not a valid license to teach in public schools. Students and faculty at CST seemed to believe that what they did was authentic and that they were serious about understanding and promoting social change. The program was context-specific also in the sense that the multiple systems in which students were experiencing poverty and marginality, and thus the need to understand and address these by future progressive teachers. By opening sensitivity to difference, there is a potential opening towards unconventional life styles and social behavior. Sensitivity in the social realm is also developed through sensitivity in the aesthetic realm. The practice and study of arts, music, and drama, is related with developing the minds and the souls towards an openness that eventually will accept differences and alternatives not just in art but also in life in general and at large (Grinberg, 2005). And if this were the case, they chose to change the world also through the everyday routines of their own lives, through reframing themselves, and reframing their relationships. After all, it was not easy to be a woman, to be woman in the 1930's, to be social activists, and to challenge their own social and economic background. Real situations, real dilemmas, real experiences with real children demanded a special effort to move philosophies of social change into practice.

One significant implication of the class on Environment was that to learn to teach they had to move away from their own comfort zones. In many senses, nowadays our students and we often struggle with our own and with their own border crossing. However, primarily, to take risks in terms of teaching meant to these student teachers at Bank Street to actively and purposefully engage in advancing an agenda of social justice.

## 7. Conclusion

Bank Street offered an intensive one-year curriculum for college graduates who were interested in teaching in progressive schools. Working closely with these schools, the program prepared teachers who enjoyed children, who knew the world in which children lived, and understood their socio-economic contexts. There was an expectation that graduates from Bank Street will foster a social justice approach in their teaching and will advance social justice agendas outside of the classroom. For this to happen they had to have knowledge and understanding of the influences of the immediate contexts, the interconnection of those primary social institutions and the influences generated by such relationships, and the impact of larger socially constructed structures, such as workplace and values in understanding and teaching the whole child. Coursework at Bank Street offered structured experiences to develop teachers' predispositions for building human relationships, disciplinary connections, and social commitments in a democratic milieu. This required that teachers also immerse themselves in scholarship, cultural knowledge, and an understanding of children and develop the habits of inquiry, creativity, and open-mindedness. The "Advisory" class and the "Environment" class are examples of learning opportunities that illustrate how the program dealt with contexts, past and present, local and societal, personal and public. To conclude, Bank Street's pioneering approach to teacher preparation in the 1930's framed how progressive teachers should be prepared to teach for social justice, while the context of progressivism and that of the systems in which the program and people were located framed the teaching program. It also offers a compelling model for how teacher education can help teacher candidates learn about contexts different from their own and connect the micro context of the classroom to broader social inequities and challenges.

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