

The carillon from St. Vincent's peals the evening melodies. Birds of many species sing their varied songs above in the exotic old trees as I walk toward the classroom building for my elementary education methodology class. Pulling my cart of books, handouts, videotapes, and assorted teaching materials, I wonder what I have forgotten. I take a few breaths to draw in the peacefulness, and nod to students clustered for a quick before-class meal at outside tables. The low drone of freeway traffic is almost lost to consciousness. This is the Doheny campus of Mount St. Mary's College, located in the heart of Los Angeles, two blocks from the busiest LA freeways, clogged bumper to bumper. A second campus perches in the hills across town. The two campuses function as one college with associate of arts and graduate programs at the Doheny campus, and bachelors degrees at the Chalon campus.

The Doheny campus is a pond of tranquility within the complex, pulsing energy of central Los Angeles. Its history is entwined in the rise of millionaires. A square block of Victorian homes surrounded by plantings collected from around the world, the campus was home to the Dohenys, their relatives and friends. Today it serves the college mission: preparing multiethnic, multilingual students to become leaders in a diverse and changing world. The opulent mansion of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Doheny now houses special events on the first floor, administrative offices on the second floor, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet on the third floor. Graced by the leaded glass windows and heavy oak doors of another era, the rest of the homes and out-buildings also have students or Sisters living upstairs and college programs downstairs. The Education Department, a state certified Child Care Center, the Center for Urban Partnership, student offices of Latinas Unidas and the African-American Council of Women have reshaped elegant living space to address present and future

needs. The splendor of past, isolated wealth has been adapted for 21st century work to empower those who have historically been ignored.

A quiet, persistent commitment to social justice permeates college activities. Predominately European American in the 1960s, the student body now reflects the ethnic diversity of California and Los Angeles more closely than any other independent college in the state. The current mission states that Mount St. Mary's College will exemplify an inclusive, progressive Catholic tradition; the strategic plan includes service and social justice components. To this end, for instance, the college has supported the development of the Center for Cultural Fluency where teachers can borrow books, posters and a variety of resources representing the major ethnic groups of Los Angeles—resources hard to find elsewhere.

As I continue toward class I mull over my students' incredibly diverse stories and experiences and worry whether I will succeed in helping them comprehend how their own students' lives and communities can become essential components of curriculum. The class's diversity is exhilarating for me, but also daunting. Despite outside political forces that negate the celebration of multi-ethnic and multilingual ways of knowing and viewing the world, Mount St. Mary's College is a place where staff, faculty and students work for an environment that values diverse perspectives and experiences. One group of students in my class describes themselves as "two Catholics, two Protestants, one Hindu." They continued:

We speak English, Spanish, Hindi, Tagalog and Vietnamese. Two of us are graduate students, three are undergraduates. One has taught for 10 years, one for two years, one has been a teacher's aide, and two of us have never taught.

But so much diversity can also be daunting. I know how difficult it is to celebrate and recognize multiple ways of knowing day to day, one to one. It is a goal that keeps faculty humble.

Entering the classroom a half hour early, I wonder how much the beginning credential candidates found helpful in last week's service learning presentation by Gloria Ramos, a recent graduate whose third grade class is immersed in service learning. Did these new preservice and in-service teachers believe that service learning projects are possible? Or did it seem too complicated, too over-

powering? I wonder if they will be able to see themselves as capable of using service learning.

Months later, as I sit down to write about the experience, I recognize that Gloria's project gives structure to this story, as it did for my students' efforts to understand and teach service learning. Two themes run through our story, and Gloria's experiences are integral to both.

Our service learning story began a year and a half ago when I found four energetic and thoughtful colleagues, including Gloria, willing to join a team to plan and implement a service learning grant. Our goal was to infuse service learning throughout the elementary credential program in order to help credential candidates connect explicitly with the parents and neighborhoods of their schools. In an era of parent-blaming, we wanted them to learn the strength and value of respecting and involving parents and of taking advantage of the many resources that exist in urban communities. The two dominant themes that thread through our first year and a half are the important role a cohesive planning and implementation team played as we grappled with unknowns, and the need to remain flexible.

The *cohesiveness of our planning and implementation team*—four education department faculty members associated in various ways with the elementary education program and an alumna teaching in Los Angeles who is familiar with service learning—sustained our vision through the ups and downs of our individual projects and our over-extended lives. Team meetings gave us the time to think deeply about what we were doing, laugh at some of our outrageous errors, and push ourselves along a mutual though varied pathway.

The other theme is that *flexibility is essential*. Without flexibility we would have missed unexpected opportunities and been unable to rescue ourselves from potential failures. Predictability was scarce during our year of beginnings, and we had to adapt to students' schedules, to plans that did not work, to unexpected opportunities, to changes in "definite" plans. In turn, the credential candidates had to struggle with new expectations and learning venues they often found strange and sometimes aggravating.

The elementary education credential candidates were introduced to service learning with a brief video and discussion that drew on their prior knowledge. Gloria Ramos' presentation followed. Gloria is a bilingual teacher in an area

