Teacher candidate attitudes towards diversity:

A pre-post course analysis

ABSTRACT: **This study seeks to determine beginning teacher education majors' views on cultural diversity before and after they take their Educational Foundations and Diversity Education course. Participants enrolled in either graduate or undergraduate versions of the course were asked to answer the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (Henry, 1991) at the beginning and end of the semester. Data was analyzed using t-tests to determine if there are pre/post test differences across various demographic groups.**

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Introduction

This research study is an initial evaluative research study which examines where our teacher education program is at the moment in terms of our teacher candidates' attitudes toward diversity.   In our MSU teacher preparation program accountability surveys from 2003 and again in 2004, it was found that diversity and human relations issues were mentioned as weak areas for our recent graduates, our alumni and by the employers of our graduates. Issues such as "awareness of different cultures and ways of life" and "ability to develop and adapt practices that address diverse learning styles" were considered areas of weakness for our students.

Review of Literature

This difficulty that teachers have with dealing with diversity is not limited to MSU. Kailin (1999) contends that teachers develop an uncritical habit of the mind that justifies inequality called "dyconscious racism." She further goes on to note that even when teachers view acts within their schools that they would call "racist" the teachers said or did nothing; leading Kailin to assert that "Silence was the persistence of racism." Sleeter (1993) studied a cohort of 30 teachers over a period of two years and found that the white teachers associated race with their own European ancestry denying the history of colonization or the complicity of social institutions in propagating inequality. Haberman and Post (1992) found that pre-service teachers, despite intensive coursework in multicultural education and over 100 hours field experience with low-income minority children in schools, these teachers reinforced their initial preconceptions rather than reconstructed their views of children of color.   When coupled with the findings of Pope and Wilder (2005) who found that teachers who value diversity tend to interact, notice and appreciates diverse individuals more in school and social situations, it underlines the importance of imparting an appreciation for diversity in our pre-service candidates.

In fact, Klug, Luckey, Wilkens and Witfield (2006) demonstrated what occurs when the interactions of candidates who appreciate diversity are compared with the interactions of candidates who appear less appreciative of diversity. Candidates who appreciate diversity are enthusiastic and motivated by their positive interactions with diversity. In contrast, those that view working with diverse students as a forced requirement, were frustrated and angry.   This perceptions of viewing diversity coursework as hoop to jump through or a to-do list item to check off is also reflected in Jackson's (2007) study of white teacher candidates at a primarily white institution. Despite this initial perception, Jackson did find that over half of her candidates, after having participated in a diversity course, had moved from what she termed the unconscious stage to the responsive stage. However, the responsive stage in not a stable stage. It is a stage in which candidates may "flip-flop between interest and apathy" (Jackson, 2007, p. 31). None of the candidates moved to her final stage of "critical consciousness" in which the candidates are empathetic and have a social action approach to teaching.   Considering the teacher turnover rate seen at high needs schools (Author & Stringer, under review), the issue of teaching our

teachers ways to positively interact with diverse populations and to do so in a sustained manner is pivotal and a nationwide as well as an institution specific issue. This paper will examine the issue of students' views of diversity as a regionally specific issue.

Relevance

In 1970, Rist, in his seminal work, related how teachers who excluded students from the educational process were in fact maintaining the unequal social hierarchy. Ladson-Billings' (1994) described how successful teachers of African-American students had culturally relevant teaching practices which engaged their students in the learning process. This past year in the Calcasieu Parish School District a noticeable achievement gap was evident in the district subgroup scores. The percentage of white students achieving proficiency at the High School, Middle School and Elementary school levels in both English Language Arts and Mathematics 20 to 30 points more than the African-American students percentage proficiency (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005). Couple that with the findings of our MSU Teacher Education accountability surveys, which found that the university that provides the majority of teachers to the Calcasieu Parish School District, is weakest in terms of our instruction concerning diversity and human relations, and the need to evaluate our courses which address diversity in the classroom is palpable.

Researchers' perspective

In my previous research, I have examined how the view of cultures within a school context can affect learning (Author & Davis-Pierce, under review). I have examined teacher perceptions and how those perceptions affect instruction, particularly the instruction of African-American students (Author, 2003) and I have examined how a teacher deals with her own attitudes and perceptions while dealing with at-risk students within her own classroom (Asher & Author, 2004). Mrs. X and I both work in the field of diversity education and both teach a course that, we hoped, caused students to reflect on differences and ameliorate their negotiations of those differences.

This study sought to determine MSU's beginning teacher education majors' views on cultural diversity both before and after completing a diversity education foundations course at either the undergraduate or the graduate level. The hypotheses tested were as follows:

1. There will be no difference in pre/post course attitudes toward diversity of study participants according to their age.
2. There will be no difference in pre/post course attitudes toward diversity of study participants according to their socio-economic level.
3. There will be no difference in pre/post course attitudes toward diversity of study participants according to their academic level.

4. There will be no difference in pre/post course attitudes toward diversity of study participants according to their ethnicity.
5. There will be no difference in pre/post course attitudes toward diversity between the above mentioned groups.

Methodology

This study examined the views of MSU students in SPED 204 and EDUC 647. Both of these courses are foundation courses which address multicultural education and the education of students with exceptionalities. In addition, both courses are requirements for initial teacher certification in either the traditional program (SPED 204) or the Master of Arts in Teaching program (EDUC 647). The participants were all enrolled in the Fall 2005 semester.

Participants were given the "Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory" (Henry, 1991) both at the first month of the semester and the last month of the semester. There were some delays in returning the surveys due to the arrival of a category 5 hurricane, the subsequent evacuation and the three weeks of school closure due to hurricane damage. These questionnaires were voluntary and students were not required to fill them out. The questionnaires utilized a five-point Likert scale and data from the questionnaires were analyzed to yield the frequencies and percentages of responses both before they begin classroom instruction and after they have completed the course.

The initial findings from this student included descriptive statistics of the frequencies and percentages of responses within the six demographic sub-groups of age, gender, ethnicity, income, academic level and international travel. While there were initially 100 participants in the study, the category 5 hurricane and a month off of school while buildings were repaired resulted in participant attrition to 76 participants. The tables below details the post-hurricane frequency of the participants in the five sub-groups.

N=76	Under 30	30-45	Over 45	
Age	32%	42%	26%	
	Graduate	**Undergraduate**		
School Level	53.9%	46.1%		
	Male	**Female**		
Gender	11.8%	88.2%		
	African-American	**Caucasian**	**Other**	
Ethnicity	26.7%	68.4%	4%	
	Up to -25K	**25K-50K**	**Over 50K**	
Income	53.9%	26.3%	18.4%	
	Only in US	**International**		
Travel	60.5%	39.5%		

These same frequencies and percentages were then tabulated for the post-course questionnaire. Paired t-tests allowed for the comparison of pre/post course attitudes of the students in the four demographic sub-groups and the overall group.

Findings

It was expected that teacher candidates' attitudes would differ after they have participated in the diversity course for which they were enrolled. Furthermore, it was expected that that there would be differences in terms of ethnicity and age, as found in the validity study of the questionnaire (Henry, 1995). This study found that the mean of the post-test scores of the overall group were higher (indicating more positive view of diversity) then the pre-test scores and that difference was significant.

Table 1: Paired Samples and T-test for Overall Group

	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean	Paired Differences	SD	95% confidence interval of the difference Lower	95% confidence interval of the difference Upper	t	d	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test	101.07	76	8.24	.95							
Post-test	104.00	76	9.76	1.12							
Pre-test-Post-test					-2.93	7.34	-4.61	-1.26	-3.48	75	.001

Within all four of the demographic subgroups all of the groups, with the exception of the middle income students, had mean scores that were higher or showing more positive views of diversity after the course. However, some of these differences were significant and some were not. Growth that was not significant was found in the older and middle ages of students. In addition, the richest students, the men and students who only traveled within the US had no significant difference in their pre-post scores. In addition, the one group whose scores lowered over the course of the semester, the middle income students, also did not have significant differences in their pre/post survey scores. (See Table 2)

Table 2: T-test results with no significance

	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean	Paired Differences Mean	SD	95% confidence interval of the	95% confidence interval of the differenc	t	d	Sig. (2-tailed)

	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean	Paired Differences Mean	SD	difference Lower	e Upper	t	d	Sig. (2-tailed)
Richest Pre	103.6	14	10.4	2.77							
Post	107.0	14	12.8	3.43	-3.36	7.70	-7.80	1.09	-1.63	13	.127
Men Pre	97.89	9	7.29	2.43							
Post	98.89	9	4.83	1.61	-1	8.22	-7.32	5.32	-.365	8	.724
In US travel Pre	99.3	30	6.72	1.23							
Post	101.9	30	8.47	1.55	-2.57	7.14	-5.23	.1	-1.97	29	.059
Middle income Pre	104.4	20	7.8	1.74							
Post	103.7	20	8.6	1.92	.75	5.38	-1.77	3.27	.624	19	.54

A number of the subgroups had significantly higher survey scores on their post-tests. These groups included the youngest students, the poorest students, women, both graduate and undergraduate students, both African-American and white students and finally, the students who had lived or traveled abroad. (See Table 3).

Table 3: T-test results showing significant differences in the pre/post mean scores.

	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean	Paired Differences Mean	SD	95% confidence interval of the difference Lower	95% confidence interval of the difference Upper	t	d	Sig. (2-tailed)
Poorest Pre	98.80	41	6.92	1.08							
Post	103.4	41	9.11	1.42	-4.73	7.62	-7.04	-2.23	-3.89	40	.000
Women Pre	101.5	67	8.32	1.02							
Post	104.7	67	10.1	1.23	-3.19	7.25	-4.96	-1.43	-3.61	66	.001
Graduate Pre	103.5	41	8.88	1.39							
Post	105.9	41	10.6	1.65	-2.41	6.91	-4.60	-.23	-2.24	40	.031
Undergraduate Pre	98.20	35	6.43	1.09							
Post	101.7	35	8.28	1.40	-3.54	7.87	-6.25	-.84	-2.66	34	.012
AA Pre	101.3	20	5.28	1.18							
Post	104.8	20	8.08	1.81	-3.50	5.57	-6.11	-.89	-2.81	19	.011
W Pre	100.9	52	9.13	1.27							

Post	103.4	52	10.3	1.43	-2.42	7.96	-4.64	-.21	-2.19	51	.033
Travel/Live Abroad Pre	102.2	46	8.99	1.32							
Post	105.4	46	10.4	1.53	-3.17	7.54	-5.41	-.94	-2.86	45	.006

Discussion

While many of the historically marginalized groups did improve their views on diversity –lower SES, African-Americans and women—the groups that are consistently viewed as possessing "cultural capital" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) –middle and upper income students and men—did not. What do these findings tell us if our courses are not improving the views of diversity of these students? What can we, as instructors, do to reach these students? Is there something in the coursework that could improve their views? The students who traveled outside of the U.S. saw significant improvement in their views on diversity scores. Would a travel aboard component be a worthy addition to the Teacher Education curriculum?

More research is of course need to determine if these results replicate in different situations.   Furthermore, a more longitudinal study needs to be undertaken to determine if these views transfer into teaching practices once our candidates get out into the field.

Limitations

A limitation that must be taken into consideration with this study is that it was undertaken during the "Hurricane Rita" 2005 semester when students were out of school for over a month and the University and city was being repaired. The researchers wondered if the stress of the hurricane as well as the comparison of "our" hurricane to that of "Katrina" contributed to the findings of this study. Another limitation of the study is that multiple t-tests increase the chance of a Type I error and therefore the findings may be misleading.

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Use the hanging indent (1/2 inch) and auto style of "text of article." Single-space references. Examples are as follows:

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