

Preparing Early Childhood Teachers for Multicultural Classrooms

Are 21st century teachers being prepared for 21st century classroom diversity?

TODAY'S EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS reflect our nation's changing cultural mosaic. With each new school year, teachers likely will encounter more and more children from backgrounds different from their own. The changing face of the American classroom reflects the progressive integration of race, religion, physical ability and language. This exciting but challenging cultural reality requires new teachers to be more responsive and better prepared to work with young, diverse students, and to be effective mentors in the multicultural classroom. As the first decade of the 21st century comes to a close, are teachers being prepared for 21st century classroom diversity?

Early childhood teacher preparation programs have responded differently to this critical issue, in part because they operate in different conditions. Little is known about circumstances that may impact how cultural and linguistic diversity issues

are addressed in early childhood teacher preparation programs. A recent FPG study examined the impact of geographical contexts, institutional characteristics and program characteristics on cultural and linguistic diversity coursework and practica requirements in 416 Bachelor's degree programs that prepare early childhood teachers.

The findings underscore the importance of aligning recommended practices with teacher preparation requirements, recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty, and providing support about diversity issues to the predominately White, non-Hispanic early childhood teaching faculty.



Key Findings

Diversity Coverage Varies

- Early childhood teacher preparation programs offering a Bachelor's degree varied in their coursework coverage of cultural as well as linguistic diversity.
- Programs were more likely to offer an entire course or more related to cultural diversity (47%) than linguistic diversity (14%).

Location Matters for Linguistic Diversity

- Early childhood Bachelor's degree programs in rural areas were less likely to require coursework focused on linguistic diversity compared to programs in larger cities.
- Bachelor's programs in states with a larger non-White population were more likely to require a practicum focused on linguistic diversity than programs in states with a higher population percentage of non-Hispanic Whites.
- These findings suggest that program requirements related to linguistic diversity may depend in part on the needs of a particular geographic area. None of the geographical characteristics, however, were related to cultural diversity.

Faculty Matter for Cultural Diversity

- Bachelor's degree programs with more non-White full-time faculty were more likely to require more coverage of cultural diversity in their early childhood teacher preparation coursework.
- This suggests that recruiting and retaining diverse faculty may be an important strategy for supporting a culturally competent early childhood teacher workforce.

Diversity Means Multiple Things

- Findings from this study highlight the need for specificity when using the term "diversity."
- Most significant findings were related to linguistic diversity, suggesting that coursework or practica requirements focused on linguistic diversity in early childhood teacher preparation Bachelor's programs may be more variable across programs.
- Linguistic diversity demands as much attention as cultural diversity in policy, practice, and research. ■

To Learn More

Lim, C-I., Maxwell, K. L., Able-Boone, H., & Zimmer, C.R. (2009). Cultural and linguistic diversity in early childhood teacher preparation: The impact of contextual characteristics on coursework and practica. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 24(1), 64–76.



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