



Investigation of Multicultural Education Courses: The Case of Georgia State University*

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Abstract

Multicultural education includes the design of learning environments according to different cultural characteristics and learners' respectful attitudes towards these characteristics. One of the teachers' expected competencies in multicultural education is recognizing learners' cultural characteristics and being respectful of these during the teaching process. In this manner, examining how institutions that train teachers conduct their activities regarding multiculturalism, and to what extent diversity is considered in these education programs, gain importance. The present study was conducted on Georgia State University's Faculty of Education in order to determine the general structure of the courses that are related with multicultural education, the organization of the teaching process, and how the evaluation processes are structured. Qualitative data analysis was used in the present study. On the basis of the descriptive case study method, document analysis, observation and interview techniques were used. In order to collect data, ten different courses' syllabi were investigated, interviews were conducted with five instructors, and three separate courses offered during the 2011- 2012 fall semester were observed. Content analysis was used in order to analyze the data. According to the results, five themes emerged: settlement, importance, goal and content organization, the teaching and learning process, and measurement and evaluation. The findings of the study discovered that the courses were built on awareness, knowledge, and skill competencies in order to help teacher-candidates deal with any difficulties they might face during their work life. Based on instructors' statements, positive changes in students' attitudes towards diversity and different cultural values were found to be the most important gains in these courses.

Key Words

Multiculturalism, Multicultural Education, Multicultural Teacher Competencies, Teacher Education.

The demographic structure changes due to migration, the difference between developed and undeveloped regions, uncontrollable population increase, and the changing interests among individuals, all of these influence the education system deeply. One of the main reasons for the current situation is related to the content of culture. Culture is associated with a structure that accommodates various elements such as behavioral patterns, attitudes, norms, values, communication

styles, language, civilization, actions, health conditions, production, and education output. It is linked with teaching, problem solving and the learning process (Doytcheva, 2005; Güvenç, 1994; San, 1983; Steffen, Keisha, Debbie, Lena, & Amy, 2011). According to San (1983), national and global culture transference is determined by that country's educational politics. Gutmann (2005) points out that in political settlement, all of the citizens' rights in terms of talking, thinking, religion and

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becoming organized should be protected and no one should be forced to accept cultural values that governmental institutions direct. Designing this structure requires a program-development process that should take various variables into account. The program-development process resembles the dynamic construct that includes mutual interaction, and it is defined as a “cylindrical construct” (Demirel, 2004; Varış, 1996). While Ertürk (1991) pointed out that educators should determine the goals of education, Sönmez (2008) underlined the desired characteristics in this process. The effect of altering the goals of societal constructs and education throughout history has been examined (Sönmez, 2011). The importance of educating individuals who can catch up with the changes in the world and who are open to changes and new experiences are included in the goals of the Ministry of National Education’s General Goals (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2012).

According to Balı (2001) no society is composed of a group of people who are clamped together around a certain ideological, religious or moral perspective. Being unable to raise individuals respect towards cultural diversity can result in *moral monism*, an idea that is defined as accepting only one life style as right or good, and believing that the more other life styles differ from this one, the more wrong they are (Parekh, 2002). Baumann (2006) underlined the changing dimension of culture and at this point an important metaphor, “melting pot,” (Tiedt & Tiedt, 1995) emerged that is used to transform various elements in a society into a homogenous structure. On the other hand, the “salad bowl” metaphor is used to mention that in this unity, different “tastes” can exist together (Pozzetta, 1991). McLuhan’s “global village” term, mentioned in 1962, has come true, and almost all societies have begun to affect each other (cited in Grant & Portera, 2011). During this process the need for focusing on different cultural values in the education process has been mentioned (Bennett, 2011). While researchers who support multiculturalism and multicultural education indicate that societies consist of various cultures and that this is an accepted reality (Aydın, 2013; Yalçın, 2002), the researchers who are against these concepts (e.g. Aldridge, Calhoun, & Aman, 2000 as cited in Çırık, 2008) argue that multiculturalism has a structure which aims to divide nations (Altunbaş, 2006).

Multicultural education is examined in the context of including positive ethnical characteristics into the classroom (Wilson, 2008), considering diversity

based upon the unity principal (Vatandaş, 2002) and the beliefs and applications used in arranging individual as well as collective lives (Parekh, 2002). In many studies about multicultural education, how differences can be integrated into education programs are examined (Billings & Brown, 2008). Nieto, Bode, Kang, and Raible (2008) evaluated this as a process that evolves teachers, students and the society, and Rao (2005) proposed a three-stage education model for creating a multicultural classroom. McGehan (1982) expanded this structure and studied multicultural teacher competencies under four dimensions and defined these as knowledge, experience, attitude and behavior (as cited in Guyton & Wesche, 2005). Similarly, Moore (2001) also pointed out a four dimensioned process. In addition to these structures, Gay (2000 as cited in Gay, 2002) also defined competencies as being aware and oriented towards learning and developing culturally sensitive teaching methods. Taylor and Quintana (2003) underlined the importance of personal characteristics and the awareness of teachers regarding multicultural education. Hermans (2002) concentrated on preparing teacher candidates for multicultural classrooms, and Washington (2003) examined multicultural teacher competencies such as awareness, knowledge and skill.

The necessity of multicultural teacher competencies was underlined in McIntyre, Rosebery, and Gonzalez’s (2001) study, and it was mentioned that what students bring to class from their families and homes directly affects their academic performance. Goodlad (1990 as cited in Jackson & Chance, 2010) pointed out that multicultural education is a moral and ethical obligation for teachers. Besides this, it is mentioned in literature that in order to have teacher certification, teaching programs should give courses about multiculturalism (Keim, Warring, & Rau, 2001). In the United States, The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accepts “Working with Diversity Populations” as one of six main standards in preparing educators to work effectively in P-12 schools (Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Preparation Institutions, 2008). Teacher candidates in the United States are trained within the framework of multicultural competencies (Ensign, 2009), and their education programs include courses related to ethnical studies (Banks, 2002; Sinagatullin, 2003).

There are some descriptive studies about multiculturalism and multicultural education in

Turkey (Açıkalın, 2010; Başbay & Bektaş, 2009; Çırık, 2008). There are also a few studies that are mainly conducted with teacher candidates and faculty (Başbay, Kağnıcı, & Sarsar, 2013, Çoban, Karaman, & Doğan, 2010; Coşkun, 2012; Demir, 2012; Ünlü & Örtten, 2013; Yavuz & Anıl, 2010; Yazıcı, Başol, & Toprak, 2009). Since studies regarding multicultural education are new in Turkey, the field practices regarding multicultural education in the United States were chosen for examination.

Anatolia, accommodating different cultures for centuries, has a rich cultural heritage (Güven, 2007) like a mosaic, including differences in traditions, beliefs, holidays, folkdances, traditional arts, clothing, architectural approaches and cuisine (Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı [Ministry of Culture and Tourism], 2012). Therefore, multiculturalism and multicultural education studies are believed to be crucial for an educational settlement that considers diversity. In this regard, it is believed that examining syllabi and course activities is helpful for understanding how institutions that train teachers conduct activities about multiculturalism and how diversity is considered within their education programs. For this purpose, the study was conducted on Georgia State University's Faculty of Education, having a history rooted in multicultural education efforts.

Method

Design of the Study

The study is a qualitative study. The descriptive-case study method was used in this study. Document analysis, interviews with instructors, as well as observations were also carried out.

The Case

The present study was conducted on Georgia State University's Faculty of Education. One of the major reasons for this selection was because this place was at the center of the American civil rights movement in the 1960's. It was also the place where Martin Luther King, who had led the racial equality struggle, lived and studied (City of Atlanta, 2013).

Data Collection

Prior to collecting data, in order to conduct the study on Georgia State University's Faculty of Education, permission was obtained from the

institutional review board (IRB). The courses related with multicultural education were determined and the syllabi of these courses were collected from the instructors in the form of printed documents. Interviews were conducted with five voluntary instructors, and the scope and purpose of the study was explained. To support the information gathered both from the syllabi and the instructors, three separate courses were also observed. The data was collected during the fall semester of the 2011-2012 academic year.

Data Collection Instruments

Document Analysis: For document analysis, electronic records and syllabi were examined. Ten different syllabi (3 bachelors', 4 masters' and 3 doctorate level) for six different courses related to multicultural education topics offered by the Faculty of Education in the fall semester of the 2011-2012 academic year were used.

Interview: Interviews were conducted with five voluntary instructors who taught these courses, and a semi-structured interview form with eight open-ended questions was used in the interviews.

Observation: A semi-structured form prepared by the researcher was used in order to observe classroom activities, teacher and learner attitudes and their behavior. Observations were carried out on three different courses (2 bachelor courses, 1 master's level course).

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used in order to analyze the qualitative data. Themes and codes were created from the beginning of the study according to the literature, the goals of the study and the data gathered. Later the qualitative data was separately read by two different experts. During these readings appropriate themes and possible codes were examined in addition to the codes that were already created. Later, the experts came together and decided on the codes and themes.

Findings

In terms of the question "What kind of structure do multicultural education courses use in terms of the dimensions of their goals, content, how the learning processes are taught, and how evaluation is performed?" five main themes were constructed: *a)* settlement, *b)* importance, *c)* goal and content

organization, d) teaching and learning process and e) measurement and evaluation.

Under the *settlement* theme, it was mentioned that multicultural education concentrates on the historical, sociological and philosophical foundations of education in order to query the education process. Instructors also indicated that the courses related to multicultural education have a structure that examines the role of the schools from the social sciences perspective. The rules for the courses were explicitly mentioned in the syllabi. Along with general rules such as academic honesty and active participation, other rules relating to the nature and structure of these courses were also underscored, such as being open to different perspectives, participating in the course based on one's own readings and experiences rather than others' interpretations, discussing ideas, and being respectful of different points of views.

Under the *importance* theme, it was seen that multicultural education courses focus on some important information and skills related to student diversity that teacher candidates would need in their work life. The role and the importance of the teachers in community movement were mentioned in the syllabi and by the instructors. In the interviews conducted on the instructors, it was mentioned that multicultural education courses provided opportunities for students to examine the different cultural structures in their society and the settled stereotypical thoughts.

Under the *goal and content organization* theme, when the goals of the courses were examined it was seen that the goals were formed in order to develop the *awareness* of the importance of multicultural topics in education, to increase multicultural education *knowledge* and to develop *skills* in order to meet the needs of different groups (Sue, Ivey, & Pederson, 1996). In the expression of these goals, actions such as querying, developing further comprehension, investigating, developing, practicing and increasing knowledge were used. In the content dimension, culture, school environment, the character of learners, prejudice, diversity and the role of the teacher in this process became apparent.

Under the *teaching-learning process* theme, it was mentioned that courses were mainly organized with a constructivist understanding. Presentations (instructor, student, video presentations), discussions, collaborative learning, film analysis, analysis of various events in the media, application experiences, projects and trips were found to be

the methods and techniques used within this framework. The findings of the observations were also parallel with the activities mentioned in the syllabi.

Under the *measurement and evaluation* theme, it was seen that various measurement and evaluation techniques were used to determine students' achievements. Since the evaluation was based on the teaching process, evaluations were activity-oriented. Peer evaluation was also mentioned as important for developing cooperation from colleagues.

Discussion

Student characteristics such as varying interests, needs and readiness levels need to be considered in education, and this important statement has been mentioned for a long time. Expecting that students with different characteristics can learn by only one common method does not conform to the contemporary educational perspective. It is important that, besides being equipped with field knowledge, teacher candidates should also be trained to have an understanding that differences in the classroom need to be taken into consideration. In this manner, teacher training programs should provide programs that consider classroom variety. Students bring to class a variety of variables such as their cultural backgrounds, gender, beliefs, ethnicities, sexual orientation and ideological views. In the present study, one of the important findings was the rules determined for the courses. In all the studies about multicultural education, being respectful to diversity has been a common theme. These findings were parallel with Schoorman and Bogotch's (2010) and Young's (1990 as cited in Hazır, 2012) studies. Instructors' statements underlined that multicultural education courses were effective in providing opportunities to teacher candidates to deal with prejudices. Multicultural education courses are important in terms of providing support to teacher candidates about how individuals in society can be purified from prejudices against each other, assisting them in changing their point of views, and creating changes in their attitudes. It is believed that by this means, teacher candidates who are expected to work in different regions of the country can contribute to the prevention of social prejudices before they occur. Based on these findings, it was seen that the courses were structured with a totalitarian understanding, from the preparation of the courses to their evaluation, and they were structured within a systems-approach framework.

The common characteristic of the courses was first to create awareness for teacher candidates so that they can conduct studies with students who have different cultural identities, and then to develop an understanding that can turn this awareness into an advantage in the process. Participating actively in the courses and being respectful were the common

understandings which emerged. The findings of the study were also found to parallel the studies of Huang (2002), Fennes and Hapgood (1997), Rao (2005), and Szabo and Anderson (2009). It is thought that the present study can provide a contribution to any multicultural education studies that might be conducted in Turkey.

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