Preparing Teachers for Diversity: A Literature Review and Implications from Community-Based Teacher Education

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Abstract

This study reviewed current issues in preparing qualified teachers for increasing diverse student populations in the U.S. and in other multicultural and multiethnic countries. Based on the framework of community-based and multicultural teacher education, this literature review paper analyzed issues and problems existed in the current curriculum, content, and practicum in traditional teacher education programs in addressing cultural knowledge and competence of preparing pre-service teachers in a multicultural society. Drawing from implications from community-based teacher education, this paper proposed several suggested strategies to reform traditional teacher education programs to meet the needs from multicultural and multiracial student populations and instructional context.

Keywords: multicultural teacher education, community-based teacher education, international perspectives on teacher preparation and development

1. Introduction

In recent years, educating preservice teachers for cultural diversity has become an increasingly important part of teacher education programs across the United States. As Mule (2010) pointed out, this issue is true for at least two reasons: "the changing nature of public education and the growing popularity among universities and colleges of the community engagement movement" (p.9). Facing the challenges emerge from students' cultural, racial, linguistic, socioeconomic, and educational diversities, there is a call for the widespread implementation and training of culturally responsive teachers, who "cultivate cooperation, collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility for learning among students and between students and teachers" (Gay, 2010, p.45). Evoking current teachers' cultural awareness is important, a more central effort needs to be accomplished is to adding diversity and multicultural content in teacher education programs. It is central to educate pre-service teachers and students in teacher education programs in a culturally responsive way, as well as to facilitate teacher candidates construct effective teaching pedagogies which drawing on experiences and knowledge developed in their professional training processes.

As indicated by Cochran-Smith (2004), the idea that teacher education is a complex issue and not simply a problem of policy implementation was influenced by and also had an influence on the "new multiculturalism" (p.16) in teacher education. Prompted by professional organizations such as AACTE and NCATE in the late 1970 and early 1980s, many teacher education programs across the country began to include multicultural and diversity issues in the program curriculum (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, French and Gracia-Lopez, 2002). The new multiculturalism in teacher education is closely connected to the notion of teacher education for social justice in that it challenges all of these assumptions and prepares prospective teachers to construct curriculum, implement instruction, interact with students, and collaborate with colleagues and communities in ways that likewise challenge them (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Facing the challenges of educating teachers for diversity, teacher education programs have routinely come to include diversity-focused courses (such as multicultural education, urban education, and teaching English language learners), placements in urban and diverse schools, and community-based field experiences in their curriculum (Mule, 2010). Through adding diversity-focused courses and emphasizing the importance of collaboration with communities, more opportunities will be offered to teacher education students to interact with diverse communities, especially communities that differ from the mainstream where most of teacher education students are grown up by social class, race and ethnicity, and primary language.

Mentioned by Mule (2010), the growing popularity among universities and colleges of the community engagement movement has its historical root: "A broader movement in higher education emphasizing deeper relationships with neighborhood communities that gained momentum in the late 1980s" (p.9). This increased attention to teacher education reform, multicultural teacher education, and community engagement, as well as the ways in which these elements interface are well-documented in the literature (Villegas & Davis, 2008; Banks et al., 2009; Irvine, 2003; Murrell, 2001). Taken together these scholarships support a college and university-based teacher education that is sensitive to the task of teaching culturally and economically diverse student population. However, the scholarship also indicated that the call for preparing teachers for diversity is fueled by concerns for quality teacher preparation and a need to respond to challenges facing both prospective teachers and teacher educators. Mule (2010) outlined the major challenges as: educational disparities or achievement gaps in American schools which often reflect demographics along class, race, ethnicity, and language; a nearly racially homogenous population of teachers; and a narrow teacher knowledge base for diversity.

2. Educational Disparities or Achievement Gaps in American Schools

The persistent achievement gaps between minority students and their White counterparts in K-12 education not only drive the agenda for educating teachers for diversity, but have also light up the attention of reform from the decision level at the federal, state, and local stages. Statistics showed that by the year 2010, about 40% of the school age population in the United State will be students of color (Gay, 1993; Gollnick & Chinn, 1998). The changing demographic diversity in the areas of race, ethnicity and culture makes current education more important and diverse. Meanwhile it also challenges the teaching effectiveness and equity for minority students. The academic achievement gap among ethnic minority and majority students prompts educators' concerns for promoting more supports for their academic engagements and learning outcomes.

Some studies re-conceptualized the academic gap as an opportunity gap, resource gap, and service gap or education debt (Banks, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2004) based on socioeconomic status, cultural stereotyping and racial segregation. Most studies about the academic achievement gap illustrate achievement barriers faced by minority students, as well as assume their racially based limitations and culturally rooted expectations about higher education result in lower academic attainments (Steele, 2004). The gaps in academic performance between White and non-White students cannot be fully explained by minority students' internal features such as cultural/racial group differences and personal abilities. Instead, the misconnections between students' internal cultural and racial backgrounds and external academic environments and teacher preparation and teaching practice, they need further investigations to explore minority students' actual learning experiences and challenges, provide improvements to scaffold their academic developments, and reduce the silenced cultural and racial gap in educational context (Steele, 2004).

In addition to minority students' test score gaps on standardized tests, other indicators of disparity in educational outcomes include overrepresentation of African American and Hispanic students in special education, lower academic tracks, grade retention, and dropouts can be also found in the allocation of skillful and qualified teachers and educational resources (Mule, 2010). As Zeichner (2003) noted, "In every instance, students who attend high-poverty schools, low-performing schools, or schools with high concentrations of African American or Latino students have less-qualified teachers than students who do not attend these schools" (p. 496). Further evidence of disparity can be found in Banks and his colleagues' (2009) study, in which they reported that "on every tangible measure---from qualified teachers to access to technology and curriculum offerings---schools serving greater numbers of students of color tended to have significantly fewer resources than schools serving mostly Whites" (p. 238). As Melnick and Zeichner (1997) pointed out, "Although the vast inequities in the U.S. society cannot be attributed entirely to the failure of schools, the failure to provide quality education for all students represents a crisis in education that is intolerable in a democratic society" (p.23). Such educators seek to educate teachers who are not only aware of this issue and its repercussions on diverse student populations but also prepared to reduce disparities in educational opportunities in their work.

3. The Demographic Dive between Students and Teacher Demographics

As mentioned by Mule (2010), another important factor that influences the agenda for preparing teachers for diversity relates to teacher demographics. Public school teachers are predominantly White, middle class, and female. However, during the recent decades, the percentage of students of color in American public schools increased from 22% to 55% (Dillon, 2006). Language and cultural diversity is enriching the demographic variety in student population, at the same time, it also challenges teachers' instructional methods and effectiveness. More teachers now in schools and in teacher education programs are likely to have more and more students from

diverse ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural groups in their classrooms (Gay, 2010). It is obviously that teachers will have increasing multicultural students in their classes who are shifting between degrees of comfort and discomfort with their own culture and identity and the school culture intertwined with cultural backgrounds and identities of teachers and their majority-culture counterparts (Dilg, 2003). Under this situation, teaching will not be simple regarded as the job that "looks deceptively simple" (Grossman, Hammerness & McDonald, 2008, p.273).

Unlike the increasing diverse student population, the homogeneous teaching force and the decline enrollments of ethnic minority students in teacher education programs will expand the "demographic divide" (Gay, 2000). In the United States, the current number of teachers from nonwhite groups declines (Delpit, 1995). The decline of minority participation in the teaching force in American higher education and the declining enrollments among Asian, Black, and Hispanic students in teacher education programs means the teaching force is overwhelming White European American (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Information about who is currently preparing to teach indicates a pattern that is generally similar to that of the current teaching force (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1997, 1999), with White students representing the vast majority (80%-93%) of students enrolled in collegiate education programs. The decline of minority participation in the teaching force and teacher education programs at colleges and universities will decrease prospective teachers' cultural sensitivity and awareness towards students from multicultural backgrounds. Teachers tend not to have the same cultural frames of reference and points of view as their students because, as Gay (1993) suggested, "they live in different existential worlds" (p.287). Consequently, these preservice teachers often have difficulty functioning as effective role models for students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), or serving as cultural brokers and cultural agents (Gay, 1993; Goodwin, 2000) who can assist students bridge to home-school differences and cultural gaps. They also often have difficulty constructing curriculum, instruction, and interactional patterns that are culturally responsive, which indicates that the students in the greatest academic need are least likely to have access to educational opportunities congruent with their life experiences and cultural heritages (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Besides of cultural and racial diversity, the socioeconomic gap between students and preservice teachers is another harsh reality. As Darling-Hammond (2006) observed in her study, "In classrooms most beginning teacher will enter, at least 25 percent of students live in poverty and many of them lack basic food, shelter, and health care; from 10 percent to 20 percent have identified learning differences; 15 percent speak a language other than English as their primary language (many in urban settings); and about 40 percent are members of minority groups, many of them recent immigrants from countries with different educational system and cultural traditions" (p.300). Based on predictions of demographers regarding the characteristics of future preservice teachers, that teacher education programs will continue to serve demographics similar to the current patterns (Mule, 2010). The mismatch between a nearly homogenous teaching force and their increasingly diverse student population is a challenge that many teacher educators need to reconsider how to enhance the knowledge base, curriculum setting, and clinical practice for their preservice teacher students to become fully prepared to the multicultural and diverse student population.

4. What Knowledge should be Taught to Preservice Teachers?

Mule (2010) indicated that a significant factor that drives the agenda for educating teachers for diverse students related to "the desire to develop in teachers the knowledge that will allow them to be effective teachers of all students" (p.12). Challenges to most teacher candidates from the majority cultural and racial group are many of them are often not prepared professional to effectively work with culturally diverse students and obtain the knowledge base of multiculturalism through their studies in teacher education programs (Delpit, 1995; Fuller, 1994; Reed, 1996). Sleeter (2008) pointed out that most White candidates enter teacher education with very little cross-cultural background, knowledge, and experiences, although they "often bring naïve optimism that coexists with unexamined stereotypes taken for granted as truth" (p.559). Similarly, Landson-Billings (2009) demonstrated that many in-service teachers who have been teaching a very long time are still struggle to teach in affirming and effective ways with multicultural students, due to a lack in the literature on the experiences of ethnic minority groups, such as African American students specifically, in their teacher education programs.

Teachers may not be culturally competent to create a learning environment that builds on students, especially minority students' cultural knowledge, social interaction patters, learning styles, and belief systems without receiving relevant knowledge base from teacher education programs (Pang, Kian & Pak, 2004). As Rodriguez (1983) claimed, teachers must become understanding and knowledgeable enough to build on the students' diverse backgrounds instead of rejecting it. Colleges and universities offer teacher education programs play a central role in facilitate teacher students to "construct a solid knowledge base of cultural and racial diversity", as well as enable them to "understand their own and their students' culture, combine with the development of

teaching skills consistent with the accepted purposes of education for a multicultural society" (Rodriguez, 1983, p.18).

Hollins (1997) illustrated the importance for prospective teachers to begin their professional preparation for teaching by constructing the knowledge base of themselves, the culture, and their students. What teachers and teacher education students need to understand is the relationship between students' home culture and school learning. Teachers need to understand how cultural perspectives influence students' approaches to learning, the curriculum content valued, and supportive social situations for learning (Hollins, 1997). The call for enriching teachers' knowledge base is also developed by Villegas and Lucas' (2002) study of fostering culturally responsive teaching in teacher education programs. They proposed following aspects that teachers need to know about their students to help them build bridges to learning: "Students' lives outside school; students' perceptions of school knowledge and belief in the potential of schooling to improve their lives in the future; students' relationships to subject matter; and community life" (p.81). Acquiring this culturally sensitive knowledge base could assist teachers in reducing conventional cultural deficit thinking along with improving their cultural competence to effectively work with students from minority groups.

Situating teacher education in local contexts: Connecting to the community

The traditional divide between college/university's theoretical-based teacher education and communities/families has been addressed by various researches. As Zeichner (2010) pointed out, traditional college and university-sponsored teacher education programs lack connections between university-based teacher education courses and field experiences in communities. The disconnection between what teacher education students are taught in university campus courses and their opportunities for learning to enact their practices in their school placements needs more concerns about how to facilitate preservice teachers to practice contextual knowledge and pedagogical skills in diverse community settings.

Based on the need of linking teacher education and diverse communities for the purpose of educating teachers for diversity, the community based teacher education attracts more concerns on teaching preservice teachers to learn about students and their communities. As Bransford, Darling-Hammond, and LePage (2005) argued, if teachers are to be effective with multicultural students, they must work in settings---where they can use what they know, where they come to know students and families well, use texts and materials that support thoughtful learning. In order to achieve this goal, teacher education programs need to consider how they can engage in partnerships with families, communities, and districts that work to transform schooling and teaching in tandem (Bransford et al., 2005).

As Boyle-Baise and McIntyre (2008) proposed, service learning and cultural immersion are two major efforts to address community issues in teacher education. Service learning, as one of the most common efforts to incorporating community elements in preparing teachers, eases a community orientation into teacher education because it can be included as an "add-on" to conventional courses, without displacing other subject matter courses. It also allows preservice teachers to "work with and learn from local people in the process of doing something that teachers serve as educational leaders for an increasingly diverse student population" (p.310).

Cultural immersion, as Boyle-Baise and McIntyre (2008) outlined, was another key factor that influenced preservice teachers' commitment to working with multicultural backgrounds students. Cultural immersion experiences, according to the authors, helped educators venture outside their cultural comfort zone and transformed their understanding of others (p.310). As they indicated in the case study in Indiana University Bloomington and The American Indian Reservation Project, cultural immersion projects have supplemental conventional student teaching, providing prospective teachers with cultural insights and developing community teacher knowledge. Through these two approaches, preservice teachers can gain profound cultural knowledge of their students, recognize the worth of local culture and wisdom, commit to service learning, and develop culturally relevant curricula for their multicultural students based on their previous community engagement experiences.

5. Learning through Community and Collaboration

5.1 Community Strengths and Funds of Knowledge

As Zeichner and Payne (2013) indicated, "While the role of school-based expertise is essential in teacher preparation, the role of expertise based in local communities is also important" (p.11). As they mentioned, preservice teachers need to engage with diverse communities so that they can truly learn and apply knowledge of working effectively with diverse students in practice. To effectively educate children in diverse settings, teachers must learn about and engage in the communities of their students, as well as view communities as the valuable

resource which facilitates them to understand their students. Noel (2013) mentioned the concept of "community strengths", which urges teachers to "go into the community, meeting and partnering with community members and agencies, to learn about the important community strengths that can then be utilized in a more culturally relevant education" (p.137). The advocacy of valuing and utilizing community strengths to facilitate students' learning also relates to the concept "funds of knowledge", introduced by Moll and his colleagues (1992). Referring to the sets of cultural and strategic knowledge and skills found within a particular community, funds of knowledge can include the strategic network of relationships established within and outside the family and community. Valuing community knowledge which often does not coincide with the types of knowledge valued in the mainstream educational system, teachers can more effectively draw on community knowledge to create a culturally relevant classroom that assist multicultural background students to achieve academic achievement (Landson-Billings, 2006).

Several studies of linking preservice teacher training to local communities address the significance of valuing community as a resource in preparing teachers for diversity. For example, Lipka (1998) provided a practical implication of how to prepare culturally responsive Yupik teachers to act as cultural brokers to connect cultures between the western ideological school system and indigenous Yupik communities. As he indicated, in Alaska, teachers and students face the situation in which the relationship of the school culture and indigenous culture don't reinforce each other. In order to break the cultural barrier, Lipka offered a concept to train teachers to become cultural brokers, who are "willing to face the deep social conflicts initiated by colonizing instructions and reconstruct the culture of school" (p.27). To achieve this goal, preservice teachers learn to view Yupik culture and community as content for schooling and involve Yupik community members into schooling. In Noordhoff and Kleinfeld's (1993) study of The Teachers for Alaska Program, preservice teachers learned how to learn from culturally diverse students and communities by involving in local community. Based on preservice teachers' reflections on their fieldwork experiences with indigenous community, they obtain knowledge of making connections between diverse students' background experiences, and learning how to learn from their students, communities, and practical experience.

5.2 Multicultural Understanding

As Sleeter (2000) pointed out, today many teachers rarely understand a community to which they do not belong to as well as they think they do. Many teachers assume they know their students well because they see them daily in schools. Consequently, teachers will easily think teaching for diversity and multicultural education narrowly, as the addition of cultural information to lessons (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008). Teacher education courses can begin to help teachers understand issues of culture, race, and socioeconomic issues, but community knowledge can't be learned in college classroom along (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Zeichner & Payne, 2013). Teachers, especially community teachers need to learn about their school communities by participating in them. Connecting teacher education programs to communities could contribute to foster prospective teachers' multicultural understanding and caring to their future students and parents. In this regard, as Murrell (2001) addressed, community-teachers could demonstrate understanding of what it means to "struggle to find meaning and opportunity in the educational system" (p.59). They are dedicated to improving the lives of urban youth; develop effective ways of working with urban youth in community settings other than schools, as well as view the community connectedness and local knowledge as a valued source which can be integrated with their teacher preparation and future instruction (Murrell, 2001).

5.3 Community Teacher Knowledge

Murrell (2001) envisions the community teacher as someone who "possess contextualized knowledge of the culture, community, and identity of the children and families he or she serves and draws on this knowledge to create the core teaching practices necessary for effectiveness in a diverse setting" (p.52). Community-based teacher knowledge is knowledge of the lives, cultural traditions, and experiences of students. This kind of knowledge has many names such as culturally responsive teaching or culturally relevant pedagogy, which includes characters as: "validation of the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference of ethnically diverse students, attention to cultural responsiveness in curriculum context, classroom climate, and instructional techniques and assessments, commitment to student success, and promotion of student engagement as productive members of their ethnic groups and of the national society" (Gay, 2010, pp.29-34). Murrell (2001) indicated that most teacher candidates can gain this community teacher knowledge through service to local communities especially when service is collaborative in nature and augmented by course work, and link preservice teachers to local wisdom and engagement. As Boyle-Baise and McIntyre (2008) reported in their studies, offering opportunities for preservice teachers to work with students and adults in local communities can let preservice teachers to identify specific information that could help them teach in culturally responsive ways.

6. Global Implications and Discussion

The significance of community based teacher education in preparing teachers in fostering multicultural awareness and caring to their students, valuing local community culture and knowledge, obtaining community knowledge base, and developing culturally responsive pedagogies that facilitate students learning as well as outreaching to their communities are well documented in western literature. Increasing linkages between university-based teacher education coursework and the fieldwork experiences in diverse communities could contribute to developing qualified teachers for diversity. Lessons from connecting teacher education to local communities are also implied in preparing culturally responsive teachers for other multicultural and multiethnic countries in the world.

For example, drawing on western experiences in preparing community-based teachers, educating teachers through connecting to ethnic minority regions in China accomplished some goals of preparing culturally responsive teachers for minority students and in ethnic regions, but some challenges have also emerged during this "out-reaching" fieldwork experiences both in China and in the United States. First issue is the "student-centered concerns" mentioned by Griffin and her colleagues (2005). As they mentioned in their study, all of the field placements require a significant amount of preservice teachers' time. Most of teacher education students both in the US and in China carry a full course load each semester. In addition, students who are required to complete field-based projects in other courses that also require them to spend time. As a result, they feel overwhelmed. This brings a dilemma for teacher educators to make explicit connections between the field experiences and courses during the semester. Another challenge faced by preservice students and teacher education faculty was communication and professional development. As Griffin et al (2005) reported one significant and ongoing problem is ensuring that all classroom teachers who serve as cooperating teachers are educated about the goal of community-based teacher education programs and knowledgeable about core components of program coursework. This problem "is exacerbated by a lack of resources available for cooperating teachers to engage in related professional development opportunities" (p.94). Creating circumstances that could promote meaningful, ongoing process between the university and college based teacher education programs and schools/communities is essential for teacher educators to ensure this collaborative partnership between preservice teacher education and communities.

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