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The Need for Diversity Education as Perceived by Preservice Teachers

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Abstract: This study investigated whether undergraduate teacher education students were prepared to teach their students in both an academically stimulating and culturally sensitive way. During the fall of 2003, student teachers were asked to complete two open-ended questions about diversity. The students were working on certificates in either the preschool through grades 4 generalist or bilingual programs. A total of 56 students completed the questionnaire. We identified 16 categories of ideas, experiences and/or activities that the preservice teachers said they would use to create diverse opportunities in their classrooms. Multicultural books were mentioned most followed by visual aids. Most of the responses were brief and not fully developed. While Banks' levels of multicultural awareness were not evident or mentioned, students had some of their own ideas on how to integrate diversity in the classroom that at least met Banks' contributions levels and, in some cases, the additive levels (Banks, 2003).

Keywords: diversity education, undergraduate teacher-education students, Hispanic students, multicultural education, staff development, elementary methods courses

The No Child Left Behind Act requires teacher education programs to produce highly qualified teachers. Our undergraduate students will teach children from many cultural backgrounds, backgrounds that most likely differ from their own cultural experiences. Are they prepared to teach their students in both an academically stimulating and culturally sensitive way? We wanted to find out the preservice students understanding of diversity strategies through their descriptions of diverse classroom environments and materials. We asked our undergraduates to take this Language, Culture and Socioeconomic Diversity Standards survey as they finished student teaching in our teacher education program.

I. Review of the Literature.

A. Culturally Diverse Students.

It is estimated that by 2010, "…minority children will make up 40% of school enrollments" (Pallas, Natriello, and McDill, 1989, p 16-22). This is supported by Taylor and Sobel (2001) with their assurance that, "Presently, students who are culturally, linguistically, and ethnically different from the dominant US [sic] culture comprise over 30% of the K-12 school-age population" (p.487). "American classrooms are experiencing the largest influx of immigrant students…Between 1991 and 1998 about 7.6 million legal immigrants made the United States their home…A large…number of illegal or undocumented immigrants also enters the United

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States each year" (Banks, 2003, p. 6). Culturally diverse students are rapidly becoming a majority in many regions of the country (Hodgkinson, 1993, Natriello, Pallas, and McDill, 1990). By 2030 Hispanics will be the majority/minority in Texas and the Southwest United States, with a large number of them being second language learners (Gollnick and Chinn, 1998). "Considering that 90% of the teacher corps is white and that cultural sensitivity, empathy and commitment are crucial to successful teaching in pluralistic classrooms, this phenomenon could have serious implications for the effective education of minority students" (Nel, 1992, p. 23). The phenomenon in this case is the resistance of preservice teachers to diversity.

B. Influences on Preservice Teachers.

Preservice teachers have experiential knowledge of teaching through their own prior school experiences, and, therefore, view teaching with the tinted lenses they have personally gained over time. They view diversity as problematic and aren't convinced that these [culturally diverse] students are capable of learning (Goodlad, 1990; Taylor and Sobel, 2001). Their expectations of students are "influenced by students' ethnicities, cultures, languages and socio-economic situations" (Ward and Ward, 2003, p. 533). Most preservice teachers approach this issue of diversity individualistically, and their conceptual ideas about diversity are shallow and limited. (Paine, 1989; Taylor and Sobel, 2001).

"The goal of teacher education institutions is to prepare quality teachers, and the need for quality teachers is rising throughout the United States" (Steinmetz, 2000, p. 18). Life experience, or contextual identity, comes through in how each individual approaches the teaching process. Our beliefs, perspectives, and values all work through our personal knowledge and application of that knowledge in practical circumstances so as to impact our own personal style of teaching (Allen and Porter, 2002; Clandinin, 1985; Clandinin and Connelly, 1987; Steinmetz, 2000). "If teachers and students are to engage in an effective teaching-learning exchange, then preservice teachers must learn about these differences and reflect on their personal behaviors, beliefs, and values and how they influence their interactions with others" (Allen and Porter, 2002, p. 128). As part of this teaching-learning exchange, university faculty should model instructional techniques and strategies that work well with diverse student populations in order for personal observation and reflection to take place (Wasonga and Piveral, 2004).

C. Dissonance Between Home and School.

Hutchinson (1999) believes that many children experience marginalization because the "meanings the child brings to the school situation are ignored or when school meanings dominate and limit a child's meanings and sense of possibilities" (p. 37). It's important for preservice teachers to be aware of this and build their programs on their students' funds of knowledge (Moll and Gonzalez, 1994). Hooks (1994) calls for educators "to teach against the grain and to focus on multiculturalism in our society, particularly in education, there is not nearly enough practical discussion of ways classroom settings can be transformed so that the learning experience is inclusive" (p. 35). In order for preservice teachers to do this they need dissonance in their methods courses to the point where they are uncomfortable enough to look beyond the accepted norm for what schools believe is necessary to teach (Hollingsworth, 1989). However, we don't want the dissonance so high that students exhibit the common resistance to diversity that is so often found in colleges of education (Holland, 1991; also see Taylor and Sobel, 2001, above).

D. Learning to Teach in Culturally Sensitive Ways.

"Learning how to teach in a culturally sensitive and responsive way is an important goal for all prospective teachers, regardless of the social context in which they teach" (Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1993, p. 113-125). Preservice teachers need to know that students will come to school with all of their cultural strengths and experiences and will thrive with teacher support (Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1993). Without encountering the "other" our preservice teachers will not feel a need to change any of their views or beliefs regarding the diverse learner (Allen and Porter, 2002).

E. Banks Levels of Integration.

Banks (2003) developed a continuum of ways that teachers integrate diversity into their classroom. The first level, contributions focuses on celebrations, holidays, foods, heroes, etc. of a culture. For example, a teacher may have her class celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. day. Although diversity is present in the classroom, it's a quick and superficial way of doing it.

The second level, additive, adds information to the curriculum, but not in depth. For instance, adding *The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1960* brings a novel about civil rights to the Martin Luther King, Jr. unit, but it doesn't change the core curriculum or provide opportunities for students to study civil rights in depth. It does not allow students to view multicultural issues from different perspectives.

The third level, transformation, requires curriculum revision where a topic would be studied in depth, with many novels and non-fiction text-sets about civil rights included. Students would have opportunities to study multiple perspectives and come away with new and transformational understandings. "Only by looking at events from many different perspectives can we fully understand the complex dimensions of American culture and society" (Banks, 2003, p. 20).

The final stage, social action, requires the students to take these new understandings and to take action such as writing a letter to the editor or organizing a civil rights exhibit. This stage requires students to take their new knowledge and to do something useful. Not only do we hope to have our university students at the transformation and social action levels, but we hope that they, too will be able to bring their future students to this point.

"…There is a dearth of empirical research on multicultural preservice teacher education" (Webb-Johnson, 1998, p. 7-16). We wanted to know how our students would teach diversity when they became teachers. By discovering what preservice teachers know about diversity in the classroom, we can then build upon their funds of knowledge and help them teach diverse curriculum and serve diverse students.

II. Our Program.

The goal for our teacher education program is to produce teacher educators who provide both academically stimulating and culturally sensitive programs. We try to incorporate multicultural education throughout the undergraduate program, but especially in the two blocks of courses just prior to student teaching. Most students take these courses as juniors and seniors. The first block consists of the reading comprehension course and the mathematics and science

(grades EC- 4) course. When those courses are completed, they next take the reading problems course, and the integrating language arts and social studies course (grades EC-4).

The faculty has master course outlines to assure that all students in the program receive the same quality experiences. Multicultural activities have been identified for each course. For instance, in ECE 4303, Integrating Language Arts, Social Studies and the Fine Arts, every class is housed in an elementary school and the students research the community and create a project that looks at the school and the surrounding areas in depth. In addition, students spend time at The Institute of Texan Cultures, a museum, library, and resource for cultures specifically located in Texas. Integrating multicultural experiences is explored in its complexity.

III. The Study.

During the fall of 2003, student teachers were asked to complete a Language, Culture and Socioeconomic Diversity Standards survey. The students were working on certificates in either the preschool through grades 4 generalist or bilingual programs. We qualitatively analyzed two essay questions that focused on our diversity questions. A total of 56 students completed the questionnaire. The two questions were as follows:

1. You are a first year teacher in a diverse setting in which your classroom is composed of African-American children, Hispanic children, Hindu children and Euro-American children. Describe your classroom environment.
2. What kinds of strategies or techniques would you use to support leaning in the content areas and to assist the English language development of the English language learners in your classroom?

Analysis was through constant comparative techniques (Merriam, 1998). We determined categories and then data were reduced, displayed and conclusions were drawn (Huberman and Miles, 1998, p.180). According to Merriam (1998), “Categories should reflect the purpose of the research, should be exhaustive, should be mutually exclusive, sensitizing and should be conceptually congruent” (p. 183-184). The themes constructed here came from the language of the students themselves.

IV. Results.

We identified 16 categories of ideas, experiences and/or activities that the preservice teachers said they would use to create diverse opportunities in their classrooms. We then displayed the data in three major categories, high diversity, medium diversity and low diversity. Categories that were rated as high diversity were mentioned multiple times by many participants, such that these items were listed between 19 and 30 times. Categories with items written between 10 and 13 times were rated as medium diversity, and the low diversity items were listed between 6 and 8 times. Anything shared less than 6 times was not categorized.

Items listed in the high diversity column are not specifically meant to be interpreted as those activities that would best meet the needs of diverse learners. They are listed in this column mainly because of the number of student responses indicating the students’ understanding of what would meet the needs of diverse learners.

Table 1. Ideas to Incorporate Diversity into the EC-4 Classroom.

High Diversity	Medium Diversity	Low Diversity
Multicultural books 30	Teacher and/or Student use Native language 13	Pair-share 8
Visual Aids 24	Vague (no specifics listed, used generalities) 12	Environment friendly, safe, enjoyable, talkative, open 7
Manipulatives 23	Grouped with English-speaking peer or peers 12	Learning centers 7
Exposing and highlighting Culture (foods and traditions) 19	Working together in Cooperative groups 11	Modification of lesson plans 7
	Students share backgrounds or parent backgrounds 10	Graphic organizers 6
		Teach Respect 6
		Work one-on-one (teacher tutoring) 6

The multicultural books category was mentioned the most. Multicultural books included cross-cultural books (across 2 different cultures), books that focused on one culture, and were across genres (fiction, non-fiction, etc.). Students said that they would read these books in classrooms, integrate them during content lessons and incorporate them into reading lessons. One preservice teacher said "I choose a wide strategy of books which expose my students to new cultures and ways of thinking." Another said that she would, "bring in books to incorporate into diversity lessons. Always have literacy on these topics throughout the entire year."

Multicultural books are a rich resource for educators provided that the books are evaluated and offer culturally accurate information and are of high quality. That student teachers recognized their value for both instruction in reading and the content articles is encouraging.

Visual aids were the next discussed topic. Students said they would use pictures to help get across ideas. Visual aids included posters and pictures. One student shared, "There would be pictures around the room representing all cultures within the classroom. Things around the classroom would be labeled in various languages." Another said, "Photos in games (in the learning centers) include many different people of different backgrounds and cultures."

Visual aids are valuable resources for educators at all levels. Pictures are especially helpful for students who are second language learners who need to build vocabulary and to help them connect to abstract ideas. One student said that she would have "centers labeled in English, but with smaller labels in other languages." She continued that she would "provide many visuals so students could see rather than rely on language for understanding."

Manipulatives such as cuisenaire rods and buttons and chips followed and were mentioned to help students with mathematic concepts. "I would use cuisenaire rods to help make math more concrete," wrote one student. Another student wrote that she would use "manipulatives that can help comprehension."

Exposing and highlighting culture followed the other three categories. This includes highlighting traditions and sampling foods from diverse cultures. Graphic organizers, teaching respect and one on one teacher tutoring were shared less often. One student wrote, "My learning centers focus is the diversity of San Antonio's roots represented…12 cultures." Another wrote,

"I brought in texts of different cultures on one topic-family traditions. The texts show how different cultures have different family traditions."

While highlighting culture through celebrations and food can be beneficial, it needs to be done authentically and embedded in a deeper study of the culture.

V. Discussion.

There were only two fully articulated answers. Most of the responses were brief and not fully developed. This was particularly disappointing because although the strategies mentioned had merit, the description of the actual implementation was incomplete and therefore difficult to evaluate. One of the more fully articulated answers follows. "I would incorporate literature from all these cultures along with adapting lessons and schedules to include all these cultures. I would also do a take home questionnaire for all students about their primary language, use adaptations like outlines of most important points. I have incorporated diversity in my social studies lesson plans and I did one on music and the roots of different types of music. I incorporated diversity into my thematic units by mostly dealing with the Hispanic cultures because the theme was Fiesta, I also incorporated books on Asian-Americans, and lots of foods from many different cultures; Indian, Italian, Chinese, etc."

Even in the others, though, some strategies were shared. While Banks' levels of multicultural awareness were not evident or mentioned, students had some of their own ideas on how to integrate diversity in the classroom (e.g. through books, visual aids, and manipulatives) that at least met Banks' contributions levels and, in some cases, the additive levels (Banks, 2003). Since both these levels are on the lower part of Banks continuum, students ideas of how to deepen their work was absent.

Table 2. Banks Levels of Integration.

Contributions
Exposing and highlighting
Culture
Foods and Traditions
Contributions of the culture to the content
Sharing their culture
Multicultural books
Games
Students share their backgrounds or their parents backgrounds
Additive
Guest Speakers
Teaching respect
Transformation
Social Action

Taylor and Sobel (2001) found similar results when reporting "45% [of their student cohort] felt competent to adapt instructional methods for learners of diverse backgrounds" (pp. 494-495). While this was not a study of whether the strategies developed in the education curricula was sufficient in helping the pre-service teachers understand diversity, we had hoped that the students would have made some connections between the coursework and their future practice.

Although many multicultural experiences were built into the program, the students did not internalize them to the point that they could articulate them as they went out into their teaching career. The responses listed in the high diversity category, though not best methods for working with diverse learners as indicated above, are considered to be usable, adaptable strategies for diverse learners.

Like Paine (1989), we found our students' responses were limited in depth. This was especially disappointing because we had integrated diversity topics into all our course syllabi and had shared ideas and successful experiences as a faculty. We wondered if students were aware of the multicultural experiences but needed more scaffolding in order to process the experiences and relate them to their own experiences and understandings. Perhaps we needed to be more concrete when we shared these experiences in our classrooms and make the connection clear for their future classrooms.

VI. Implications and Recommendations.

This baseline data offers a picture of our students' understanding for teaching diversity and the work that still needs to be done. The classroom syllabi need to be reviewed for multicultural classroom experiences again. Then, questions should be asked. What types of experiences are these in comparison to other university teacher education programs? Is there any consistency of experience across the classes, or is it a progressive growth of experiences begun at the start of the teacher education program? With the high numbers of Hispanic students in this area, are we sharing enough of Hispanic culture and/or are we ignoring other diverse groups and our students' needs to confront diverse groups as well? Certainly, these are not all the questions that need to be answered.

Some preservice teachers have felt university instructors are inconsistent in modeling multicultural teaching strategies (Wasonga and Piveral, 2004). Our program instructors may need to revisit this issue in their own teaching about multiculturalism. The preservice teachers who responded to this questionnaire were part of a group of students who participated in the early changing period of our teacher education program. Reevaluating the current preservice teachers with the same instrument as was used in this study, should be performed and compared. The second analysis may indicate continuing areas of weakness in our program, or it may also indicate parts of the program that are now performing more successfully than before. In conclusion, careful and continued monitoring of diversity education is needed in our teacher education program to help us reach our goal of helping all students in our future teachers' classrooms grow and thrive.

Although we are based in a college of education, this study is relevant to instructors in many disciplines. Our college classrooms are increasingly diverse (see Banks, 2003), and we all need to monitor our courses to see how the important concepts and ideas of our disciplines are actually being understood and integrated into their future practice. This is an important consideration for professors in many disciplines that send students into clinical practice. As

instructors we need to both model diversity and then articulate clearly to our students what we are doing and give them many opportunities to reflect upon what they are learning, seeing and experiencing. Because diversity is so complex, this topic needs to be addressed many times in multiple ways.

How do professors in all disciplines deal with diverse students? Are there strategies that will help us teach them better? What do we all need to do in our programs to enhance our teaching and our students' learning? These are the questions we need to continue investigating.

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