

Multicultural Teacher Education: Examining the Perceptions, Practices, and Coherence in One Teacher Preparation Program

By Lori Czop Assaf, Rubén Garza, & Jennifer Battle

With the nation's shifting ethnic and cultural texture, multicultural education has become imperative in the 21st century. As an outcome of the shifting diversity in our country, more than 6.3 million students with English as their second language and as many as 13 million students living in poverty are enrolled in pre-K through 12th grade public schools (Children's Defense Fund, 2005). In contrast to student diversity in the U.S., most of the current teaching force, those coming into teaching, and those who teach prospective teachers are White females who have been raised in middle class homes in rural and suburban communities (http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/ind_1_1.asp). With such dramatic changes in

Lori Czop Assaf is an associate professor, Rubén Garza is an assistant professor, and Jennifer Battle is a professor, all with the College of Education at Texas State University-San Marcos, San Marcos, Texas.

our nation's cultural landscape, it is not surprising that one major goal of many teacher education programs is to better prepare a mostly White, female monolingual teaching force to work effectively with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Yet, even though most teacher education programs report that they have thoroughly incorporated diversity perspectives and multicultural content into the curriculum, external examinations often prove the contrary (Bartolomé, 2004; Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005).

Multicultural Teacher Education

Many teacher preparation programs attempt to infuse multicultural perspectives by simply adding one or two courses in multicultural education and/or requiring teacher candidates to complete assignments that explore surface level differences in culture and language such as sampling different “cultural” foods or learning to say hello in several languages. Such practices can be superficial and partial rather than infused into a coherent multicultural curriculum (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996) and can reinforce the idea that only a few individuals are responsible for preparing teacher candidates for a diverse society. Even when multicultural courses are thoroughly infused into the curriculum, many teacher educators in the same teacher preparation program tend to have very different ideas about multicultural perspectives on teaching and teacher education and how important they are.

According to Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, and Shulman (2005) one way to make long-lasting changes in the way teacher candidates are prepared to work with diverse students is to create coherent programs where teacher educators build a shared vision of good teaching, use common standards of practice that guide and assess coursework and clinical work, and demonstrate shared knowledge and common beliefs about teaching and learning. For Tatto (1996), having a coherent program does not necessarily suggest that all faculty think alike, instead the coherence of a program should consider how faculty members can reach *common ground* around professional norms and expectations, as well as in the way that learning experiences are organized and conceptualized.

In other words, creating a coherent multicultural teacher education program requires faculty members to strive for and identify a central focus for teacher learning, to be collectively responsible, and to have the opportunity to influence policies and practices. Such program coherence is sustained by a collective purpose and promotes focused and sustained program development (King & Newmann, 2000). Although the literature on multicultural teacher education asserts that coherence may be one of the most critical aspects of teacher preparation programs (Nieto, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), there is very little research on this topic. And like Gay and Howard (2000), we believe that teacher education programs and the faculty who teach in these programs “must be held accountable for implementing quality multicultural education as they expect their students in K-12 classrooms” (p. 15).

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher educators’ perspectives about multicultural education in an elementary and middle school teacher preparation program. Specifically, our investigation explored how teacher educators’ beliefs, perceptions, and practices contributed to the coherence or lack thereof, in one teacher education program. This investigation is a response to the call for more research on the coherence of teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005).

Multicultural Teacher Education Conceptual Framework

Cochran-Smith (2003) designed a conceptual framework that identifies the varied meanings of multicultural teacher education. She organizes this framework around seven key questions that relate to issues of diversity, ideology, knowledge, teacher learning, teacher practice, outcomes, and teacher candidate selection. Following the exploration of these seven questions, Cochran-Smith (2003) recommends that the answers from the previous questions be examined under the eighth question: How are the first seven questions connected to and coherent with one another in particular policies or programs (*The Coherent Question*)? (See figure one for list of the other seven questions). Cochran-Smith's (2003) conceptual framework can be used to explore how teacher educators feel about the varied aspects of multicultural teacher education and uncover how multiple perspectives and practices fashion the coherence of a teacher education program.

Literature Review

In the next section, we review several research studies that have examined teacher candidates' and teacher educators' beliefs and attitudes concerning multi-

Figure One

Multiple Meanings of Multicultural Teacher Education Theory and Practice:
Seven Key Questions (Cochran-Smith, 2003)

1. How should the increasingly diverse student population in American schools be understood as a challenge or a "problem" for teaching and teacher education, and what are the desirable "solutions" to this problem (The Diversity Question)?
2. What is the purpose of schooling, what is the role of public education in a democratic society, and what historically has been the role of schooling in maintaining or changing the economic and social structure of society (The Ideology or Social Justice Question)?
3. What knowledge, interpretive frameworks, beliefs, and attitudes are necessary to teach diverse populations effectively, particularly knowledge and beliefs about culture, language diversity and its role in schooling (The Knowledge Question)?
4. How do teachers learn to teach diverse populations, and what, in particular, are the pedagogies of teacher preparation (e.g. coursework assignments, readings, field experiences) that make this learning possible (The How Teachers Learn Question)?
5. What are the competencies and pedagogical skills teachers need to teach diverse populations effectively (The Practice Question)?
6. What should the consequences or outcomes of teacher preparation be, and how, by whom and for what purposes should these outcomes be assessed (The Outcomes Question)?
7. What candidates should be recruited and selected for America's teaching force (The Recruitment/Selection Question)?

Multicultural Teacher Education

cultural education. These studies illustrate the importance of specific instructional practices and field-based experiences in multicultural settings. They also highlight the ways in which teacher educators and teacher education programs can impact future teachers' beliefs and attitudes about teaching in multicultural settings.

Teachers Candidates' Beliefs and Attitudes about Diversity

Capella-Santana (2003) examined the multicultural attitudes and beliefs of fifty-two teacher candidates in an undergraduate elementary education program. The teacher candidates completed questionnaires and interviews before and after taking a multicultural education course and before student teaching in an urban school. Results suggest that these novice teachers' attitudes and beliefs about diversity changed positively during the teacher preparation program because program instructors allowed the teachers to freely discuss and challenge issues that occurred in their urban school. According to Capella-Santana, being placed in a diverse school setting and taking a multicultural course focused on similar issues helped the future teachers change their attitudes and develop a desire to work in diverse school settings.

Duarte and Reed (2004) found similar results when they examined twenty, White, female teacher candidates' cultural responsiveness. The novice teachers in Duarte and Reed's study completed a survey prior to and after a 3-hour field base experience in a public school in order to examine their beliefs and attitudes about multicultural education. After completing the first survey, the teacher candidates volunteered to have their field experience in an urban school (experimental group) or a rural school (control group). The teachers who volunteered for the urban school participated in two diversity workshops. The teachers in the rural school were given no additional training or support. Duarte and Reed discovered that all of the teacher candidates held stereotypical attitudes regarding minority children and minority neighborhoods prior to their field placement and had very few strategies on how to address the needs of diverse learners. At the end of the field-base experience, the experimental group "offered clearly defined ideas, utilized real-life scenarios that would make learning experiences more meaningful; presented materials to accommodate different learning styles; utilized multicultural and diverse literature to focus on issues supporting the minority experience, and facilitated learning that included students' cultural background" (pg 249). The control group confused cultural background for socioeconomic status and maintained deficit attitudes about diversity. Duarte and Reed recommend teacher education programs restructure their field experiences to include specific strategies needed to work in diverse school settings.

Davis, Crumpler, Stallworth, and Crawford (2005) used ethnographic methods as a tool to help teacher candidates understand their students' lives. Thirty-four teacher candidates, enrolled in a large Midwestern teacher preparation program, observed and described interactions within specific community settings, such as churches and eating establishments—places where their students actively partici-

pated outside of school. Ethnographic methods such as observations and interviews were used to understand students' lives outside of school and to explore students' cultural identities. The authors concluded that ethnographic methods were an effective way for teacher candidates to learn about students' cultural lives outside of school, to develop an in-depth awareness of the teacher's role in differentiating the curriculum, and to build positive relationships with students and families of different cultural backgrounds. These studies highlight how effective instructional practices and field experiences in teacher education programs can have a positive impact on future teachers' attitudes and beliefs about diversity.

Teacher Educators' Beliefs and Attitudes about Diversity

Smolen, Colville-Hall, Liang, and MacDonald (2005) surveyed 116 full-time teacher educators at four mid-western colleges of education (each author worked at one of the four colleges) in order to uncover their beliefs and commitment to multicultural education. Findings from the study suggest that while most of the teacher educators acknowledged the changing demographics of society, few shared common beliefs and attitudes about effective ways to address the impact of diversity in their teacher education programs. Smolen, Colville-Hall, Liang, and MacDonald (2005) call for teacher educators to critically examine their own beliefs and practices, develop a personal investment and commitment to equitable education, and work to change the existing culture of the learning/teaching community of their individual programs. Much like Smolen et al., Bruch and Higbee (2001) surveyed a group of developmental education faculty in order to understand their beliefs and attitudes about multicultural education. Only 10 out of 67 faculty members completed the survey. Bruch and Higbee found that among the few instructors who completed the survey, all believed there was a need for multicultural education in order to change practices and assumptions, embrace universal humanity and dignity, and improve their instruction. Many faculty members expressed a fear that too many university instructors take a "laissez faire" stance towards multicultural education and tend to model deficit perspectives. Bruch and Higbee believe that a model of multiculturalism should be locally produced and that education professionals must find ways to discuss these issues in ways that will help them rebuild their courses and revitalize their programs.

In another study, Gordon (2005) explored her own struggles with being a White teacher educator and talking about race with her preservice teachers and surveyed fellow teacher educators on how they infused diversity into their courses. Gordon focused on how White faculty members address race among themselves and with their students in the Elementary Education Program at George Mason University and discovered that the White faculty in her program grappled with ways to address race in "politically correct ways." In fact, they avoided examining race on systemic levels. Broadly defined notions of diversity and a resistance to have "unpleasant" discussions with their students prohibited teacher educators from explicitly "see-

Multicultural Teacher Education

ing” race or addressing other multicultural issues in their courses. Gordon suggests that teacher educators challenge ways in which they may be reproducing social inequities in schools through their belief systems and lack of explicitly addressing racism in their courses.

While many teacher candidates may come to teacher education programs with stereotypical beliefs and deficit attitudes about students from diverse backgrounds, the studies above suggest that teacher education programs and teacher educators themselves can impact responsive practices and beliefs in multicultural classrooms. Yet, teacher educators rarely have the opportunity to explore their own beliefs and attitudes and understand how their teacher education program aligns with effective multicultural teaching and learning. In this self-study, we explored the perspectives, beliefs, and practices of teacher educators working in one field-base teacher preparation program with the aim of understanding how beliefs and attitudes held by teacher educators shape the preparation of future teachers who will potentially work in multicultural school settings.

Purpose of the Study

We believe teacher educators who work in colleges of education play a pivotal role in shaping the beliefs and attitudes of future teachers; however, compared to the research on teacher candidates’ beliefs, few studies have focused on the beliefs of teacher educators who work directly with future teachers. In fact studies of teacher educators—what they are like, what they do, and what they think—are typically overlooked in teacher education research (Darling-Hammond, 1999). In order to examine the beliefs and attitudes of teacher educators we adapted Cochran-Smith’s (2003) multicultural conceptual framework using qualitative research methodology. Keeping in mind that although individuals may belong to the same discourse community and their perspectives may conflict or contradict each other, we explored how their perspectives, beliefs, and practices differed and describe what those differences may indicate about the coherence of one teacher education program. The following questions guided this study: (1) How do teacher educators working in the Early Childhood-4th field experience program and the Middle School field experience program perceive multicultural teacher education? (2) How do their perceptions and beliefs about multicultural teacher education inform their practice? (3) What are the different perspectives between and among teacher educators working in the field experience program? and (4) What do those differences reveal about the coherence of one teacher preparation program?

Methodology

Context and Participants

This study took place at a large southwestern university where all undergradu-

ate teacher candidates (also referred to as preservice teachers or interns) seeking an elementary (Early Childhood-4), middle school (5-8), or secondary (9-12) certification participate in a field-based program (block) for one semester. This 60-hour field experience requirement takes place prior to student teaching. Teacher candidates in the Early Childhood-Fourth Grade (EC-4) Program take two reading courses and one curriculum and instruction course at a local elementary school site. While taking courses at the school site, teacher candidates intern in a classroom with a mentor teacher for one semester. Middle School teacher candidates take two reading courses and one learning theory course on their school site and also intern with a mentor teacher for one semester. The teacher candidates in the field-based programs complete courses in reading, writing, assessment, curriculum design, and classroom management.

Thirteen teacher educators work in the EC-4 Program in collaboration with nine elementary schools. Two teacher educators work with the Middle School Program in collaboration with two middle schools. One teacher educator serves as the administrator and occasional instructor for all field-based courses. The demographics across all schools vary, however approximately 40% of students who attend elementary and middle level schools in the region come from Latino/a backgrounds and as many as 30% speak English as their second language (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/research/>). As part of the field-base requirements, teacher educators spend approximately 16 hours a week on the school site teaching courses and supervising teacher candidates. In all, the teacher educators instruct over 320 teacher candidates, work in collaboration with approximately 231 mentor teachers, and partner with 6 different school districts in the area.

Fourteen teacher educators participated in this study. Nine of the teacher educators are full-time tenure track or tenured faculty and have taught courses in the field for an average of four years. The other five teacher educators are full-time adjunct faculty and have taught in the field for an average of seven years. Eleven of the teacher educators are White, middle class females between the ages of 30-55 years. Two are Mexican-American females and two are White, middle class males between the ages of 40-55 years old. Three of the fourteen teacher educators speak Spanish fluently. Because the field-based programs are spread out in varying schools throughout the region, teacher educators gather approximately once a year to discuss their courses.

The first and third authors of this study have taught in the elementary field-experience program and the second author currently teaches in the secondary field experience program. As insiders to the different programs, we were aware that each teacher educator taught their courses differently and seemed to hold different beliefs and attitudes about diversity. We pursued this study in order to better understand how varied perspectives and different instructional practices related to each other and the overarching goals of college of education.

Data Collection and Analysis

We used qualitative methodologies (Merriam, 2001) to examine the perspectives and instructional practices of the fourteen teacher educators who were responsible for instructing teacher candidates in the elementary and middle school field-based classes. Participants were interviewed as key informants. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim and served as the primary source of data. Other data sources included follow-up interviews, a focus group interview with selected volunteers, and a collection of course artifacts such as course syllabi, schedules of topics, quizzes, exams or other assessments. Follow up interviews and the focus group were used to clarify misunderstandings and to member-check participants' espoused views. To document ongoing discoveries as we examined the data sources, we recorded our reflections in a research journal (Erlandson, Harris, Skinner, & Allen, 1993) and discussed ongoing findings with a team of non-participating researchers.

Data analysis was conducted by using constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). All data sources were examined independently using qualitative data reduction strategies. We read and reread all data and coded units of words that stood alone in meaning (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Open coding involved reading the transcripts of each teacher educator and from the focus group interview, line by line and naming and labeling important words and phrases (e.g., "It's great," "I believe," "quite difficult"). Each code was then reexamined, redefined, and combined with other similar codes. After the codes were identified, they were defined, and categorized into emerging themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using axial coding (Charmaz, 2006), the themes were sorted, and placed into subcategories. "Axial coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data to give coherence to the emerging analysis" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60).

As initial themes emerged, we individually wrote summaries describing each theme and then discussed them to ensure inter-coder reliability (Charmaz, 2006). The written summaries were organized according to "big tentative themes" that emerged from the data. For example, one emerging theme was titled "Insider/Outsider Information." As a research team, we wrote a detailed summary of the theme and made individual comments and changes based on our interpretations of the data. Finally, themes were confirmed and other research was used to support its broader significance.

Findings and Discussion

Data analysis revealed four themes: *Balancing Optimistic Perspectives of Diversity While Facing Challenges*, *Authentic Experiences with Diverse Students*, *Universal Methods or Ideological Understandings*, and *Ethnic and Linguistic Differences: Outsider or Insider Stances*. In the following section, we describe these four themes and expand on how the participants' perspectives, beliefs, and practices contribute to the coherence of one teacher preparation program.

Balancing Optimistic Perspectives of Diversity While Facing Challenges

All of the teacher educators shared the same optimistic view that diversity is an opportunity for all people, especially those who will work with students from varying ethnic, linguistic, economic, and religious backgrounds. For example, one teacher educator noted, "It's wonderful if you can speak more than one language... it's exciting and positive." Another explained, "I think it could be a very positive and productive thing-particularly when our students get to be in classrooms with kids from other cultures." These comments reflect a "happy talk" perspective about multiculturalism. In fact, the teacher educators' optimistic perspectives are in concert with findings from what Harvard sociologists Bell and Hartman (2007) found in a large national study on Americans' view of diversity suggesting that "Beneath all the happy talk about diversity, many Americans harbor a deep ambivalence about where diversity will lead them and what their responsibility is to it" (p. 900).

Much like the participants in Bell and Hartmann's study, the teacher educators expressed a great deal of uncertainty about how to address diversity in their field-based courses and struggled with the challenges of preparing teachers for the realities of the classroom. For example, one teacher educator explained, "But it [diversity] presents challenges because we're not and our interns are not knowledgeable on all of the different cultures and language backgrounds." Another shared, "If I am a new teacher and I am going to have five kids who don't speak English or who come from poor family backgrounds, and I'm responsible for their learning, what will happen? That's what is most challenging." The teacher educators worried about teacher candidates' misconceptions about diversity, but especially their assumptions about students who speak a language other than English and who come from low-income backgrounds. One middle school teacher educator explained, "My interns come in with misperceptions and a lack of understanding about the students they are working with...that is the challenge I think we are facing, getting back to misperceptions and assumptions."

Finding a balance between sustaining optimistic perspectives while helping teacher candidates recognize the challenges of working with culturally and linguistically diverse students and their own middle class monolingual backgrounds caused the teacher educators much anxiety. And while they all believed teacher candidates should become less judgmental and more sensitive to students' diverse backgrounds, they rarely made the time to address such issues explicitly. In fact, teacher educators feared that explicitly bringing up racial or socioeconomic issues would create resistance and create situations that they would not be able to manage. One teacher educator explained,

I should step up and say something... but I don't go into it with the very resistant kid. Because there are always those couple of resistant kids who just don't want to talk about this and for me, it is a big sense of worrying about doing it wrong. Or creating more resistance in those students, somehow feeding the resistance.

Multicultural Teacher Education

The teacher educators also worried about the social stigma of addressing race. As one teacher educator explained:

I think it is really dangerous, considering the ethnic and economic make up of the professors in the block programs, for us to approach that we actually have the correct answer and that our students are just naïve and that they don't know. We don't want to talk about these issues from the 'I am an enlightened professor and I know' perspective.

Instead, most embedded less sensitive diversity issues such as ethnic celebrations and holidays into their courses by using multicultural picture books. They shared that using multicultural picture books allowed them to "use outside sources" that would allow them to "sneak in" multicultural perspectives without distancing teacher candidates.

It is important to note that many of the teacher educators worried that focusing on the challenges of teaching would dampen the optimistic attitudes they wanted the teacher candidates to cultivate about cultural and linguistic diversity. As one teacher educator explained, "I don't think it's necessarily helpful for students to have cynical outlooks before they get started teaching." Another added, "If they knew how many teachers burn out, like I did, they might not go into teaching."

Authentic Experiences with Diverse Students

The value of field-based experiences is a complex yet accepted belief among many multicultural teacher education researchers (Capella-Santana, 2003; Duarte & Reed, 2004; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001) and the teacher educators in this study shared this perspective. In fact, all of the teacher educators believed that field-based learning experiences offer important opportunities for teacher candidates to gain valuable knowledge about multicultural teaching and learning, to connect theory with practice, to become integrated into the school community, and to become more aware of and responsive to diversity. For example one teacher educator explained, "I think the best way is to have them [teacher candidates] at schools- complementing theory with the field-base so that they see first hand what language learners look like, talk like, etc." Another agreed,

Interns definitely need to be at schools like the one I am. This is a bilingual Vietnamese school, 41 languages are spoken here and everyday they walk into the classroom and are dealing with English language learners and the challenges and the great things that happen.

All of the teacher educators agreed that the benefits of working at field-based schools outweighed their own abilities to teach for diverse populations and offered authentic opportunities for multicultural education. This teacher educator explained, "I give them practical ways to approach learning... and we talk about all their ideas but if they don't have the context or the exposure to schools and students, then they just won't get it."

Teacher educators planned their instruction around the needs of their field-base school and direct contact with students. They required teacher candidates to write and teach three different lessons in their assigned classroom and conduct at least one case study on a student in their school. While these assignments varied in focus and scope, all of the assignments required teacher candidates to work directly with learners in their schools. For instance, one teacher educator explained how completing a read aloud lesson using a Mexican American picture book helped one of his teacher candidates gain valuable knowledge about her students' backgrounds:

...she recognized that her students, not entirely, but most of her students are Mexican. She is in a bilingual class and they live here in the states and they're dealing with those issues and by doing her read aloud with this book she probably was able to speak to them on some level.

At the same time, some teacher educators worried that pressures to pass high stakes tests in some field-based schools sent wrong messages about effective instruction for diverse populations. One teacher educator shared,

They [teacher candidates] get out there, especially in schools that have the lower socioeconomic ethnic groups, and we see so much stress on (state-mandated test) preparation... we know if they gave instruction on strategies, because we know all kids don't learn the same, and they're not going to get those tests the same, they may need more time and more repetition. But our interns they are seeing this and they are getting the wrong ideas about teaching. I worry about this.

Another teacher educator, also concerned about testing pressures and the negative attitudes that can be played out in schools, stressed the importance of supervising teacher candidates while in classrooms: "We as professors need to help our interns be able to make sense of their experiences. They have to have the tools to analyze what's going on and understand how it relates to diversity... to think in a historical kind of way."

Universal Methods or Ideological Understandings

Many of the teacher educators vacillated between focusing on effective teaching methods and helping teacher candidates consider personal and sociocultural ideologies related to multicultural education. Some shared that teacher candidates should master recommended practices and use these with all students. For instance, one teacher educator explained, "I think they [teacher candidates] need to know specific strategies to help those children develop English or to understand how we do things here in America." Likewise, another teacher educator noted, "Our kids [teacher candidates] really like to have a teacher toolbox of things to do. In fact, I think it should be a teacher toolbox of 'this is what you do' follow carefully."

Although half of the teacher educators noted methods-based instruction as a positive solution to working with diverse learners, none of them were able to give specific examples or identify which strategies were most effective. One stated,

Multicultural Teacher Education

They need to know actual strategies but I don't know what those are because I don't teach that. I mean, I don't know exact strategies to use. I probably need to know more about multicultural education to help children's instruction.

Others shared that teacher candidates needed to have a solid research base to best work with diverse students. One teacher educator acknowledged,

I think they [teacher candidates] need to know some foundational types of information... a general understanding of the research that suggests particular teaching strategies or motivational approaches but I am going back to the fact that I don't currently use those in my block.

Embedded within the methods perspective is the underlying belief that instruction for diverse students should mirror instruction that works for all students. Another teacher explained, "Good teaching is good teaching and learning how to manage student behavior and student learning—that is all you have to do." This perspective resembles a common orientation in U.S. teacher education and a current debate among many multicultural educators (Bartolomé, 1994; Delpit, 1995) on whether teacher education programs should focus solely on instructional methods based on "best practices" that are deemed effective for mainstream, monolingual students or to help future teachers take into consideration the socio-historical and political dimensions of education.

This debate was evident among other teacher educators in this study. For example, several teacher educators believed that teacher candidates should critically reflect on socio-political and sociocultural ideologies of education. While this belief did not replace the importance of certain methods, it was more of a central focus for a small number of teacher educators and is reflected in their practice as described below. Issues deemed important included language hegemony, identity, home and school connections, and how socio-economic differences impact teaching and learning. For example, while sharing a story about a teacher who taught in an urban school setting and dropped out after her first year of teaching, this teacher educator explained the importance of learning about social inequities, racism, and language learning:

If she had a firmer understanding of the history of inequities and racism in the country and a more critical perspective on language learning, she wouldn't have gone into that classroom and then been so quick to feel wronged by the parents. She may have even been able to dialogue with them... these problems are bigger than her but if she knew she might have at least been able to navigate those waters rather than feel like a victim in that situation... I tell this story because I think it represents a story that I have heard many times before. It shows a lack of the sort of critical reflexive position that actually needs to be taken by teachers, not just White teachers but all teachers, especially White, monolingual teachers.

Reflecting on social inequities was important for another teacher educator who expressed that teacher candidates must be aware of how schools and teachers can

socially construct learning disabilities by how they define struggling readers and English learners. She explained,

In my school, teachers will recommend kids for tutoring who teachers perceive as struggling but after they are assessed and when given opportunities to perform they are not necessarily struggling. They are struggling within the particular boundaries of the classroom... I believe in instructional disability that we create disabilities through poor instruction. For instance, we had a young fourth grade student who was a non-native speaker of English but had been in the school for three years and identified as a struggling reader and it was in fourth grade that they discovered that she was reading on a pre-primer level. That is instructional disabilities and discrimination.

Another teacher educator explained the importance of helping teacher candidates conceptualize that Standard English is the language of power in the U.S. and that all children should have access to it. Like the other teacher educators who expressed socio-cultural perspectives, she shared a story about her own teaching in an urban school in Tennessee:

It was my practice in middle school to point out to my students that their ability to create raps was a very complex form of verbal art. And if they were able to do that, they could master Standard English in no time. I told them that because Standard English is what they can use to have power and have money they would need to code switch and know when and where to use their language as power.

The teacher educators who maintained this socio-political and sociocultural perspective also expressed the importance for teacher candidates to reflect on their own White, monolingual backgrounds as well as the consequences of not interrogating one's assumptions about schools and language. The comment below illustrates this articulated belief:

Instead of white blindness, they [teacher candidates] have a lack of critical perspective on diversity in general. They need to interrogate their own beliefs and know how much language is tied to identity... Without interrogating our beliefs, I think that we can often passively send messages, which are inappropriate or problematic for students.

Instead of supplying teacher candidates with a tool box of best practices or methods to teach all students, this group of teacher educators used 'accidental discussions' to address critical issues with their students. These accidental discussions were rarely planned but always attempted to address real situations in the field-based schools where teacher candidates interned. This perspective is similar to transformative education as suggested by Giroux and McLaren (1987, p. 271): "Teacher education ought to promote a situation where future teachers can deal critically with what exists in order to improve it." This transformative view would require a "commitment to the critiquing, challenging and changing of the status quo... grounded in an examination of power relations and a challenging of social structures which produce

Multicultural Teacher Education

or perpetuate unequal social relations” (Grundy & Hatton, 1994). Ladson-Billings advocates similar transformative ideas in her book *Crossing Over to Canaan*. She asks teacher educators to create a vision of teacher education with a “transformative agenda” modeling a social consciousness and identifying the tools to effect real social change in the lives of children (2001, p. xiii-xiv).

Ethnic and Linguistic Differences: Outsider or Insider Stance

All of the teacher educators noted that multicultural education should build on students’ ethnic and linguistic differences. However, the approach teacher educators used to address and discuss differences in their courses varied. Many focused on differences in terms of ethnic group identifiers such as “Black kids need to focus on Standard English” or socioeconomic differences such as “poor kids are the ones that really have trouble.” For example, when asked what teacher candidates need to know about teaching non-standard forms of English, this teacher educator explained:

I believe that it goes back to understanding the culture of the Black family and their dialects and why they have those dialects, how they communicate with each other in a different dialect. If we don’t understand the Black culture, how are we going to know about the language because the language is so much part of the big picture?

Besides focusing on ethnic differences, many expressed the importance of comparing individual learning abilities with traditional, state mandated objectives. For example, this teacher educator noted, “Each child coming into the classroom will be different, most are Hispanic, some are Black and teacher candidates need to have a list of differences so they will know how each kid will measure up to grade level standards.”

At the same time, many worried about the ethnic differences between teacher candidates and the students they will teach in schools. In order to be responsive to ethnic uniqueness, some of the teacher educators believed that teacher candidates should learn about their students’ ethnic backgrounds and this required outside research. One teacher educator noted, “If we get a student and we’re not sure about their culture, instead of judging them right away, I think we need to do a little research or look some things up.” Another suggested requesting an expert to come talk to the teacher candidates: “Maybe bring in some experts that have taught people of these cultures and have them share with us how they learn in their country or what are some of the important things... you know they can advise us.”

Instead of using an outside stance to learn about cultural differences, several other teacher educators believed teacher candidates must develop personal relationships with students in order to gain an insight into students’ unique ways of thinking and understanding the world. Student insight goes hand in hand with personal insight into one’s own ways of being. For example, one teacher educator explained “when

they [teacher candidates] begin working with a student who is different from them, either linguistically or from a social class, or from race or ethnicity, that's neat because they learn something about that child but they also begin to learn about themselves and I encourage them to share that with their student." Learning about a student's cultural or linguistic background does not require outside research, but building an insider perspective on students, their community, and the culture of their classroom. One teacher educator explained, "I encourage them to eat lunch with them or follow the child to specials, out to recess and talk to him. See how the child does in different classrooms so they understand the whole child and different perspectives."

Teacher candidates are encouraged to be ethnographers of students and make informed teaching decisions based on their interactions with students and their families. One teacher educator explained,

I do a child study where the interns basically are assigned to get to know a kid. I mean get to know a kid and then show me that you know the kid and build a bridge to their language and literacy instruction.

Another teacher educator described a project he does every semester with his teacher candidates and a group of seventh graders. "This one very specialized series of projects is helping interns get to know the nature and characteristics of kids from different backgrounds and languages. My responsibility is to be there to help them develop interpersonal relationships." This perspective aligns with culturally responsive teaching and learning (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995) as well as constructivist perspectives (Garcia, 2004) prevalent in multicultural teacher research. These theories advocate that teachers should become "cultural brokers" who develop cultural competence to work effectively with parents and families, draw on community and family resources, and know how to learn about the cultures of their students (Bartolomé, 2002).

Discussion and Implications

The fourteen teacher educators who participated in this study expressed varying beliefs and practices about multicultural teacher education. Similarly, they all identified the importance of preparing teachers for the growing cultural and linguistic diversity in U.S. schools (Smolen, Colville-Hall, Liang, & MacDonald, 2005) and agreed that learning through authentic field experiences can give teacher candidates the opportunity to experience the uncertain, dynamic, complex, and multifaceted nature of diversity in today's schools and influence what teacher candidates believe and come to know about their students' experiences and abilities (Capella-Santana, 2000; Duarte & Reed, 2004). And, while they shared an optimistic perspective about diversity, much like Gordon's research (2005) they grappled with ways to address race and the tensions associated with multicultural education. Some believed that mastering particular methods or "best practices" would improve the achievement of diverse students while others used accidental discussions to help future teachers

Multicultural Teacher Education

critique sociocultural realities and interrogate their own lived experiences. These beliefs and practices resemble a current debate among many educators (Bartolomé, 2004; Delpit, 1995) on whether teacher education programs should focus solely on instructional methods based on “best practices” that are deemed effective for mainstream, monolingual students, or to help future teachers take into consideration the socio-historical and political dimensions of education.

These results can have different implications for a teacher preparation program. For instance, some warn that by not explicitly addressing race, a colorblind perspective among teacher educators can perpetuate negative perspectives about minority students and can add to the mismatch between a White teaching force and a diverse student population (Irvine, 2003). Likewise, if teacher candidates assume that the use of a few “good” strategies or mastery of particular teaching methods in and of themselves will guarantee successful student learning, they may believe that simplistic solutions will decrease the achievement gap. This assumption could reproduce the belief that schools are just and fair places where all students have equal opportunities. At the same time, teacher candidates may consider learning to teach as mastering technical skills instead of a complex interaction of knowledge, experience, and personal beliefs about diversity. These practices can promote simplistic and surface level knowledge about multicultural teaching and learning (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

These findings suggest that the teacher educators’ varied perspectives and practices may not illustrate a coherent teacher education program in which faculty members have a collective purpose and central focus for multicultural teacher learning. Yet, we believe this study has important implications not only for us, but all teacher education programs that prepare teachers for multicultural school settings. Having coherence within a program does not necessarily suggest that all teacher educators think the same. Instead, coherence should consider how teacher educators align their beliefs and practices and work together to conceptualize and organize how learning experiences for our diverse student population are carried out (Tatto, 1996). According to Hammerness (2006), coherence in a teacher preparation program should not be viewed as a final outcome to achieve, but rather, a continuous reflective process that involves assessment and self-reflection to scaffold a program’s coherence.

If teacher educators hope to positively influence the success of culturally and linguistically diverse students, then we must continuously assess our thinking and classroom practice to improve the way we educate future teachers. As Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries (2004) suggest, “teacher educators themselves must engage in unflinching self-examination about underlying ideology in much the same way that they urge for teacher candidates” (p. 956). Teacher educators must critically consider their values and beliefs about diversity and understand how their perceptions filter their instruction and the aims of a teacher education program. As insiders and gatekeepers to the profession, teacher educators play a pivotal role

in influencing the policy and practices related to multicultural issues in teacher education (Bartolomé, 2004) and their influence on teacher preparation programs must not be overlooked (MacDonald, Colville-Hall, & Smolen, 2003).

Developing a coherent program can be challenging, but teacher educators can work towards a shared vision of teaching and learning if they are committed to exploring their individual and shared beliefs and practices. In order to do this, teacher educators must make the time and create the space to reconsider their beliefs, practices, and goals as educators. They need to establish personal and programmatic goals yearly, coupled with individual and collective program self-assessment. Conducting program research such as Bruch and Higbee's (2002) self study can help teacher educators develop a model of multiculturalism that is locally produced and understood as well as uncover the tensions and conflicts needed to change current practices and assumptions. Teacher educators may consider adding a performance-based assessment to their field-based courses such as an end of the program portfolio and presentation. As faculty construct new ways to assess novice teachers' knowledge and beliefs about multiculturalism, they will be forced to flesh out important principles and practices needed to occur in all courses.

This process will provide opportunities to discuss tough but important issues related to working in diverse school settings. More importantly, teacher educators must be committed to advancing their own learning as well as the learning of the future teachers who walk through their program. The teacher educators in this study have large course loads and many professional responsibilities. They are rarely given opportunities to reflect on their own beliefs and practices regarding multicultural teaching and learning. This study was the first opportunity for many of the teacher educators to talk about their beliefs and practices around multicultural education. More professional development such as book clubs or multicultural institutes that give teacher educators the time and space to critically reflect on their experiences may be the first step in changing how we prepare future teachers for the shifting cultural and linguistic landscapes of our schools. Even though Irvine (2003) views critical reflection as a significant aspect in the professional development she notes, "Faculty members cannot be expected to develop commitment and competence on their own" (p. 43).

This work must be seen as a long-term and ongoing undertaking that requires administrative support" (Gordon, 2005, p. 150). Therefore we strongly suggest that deans of colleges of education and chairs of teacher education programs value the work that it takes to develop a coherent program by giving teacher educators' the time and professional support to do this important work. Such a commitment would highlight the institutional support necessary to develop program coherence and growth. And since teacher preparation programs work collaboratively with school districts and community groups, a cohesive teacher education program should consider the goals and needs of the local community. Teacher educators should consider volunteering in community-based field experiences outside of

Multicultural Teacher Education

their course requirements in order to gain valuable resources for understanding students, for understanding contextual factors significant to learning in diverse school settings, and for providing opportunities for linking community, school, and university goals.

Limitations

Using Cochran-Smith's conceptual framework allowed us to uncover of the complexity of teacher educators' beliefs and attitudes about diversity as well as uncover the varied practices in one teacher education program. Few studies have closely examined teacher educators' perspectives and attitudes in relation to program coherence. Yet it is important to identify a few limitations of this study. First, the teacher educators expressed varying degrees of experience and knowledge related to multicultural education. Such differences can be traced to institutional ranks (adjunct, lecturer, and tenure-track) and the educational background of the faculty. At the same time, professional development support or lack of support may also be a factor in the participants' varied attitudes and beliefs about diversity. We did not explore how the teacher educators' educational and professional development experiences and/or professional ranks shaped their beliefs and attitudes.

Future research should take these issues into consideration in order to flesh out how such differences may impact the central focus and shared responsibility of a program. Additionally, the participants conducted their field-based programs at different schools in the region. Some schools were more culturally and linguistically diverse than others. Local school diversity may have played a larger part in how the teacher educators viewed multicultural education and its importance in the program.

A Final Comment

Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) suggest that teacher education programs study themselves and the communities in which they are a part of as an important and ongoing effort. They contend that "Preservice and in-service teacher education programs need processes that prompt teachers and teacher educators to raise questions about race, class, and ethnicity and to develop courses of action that are valid for particular communities" (p. 104). Much like Cochran-Smith and Zeichner suggest, our research served both as an indirect self-study of one teacher preparation program as well as a personal look at our own beliefs and instructional practices. It has allowed us to be critically reflective and question our perspectives while closely studying those of our fellow colleagues.

In the end, this study has helped us to examine how our racial, multilingual, varied worldviews and instructional practices have contributed to simplistic notions of diversity. Through our study we have become more cognizant of the importance of talking about racism in relation to multicultural teaching and learning, and

how colorblind perspectives, often unintentional, can negatively impact student learning.

References

- Bartolomé, L. I. (1994). Beyond the methods fetish: Toward a humanizing pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64(2), 173-194.
- Bartolomé, L. I. (2002). Creating an equal playing field: Teachers as advocates, border crossers, and cultural brokers. In Z. F. Beykont (Ed.), *The power of culture: Teaching across language differences* (pp. 167-192). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.
- Bartolomé, L. I. (2004). Critical pedagogy and teacher education: Radicalizing prospective teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 31(1), 97-122.
- Bell, J. L. & Hartman, D. (2007). Diversity in everyday discourse: The cultural ambiguities and consequences of "Happy Talk." *American Sociological Review*, 72, 895-914.
- Bruch, P. L., & Higbee, J. L. (2002, Fall). Reflections on multiculturalism in developmental education. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 33(1), 77-90.
- Capella-Santana, N. (2003). Voices of teacher candidates: Positive changes in multicultural attitudes and knowledge. *Journal of Educational Research*, 96(3), 182-190.
- Davis, L. S., Crumpler, T. P., Stallworth, C., & Crawford, K. M. (2005). Beyond awareness: Preparing culturally responsive pre-service teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 32(2), 85-100.
- Duarte, V., & Reed, T. (2004). Learning to teach in urban settings. *Childhood Education*, 80(5), 245.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Children's Defense Fund. (2005). The state of America's children. Retrieved on December 12, 2007 at <http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageServer?pagename=publications>
- Cochran-Smith, M. (2003). The multiple meanings of multicultural teacher education: A conceptual framework. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 30(2), 7-26.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Zeichner, K.M. (2005). Executive summary. In M. Cochran-Smith & K.M. Zeichner (Eds.), *Studying teacher education: The report of the AERA panel on research and teacher education*. Washington, DC: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cochran-Smith, M., Davis, D., & Fries, K. (1995). Multicultural teacher education: Research, practice, and policy. In J. Banks & C. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. New York: MacMillan.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1999). Educating teachers for the next century: Rethinking practice and policy. In G. A. Griffin (Ed.), *The education of teachers* (pp. 221-256). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hammerness, K., Grossman, P., Rust, F., & Shulman, L. (2005). The design of teacher education programs. In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do* (pp. 390-441). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Erlanson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Garcia, E. (2004). Educating Mexican American students. In J. A. Banks & C. A. McGee

Multicultural Teacher Education

- Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education, 2nd Edition* (pp. 491-514). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gay, G., & Howard, T. C. (2000). Multicultural teacher education for the 21st century. *The Teacher Educator, 36*(1), 1-16.
- Giroux, H., & McLaren, P. (1987). Teacher education as a counter public sphere: notes towards a redefinition. In T. Popkewitz (Ed.), *Critical studies in teacher education: Its folklore, theory, and practice* (pp. 226-297). London, UK: Falmer Press.
- Gollnick, D. (1995). National and state initiatives for a multicultural education. In J. Banks (Ed.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Gordon, J. (2005). Inadvertent complicity: Colorblindness in teacher education. *Educational Studies, 38*(2), 135-153.
- Grundy, S., & Hatton, E.J. (1995). Teacher educators' ideological discourses. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 21*(1), 7-23.
- Hammerness, K. (2006). From coherence in theory to coherence in practice. *Teachers College Record, 108*(7), 1241-1265.
- King, B.M., & Newmann, F.M. (2000). Will teacher learning advance school goals? *Phi Delta Kappan, 81*(8), 576-82.
- Koppich, J. (2000). Trinity University: Preparing teachers for tomorrow's schools. In L. Darling-Hammond (Ed.), *Studies of excellence in teacher education: Preparation in a five-year program* (pp. 1-48). Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.
- Irvine, J. J. (2003). *Educating teachers for diversity: Seeing with a cultural eye*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Multicultural teacher education: Research, practice, and policy. In J. A. Banks & C. A. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 747-761). New York: Macmillan.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Liston, D., Whitcomb, J., & Borko, H. (2006). Too little or too much: Teacher preparation and the first years of teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education, 57*(4), 351-358.
- MacDonald, S., Colville-Hall, S., & Smolen, L. (2003). Program ownership and the "Transformative Agenda" in colleges of education: Teachers of teachers working towards a more equitable society. *Multicultural Education, 10*(4), 7-14.
- Merriam, S. B. (2001). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merseth, K. K., & Koppich, J. (2000). Teacher education at the University of Virginia: A study of English and mathematics preparation. In L. Darling-Hammond (Ed.), *Studies of excellence in teacher education: Preparation in a five-year program* (pp. 49-81). Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic minorities*. Retrieved on December 14, 2007 at http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/minoritytrends/ind_1_1.asp
- Nieto, S. (2000). Placing equity front and center: Some thoughts on transforming teacher

Lori Czop Assaf, Rubén Garza, & Jennifer Battle

- education for a new century. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 180-187.
- Smolen, L.A., Colville-Hall, S., Liang, X., & MacDonald, S. (2005). An empirical study of college of education faculty's perceptions, beliefs, and commitment to the teaching of diversity in teacher education programs at four urban universities. *The Urban Review*, 31(1), 45-61.
- Strauss, C., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research-techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Tatto, M. T. (1996). Examining values and beliefs about teaching diverse students: Understanding the challenges for teacher education. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 18(2), 155-180.
- Villegas, A., & Lucas, T. (2002). *Educating culturally responsive teachers: A cohesive approach*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Zeichner, K. M. (2000). Ability-based teacher education: Elementary teacher education at Alverno College. In L. Darling-Hammond (Ed.), *Studies of excellence in teacher education: Preparation in the undergraduate years* (pp. 1-66). Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.
- Zeichner, K. M., & Hoelt, K. (1996). Teacher socialization for cultural diversity. In J. Sikula, T. Buttery, & E. Guyton (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (2nd ed., pp. 525-547). New York: Macmillan.