Individual and Group Reflection Strategies

What We Learned from Preservice Teachers

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Introduction

As classrooms become more diverse, one of the necessary goals of teacher education programs is to prepare preservice teachers (PSTs) to work with children of diverse populations (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2001). PSTs who derive largely from a dominant White culture will clearly face this challenge. One effective approach used to assist PSTs to grasp the issues of cultural awareness and diversity involves the use of reflection to consider one's identity in relationship to others. Garmon (2005) argues that "regular reflection on one's teaching is considered an essential practice for teachers, and it is equally important in developing multicultural knowledge and sensitivity" (p. 278).

As a result, reflective thinking and teaching represent processes that require PSTs to consider the nature of their work and to use logical and rational analyses of their own teaching. Howard (2003) and Milner (2005) claim that PSTs should also reflect upon what they perceive, fear, hear, gain, or confront. Kelchtermans (2007) finds that reflection enables teachers to perceive themselves in relationship to various professional systems. Thus, reflection represents a learning process that, with guidance and practice, enables PST's awareness of professional place and guides their processing of related emotional issues.

Yet the manners in which teacher educators structure learning relate to the patterns of reflection that occur. Recent studies (Lin, 2009; Lucey, Ransdell, & Anderson, 2008) describe the patterns of reflections among PSTs in their efforts

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to clarify the socio-cultural identities of themselves and others. Lin employed Schmidt's (1998, 1999, 2001) ABCs model of cultural understanding to examine the cultural dispositions of PSTs and related them to attitudes of their peers. Lucey et al. assigned PSTs to randomly assigned groups and analyzed their guided reflections, composed at the end of the semester. They observed that the PSTs considered biological, psychological, and sociological relationships based on utilitarian (e.g., work ethic), rather than ethnic-racial patterned principles.

Lin's (2009) and Lucey et al.'s (2008) efforts employed two different approaches toward engendering multicultural awareness. The former employed individual processes and reflection while the other employed collaborative efforts. As these two studies yielded different PST views of cultural identities and relationships, we consider it appropriate to examine literature into the processes for PST's formation of cultural dispositions and their relationships to these works.

To that end, this article provides an interpretation of literature relating to these issues. It begins by considering the conditions that shape the general formation of attitudes towards others and how these processes relate to the preconceptions of PST's. It follows this discourse by discussing results of efforts to sensitize PST's to needs of those who are ethnically/racially different from them. Next, it reviews the works of Lin (2009) and Lucey et al. (2008) and relates them to the literature. Finally, it provides ideas for designing successful interventions and provides ideas for their research.

Formation and Consequences of Dispositions towards Others

Attitudes towards cultural groups represent a complex phenomena that involves many different influences. Brewer's (1999) review of literature finds that individuals

develop positive relationships with those whom they identify as possessing common positive characteristics ("in-groups"); however, this disconnection seeds tendencies of alienation towards those lacking these similarities, and breed feelings of hate through attitudes of moral superiority, perceived threat, common goals (perceptions of interdependence), common values and social comparisons, and power politics (Brewer, 1999). Studies indicate that providing a sense of security eases negativism towards out-groups (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001).

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes relate to their lived experiences (Lin, 2008). The influences of sociocultural, historical, and political contexts in which PSTs grew up are closely related to their efficacy in teaching. Lin, Lake, and Rice (2008) propose that it is important for PSTs to experience diverse settings while constantly engaging in internalized dialogues in order to help them make connections between their personal experiences and diversity issues.

Internalized dialogues require framing and reframing one's thinking in order to improve upon children's learning is basic to the active process of reflection. Connelly and Clandinin's (1994) work with PSTs shows how they develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their practice through the process of reflection. Yet, one of the hardest things to do is to reflect on personal cultural values and understand that many ideas held as truths are culturally based.

Contextual influences on dispositions and ideas represent a human condition. Just as experiences provide the bases for teacher beliefs and attitudes, they also influence those of the students. There are a multitude of factors that may influence behaviors (Banks, 2004). Koppelman, with Goodhart's (2005) recommendation that teachers try to address causes of student misbehaviors, rather punish the misbehaviors themselves, provides a respectful approach to validating the background of

the student to reshape his or her disposition towards a healthy outcome.

The teacher's cultural awareness may relate to a student's academic success or failure (Irvine, 2003). Creating a respectful classroom environment requires a willingness and ability to use knowledge of student cultural context to develop classroom policies and procedures while respond appropriately to student needs. Facilitating PST's awareness of students' cultural backgrounds and their relationship to learning represents a crucial process towards cessation of the conditions that cause recurrence of structured social inequities (Gay, 2000).

Efforts to Sensitize PSTs

It is believed that PSTs are able to change their perceptions and attitudes toward children of diverse backgrounds (e.g., Brown, 2004; Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Martin & Van Gunten, 2002; Peralta-Nash, 2003; Trent & Dixon, 2004). The following sections outline approaches used to assist PSTs process cultural awareness and diversity issues into individual- and group- based approaches (see Table 1).

Individual-based Approaches

One of the strategies employed is the ABCs of Cultural Understanding and Communication (Schmidt, 1998). This approach focuses on working with individuals to realize and overcome their patterns of bias. The far reaching potential of the ABCs model has been documented by teacher educators across disciplines (e.g., Lenski, Crumpler, Sallworth, & Crawford, 2005; Pattnaik, 2006; Xu, 2000). The purpose of the ABC's model is to enable both students and PSTs to realize the influence of culture in their own and that of others (Moll, 2000).

This model greatly emphasizes the importance of self-reflection. Pattnaik argues that it helps PSTs "critically reflect over white privileges and racism in the American society and the influence of "whiteness" on self and minority communities" (p. 117). Reflective thinking and reflective teaching involve processes that require PSTs to seriously consider the nature of their work and to use logical and rational analyses of their own teaching. The ABCs model provides a foundation for individuals to critically examine, document, and think through their thought processes in order to be aware of their attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences.

Though reading theoretical literature is necessary for PSTs, practical field-based experiences are imperative. Service learning is one such experience. According to Kaye (2004), a service learning project can be classified as one of four different approaches. They are: (1) direct service: children's service directly affects and involves the recipients; (2) indirect service: children do not provide service to an individual but to the community as a whole; (3) advocacy: intent is to create awareness of or promote action on an issue of public interest, and (4) research: involves children finding, gathering, and reporting on information in the public interest. Service learning is tool that provides PSTs with both a general and concrete foundation about how to make sense of differences, social injustice, and their roles as change agents (Reneer, Price, Keene, & Little, 2004).

Service learning also provides PSTs with opportunities to develop pedagogical skills and to confront culturally different stereotypes and beliefs (Pang & Park, 2003). Engaging PSTs in service learning also allows teachers educators to

> make the connections between theory and practice, raises their level of multicultural consciousness, provides them with insight into the hierarchy and political agendas driving educational policy, increases their ability to negotiate and form partnerships with culturally diverse groups in the school environment and encourages the practice and educational equity. (Brown & Howard, 2005, p. 7)

Group-based Processes

Based on their review of literature, Park and Judd (2005) argue that social grouping represents a necessary part of human existence, and thus efforts to prompt lessening or elimination of grouping may have negative outcomes. Diversity represents a aspect of society that needs to be viewed in a positive perspective. Diamond's (2005) cogent work, which describes the urgency of global societal stakeholders to collaborate and devise mutually supportive solutions to the environmental predicament that exists, illustrates the beneficial outcomes that could result through respect of different knowledge bases. Park and Judd reference several models (mutual differentiation, common in-group identity, multimodal, and multicultural). These approaches require that different groups work with each other to achieve common goals or to recognize the values of their differences.

Within education, group study has been shown to yield positive psychological outcomes when members work together to perform as a unit (Petress, 2004; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Using reflection as a process to explore these experiences represents a viable professional development possibility. Gay and Kirkland (2003) identify several general obstacles to reflection that include ignorance of reflection itself, absence of quality reflection opportunity, and the standardization professional expectations. They also identify specific obstacles (student diversion, avoidance, and superficial concern).

Cochran-Smith's (1995) small group work, which found that PSTs experienced difficulty affirming their students' cultural identities when the teachers could not affirm their own, presents an example of these struggles. Both the nature and processes of teacher preparations may relate to these challenges. By interpreting teacher education in a broad sense, programs may enable candidates' holistic perspective of social relationships and model the authentic instructional strategies that could replenish the social capital that eludes 21st century society (Putnam, 2000). Part of this process requires critical analysis of candidates' clinical settings (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, with Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005) to interpret whether or not classroom conditions perpetuate the systemic structural problems that perpetuate cultural inequities.

Table 1
Approaches to Assist Preservice Teachers Process Cultural Awareness

Approach	An Example	Components
Individual-Based Approaches	ABCs Model	Self-reflection Realizing influence of culture Practical, field-based experiences, such as service learning
Group-Based Processes	Mutual Differentiation	Group study Small group work Reflection Analysis of clinical settings

Our Experiences

To explain how each of our recent experiences with PSTs relates to the aforementioned literature, we now describe a study that took place in a suburban university in a southeastern state.

Schmidt's (1998) ABCs model was used to help the PSTs better understand about themselves and their peers in the same cohort. The ABCs model used in this study included: (1) autobiography, (2) biography, (3) cross-cultural analysis/comparison, (4) cross-cultural discussion, and (5) application in classroom.

Three major findings were found in this study. First, PSTs were able to admit their biases and prejudice after going through the steps of the ABCs model. Second, the positive impact of the ABCs model on PSTs enabled them to understand self and others better. Third, the participants recognized their attitudes could be influential to their teaching.

In line with previous studies (e.g., Finkbeiner & Fehling, 2006; Pattnaik, 2006; Xu, 2000), findings of this study revealed that the ABCs model was a great tool that helped PSTs to better understand their own beliefs and values, and to connect curriculum with children's specific needs. Despite the fact that the finding of bonding among participants was not discovered in the previous studies, it was encouraging. By going through the steps of the ABCs model, which required a thorough analysis of knowledge about self and others, perhaps helped participants connect to each other at a deeper level.

The second endeavor occurred at a southern urban institution. Researchers interpreted PSTs perceptions of their interactions with others after being randomly assigned to lesson planning groups. Participants did not observe traditional (e.g., race/ethnicity) patterns within groups, but reported challenges reconciling various work ethics and spent much of their experience transitioning from competitive to cooperative mindsets.

While this situation may appear relevant to an educational system that imprints increasing degrees of corporate-styled "professional" conduct and responsibilities (Valli & Buese, 2007) upon teachers, it emulates the avoided conversations about diverse approaches to professional settings that Gay and Kirkland (2003) lament. Studies (e.g., Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Sleeter, 1994) indicate various degrees of success enabling PSTs and teacher's sensitivity to cultural needs occur. Studies about patterns of group functioning and interaction should not ignore the approaches to achievement that a Euro-descended dominant culture may ignore. Building from Park and Judd's (2005) work, teacher educators might consider other models of group functioning to help culturally heterogeneous groups of PSTs attain common goals while using the ABC's model (Schmidt, 1998) as framework for guiding analysis.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The two works (Lin, 2009; Lucey et al., 2008) indicate that individual and collaborative reflections can be used in various ways to help PSTs to better understand themselves and their students in order to make learning more meaningful. Teachers' lived experiences were found to be factors that determined their willingness to involve and become change agents for their children (Lin, 2008). Thus, the ABCs model can be used to focus on teachers' lived experiences and life stages. Nevertheless, as Pattnaik (2006) suggests, there is a need for longitudinal research to explore the long-term impact of the ABC's model on research participants.

One consideration that also needs our attention is the kinds of questions asked during interviews. A few participants in Lin's (2009) study pointed out that they might have learned more about self and others if they asked different types of questions. Future individual-focused studies therefore can focus on guided questions such as values, religious practices, and work habit (Lucey et al., 2008) in order to have a greater impact on participants.

These studies inform the multicultural education community that the nature of PSTs' reflections relates to their contexts of origin and the structures of their learning. Lin's (2009) work employed a guided analysis that prompted participants' realization and analysis of their biases and synthesis of their resolutions. Lucey et al.'s work (2008) employed an unguided process that forced participants' resolution of conflicts that occurred in the normal course of course work and reflection upon the personal interactions that occurred.

As these works reported different patterns of bias (race, gender, or religion in one and group function roles in the other) we view these studies as calling for research into the conditions that prompt attributions of particular behaviors to personal traits and cause stereotyping to occur. While PSTs need guidance to realize their cultural biases, they also need to interact with others to experience and relate these biases to professional relationships, whether they are with students, colleagues, or professors.

We encourage further study into this area that uses case study and focus group methods to guide PSTs' reflections about these issues. For example the ABC model could be employed to guide individual students' examination of themselves and then chart their patterns of bias within class project groups. Another strategy may be for students to complete interactive reflection notebooks during a semester as they collaborate in groups. Furthermore, studies might employ pre- and post- surveys of PSTs' multicultural dispositions in association with guided efforts to confront their bias through reflection.

The arts may also provide instructional tools for fostering these efforts. Drama represents a vehicle for visualizing (Pedalty, 2001) or role-playing patterns of bias (Lamson, Aldrich, & Thomas, 2003). Combining visual art and music also represents a viable strategy for initiating conversations about social justice that could be extended to dialogues about patterns of bias (Lucey & Laney, 2009).

Both individual and group reflections represent important processes that enable PSTs to think critically, respond respectfully, and practice effectively. These two approaches help PSTs understand themselves and others in meaningful and practical contexts. The methods by which multicultural educators facilitate these reflections relate to their outcomes. In a climate of conformance that emphasizes compliance over pluralism, the outcomes of our multicultural education efforts depend on their structure and their content. This issue can not be ignored in the name of standardization. The art of teaching can not avoid this scientific truth.

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