Foundational Field Experiences:
A Window into Preservice Teachers' Cultural Consciousness and Self-Efficacy for Teaching Diverse Learners

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This study examined preservice teachers' cultural consciousness and self-efficacy while tutoring diverse students during an initial urban field experience. The 46 participants, enrolled in an introduction to diversity course, completed an 18-hour tutoring requirement in elementary and secondary schools. Paired-sample t-tests yielded statistically significant differences on cultural consciousness and self-efficacy scales, p < .05. Qualitative analysis indicated the participants began to develop perspective-taking abilities beyond their own and to critically examine teachers' pedagogical behaviors with culturally diverse

Educational foundation courses, in conjunction with initial field experiences, have been described as critical entry points for developing preservice teachers' interpretative contexts for future pedagogical courses (Ryan, 2006). These contexts must be situated within the historical, cultural, social, economic and political lives of the students they will teach, extending beyond an understanding of and sensitivity towards diversity to the development of efficacious teacher candidates.

Foundational courses and their required field components provide viable opportunities "for such examinations and can scaffold teacher candidates from their own experiences and beliefs to complex understandings of educational access and equity" (Ryan, 2006, p.12). Concomitantly, existing and evolving beliefs, dispositions, prior experiences and attitudes of preservice teachers must be constantly examined and analyzed (Garmon, 2005; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Genor & Goodwin,

2005; Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Ryan, 2006) beginning in initial or foundational courses and field experiences. This is especially crucial in light of the mismatch in the diversity of both classroom and preservice teachers and the students in U. S. classrooms (Gollnick & Chinn, 2008).

As the population of students-of-color attending public schools continues to increase, the ethnic and racial diversity of educators remains relatively unchanged (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). By examining the development of preservice teachers' cultural consciousness and efficacy for teaching diverse learners during initial field experiences, teacher educators are able to understand crucial elements of foundational experiences that impact preservice teachers' reflective practice as they prepare to teach all students.

Consequently, foundational courses and their required field components provide opportunities

for preservice teachers to examine the strengths and limitations of personal experiences and the impact of their beliefs and attitudes toward culturally different students. The present study examined preservice teachers' beliefs about cultural differences and their capability of teaching diverse learners during an initial field experience while tutoring in urban schools.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Cultural Consciousness

A critically conscious perspective is imperative to becoming a culturally responsive educator (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). It is important that preservice teachers reflect on the social and cultural construction of their own identities and those of their students (Ryan, 2006). Challenging and questioning one's beliefs is particularly crucial because of the relationships among teacher beliefs, expectations, and sense of efficacy for teaching diverse learners (Kyles & Olafson, 2008). Equally important, preservice teachers must develop an understanding of America's socially stratified society and the social inequalities perpetuated through an ideology based on beliefs in a meritocracy (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Early studies (Haberman & Post, 1992; Sleeter, 1992) described the tendency of preservice teachers to 'blame the victim' rather than recognize that disparities in achievement are linked to systematic inequities. Gay and Kirkland (2003) described this strategy as avoidance because it shifts the focus from race, class or gender to the individual attributes of students. When differences are no longer viewed as deficits, preservice teachers are able to develop an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Therefore, it is critical that during foundational courses and field experiences, preservice teachers begin to understand the implications of their own cultural identities and belief systems on their expectations

of students from backgrounds culturally different than their own.

Autobiographical Reflection

Autobiographical texts are valuable documents for analyzing and critiquing preservice teachers' experiences (Hyun, 1997; Rodriguez & Sjostrom, 1998). Hyun (1997) examined the interrelationship between autobiographical reflective activity and preservice teachers' cultural sensitivity. Results indicated that engaging in autobiographical reflective activity assisted preservice teachers in: 1) Developing a conceptual sense of perspective-taking ability other than oneself; 2) Critically examining teachers' pedagogical behavior with children from diverse backgrounds; 3) Seeing individual uniqueness based on family culture that is beyond the ethnic or group/race orientation; 4) Making a connection to the issue of equal (equitable) education; and 5) Realizing the need for creating diverse interactions and teaching styles in conjunction with developing multiple/multiethnic perspective-taking abilities (Hyun, 1997, pp. 4-6). These themes illustrate the complexities of preservice teachers' understandings of the experiences of learners and the implications for instructional decisions.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy beliefs have been proven to strongly predict future behaviors such as the choices of task, effort, perseverance, and resilience that would lead to greater performance (Bandura, 1977, 1986). According to Bandura (1982), there are four sources of self-efficacy development: (a) performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious experience, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) emotional arousal. He explained that some people have strong self-efficacy due to their successes, while others have low self-efficacy due to their failures. Also, individuals develop self-efficacy by observing similar others perform successfully. One's perception of efficacy is enhanced by verbal persuasion from others and their ability to

manage stressful situations effectively. Moreover, people who have a high sense of self-efficacy tend to choose and persist in a task, which leads to greater performance. Since self-efficacy is considered a situation-specific construct, there is a need to explore teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in specific contexts (Bandura, 1977).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine preservice teachers' cultural consciousness and to assess their levels and sources of efficacy during an initial urban field experience while tutoring diverse learners. Four research questions guided this study: (a) In what ways do preservice teachers become more culturally conscious during an initial urban field experience? (b) What element(s) of cultural consciousness emerge when preservice teachers engage in autobiographical reflection? (c) Do preservice teachers become more efficacious in teaching culturally diverse learners following an initial field experience? (d) What experience(s) affect preservice teachers' sense of efficacy in teaching diverse students?

Method

The investigators utilized a mixed methods research design gathering both quantitative and qualitative data. For quantitative data, the investigators administered pre- and post-tests of the instruments (described in the section below) at the beginning and end of the semester. Qualitative data was based on the participants' reflections on their tutoring experiences through a structured electronic journal blog during and at the conclusion of an 18-hour tutoring field requirement in urban schools.

The participants of this study were drawn from a population of preservice teachers enrolled in nine sections of an introduction to diversity for educators course during fall 2009 and spring 2010 semesters at a mid-sized university in the southeast. A prerequisite for entry into the teacher education program, students were required to complete an 18-hour tutoring requirement in an urban elementary or high school. The participants consisted of 46 undergraduate students, 44 females and 2 males. The average age of this sample was 19.7 years old and the majority was classified as either sophomores (57%) or juniors (33%). Eighty percent of the participants self-identified as European-American/white, 10% as African-American/black, 4% Hispanic American, 2% Asian American and 2% as multi-ethnic. Elementary majors comprised 57% of the participants, secondary majors represented 17%, and education minors 26%.

The following four instruments were used in this study:

Demographic Background Questionnaire

The investigators designed this questionnaire to gather preservice teachers' demographic data. The questionnaire items included age, gender, ethnicity, type of high school attended, academic major, classification, and current GPA.

Inventory of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity (ICCS) (Cushner, 2006)

The ICCS is a self-assessment instrument regarding one's intercultural experiences and rates one's agreement or disagreement with a series of statements. The participants were asked to respond to 32 items using a 7-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree, and 7 = strongly agree). The five subscales provided a multi-dimensional assessment of an individual's intercultural experiences: Cultural Integration (C Scale): degree of integration of elements from other cultures into one's daily activities; Behavioral (B Scale): degree to which an individual has adopted new behavior or one's comfort when interacting with others; Intellectual Interaction (I Scale): degree to which an individual seeks out knowledge of other cultural orientations; Attitude Toward Others (A Scale): degree of openness toward others; and

Empathy (E Scale): degree to which an individual identifies with the feelings of others. The higher the score, the more inter-culturally sensitive an individual is presumed to be. The total score on the ICCS and the total subscale scores were used for analysis.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy (CRTSE) Scale (Siwatu, 2007)

The CRTSE measures preservice teachers' beliefs about their capability of teaching culturally diverse students. There are 39 items, and the participants are asked to rate each item using a 10-point rating scale (0 = not confident, 5 = moderately confident, and 10 = completely confident). The scoring is based on the composite score over 39 items. The range of possible scores is from 0, indicating that the preservice teacher is not confident about teaching in diverse settings, to 390, indicating that the preservice teacher is completely confident.

Reflective Journal Blog

The qualitative data source was a guided Reflective Journal Blog Participants responded to the following two prompts: (a) "Using the dimensions of multiculturalism (ethnicity, socio-economic status, language, exceptionalities, gender), describe and analyze how this tutoring field experience has impacted your perceptions and expectations of diverse students" and (b) "What experiences affected your confidence in teaching diverse learners? Describe."

Results

Preservice Teachers' Cultural Consciousness

A paired sample t-test yielded a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre- and post-test on the Inventory of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity (ICCS) at alpha levels of .01. The post-test score (M = 161.60, SD = 15.10) on the ICCS was statistically significantly higher

than the pre-test score (M = 155.51, SD = 15.03) p = .000. Additionally, paired sample t-tests of the subscale scores yielded statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre- and post-test on Cultural Integration (C Scale), Attitude Toward Others (A Scale) and Empathy (E Scale). The average post-test score for the C, A, and E Scales (M = 42.02, SD = 9.89; M = 29.43, SD = 3.83; and M = 26.89, SD = 2.98, respectively) were statistically significantly higher than that of the pre-test scores for the C Scale (M = 38.33, SD = 9.31), p = .000; A Scale (M = 28.35, SD = 3.65), p = .000; and the E Scale (M = 25.76, SD = 2.98), p = .034.

To examine the element(s) of cultural consciousness that emerged when preservice teachers engaged in autobiographical reflection, investigators analyzed the journal prompt, "Using the dimensions of multiculturalism (ethnicity, socio-economic status, language, exceptionalities, gender), describe and analyze how this tutoring field experience has impacted your perceptions and expectations of diverse students." Journal responses were analyzed using content analysis coding based on five tendencies identified by Hyun's (1997) research study: 1) developing a sense of perspective-taking ability; 2) critically looking at teachers' pedagogical behavior with children from diverse backgrounds; 3) recognizing individual uniqueness beyond ethnic or racial group orientations; 4) connecting to issues of equitable education; and 5) realizing the need for creating diverse interaction and teaching styles.

Content analyses of journal entries indicated that 81% of the preservice teachers reflected the development of "a conceptual sense of perspective-taking other than oneself" (Hyun, 1997, p. 4). One preservice teacher (s6) reflected, "I now realize that I shouldn't just make assumptions about people but rather think about why they act the way they do or they are the way they are. I need to be more aware of what's going on with the students instead of just assuming everyone lives in situations such as my own." Likewise, s8 wrote,

"I really now see how sheltered my education experience was growing up." Another student (s9) echoed similar sentiments:

> "Coming from a very small, rural back-ground…I had never realized so many different opinions and views on life could be contained within one classroom… Through this I have become more concerned and aware of the people around me and become more open to others' views and opinion."

This analysis was consistent with the subscales A and E scores, increased openness toward others and ability to identify with others' feelings.

However, only 31% of the participants utilized their multiple perspective-taking abilities to recognize the importance of implementing culturally relevant instructional methods when teaching diverse learners. Quantitative analysis also indicated that 69% of participants recognized distinctions in teachers' pedagogical behaviors with children from diverse backgrounds. In contrast, however, only 25% of the participants were able to link their increased cultural awareness to issues of social justice and equitable educational experiences.

Preservice Teachers' Sense of Efficacy

A paired sample t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant change in the preservice teachers' sense of efficacy in teaching diverse learners at the conclusion of the initial urban field experience. The results found a statistically significant difference on the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy (CRTSE) Scale at an alpha level of .05. The post-test score (M = 341.69, SD = 29.20) of CRTSE was statistically significantly higher than the pre-test score (M = 294.00, SD = 55.85) of CRTSE, p = .001. The internal consistency based on Cronbach's alpha was .97 for this sample.

The journal prompt, "What experiences affected your confidence in teaching diverse learners?" was analyzed to determine what experience(s) affected preservice teachers' sense of efficacy in teaching diverse students. Investigators used content analysis with the coding based on Bandura's (1982) four sources of self-efficacy (i.e., mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal). The results indicated that 70% of the preservice teachers reported that their own mastery experiences enhanced their sense of efficacy for working with students from different cultural backgrounds. For example, student 4 (s4) wrote, "The entire experience has affected my confidence in teaching diverse learners, from the beginning to the end. But, to be more specific, working with my small group boosted my confidence." Another 20% of the participants reported that their self-efficacy developed due to having vicarious experiences (i.e., classroom teacher or university faculty as a model). For example, s12 described, "My directing teacher helped me see how much influence a teacher has on their students. She really helped me to see that I can teach a diverse classroom." The remaining 10% indicated that verbal persuasion (i.e., praise from teachers) helped their efficacy beliefs increased. For example, s14 wrote, "At the end of my field experience, the teacher told me that I was a great impact on the students…this experience of a compliment like that affected my confidence in teaching diverse learners."

Discussion and Implications

The current study affirmed the value and importance of engaging preservice teachers in initial diverse field experiences. Composite data analysis indicated that preservice teachers did experience growth in their levels of cultural sensitivity and self-efficacy while tutoring culturally diverse learners. The use of structured autobiographical journal prompts provided specific data regarding the extent of preservice teachers' cultural consciousness and the sources of their teaching

efficacy with diverse students. Specifically, they began to develop perspective-taking abilities beyond their own, became more open to differences in others, and began to critically examine teachers' pedagogical behaviors with children from diverse backgrounds. Also, preservice teachers' own successful field experiences as well as working with effective classroom teachers promoted their sense of efficacy in teaching those who are culturally different. These findings have important implications for teacher education programs and subsequent field experiences.

First, teacher educators must make explicit the linkages between cultural competence and instructional practices and decisions in initial/ foundational field experiences and pre-requisite courses. Although preservice teachers in this study did recognize the importance of using multiple frameworks to understand the diverse needs of the students they were tutoring, only one-third connected these multiple frameworks with the need to utilize culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition, the majority did not associate the origin of these needs to socially inequitable practices and policies. Instructional practice that is scaffold within a socially conscious framework (Ryan, 2006) is also recommended in subsequent field requirements.

In addition, it is critical that preservice teachers have positive experiences when working with culturally diverse students and have, as models, successful teachers of diverse learners (Siwatu, 2007). The results of this study emphasize the need to examine the structure of these foundational field requirements as well as the classroom teacher's effectiveness with diverse learners because of their impact on preservice teachers' sense of teaching efficacy. Although identified as 'prerequisite' experiences, initial, 'foundational' field requirements with diverse learners must be viewed as relevant and critical to preservice teachers' development as are subsequent, more intensive field components.

Teacher education programs should examine the structure of initial field placements because of their potentially transformational influence on preservice teachers' belief systems. Preservice teachers with limited experiences in diverse settings tend to hold naïve beliefs about diversity (Kyles & Olafson, 2008). The present study affirms the importance of examining these beliefs during initial field experiences with culturally diverse students to support the growth of preservice teachers' cultural consciousness and teaching efficacy. Preservice teachers must be guided to recognize systemic and inequitable practices and policies that can impact the educational experiences of students attending urban schools.

Future research should focus on examining the development of preservice teachers' cultural critical consciousness and self-efficacy as they progress through the teacher education program. Specifically, researchers should examine changes in preservice teachers' cultural consciousness and self-efficacy and what experiences contributed to those changes. A longitudinal study could inform the development of models for developing cultural critical consciousness and self-efficacy through initial, practicum, and internship experiences. Preservice teachers' journeys toward more complex examinations of their "personal and professional cultural critical consciousness" (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p. 181) and increased self-efficacy for teaching diverse students provide rich and relevant data for re-conceptualizing teacher education programs for 21st century learners.

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