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Incorporating Multicultural Education into Teacher Preparation Programs

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ABSTRACT

In this comparative study, the discussion of multicultural education focused on these four research questions: “What is multicultural education?” “How are teaching preparation programs approaching multicultural education?” “What does multicultural education look like in the classroom?” and “Is multicultural education an explicit portion of teacher preparation programs for pre-service teachers in South Carolina?” Using James A. Banks’s five dimensions of multicultural education as the theoretical framework for the study, the following dimensions were explored to see if they were present within teacher preparation programs: content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowering school culture and social structure. Interviews were conducted with faculty members, who met the following criteria: (1) a research interest in multicultural education, (2) experience with teaching a course for multicultural education or a related course about diversity, and (3) are teaching at a university or college with a Teaching Fellow Program in South Carolina. Along with interviews, an analysis of literature addressing the research questions was conducted. The results from the research were the following: Content integration, knowledge construction, and prejudice reduction were present within teacher preparation programs through required literature, writing assignments, and conversations that were structured into the syllabus to challenge the ideas and opinions that they brought into the classroom. Equity pedagogy and empowering a school culture and social structure were not present within teacher preparation programs. The implication for this research is that we must go beyond the common rhetoric of “inclusivity and multicultural understanding” because the classroom is not a utopia. It does not exist in its own world; it is a smaller environment that children grow, learn, and develop in preparation for a much larger environment—the world. Students need to learn how to engage in a healthy dialogue about those issues and learn how to dismantle the –isms that have been embedded within social policy, the judicial system, employment, and other pathways to access. A way to achieve this is that universities and colleges do not need to increase courses, but enrich those courses. By taking a closer look at the essential readings of offered courses, writing assignments, discussions, and service learning opportunities, a deeper analysis can be added to see if different races, ethnicities, religions, genders, nations, and sexual orientations are represented within the curriculum.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) states that by the year 2023, 55 percent of students receiving public primary and secondary education will be students of color (2013). In the midst of a changing student demographic, the average teacher is predominately white, female, and middle class (Gorski, 2012). In fact, 81.9 percent of teachers in public and private primary and secondary education identify as white (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). All teachers

regardless of race, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation or language bring their own biases (Gorski, 2012) into their teacher preparation programs, and it is up to these programs to encourage reflexivity to protect against potential biases. With the changing demographics of students, a deeper and more critical discussion of how teachers are being taught to address diversity in the classroom needs to occur.

The term diversity can refer to a variety of social statuses, but for the context of this paper, I will limit my discussion of diversity to

race, and ethnicity. These are the criteria that Banks (1994) uses as a focus to multicultural education. Arguably, the purpose of education involves, “developing the intellect, serving social needs, contributing to the economy, creating an effective work force, preparing students for a job or career, promoting a particular social or political system” (Forshay, 2012). Students cannot truly serve the “social needs” or to “promote a particular social or political system” if they are not being taught how to critically think and examine the current structures of society, including racial structures. A student learns about individuals belonging to other groups via television and internet, family, and sometimes through peer interactions, but this information is often incomplete or distorted. Therefore educators must also explicitly teach children how to learn to “think critically, how to recognize discrimination and injustice, and to work to challenge injustice” (Handbook of Research on the Education of Young Children, 2012). It is important for teachers to have diversity training in order to better serve their students and prepare them for the adult world.

There are many conceptual frameworks in the realm of education about how to teach teachers to address the multiple identities that students bring to the classroom. Some of those conceptual frameworks include: culturally relevant pedagogy, social justice education, democratic education, critical pedagogy, and multicultural education. These frameworks are built from the foundation of teaching for social justice. The objectives and goals of the previously listed frameworks are “frequently intertwined and overlapping” (Dover, 2013).

Culturally Responsive/Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a framework that uses the personal experiences and cultural knowledge of the students within the classroom as the center of the curriculum. This requires teachers to take on the perspective of another to learn the cultural norms and understand the value in the diverse racial, ethnic, and language makeup in the classroom. Two examples of culturally responsive/relevant pedagogy are:

- Students can learn about weather by using their culture as seen within myths,

folklore and family sayings to teach the scientific concepts of weather. By using some of the students’ cultural backgrounds, a closer connection and better understanding to the scientific content can form (Irvine, 2009).

- For social studies, a teacher can create a voter education project by helping students “analyze and report voting patterns in their neighborhood” (Irvine, 2009).

Social Justice Education

Social justice’s framework has a strong emphasis of building social awareness for students through the lens of power and privilege. Through that lens, students will critically examine how opportunities are not readily available for every individual, how oppression is found on an institutional and personal level, and what can be done to create social change. The teacher fulfills the role of an advocate by acknowledging the social, political, and economic realities that students and their parents encounter (Bemak & Chung, 2005).

Democratic Education

In the democratic education framework, the curriculum is enriched with the values of justice, respect, and trust with a goal of creating a community of equals by allowing students’ ideas and opinions to be equal to the teacher’s (Waghid, 2014). Democratic education can be embedded in the creation of policy groups such as youth advisory councils, student councils, student-teacher-administrator committees, and students leading reform efforts within their schools and communities.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy details the examination of the power that marginalized groups experience compared to whites. The goal of this framework is to equip students with the tools to address inequalities in their environments to critical pedagogy in the context of a classroom. It works on a continuum and encourages students to move toward action and human agency “by applying agency through critical thinking in the classroom, then through individual social action, and finally through group social action” (Marri, 2005).

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education focuses on creating equal opportunities for learning despite race, class, gender or exceptionality. Using the United States as a foundation, multicultural education requires teachers and students to dive into dismantling their “attitudes, beliefs, feelings, assumptions about U.S. society and culture” (Banks, 119). Though dismantling, teachers are able to make students conscious of the strengths and the contributions of diverse individuals within the United States’ context.

Multicultural education goes beyond content integration or an additive approach. With an additive approach, educators tend to “highlight an ethnic or cultural group invention, and discovery or contribution” (Baptiste & Key, 2001, p. 2) without changing the curriculum. Multicultural education in contrast helps educators see that content integration—say, putting content about Mexican Americans or African Americans in the curriculum—is important, but that it’s only a first step toward addressing diversity. The five dimensions of multicultural education are: (1) content integration, (2) knowledge construction (3) equity pedagogy (4) prejudice reduction, and (5) empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 1998). Due to its multi-dimensional approach, the focus of my study is examining how teachers are trained to address diversity within teacher preparation programs using multicultural education as the main conceptual framework.

METHODS

Because definitions and implementation of multicultural education vary widely, through this study, I investigated the following research questions: “What is multicultural education?” “How are teaching preparation programs approaching multicultural education,” and “What does multicultural education look like in the classroom?” I conducted 9 in-depth phone interviews with college professors. I decided to do a comparative study by interviewing faculty members to see how they understand multicultural education and what they do to prepare pre-service teachers in teacher preparation programs. In order to gather

unfiltered feedback about faculty members’ different preparation programs, I informed the interviewees that their identifying information would be kept confidential.

Population

I began by identifying universities and colleges with Teaching Fellow Programs. Universities and colleges for the study were identified through Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (CERRA). Out of the 14 universities and colleges with a Teaching Fellow Program, nine met the criteria for the research study: (1) research interest in multicultural education, (2) experience with teaching a course for multicultural education or a related course about diversity. Faculty members were chosen based on their biography and their listed research interest. I then narrowed my pool of potential interviewees to faculty at those universities and colleges who met the two criteria. I contacted potential participants through an email requesting their participation in the study. I attached a consent form detailing the study and whether the participants were willing to be tape recorded for the semi-structured interview. Out of the nine eligible universities and colleges, five universities and colleges chose to participate.

Interviews

My interviews were semi-structured. This allowed me to form an understanding about what multicultural education looks like within teacher preparation programs in South Carolina from the unique perspective of the faculty member. The open-ended questions allowed the faculty members that were being interviewed the freedom to elaborate on each question and provide additional information that helped me better understand the topic in discussion. Interview questions were created based upon doing an analysis of the existing literature. The primary interview questions were as follows:

- Are strategies for multicultural teaching an explicit portion of undergraduate teacher preparation programs?
- Are there any discussions and self-evaluations of pre-service teachers to identify their own racial, cultural, religious and sexual orientation biases

before they are placed in their full-term internship?

- Where do majority of teachers in your college of education seek employment after graduation?
- How do you faculty members define multicultural education?

Each interview was tape recorded to ensure accuracy and was transcribed after the interview. In addition to the interview, faculty members were asked if they could provide a syllabus for the class they were teaching that had multicultural principles.

FINDINGS

Using the Multicultural framework, Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education, the following dimensions were present: content integration, knowledge construction, and prejudice reduction within South Carolina universities and colleges that were interviewed. Equity pedagogy and empowering school culture and social structure were two dimensions that were not met. Content integration was met by the five universities by the required literature that professors had students reading, writing assignments, and conversations that were structured into the syllabus to challenge the ideas and opinions that they brought into the classroom.

Bank's Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education	South Carolina's Colleges/Universities
1. Content Integration	Present
2. Knowledge Construction	Present
3. Equity Pedagogy	Not Present
4. Prejudice Reduction	Present
5. Empowering School Culture and Social Structure	Not Present

Table 1: A chart depicting if Bank's Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education was present in South Carolina's colleges/universities.

Knowledge construction was present because the professors at the five universities were intentional about the curriculum that they were teaching. Material was introduced as the student's ability to critically examine their own experience, compared to what is being manifested in society and their readings. This process of thinking provided students with a starting point to start thinking about implicit cultural assumptions that could be within the classroom curriculum. Equity pedagogy was not present within any of the five universities because there were not any readings or discussions about how teachers can modify their curriculum through cultural competency to meet the racial, cultural, ethnic, and gender groups within the classroom. Equity pedagogy is different from learning about diverse learners because the family and community culture of the student is being discussed rather than the learning style of the student, such as, tactile, auditory, kinesthetic or visual learner.

Prejudice reduction was present because the classroom discussions and the required written reflections were focused on the teacher's racial attitudes and how that can impact the students as well as how the students' racial attitudes can affect the classroom environment. Yet it did not move past discussion and written reflections. There were no mentioned or planned opportunities for students to create a tangible plan or learn about strategies to create a culturally competent classroom. Lastly, empowering school culture and social structure was not present and that could be contributed to the lack of time and room within the curriculum for teacher preparation programs. The students were primarily freshmen and sophomores. At this dimension, everyone involved with the education process, from administrators to the parents, are promoting a multicultural education. To reach this level, the other four will have to be beyond the emerging stage.

IMPLICATIONS

Teacher preparation programs are stretching themselves to meet the growing demands of high quality teachers. The changes that have been made to various teaching

programs include raising admission requirements, recruiting more students from STEM fields to become teachers, and improving the curriculum to include more field experience (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Even with the mentioned improvements of teaching programs, there is still not a space being made to include multicultural education beyond the “rhetoric around inclusivity and multicultural understanding (especially in relation to popular notions of globalization and internationalization)” (Lam, 2015) as part of the teacher preparation process. The reason why we must go beyond the common rhetoric of “inclusivity and multicultural understanding” is because the classroom is not a utopia. It does not exist in its own world; it is a smaller environment that children grow, learn, and develop in preparation for a much larger environment—the world. The discussions of race, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation and privilege are happening outside of the classroom and affecting people in harmful ways. Students need to learn how to engage in a healthy dialogue about those issues and learn how to dismantle the –isms that have been embedded within social policy, the judicial system, employment, and other pathways to access.

Requirements for educators are increasing with each year. As the expectations increase, universities and colleges are trying to get ahead by loading up programs with additional classes to prepare pre-service teachers with even more. However, the more usually do not include multicultural education. Universities and colleges do not need to increase, but enrich. By taking a closer look at the essential readings of offered courses, a deeper analysis can be added to classroom discussion to see if different races, ethnicities, religions, genders, nations, and sexual orientations are represented. Creating an inclusive framework to process information can better assist the conversation within the classroom—especially when it is challenging and uncomfortable.

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