Operation 2014: Developing Culturally Competent Teachers for a Diverse Society

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This conceptual analysis addresses the need to develop culturally competent public school teachers who are prepared to successfully instruct students from high-poverty, high-risk and culturally diverse communities. It directs attention to the need for a paradigm shift to engage teachers in continuous, long-term professional development centered on culturally responsive instruction to ensure quality education of all students. The continuous widening of the achievement gap and the high turnover of teachers in high-poverty, high-risk, culturally diverse schools have led to this disciplined inquiry to advance culturally responsive instruction. The year 2014 has been targeted by the U.S. Department of Education to ensure all students are performing academically on grade level. This proposal promotes the year 2014 also as the year that all U.S. teachers are prepared to address the multitude of cultural differences in diverse, high poverty and high risk schools through targeted professional development.

Operation 2014: Developing Culturally Competent Teachers for a Diverse Society

On March 10, 2009, U. S. President Barack Obama unveiled his education plan for the nation’s schools while speaking at the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Of the five pillars his administration will focus on, Pillar Three targets recruiting, preparing, and rewarding outstanding teachers. President Obama spoke at length regarding what he described as “unprecedented commitment to ensure that anyone entrusted with educating our children is doing the job as well as it can be done.” He continued by stating that “America needs to make investments in innovative ideas.” Education should focus on 1) strengthening the teachers currently in the field with the skills and knowledge necessary
to meet the needs of their students; and 2) giving our educators the opportunity to collaborate on best practices, thus making them more effective and efficient (www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29612995/).

To further illuminate the trouble in American schools, Ladson-Billings (2008, p. 235), in *A Letter to Our President*, noted that The National Governors' Association identified the achievement gap as, "a matter of race and class. [And], across the U.S., a gap persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts." The association further stated, "This is one of the most pressing education-policy challenges that states currently face" (http://www.subnet.nga.org/educlear/achievement/retrieved electronically 10/27/05).

**Review of Relevant Literature**

The continuous widening of the achievement gap and the high turnover of teachers in high-poverty, high-risk, culturally diverse schools have led to the need for a national response to advance culturally responsive instruction. After reviewing 80 published data-based research studies that examined the preparation of teachers for schools that were historically underserved and multicultural, Sleeter (2001) determined that research on preparing teachers was piecemeal and predominated by small-scale action research studies focusing on local efforts of program improvement. This brief literature review will highlight: 1) the present status of the demographics of the teaching and student populations and the academic achievement gap; 2) literature on cultural competence; and 3) programs that have addressed the needs of culturally diverse students from high poverty and high needs communities.
Students

A lack of culturally responsiveness has had a negative impact on the quality of education received by students from culturally diverse backgrounds. According to Sleeter (2001), students in high-poverty, high-risk schools are learning far too little, becoming disengaged, and dropping out at high rates. Countless researchers agree that minority and/or high poverty students are more likely to drop out of high school (Lavin-Loucks, 2006). It an attempt to narrow the achievement gap between white students and students from diverse cultures and ensure the academic achievement of all students, the federal government enacted Public Law 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was signed into law in January, 2002. A core principle of the act was to ensure that all students are able perform academically on grade level or above by 2014 (Building on Results: A Blueprint for Strengthening NCLB, 2007). NCLB mandated the measurement of academic progress of all students in reading, mathematics and science. Public schools are required to raise the achievement of students each year and to eliminate the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, language, and special education status or face severe sanctions. NCLB focuses solely on the academic achievement of the students. However, the National Center for Education Statistics: Institute of Education Sciences published an assessment of the educational progress and challenges that racial and ethnic minorities face in the United States (KewalRamani, et.al, 2007). The report highlighted the differences that continue to prevail among Hispanic, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White students and gives evidence to the continued persistence of the achievement gap. Among the findings:
Black and Hispanic 4th graders were the most likely to attend high-poverty schools (more than 75 percent of students, 48 and 49 percent respectively). White students were the least likely to attend schools in this category (p. 35). Fifty-two percent of Black students and 58 percent of Hispanic students attended schools where 75 percent or more of students were minorities (p. 36). On the long-term National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), White students continue to outperform Black and Hispanic students in both reading and mathematics (p. 45).

An additional study commissioned by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University entitled *School Accountability under NCLB: Aid or Obstacle for Measuring Racial Equity?* (Owens & Sunderman, 2006) revealed that schools most likely to be identified as needing improvement were highly segregated and enrolled a disproportionate share of a state’s minority, low income students and disadvantaged students.

**Teachers**

The U. S. Census reported that as of 2006, thirty-four percent of the population was non-white: Hispanic/Latino – 14.8%, Black – 12.8%, Asian, 4.4%; two or more races – 1.6%, American Indian/Alaska Native – 1%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander - .2% (U. S. Census Bureau, 2008). As reflected in data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the teaching population in the public schools does not reflect the U.S. population. Among public school teachers, 83 percent are non-Hispanic White, 8 percent are non-Hispanic Black/African American, 6 percent are Hispanic/Latino, about 1 percent are non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native, about 1 percent are non-Hispanic Asian, and less than 1 percent are non-Hispanic Native.
Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Strizek et al, 2006). Twelve sources of diversity that influence teaching and learning may be identified as: race, ethnicity/nationality, social class, sex/gender, health, age, geographic region, sexuality, religion, social status, language, and ability/disability.

Teachers must be prepared to address the considerable diversity in experiences children bring with them to school (Darling-Hammond, Wise & Klein, 1997). Darling-Hammond reported that nationally about one third of beginning teachers leave within 5 years, and the proportions are higher for teachers who enter with less preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 300). “In the classrooms most beginning teachers will enter, at least 25% of students live in poverty and many of them lack basic food, shelter, and health care; from 10% to 20% have identified learning differences; 15% speak a language other than English as their primary language (many more in urban settings); and about 40% are members of racial/ethnic “minority” groups, many of them recent immigrants from countries with different educational systems and cultural traditions” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 300).

Numerous factors have been shown to contribute to early teacher burnout in high-needs, high-poverty culturally diverse school communities. These factors include being ill prepared to teach in high-needs, high-poverty culturally diverse schools. It has also been shown that the pressure strategies of high-stakes accountability systems decrease teacher commitment in low-performing schools which can result in de-motivating teachers (Mintrop and Trujillo, 2005).
Cultural Competence

Cultural Competence is a term that has been most related to the U. S. health care industry to address patient/family centered care with an understanding of the social and cultural influences that affect the quality of medical services and treatment (AAMC, 2005). The most frequently cited definition of cultural competence is from the National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) at Georgetown University Child Development Center: the capacity to 1) value diversity; 2) conduct self-assessment; 3) manage the dynamics of difference; 4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge; and 5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities served (NCCC, 2008).

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) addressed cultural competence in its mission to enhance the learning of all children and youth. It defined a culturally competent school as “one that honors, respects, and values diversity in theory and in practice and where teaching and learning are made relevant and meaningful to students of various cultures” (Klotz, 2006, p. 11).

The National Association of State Boards of Education (1994) addressed culturally competent schools in the policy update, Cultural Competence and Education. It strongly recommended policies regarding cultural relevance or competence should be linked with teacher training and in-service professional development programs so that teachers are able to meet the needs of a diverse student body. (NASBE, July 2004).

For the purposes of this conceptual analysis, cultural competence for educators is defined as: 1) the ability to engage in self-reflection and self-critique of one’s belief system about oneself, individuals and groups of people; 2) the knowledge, understanding, acceptance and appreciation of diversity among students (Ward & Ward, 2003); 3) the
ability to demonstrate behaviors that are congruent with an understanding of differences among learners; 4) and the ability to effectively operate within different cultural contexts (NASP, 2003).

This Operation 2014 model proposes an equally important goal, in addition to the academic achievement of all students (NCLB), for the year 2014: the cultural competence of all public school teachers and leaders. How pre-service teacher education programs address this is of paramount importance.

Sources of Data

The evidence / data source utilized to form the theoretical inquiry for this analysis stems from a recent survey of first year teachers from across the country conducted by The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Participants were asked which improvements they recommended for the teaching profession. Preparing teachers to teach in diverse classrooms emerged as one of only two recommended improvements for the teaching profession (Rochkind et.al., 2007).

A second data / evidence source is a national study conducted by one of the few states to address cultural competence of teachers. The Oregon University System (2001) conducted a survey of the teacher certification requirements in 24 states to determine their cultural competence requirements for teacher licensure to advise and inform Oregon legislature's consideration of Senate Bill addressing cultural competence. The survey revealed that: 1) sixteen states did not have any certification requirements for cultural competence for teachers; 2) fifteen states had generic requirements; those that incorporated cultural competence into a general statement of standards; 3) six states had course work requirements for teachers; 4) three states stated that their certification
requirement followed the NCATE 2000 Standards; and 5) a total of seven states had specific cultural competence requirements - Alabama, Alaska, California, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, and New Mexico (Oregon University System, 2001).

Theoretical Framework of the Analysis

The theoretical / conceptual framework for the cultural competent teacher conceptual analysis is derived from the objective self-awareness theory, the critical race theory and the culturally responsive teaching theory. Combined, they provide the concepts essential for understanding the rationale to establish cultural competency for teachers in today’s public schools.

The objective self-awareness theory has been defined as the behavioral and cognitive changes that follow self-focused attention resulting from a comparison between the behavioral or cognitive aspect of a person and a relevant internal standard of correctness (Hormuth, 2006). It predicts high self-awareness will strengthen the person’s relationship between their internal self-discrepancies and emotions (Philips and Silva, 2005). For the purposes of this conceptual analysis of proposing public school teacher cultural competence, OSA theory will be defined as the process of an individual becoming aware of the personal internal and external behavioral characteristics that distinguish them from others; becoming an objective observer of ones own behavior.

The critical race theory insists on the recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities of origin when analyzing society (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993). It values the critical reflection of the lived experience of people of color who experienced racism. CRT asserts that the cultural wealth of the people from communities of color is valued and nurtured. CRT is an
important component of preparing culturally competent teachers due to the attention it
gives to how race and racism affects the lives of the students, their parents, and the
communities where they live. Race-neutral education, which has been the norm for many
years in American public schools, is challenged.

Culturally responsive teaching is defined by Gay (2000) as using the cultural
characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of diverse students as tools for teaching
them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and
skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they
are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily
and thoroughly (Gay, 2000). It highlights modes of teaching that are congruent with
children's cultural and class-based patterns of living. The focus is on assisting teachers to
become bicultural. Gay (2002) outlined five steps necessary for preparing culturally
responsive teaching: 1) explicit knowledge about cultural [class] diversity; 2) acquiring
detailed factual information about the cultural particularities of specific groups (racial,
ethnic, and class) and learning how to convert that knowledge learned into culturally
responsive curriculum designs and instructional strategies; 3) creating classroom climates
that are conducive to learning for ethnically diverse students; 4) Effective cross-cultural
communication; and 5) delivering instruction to ethnically diverse students.

Foundation of the Conceptual / Theoretical Model

This research presents Operation 2014 as a comprehensive model for preparing
American public school teachers to become culturally competent to teach in high poverty,
high risk and culturally diverse schools by the year 2014, which correlates with the year
of the proposed academic achievement for students through federal NCLB (No Child Left
Behind) policy. The premise of the model is based on the following underlying assumptions:

1. Culturally competent teachers are able to engage in *self reflection*, and thus step outside of their worldview, to discern how their experiences and cultural backgrounds affect what they perceive and interpret about the race, culture and ethnicity of students in their classrooms. In alignment with the objective self awareness theory, phase one of the teacher cultural competence model involves exploring and becoming aware of self. It is imperative for teachers to recognize and address the characteristics associated with their personal dispositions. Teachers must first take an examination of themselves by exploring the complexities of their individual identities. An initial understanding of identity development will enable them to see how their own personal identity can affect the way in which they interact with their students. They will begin to examine how their own attitudes and beliefs influence their thinking about others. This will allow teachers to gain a keen awareness of how their personal experiences have an impact on their actions and interactions with students. Teachers will achieve a heightened awareness of the importance of learning what makes their students the unique individuals they are.

2. Culturally competent teachers understand, acknowledge and appreciate the *historical impact* of race and class in U. S. education and its legacies. Instead of ignoring or denying our history as a country in terms of intolerance, it should be acknowledged, described and analyzed. The critical race theory will be the focus for the second segment of this phase as teachers begin to develop the capacity to
make connections with cultures different from their own monoculture environments. Through a historical analysis of the events of racism, privilege and power, they will be able to obtain the appropriate background knowledge needed. When teachers begin to understand the historical context in which their ideas about teaching and learning were developed, it is proposed that they will become empowered to recognize and resist the tendency to continue to perpetuate the negative consequences of stereotyping in the classroom. It is imperative for teachers to be able to educate in a diverse, global society through reflective classroom instruction and dialogue. The culture of the professional development sessions will promote teacher participation in non-threatening settings as they explore the historical impact of race, privilege and power in America.

3. Culturally competent teachers manage the *dynamics of difference* within the classroom. Effective culturally competent teachers are at the forefront of understanding the dynamics of the differences among their students and the differences between their students and their personal lives. This acknowledgement of the differences, understanding the differences, and managing the differences assists in eliminating misconceptions and unconstructive interactions that may occur in the classroom. All categories of difference influence the way people interact with others. Those of different races, ethnicities and cultures bring a repertoire of learned beliefs and stereotypes, acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, communications styles, and perceptions about larger society with them during interactions.
4. Culturally competent teachers are aware of the impact that teacher expectations have on the ability of students of all races and classes to achieve academic success and begin to facilitate instruction based on high expectations that all children can learn. Holding high positive expectations for students entails offering abundant praise rather than criticism, not reducing expectations for low-achieving students, and being student centered by engaging students in the active construction of their knowledge (Kagan, 1992). Teachers who effectively instruct students of all races and classes are also able to demonstrate a value of the student as co-equal human beings sharing in the process of their academic and social development (Spradlin & Parsons, 2008).

5. Culturally competent teachers acquire skills in positive behavior management that instills positive self-concept, character and leadership in children from all races and cultures. Much of the loss of student self-confidence and positive self-image stems from ineffective and disempowering behavior management techniques. Culturally responsive behavior management strategies focus on how academics override discipline, and how when a student is motivated to achieve and believes in their ability to do so, misbehavior begins to disappear. The following are the key values of behavior management techniques for high poverty and diverse schools that instill positive self concept, character and leadership: 1) Culturally competent teachers understand that modeling their expectations of student behavior is the first step to attracting positive behavior from students of diverse cultures and backgrounds; 2): Culturally competent teachers realize that developing positive and respectful relationships with students is at the basis of a
positive behavior management system. They base all of their interactions with
students on reciprocal respect and realize that they may be the only steady and
consistent force in their lives (Peters, 2006); 3): Culturally competent teachers
often reflect on their interactions with their students to determine if they are
empowering the students to develop into decision makers.

6. Culturally competent teachers initiate and facilitate parental involvement
programs that encourage parent/guardian participation in learning. They develop
a respect for and understand the culture of the community they serve through an
objective analysis of the historical prejudiced practices many generations have
endured. The most consistent predictors of children’s academic achievement and
social adjustment are parent expectations of the child’s academic attainment and
their satisfaction with their child’s education at school (Michigan DOE, 2002).
Acquiring the desire and capacity to increase parental involvement includes
strategies for various forms of parental involvement, ethical standards for working
with parents from high poverty and diverse communities and real-world examples
and strategies for developing positive relationships with parents. Feeling part of a
larger community provides parents residing in high poverty areas antidote to an
unstable environment. This sense of belonging to the school or classroom
community develops psychological connections and a commitment to others
(Hawley & Rollie, 2007).

7. Culturally competent teachers collaborate with colleagues to work together to
meet the needs of students and families from various races, ethnicities and
cultures. With a high self awareness strengthening the relationship between
internal self-discrepancies and emotions, culturally competent teachers are able to employ the high self awareness to engage in collaboration with colleagues. The underlying purpose of collaboration is to increase student achievement. The daily communication should focus on effective teaching strategies and student learning. Developing the capacity to actively engage in collaboration through frequent and casual communication as well as formal and focused collaboration is an important component. Many of these casual collaborative moments occur over lunch, through notes, emails, or passing through another teacher’s class. Examples of formal and focused collaboration involve curriculum and assessment planning and reflecting, problem solving, analysis of data and detailed intervention discussions on particular students. Effective collaboration etiquette includes the art of reaching consensus, the practice of valuing the time of colleagues, proactively focusing discussions on student concerns, setting time limits and developing an agenda for meetings to ensure everyone’s concerns are being addressed. Collaborative teaching is an art that requires consistent reflection and respectful communication.

8. Culturally competent teachers engage in self-management techniques that reduce stress and improve professionalism and interpersonal skills. Culturally responsive professional development in self-management better prepares teachers to deal with the added stresses of teaching at high poverty, high risk, culturally diverse schools, while increasing their ability to professionally manage students and communicate with parents and colleagues. The first phase of self-management is proactive personal stress reduction which includes recognizing stressors, dealing
with stress appropriately, eating a balanced diet and having an exercise plan (Anderson & Bolt, 2008). The next phase of self-management is professional self-management which includes prioritizing, organization strategies and time management. The final phase of self-management is communicative self-management which covers professional verbal written communications, conflict resolution with and eliminating power struggles with students and parents. Communicative self-management requires teachers to be vigilant with what they say, avoid taking things personally and not making assumptions.

9. Culturally competent teachers accelerate student learning and develop instructional strategies to motivate students to become proficient lifelong readers and writers. “Although low and slow progress in reading has serious consequences for all children, it is especially critical for children who are already placed at risk by poverty. Furthermore, average early reading performance for a school tends to decrease as the proportion of students eligible for free and reduced-cost lunch increases. Hence, the statistical expectation for reading performance in high-poverty schools is relatively low” (Adler & Fisher, 2001, p. 616). Emphasizing culturally informed literacy instruction is useful for helping teachers to advance the literacy of students from high poverty and culturally diverse communities. Culturally informed teaching uses students’ culture as a frame of reference to facilitate learning literacy achievement. Curriculum materials that reflect students’ culture should be selected as the primary texts. This allows the culturally competent teachers to use literature to address concerns specific to their students. The materials facilitate literature mediations that bridge
the gap between the students' in-school and out-of-school literacies (Tatum, 2004).

10. Culturally competent teachers engage in instructional strategies that engage students in higher order critical thinking. Achievement in mathematics and science education for high poverty culturally diverse students necessitates instructional strategies involving teaching students within a problem solving or application context. Students must become “actively involved in exploring, predicting, reasoning and conjecturing so that facts become integrated into mathematical skills and strategies that can be applied to authentic real world problems” (Borich, p. 264). Effective educators do not simply teach mathematics and science concepts and/or skills from a curriculum or text, they engage in curriculum transformation (Spradlin & Parsons, 2008) where the knowledge of students from high poverty and culturally diverse communities is integrated in the curriculum. Curiosity, investigation and critical analysis are continuously encouraged through authentic activities.

Conclusion

The purpose of this conceptual model is to reconstruct the philosophical debate on the preparation and professional development of U.S. public school teachers. It challenges the current national trend of defining a “highly qualified” teacher as one who has taken the appropriate number of academic classes in the chosen subject area and who has passed the state subject area and certification examinations. Utilizing the national achievement gap research, policy from the federal No Child Left Behind Act, and recent surveys and reports as the foundation, this analysis proposes a new model for U.S.
teacher professional development and preparation inclusive of the needs of students from high-poverty, high risk and culturally diverse communities. It is significant to the field given that culturally responsive teachers would be more proficient in meeting the academic needs of students who are diverse in race, ethnicity/nationality, social class, gender, health, geographic location, sexuality, religion, social status, language, and ability/disability and therefore assist in narrowing the achievement gap. A paradigm shift is in dire need to alter the national focus in education from high stakes testing and standardized reform to ensuring the cultural competence of teachers in education so that students in the public schools of high poverty and/or diverse backgrounds may achieve high academic goals and become empowered to proactively contribute to society.
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Article Citation