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### **Preparing Pre-service Teachers for Diversity**

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With the increase of culturally and linguistically diverse students in both urban and rural schools, it is mandatory that teacher education programs work diligently to prepare pre-service teachers to teach all children effectively since, unfortunately, students of color generally display lower levels of achievement than their White counterparts. Many universities are attempting to solve this issue by placing their pre-service teachers in schools with high levels of diversity, but is this really enough? This inquiry shares how a university supervisor at a large research one university embedded a focus on cultural responsiveness (the sociocultural context of schools, personal culture, dimensions of culture, and developing culturally responsive classroom environments) into seminars within a field experience.

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## Introduction

According to the U.S. Census report for 2010, both the African American and Hispanic populations are increasing rapidly. These two minority groups account for approximately 30% of the U.S. population (US Census Bureau, 2013). These statistics may seem alarming, but there has always been diversity in this country. What is new is not so much the population diversity, but how it is reflected in the school system. Historically, schools were segregated so the teachers' and students' cultural backgrounds mirrored each other. The Brown decision of 1954 integrated schools, which caused teachers to teach students from cultural backgrounds they were unfamiliar with. Villegas (2008) summed it up this way:

While the overall intent of the Brown decision was to provide equal educational opportunities for African Americans, school desegregation significantly changed the role of White teachers in elementary and secondary public schools. In the segregated system, White teachers had taught only White children. After 1954, however, they were also responsible for teaching the children of color assigned to their classes, an undertaking for which most were unprepared. This lack of preparation is evident in numerous studies conducted in racially/ethnically integrated classrooms during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the results of which showed that White teachers generally held lower expectations for students of color and often treated them less favorably.

Even though desegregation focused primarily on racial equality, the studies conducted in those racially/ethnically integrated classrooms may have brought to light other types of diversity that were ignored in the school curriculum as well.

Federal regulations have also made it difficult to continue to ignore the miseducation of diverse students in America's schools. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, set in place requirements that reached into virtually every public school in America. This legislation expanded the federal role in education and took particular aim at improving the educational lot of disadvantaged students (edweek.org, 2004). This was to be done by increasing accountability measures, teacher qualifications, and giving extra funding to high poverty and low performing schools. Unfortunately, NCLB also created a negative outcomes for diverse students. This decree has produced an environment concerned with high stakes testing and accountability that often results in a limited, prescriptive curriculum (Au, 2009; Kaplan, 2004). Achieving quality education for all students means teachers must be adequately prepared to develop the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work with students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds as today's students come to school with an array of backgrounds and needs (Ukpokodu, 2002). These reasons, among others, is why it is imperative for colleges of education to prepare teachers to teach all students effectively. This inquiry describes how I, a university supervisor, embedded a focus on cultural responsiveness (the sociocultural context of schools, personal culture, dimensions of culture, and developing culturally responsive classroom environments) into seminars within a Level 2a & 2b field experience. The questions that guided my inquiry are:

1. How can I use supervision (seminar) to promote preservice teachers' critical reflection into culture in a Level 2 field experience?

2. How do strategies I use within a class seminar influence the preservice teachers' perceptions, beliefs, understanding, and attitude toward culturally responsive teaching?

## **Literature Review**

In this section, I review teacher capacity for culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive pedagogy in teacher education.

### **Teacher Capacity for Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Teacher capacity is defined as the core knowledge, skills, and dispositions that teachers should possess to teach in today's classrooms (Howard & Aleman, 2008). This section will highlight the knowledge, skills, and dispositions researchers feel are necessary for pre-service teachers (PSTs) to gain in order to become culturally responsive teachers.

Gay (2002) recommends that explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is imperative to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students. Milner (2010) highlighted five concepts that he believes are central to education of teachers. These concepts are: (a) color-blindness, (b) cultural conflict, (c) myth of meritocracy, (d) deficit conceptions, and (e) expectations. This is a great starting point because as Howard (1999) so aptly stated, "We can't teach what we don't know." More specifically, Gay (2002) stated:

Culture encompasses many things, some of which are more important for teachers to know than others because they have direct implications for teaching and learning. Among these are ethnic groups' cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns. For example, teachers need to know (a) which ethnic groups give priority to communal living and cooperative problem solving and how these preferences affect educational motivation, aspiration, and task performance; (b) how different ethnic groups' protocols of appropriate ways for children to interact with adults are exhibited in instructional settings; and (c) the implications of gender role socialization in different ethnic groups for implementing equity initiatives in classroom instruction. (p. 107)

Villegas and Lucas (2003) call for teachers to acquire "sociocultural consciousness," which means recognizing that people's ways of thinking are significantly influenced by race, class, gender, and language, and the hierarchical social systems in which they are located. Gaining sociocultural consciousness may in turn help pre-service teachers gain a deeper knowledge of themselves. Culturally responsive teachers demonstrate awareness of differentness of self and others and relatedness to other people and cultures; they must know the self to teach and understand others (Howard, 2006).

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Teacher Education Programs**

Developing a pedagogy of teacher education is not a veiled call for a “complete book of rules” about how to teach teaching, rather, it is a way of focusing serious attention on the need for teacher educators’ knowledge of practice to be more formally shared and critiqued in line with other scholarly traditions (Loughran, 2008). A pedagogy of teacher education involves a knowledge of teaching about teaching and a knowledge of learning about teaching and how the two influence one another in the pedagogic episodes that teacher educators create to offer students of teaching experiences that might inform their developing views of practice (Loughran, 2008).

One strategy employed by many teacher educators in an effort to develop cultural responsiveness in their pre-service teachers was critical reflection (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Smith, 2009). Gay and Kirkland (2003) assert that instruction in teacher education programs must include the fundamental element of critical cultural self-reflection that takes place in a context of guided practice in realistic situations and with authentic examples. Smith (2009) promoted similar strategies when he examined effective approaches to multicultural education in pre-service teacher education. He suggested that teacher educators contextualize teacher candidates’ increased knowledge of content and pedagogy and engage teachers in critical reflection. Prospective teachers should also become knowledgeable regarding curriculum publications that can assist them in teaching multicultural issues (Smith, 2009). Gay (2010) suggested that teacher educators support pre-service teachers in examining their beliefs and attitudes about cultural diversity, along with developing cognitive knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Another strategy implemented by teacher educators was the use of video cases. Smith (2009) described the value of using video cases to model both strategies and teachers’ thinking that is required to modify approaches in response to students may bolster teacher candidates’ understandings of teachers’ specific strategies for culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2010) also used video recordings of teacher educators’ practices while examining ways to combat negative attitudes and perceptions about diversity.

In summary, the content taught in courses promoting culturally responsive teaching is just as important as the pedagogy used to teach it. Culturally responsive teaching will be referred to as CRT in the remainder of this article. The transmission approach to teaching that is widespread in higher education may not be as effective in equipping pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to teach diverse students. Holt-Reynolds (1992) stated,

The principles of professional practice that we as teachers of teachers study, value, and submit to our students have an annoying and unavoidable way of doubling back on us...I ask myself whether I am reflecting accurately the principle I am advocating...Am I practicing what I am teaching?...We are, after all, always a teacher and a group of students. Do not the very principles we are discussing apply to us while we are studying them? (p.326)

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study will align with Villegas & Lucas’ (2002) curriculum proposal for preparing culturally responsive teachers. According to Villegas & Lucas (2002):

Six strands, or organizing constructs, give coherence to our curriculum proposal for preparing culturally responsive teachers: (1) gaining sociocultural consciousness; (2) developing an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds; (3) developing the commitment and skills to act as agents of change; (4) understanding the constructivist foundations of culturally responsive teaching; (5) learning about students and their communities; and (6) cultivating culturally responsive teaching practices. (p. 26)

These strands will provide a framework for analysis.

### **Context**

The teacher preparation program at this university is organized in a cohort model. The cohorts consist of 20-30 students who take the same courses together. Each cohort has two different field experience schools where the pre-service teachers are placed. They remain at their selected school for three semesters of field experience (Level 1, 2a, & 2b). I was the field supervisor for the pre-service teachers at one of the selected schools for all three semesters. This study took place in two phases. Phase one was during the level 2a experience and, phase two was during the level 2b experience. During their level 2a internship, the pre-service teachers interned for two-half days per week and participated in a weekly 2 hour seminar. The level 2b internship included two full days in the classroom and a weekly 1 hour seminar.

### **Methods**

This inquiry employed the case study method. Merriam (1998) presented a broad overview of case study as an application of qualitative research. She summarized the choice of case study design as a way to gain understanding of the situation, where the process of inquiry rather than outcome of the research are of interest to the investigator (Brown, 2008). Merriam (1998) explained that,

the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study: the case. The case is a unit, entity, or phenomenon with defined boundaries that the researcher can demarcate or fence in, and therefore, can also determine what will not be studied. The case is a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. (p. 27)

The case in my particular inquiry is the seminar class. All of the data collected for this inquiry were either during or at the end of seminar.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection during Level 2a consisted of the pre-service teachers' reflection journals and my researcher's journal. The responses in the reflection journals were based on the

activities enacted during seminar. I planned out the seminar activities with two other colleagues before the beginning of the semester.

Table **Purposeful Planning Of Seminar** 1.

<b>What is the current sociocultural context of schools?</b>	Display current statistics in education
<b>What is culture? What is my personal culture?</b>	Define culture, what makes up a person’s culture (hidden culture), cultural autobiography
	Show quote about colorblindness (“I don’t see color. I see children”), definition of colorblindness
<b>What are the dimensions of culture?</b>	Define privilege, social identities portrait, line activity
	Review of what we have done so far with culture, connection to the classroom, jigsaw vignettes from students of different cultures
	Dimensions of culture/cultural mismatches, 2 Corners activity
<b>How do we develop culturally responsive classroom environments?</b>	Jigsaw readings of Villegas and Lucas (2007) article on CRT, watch video looking for CRT strategies

Seminar schedule of activities

During Level 2b, before coming to seminar, the PSTs were to read the assigned article for the week and write a response. They were also supposed to create discussion questions for their peers. They were familiar with this form because they had used it during a previous semester in a class that I taught. The end of the form had a space for post class thoughts where they could write any ideas that arose during the class discussion. I kept notes about the discussions during seminar as well as my thoughts throughout the semester. They also wrote in a journal at the beginning of seminar. There were a few instances where the journal prompt was focused on culture (i.e. Based on the community and classroom information you collected, what wonderings do you have about your students/teaching practices?).

## Data Analysis

My goal for analysis is to make sense out of the data so I followed Merriam's method of data analysis. Merriam (1998) defines data analysis as, "the process of making sense out of the data, and making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning." I was also engaged in simultaneous data analysis. Merriam (1998) stated data collection and analysis:

is not to say that the analysis is finished when all the data have been collected. Quite the opposite. Analysis becomes more intensive as the study progresses, and once all the data are in. (p. 155)

Since my data included journal reflections new questions arose after each analysis that helped to deepen my understanding of the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of the readings and strategies I implemented during seminar.

I analyzed my data using thematic analysis. The term thematic analysis refers to the process of analyzing data according to commonalities, relationships and differences across a data set (Grbich, 2013). I began with open coding of the data. To code is to create a category that is used to describe a general feature of data; a category that pertains to a range of data examples (Grbich, 2013). Open coding involved reading the various data sets and line by line and naming and labeling important words and phrases (e.g. "Informative," "take for granted," "see students"). I then reexamined, redefined, and combined codes that were similar. After the codes were identified, they were defined, and categorized into emerging themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## Findings

Data analysis revealed three themes: *Making Connections*, *Cognitive Dissonance*, *Developing Personal and Teacher Identity*.

### Making Connections

A majority of the reflections completed by the pre-service teachers included some form of connection. They made personal connections to their personal life and/or connections to the classroom environment. Below are some examples of personal connections:

*"This exercise showed me how I take for granted sometimes what I've been given and how what I may think is expected, but not everyone receives the same opportunities as I have in life."*

*"If someone had asked me if I ever stereotyped someone before, I would have probably said no, but after reading this article I realized that I stereotype people without even noticing it. This article made me more aware of the attitudes we have towards different groups of people without even consciously realizing that we have these stereotypes."*

These connections are important because it helps to build the pre-service teachers' sociocultural consciousness. Sociocultural consciousness is defined as, "awareness that one's worldview is not universal but is profoundly shaped by one's life experiences, as mediated by a variety of factors, chief among them race/ethnicity, social class, and gender (Villegas & Lucas, p. 27)." The pre-service teachers began to realize that other people have different experiences which may impact their point of view in different situations.

Many pre-service teachers also made connections to practices they have witnessed or engaged in during their internship. After reading an article about culturally responsive teaching, one pre-service teacher reflected that, "*When reading about the story of Belki Alvarez, I instantly connected to a student in my fourth grade internship. She also had numerous household duties being the oldest along with other responsibilities. In the classroom, she lacked fluency and some comprehension with non-fiction text. As the article mentioned, we found a way for her to connect to her out of school experiences while she was reading books she could relate to.*" This pre-service teacher began to gain another aspect of sociocultural consciousness. Another element in gaining sociocultural consciousness is for pre-service teachers to, "...understand the intricate connection between schools and society...in admitting that schools privilege some students whether based on race, social class, gender, language group, or any other factor (Villegas & Lucas, p. 30-31)."

## **Cognitive Dissonance**

The pre-service teachers did not always agree with the articles we read or the content we discussed. They often experienced cognitive dissonance. Merriam-Webster (2015) defines cognitive dissonance as, "psychological conflict resulting from incongruous beliefs and attitudes held simultaneously." Some of the reflections that displayed cognitive dissonance are as follows:

*"However, I think because everyone keeps making a big scene about it and saying this person is treated with privilege that is a major reason why it is still an issue today"*

*"But I was not a slave owner, I did not put people in oppression"*

*"I was confused at the end of the article when they spoke about familiarizing kindergarten students with the history of resistance"*

*"I did not agree with everything this article had to say about Mexican immigrant culture. Although I am not a Mexican immigrant I have 15/18 students in my class who are and who do not fit into the description explained by the article."*

This dissonance highlighted the pre-service teachers' ability to critically reflect on the articles and activities. Critical reflection occurs when we analyze and challenge the validity of our presuppositions and assess the appropriateness of our knowledge, understanding and beliefs given our present contexts (Mezirow, 1990). Gay and Kirkland (2003) assert that instruction in teacher education programs must include the fundamental element of critical cultural self-reflection that takes place in a context of guided practice in realistic situations and with authentic examples.

## Developing Personal and Teacher Identity

These activities prompted the pre-service teachers to examine their personal identity and their identity as a teacher. In order for teachers to truly become culturally responsive, they should have knowledge of their own culture and what presuppositions they may bring into the teaching environment. One pre-service teacher stated, “...as a *White female* it is important to first understand my own values and views and reflect on what is important within me.” Some pre-service teachers began to develop their teacher identity as well. They made statements about specific behaviors and practices they would exhibit in their own classrooms.

*“More importantly, whatever my classroom is composed of I want my students to understand there is a world outside of their school, church, neighborhood, city, state, country, and continent.”*

*“In my opinion the best method to overcome these misrepresentations is to reflect daily as an educator. Only then will we open our eyes to the reality that ALL children can succeed in the classroom.”*

*“I really thought it was important to get to know your students and families and observe how students and families react to different situations, pictures, and people”*

While developing their personal and teacher identity, the pre-service teachers were also developing an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds. An affirming attitude toward students who differ from the dominant culture is the second fundamental orientation for successfully teaching a changing student population (Villegas & Lucas, p. 35). One pre-service teacher highlighted this point by stating, “*“Instead of focusing on students’ labels we should try to move away from making false assumptions about the way they are and start highlighting their strengths.”*” They also were developing the commitment and skills to act as agents of change. By actively working for greater equity in education, teachers can increase access to learning and to educational success and can challenge the prevailing perception that differences among students are problems rather than resources (Villegas & Lucas, p. 53).

## Discussion

This inquiry aimed to identify how I, as a university supervisor, could promote pre-service teachers’ critical reflection into culture and influence their beliefs about culturally responsive teaching. By engaging in this inquiry, I was provided with insight into practices that enhance critical reflection and added to the literature regarding developing a teacher preparation curriculum that promotes CRT. By systematically planning seminar activities, I was able to provide the pre-service teachers with knowledge about important concepts and influential literature on culture. According to Gay (1993):

The systematic inclusion of multicultural education in teacher preparation programs has the potential for building bridges across the cultural borders ethnically diverse students

bring to the classroom, creating shared referential linkages between students and teachers, and preventing impenetrable barriers to effective teaching and learning from occurring. (p. 288)

The articles the pre-service teachers read and activities they engaged in gave them a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of this topic. They were able to reflect critically and make connections between the literature and the classroom setting. Many of them also made connections between the literature and their teaching philosophy. I believe engaging in this experience has helped to increase the pre-service teachers' sociocultural consciousness. Villegas and Lucas (2002) conceptualized sociocultural consciousness as a continuum:

It is useful to think about sociocultural consciousness along a continuum, with dysconsciousness at one end and consciousness at the other. In this conception, those at the dysconsciousness end of the continuum see their own worldviews as universal and are unaware that their particular take on the world reflects a given social space in a stratified system in which people are sorted according to class, race/ethnicity, and gender, among other factors...those at the conscious end of the continuum are fully aware that a multiplicity of perspectives on the world exists and that each person's perspective reflects his or her location in the social order. (p. 32)

This experience seemed to push the pre-service teachers toward the conscious end of the continuum. Based on the reflections, it seemed as if most of the students began to understand that a persons' experiences have an effect on how they see the world.

This inquiry provided some insight, but there is so much more to be done. Preparing and retaining highly qualified teachers for our nation's schools is one of the greatest challenges facing American education, especially within the context of widespread calls for educational accountability, mandates for the reform of teacher preparation and public K-12 education, and inequitably distributed teacher shortages (Helfeldt et al., 2009).

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