

Multicultural Education: Using Penn State's Teacher Education Performance Framework to Help Education Students Develop a Multicultural Perspective

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Abstract

The make-up of classrooms is changing. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics 37%, or one out of every three students, are considered to be of a racial or ethnic minority background (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2000). However, nine out every ten teachers are white. By 2020, minority students will make up 44% of students enrolled in public schools. By 2050, minority students will make up 54% of that same population. Enrollment for minority students in both elementary and secondary public schools has increased 73% over the last 25 years, compared to 19% of white students. Minorities enrolled in teacher education programs nationwide, however, account for only 15% of all students, while whites make up over 80%. As recently as Fall 2003, minorities comprise approximately 10% of the 3,210 students enrolled in the College of Education at Penn State. Many education researchers see this as an alarming trend that has harmful implications for the quality of teaching and the teacher shortage in elementary and secondary schools. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly important to help teachers, regardless of background, to acquire the appropriate attitudes, knowledge, and dispositions to work effectively with students that come from different cultures or class backgrounds (Tiedt and Tiedt, 2002).

Introduction

Background and Motivation

Prospective teachers should be prepared to work with diverse groups of learners. The concept of a multicultural education is one of the major approaches in recent years that have been proposed to address some of the disparities in classroom learning for all students, particularly those of a racial or ethnic minority. It is still the responsibility of teacher education programs to help prepare prospective minority teachers as well to help them draw on their own unique experiences, as they are applicable to classroom teaching and learning.

The *Teacher Education Performance Framework* for the College of Education at the Pennsylvania State University outlines the individual expectations for all teacher education candidates graduating from its program. As a university composed of

predominately white, monolingual students, it is imperative that the College helps their students to develop a more multicultural perspective early in the program at the university.

Challenge Five of the “Assessment of Progress Towards Implementing A Framework to Foster Diversity at PSU: 1998-2003” listed the freshman seminar as one of the college’s efforts to support a multicultural curriculum, however each freshman seminar varies widely in the structure in which the material is presented.

Although the language of the framework and the college, itself, do express some means of support for addressing issues of diversity, it is the issue of implementation that raises some concerns. The major goal of this research is to study possible means of further implementing aspects of multiculturalism into the teacher education program by developing a unit on multiculturalism in the freshman seminar course that is required of all students entering the College of Education at Penn State.

Explanation of Terms

Multicultural Education: An educational reform movement whose major goal is to restructure curricula and educational institutions so that students from diverse backgrounds will experience equal educational experiences.

Culture: The set of beliefs, attitudes, and values that define a person or group.

Cultural Responsiveness: The skills, beliefs, and concepts that guide student-teacher interactions in the classroom setting that views cultural diversity as a resource rather than a problem.

Research Questions

The following are the questions that guided this research and that it seeks to answer:

1. How does the performance framework address issue of diversity in terms of teacher preparation?
2. If there is evidence of language regarding issues of diversity within the framework, how is it implemented throughout the curriculum?
3. What possible models exist that can be used to improve the curriculum to address multicultural issues?
4. What approach could best be used to introduce multicultural issues early in the teacher education program?

Current State of Teachers In Terms of Diverse Make-Up

It is clear that the low percentage of minority teacher education students enrolled in prospective teacher programs should be alarming. This disparity between high percentages of students of color and teachers illustrates potential for drastic changes in national education policy. Minority-serving institutions (MSI’s), which include historically black, Hispanic-serving, and Tribal Colleges, graduate nearly half of all minorities with teaching degrees (www.ihep.com/Org.php?parm=Press/pr21.htm, 2003).

In this press release from the report “Educating the Emerging Majority,” it states that although MSI’s get 36% less funding than other universities, they award 46% of teacher education bachelor’s degree for African American students, 49% for Hispanics, and 12% for American Indians.

One of the major issues that has added to the low numbers of minority students enrolled in teacher education programs nationwide have to do with low teacher pay. Raising the salaries of teachers to levels of other professions that make invaluable contributions to society was one recommendation that the report stated to help raise the numbers. Another recommendation was to create a national study to identify specific factors that lead to changes in enrollment among minorities in teacher education programs.

Regardless of background, it has become imperative that teachers are prepared to teach racially, ethnically, economically, and linguistically diverse groups of students (Lucas and Villegas, 2002). Lucas and Villegas’ proposed approach to creating culturally responsive teachers states that most teachers teach how they were taught. In addition, most of them spend only one semester in a classroom with one teacher before completing their pre-service education. This, in Lucas and Villegas’ opinion, is not sufficient in giving prospective teachers the preparation they need to work effectively with diverse groups of learners. It is this issue that drives the vital concept that teacher education programs prepare their teachers, regardless of racial or ethnic background, to develop multicultural perspectives for the classroom.

Their approach also states that universities as institutions should in addition to creating culturally responsive teachers, they should be committed to diversifying the teacher force. Mission statements alone do not bring about change. Therefore, it has become important that colleges and universities make efforts to start rethinking general education courses and electives to help their teacher education students develop a more multicultural perspective (Lucas and Villegas, 2002).

*Table I
Distribution of the Student Population and the Teaching Force in Public Schools by
Race/Ethnicity, 1995-96. (Villegas and Lucas, 2002)*

	White	Of Color
Students	64.8%	35.2%
Teachers	90.7%	9.3%

Source: NCES, 1997b

Lack of Multicultural Perspectives Impact on Public Schools

The educational system, particularly in the area of teacher education, must become more responsive to the needs of the growing population of students in order to stay in line with democratic principles that this nation was built on (Lucas and Villegas, 2002).

The impact of a multicultural curriculum on this population of students can be showed in the many areas that constitute an achievement gap between minority and majority students. These areas include standardized test scores, the overrepresentation of minority students in special education programs, low-achieving instruction group designations, vocational curricular tracks, elevated high school drop-out rates, and low enrollment to postsecondary educational institutions (Educational Testing Service, 1994; Ekstrom and Villegas, 1991; Meier, Stewart, and England, 1989; Oakes, 1985; NCES, 1997c, 1999d, 1999b, 1999c; Tomas Rivera Center [TRC], 1993).

Because the majority of teachers are white, middle class, and English monolingual, it creates a challenge for teachers to design instruction that builds on the background experiences and capitalize on the background experiences of their students (Fuller, 1992; NCES, 1993a; Zimpher and Ashburn, 1992). In support of this idea, *Teaching in the Secondary School* states, “if you are a member of the white majority, you may well live in a world where perspectives of your own group are so dominant that you may fail to recognize that you have a worldview that may differ from that of members of other cultural and ethnic groups” (Armstrong and Savage, 2002).

Table II
Current and Projected Distributions for Five to Nineteen Year Olds in the United States by Race/Ethnicity
(Villegas and Lucas, 2002)

Race	1995	2035	2050
White	67.6 %	49.5%	43.9%
Black	14.7%	15.8%	16.0%
American Indian	1.0%	1.1%	1.1%
Hispanic	13.1%	25.8%	30.25
Asian	3/6%	7.8%	8.8%

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1996. Calculations by authors.

The Penn State Teacher Education Program

In *Challenge One* of the “Framework to Foster Diversity: 1998-2003” the college was asked to provide its own description of diversity and how that understanding is demonstrated within the college. It described it as “fostering and respecting diversity in ethnic, racial, and cultural identities as well as in philosophies and points of view along with sensitivity to issues surrounding gender identity, age difference, and challenges associated with disabilities of various kinds. It also stated that it had developed several courses that explicitly addressed issues of diversity.

In *Challenge Two* of the “Framework to Foster Diversity: 1998-2003” the college addresses the question of what visible support it had for diversity. It listed the 80 hours educational work experience requirement, student teaching placements, Urban and Middle Childhood Education degree, the Institution to Foster Multicultural Understanding and other urban programming as some concerted efforts to address the need to understand multiculturalism in the area of education.

The 80 hours of education work experience is required of all teacher education students before entering the college in their junior year. Half of those hours must be with learners of a different cultural, social, or ethnic background than the student. Although this introduces the student to the college's commitment to diversity, the student has a lot of flexibility in how to fulfill that requirement. Upon completion, the student is not given any specific guidelines on how to analyze their experiences in terms of possible future implications for teachers.

Student teaching is another opportunity to expose teacher education students to diversity outside of the university setting. However, universities as institutions should be aware that this portion of the pre-service teacher program has a limited effect on the perspectives of their students who have little or no sensitivity to diversity (Lucas and Villegas, 2002).

The freshman seminar, required by all first-year education students, is a fairly new aspect of the teacher education program initiated in the summer of 1999. The primary goal of the course is to guide education students through the transition from high school to college. The secondary goal is to acquaint first-year students interested in education with the college itself, including contemporary issues in education, multiculturalism on campus, in education, and in the society at-large, in addition to other careers in the education field. The seminar is composed of several sections, usually around seven or eight, which are each offered by different instructors. The instructors have their own unique abilities and expectations for the course, which in terms of multiculturalism presents some additional challenges.

Current Definitions and Challenges of Multicultural Education

“When we open ourselves to learning about the historical perspectives and cultural experiences of other races in America, much of what we discover is incompatible with our image of a free and democratic nation.” (Howard, 2002)

As earlier defined, multicultural education is a movement in education reform that is concerned with changing the way schools teach students to include the diverse perspectives that our nation represents. In his third edition of *An Introduction to Multicultural Education* Professor James A. Banks at the University of Washington, Seattle describes this reform movement as the efforts to enable an increased amount of interactions between student and teacher that builds upon the idea of cultural diversity as an enriching educational tool (Banks, 2000).

In his book, *Studies in Comparative Education: Teacher Training and Multiculturalism*, Raul Gagliardi discusses the varying perspectives of multicultural education from around the world. It is not only the United States that is facing issues of diversity in the classroom as we move further into the millennium. He believes that teachers play a critical role in one of the more powerful educational strategies by promoting dialogue between cultures and obstructing the appearance of the phenomena of cultural intolerance (Gagliardi, 1995). Besides media and family, teachers are one of the most important aspect of any child's socialization process. Therefore, it is vital that teachers take this role seriously by helping to create responsible citizens that respect differences.

Understanding pupil's learning difficulties is a fundamental element in any educational activity, particularly when teachers come from a different community than the students (Gagliardi, 1995). Learning style is inherent within multicultural education. Students learn differently. Whether they are hands-on, auditory, or visual learners, it is up to the teacher to make those types of connections with their students. Cultural differences also bring about some new issues. Teachers that misunderstand a student's cultural behavioral style may underestimate that student's intellectual potential and unknowingly misplace, mislabel and mistreat them (Bennett, 2003). The focus should be on how students learn rather than assuming whether or not they are capable of learning.

Historically, there has been little concrete evidence that serious work has been done to address issues of race/ethnicity, class, and language in the teacher education curriculum (Villegas and Lucas, 2002). In some ways, this widens the gap between the white majority, middle-class, English-speaking teachers and their poor or minority students. The large-scale academic underachievement is evidence that the educational, social, economic, and political systems are not working as they should.

Cultural Responsiveness

Often placed under strict curriculum guidelines, teachers get stuck in the mind-set of teaching to a test or teaching to a set of standards. Although these tests and standards have certain expectations, there is still much room for flexibility in terms of instruction. Cultural responsiveness seeks to provide teachers with some guidelines that they can work within to integrate ideas of diversity while using it as a resource rather than a hindrance in the classroom. In Villegas and Lucas' book, they present six strands that are inherently connected which illustrate some concrete ways that teachers can begin to explore some of these concepts. The first three strands examine any assumptions about schools and their relationships to society, poor students of color, and the work of teachers. The second three strands are practical examples of implementing aspects of culturally responsive teaching.

Strand One: Gaining Sociocultural Consciousness

The idea that teacher education has the responsibility of developing specific strategies for learning about student individual and cultural background knowledge and experiences helps teachers to achieve a consciousness that is socially and culturally aware.

Strand Two: Develop an Affirming Attitude Toward Students from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds

This is important in allowing prospective teachers to examine some of their own assumptions and perceptions about other groups to create an awareness of how these may potentially harm their ability to teach students effectively.

Strand Three: Develop a Commitment and Skills to Act As Agents of Change

The main goal of this strand is to get teachers to develop a clear vision of their role and goals as educators. In many ways teachers can be seen as moral actors, but it is

up to the individual to decide how much of a moral actor that he or she chooses to be in the classroom.

Strand Four: Embracing Constructivist Foundations of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Constructivist foundations are composed of the transmission and the constructivist views. The transmission view sees school knowledge as a collection of facts, concepts, principles, and theories that compose the curriculum. The constructivist view perceives beliefs, assumptions, and theories as being shaped by individual experiences.

Strand Five: Learning About Students and Their Communities

To help promote student motivation in the classroom teachers should be aware of their students' lives, how they perceive school knowledge, prior experiences with the subject matter, and their community lives.

Strand Six: Cultivating the Practice of Culturally Responsive Teaching

In a multicultural society, it is the responsibility of educators continuously tailor instruction to individual children in particular contexts.

Although these strands provide some specific contexts within which prospective teachers can be trained, without the support of the institution, they have no bearing. Traditionally, colleges and universities were not designed to promote values associated with diversity or serve diverse populations (Villegas and Lucas, 2002). However, in a diverse society it is vital that prospective teachers gain these types of experiences before entering a classroom of their own where they can put some of them to practice.

The Concept of Self- and Social Construction

As *Strand Two* states, it is important for prospective teachers to grasp their own perceptions and assumptions of other groups to begin the process of self-reflection. Self-exploration is essential to the practice of becoming a culturally responsive teacher. In addition, teachers need opportunities for critical reflection for the variety of pre-service experiences (Villegas and Lucas, 2002). Becoming multicultural can be defined as the process whereby an individual develops competencies of perceiving, evaluating, believing, and doing in multiple ways (Dillard and Ford, 1996). This is the idea behind the process of self- and social construction. These four phases are the driving forces behind the conception of the unit that follows. However, in terms of self-reflection, I will be examining the first two phases.

Phase I: Construction of Self

Constructions of self are the set of basic motivations, values, beliefs, and identities that makes up each individual person. Each person brings a unique history with her or him that influences her or his perceptions of self. These unique histories help create the social interactions in both learning and school context.

Phase II: Deconstruction Through Critical Self-Reflection

The basic idea supporting deconstruction is that self-knowledge is crucial for understanding self as the subject and involves a combination of self-reflection on past events as well as the critical questioning of those experiences in the present. To aid this process, time and place for reflection in addition to the response of others are essential.

This idea supports the dialogic process that takes place in two arenas that include 1) the self and others and 2) self and the reflective self. It is through dialogue with others who may perceive the world differently from ourselves that inner dialogue can reshape those types of generalizations. Sharing personal histories with others enables the recognition of similarities and opens the door for understanding. However, reconstruction of the self begins with the feedback one gets when one acts from one's own personal perspective. Continuing these interactions with others followed up by internal reflection on those interactions cycles of instability and changing perspectives may ensue.

Designing the “Multicultural Unit”

The multicultural unit utilizes the concepts of self-construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction to allow the prospective teacher the opportunity for self-exploration primarily through open dialogue within the setting of the small group discussion and a variety of assessment tools. The approach proposed by Villegas and Lucas on culturally responsive teaching is also used to contribute to the set of small group discussion with guided questions in addition to several classroom activities. The assessments that are used are based on the language within the teacher education performance framework that stresses the need for its students to understand student diversity and how to tailor instruction to the needs of their students.

The freshman seminar course lasts approximately fifteen weeks allowing for great flexibility for the seminar instructor. Because the concept of multiculturalism is already included within the syllabus topic list for the course, it provides easy opportunity for expansion. The unit itself is designed to last about six days. Depending on the flow of the class and what days the course is offered, the unit may last up to two weeks. A list of resources is included in the references section for instructor to consult for further information. In addition, it is encouraged that the instructor would also use the students as resources. The assessment and guided questions come from *Teaching in the Secondary School: An Introduction* by Armstrong and Savage.

“The Multicultural Unit”

Day One: Define several terms relating to multiculturalism (race, ethnicity, diversity, prejudice, culture). Students will also receive a multicultural inventory assessment to complete individually.

Explanation: Depending upon the size of the course, the class may be split into four or five small groups. Together, they will come up with a group definition for each term. This idea is based on the second phase in which receiving feedback from other students and witnessing their reactions aids in the ‘awakening’ process. There are several inventories that allow students to examine some specific aspects of multiculturalism as they relate to them. For the remainder of the unit, these

definitions and inventories will allow the students to reflect on them and their process from the beginning to the end of the unit.

Day Two: Sharing first awareness or a major awareness of difference.

Explanation: Having an experience and processing an experience are two very different things. This activity will also take place in the same small groups that the students were in the first day in which they will continue for the rest of the unit. This will contribute to a comfort level between the members of the group. The conscious awareness of these experiences and the feedback received from other members of the group will aid in the processing of those experiences and what that may mean for them as a future teacher.

Assessment: The students will be given this writing prompt to answer and bring in for the next class period (How are my ideas influenced by the community I lived in and the schools I attended when I was a elementary/high school student?)

Day Three: Present the first three strands of Villegas' and Lucas' approach to culturally responsive teaching as it applies to the importance of doing self-reflection. The brief presentation will be followed by small group discussion. The groups will be given the following questions to answer:

- 1) How do I think individuals learn in the classroom?
- 2) To what do I attribute lack of school success of students who are members of certain groups?
- 3) Where did I get my ideas about good educational practice?

Explanation: These are not easy questions for anyone to answer. The goal of these questions is to get some positive interactions and allow the students to draw on their own personal experiences to better understand themselves.

Assessment: The students will be given the second writing prompt question that will relate to the day's discussion. They will be asked to describe:

- 1) Two examples of instruction that they believe went really well and why.
- 2) Their picture of the teacher as a change agent. Do you believe that teachers should take this role upon themselves?

Day Four: Share past learning experiences in which they learned about the "other."

Explanation: Students will discuss in small groups the variety of learning experiences that they have had in their respective elementary or high schools in which they learned about a culture different from their own.

- 1) What was this topic related to?
- 2) Was the teacher enthusiastic about the topic?
- 3) What impression did learning about the topic have on you as a student?

Assessment: Students will be given a third writing prompt which will ask them to:

- 1) Describe what views they have about what the curriculum (based on subject area) should be?
- 2) Consider what would they as the teacher could possibly do differently to teach students about the same topic?

Day Five: Students will begin learning about and discussing specific techniques that they

can use to start putting some of the things they have learned into practice. Students will each describe the meaning of their first and last names.

Explanation: This will show students that there is diversity within themselves even if it may not seem obvious. This will also be a good exercise that they can utilize in their own classrooms.

Assessment: Students will be required to find an outside activity that they can use in the classroom to illustrate concepts of multiculturalism that can be easily integrated into their classroom instruction.

Day Six: The students will bring in their examples of an outside activity on the last day of the unit and introduce it to the class. After a two to three minute presentation, the other students will be given the opportunity to ask questions. During the presentation they will have to include the answers to these three questions:

- 1) What age group is this activity intended for?
- 2) How is this activity administered?
- 3) In what subject areas could this activity be used?

Explanation: The students will be able to use each other as resources. In addition they will see practical applications that they can use.

Assessment: Students will prepare a written multicultural philosophy regarding their role as a teacher in presenting material from various perspectives.

Conclusion

The key to making the teacher education performance framework successful is in its implementation and reinforcement in other courses within the College of Education. Although the language of the framework expresses support for teacher understanding of diversity as it relates to classroom success, there needs to be further concrete support within the college to prepare teachers to understand its importance. It is vital that these types of experiences begin early in the student's experiences within the college. They not only help to reaffirm the college's commitment to diversity, but also show that the college values it as being important to teaching.

The purpose of designing the unit for the freshman seminar course is to provide a practical example of implementation that would help introduce material to education students that they would be able to reflect back on throughout their preparation as teachers in the College of Education at Penn State. However, there are many challenges to implementing these changes. The misconceptions that are often associated with the notion of "teaching diversity" create a major barrier to bringing about institutional changes. Diversity is not meant to be something that should be taught. It should be something that people understand and come to appreciate for its values. As teachers, recognition of diversity, in its many forms, is essential to teaching and preparing students to be fully functional as democratic citizens, therefore this focus on diversity needs the support of its institution. Preparing instructors to incorporate the concepts of the proposed unit into the class curriculum is another major challenge. These are all areas of future research that would be needed before actual implementation can take place.

The potential impact of the unit on the students can have many widespread implications. The opportunity for self-reflection is at the heart of the unit. As Dillard

and Ford noted, the process of self-reflection is vital to contributing to self-awareness before opening the door for possible change. Teaching is a very challenging job that requires teachers to understand their own strengths and weaknesses. If teachers do not take time out to evaluate their own perceptions of students and possibly other teachers, it could greatly hinder their ability to help their students reach their maximum potential in their classrooms. Interacting with other students in education courses will allow these prospective teachers the opportunity to learn from each other. Regardless of whether there is obvious racial or ethnic diversity in a classroom, students may share a wide spectrum of experiences throughout their own education and pre-service teaching experiences that have shaped them in various ways. The specific techniques in the class are also things that they can incorporate into their own classrooms to show that these concepts are very relevant to schools. With the demand placed on teachers to fulfill curriculum guideline, state and national standards, incoming teachers may feel the pressure to stick to strict classroom instruction to maintain their teaching positions. By providing an early introduction to multicultural concepts, teacher education students may develop an early appreciation for diversity that will give them a new perspective as life-long learners. The vision that I have of the unit would be unfulfilled without the development of a curiosity and desire of the students to continue the internal awareness of the self as a life-long learner.

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