

Preparing teacher candidates to work with diverse populations: A blueprint for success

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Introduction

The notion all elements be present for preparing teacher candidates to work in a broad range of school settings with a diverse population of students is truly a formidable task and seemingly impossible. What is possible in teacher candidate preparation is to become intentional in addressing every aspect of the curriculum which includes classroom field experiences.

There was a nationwide movement after the passage of P.L. 94-142 (American Disabilities Act) to require teacher preparation programs to provide course work which would deliver the pillars of knowledge and appropriate practice for special needs children. Some states required practicing teachers and administrators take similar course work as a condition for license or certification renewal. Imagine the power to address other issues like social justice, race relations, and poverty through other public laws.

It was not long after the federal and state mandates were implemented that the collaborative efforts of The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) and The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) took on the responsibility of assuring teacher preparation institutions become equally intentional in addressing other issues related to diversity. NCATE developed Standard Four which provided a

“Target” of performance rubric for teacher preparation programs. AACTE continued the dialogue of these issues through their professional development programs.

The information in this chapter is focused on reflections on the work of a partner agreement between one university’s teacher preparation program and one middle school located in a low socioeconomic urban area. The articulation agreement for this partnership was forged at a week-long conference in which the principal of the middle school and a professor of middle level education participated as a team. The conference was funded by a grant from the Eli Lilly Foundation. Fourteen other pairs of building principals and middle level teacher preparers established university/middle school partnerships.

Topics discussed in this chapter will provide an overview of several elements which can assist candidates to develop cultural competence:

- Definition of diversity from the NCATE glossary
- The Target Rubric(s) for the various elements of Standard 4 from the NCATE manual
- The research base that provides data on the changing demographics of American schools
- A model of course work which can assist in the development of teacher candidates
- A description of relevant field experiences and practicum which assist in developing teaching and learning skills and professional dispositions
- A model for opening doors of communication Between universities and public schools
- A review of the elements of addressing issues Related to children living in poverty or in low socio-economic conditions (reflections on the influence of work by Ruby Payne)

Definition of Diversity

According to NCATE (2010), diversity is defined as: “Differences among groups of people and individuals based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area. The types of diversity necessary for addressing the elements on candidate interactions with diverse faculty, candidates, and P-12 students are stated in the rubrics for these elements.

Target rubric(s) for the various elements of Standard 4 from the NCATE manual

Standard 4a - Curriculum. The unit designs, implements, and evaluates *curriculum* and *provides experiences* for candidates to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn. Assessments indicate that candidates can demonstrate and apply proficiencies related to diversity. Experiences provided for candidates include working with diverse populations, including higher education and P–12 school faculty, candidates, and *students in P–12 schools*.

Target. Curriculum, field experiences, and clinical practice promote candidates’ development of knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions related to diversity identified in the unit’s conceptual framework. They are based on well-developed knowledge bases for, and conceptualizations of, diversity and inclusion so candidates can apply them effectively in schools. Candidates learn to contextualize teaching and draw effectively on representations from the students’ own experiences and cultures. They challenge students toward cognitive complexity and engage all students, including English language learners and students with

exceptionalities, through instructional conversation. Candidates and faculty regularly review candidate assessment data on candidates' ability to work with all students and develop a plan for improving their practice and the institution's programs.

Standard 4d Experiences working with diverse students in P–12 schools

Target. Extensive and substantive field experiences and clinical practices for both conventional and distance learning programs are designed to encourage candidates to interact with exceptional students and students from a broad range of diverse groups. The experiences help candidates confront issues of diversity that affect teaching and student learning and develop strategies for improving student learning and candidates' effectiveness as teachers (NCATE, 2002).

The research base which provides data on the changing demographics of American schools

As we enter a new millennium, young adolescents from diverse racial, ethnic, and language groups are seeking access to quality educational opportunities. These students, however, are increasingly different in background and culture from one another and from their teachers. In the U.S. context, it is widely recognized the cultural gap between children in the nation's largest schools and the teachers who teach there is large and growing. The U.S. Department of Education (2008) reported the enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools was 63% white and 37% students of color – including 17% Black, 15% Hispanic, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). In contrast, the teaching force was reported as 84% white and 16% teachers

of color – including 9% Black, 5% Hispanic, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. These figures indicate large numbers of white teachers will need to be prepared with the attitudes, skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for teaching young adolescents from racial and ethnic backgrounds which differ from their own. While the majority of American teachers continue to be white, middle class and female, this is not the case for the 49.8 million K-12 public school students. In 2007, 56% were white and 44% were non-white with African Americans (15.3%) and Hispanic/Latinos (20.9%) representing the largest groups. Since 1972, the number of white students has consistently decreased (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Therefore, it stands to reason growth among non-white groups would yield more non-white pre-service teachers. Likewise, the white, middle class students attending diverse K-12 public schools would presumably bring an awareness of diversity with them to the university classroom. These figures indicate large numbers of white teachers will need to be prepared with the attitudes, skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for teaching students from racial and ethnic backgrounds which differ from their own.

A model course assists in the preparation of teacher candidates

There is greater attention to issues of diversity, equity, and social justice across the field of teacher preparation, at least theoretically. A model institution would be one which provides teacher education candidates with opportunities to learn about the craft of teaching in the practice of teaching young adolescents (all students), no matter their background or socioeconomic status. With the use of differentiated instructional methods, novice teachers

are more able to make connections between theory and practice in deliberate and integrated ways, which becomes critical in preparing all teachers to work effectively and equitably with young adolescents and other developmental groups of students (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Darling Hammond (1999) asserts:

Learning to teach diverse learners for deep understanding requires approaches to professional development that help teachers negotiate the web of interactions that lie between general propositions about learning, development, and teaching and the situated realities of subject matter, students, and classrooms (p. 232).

Multicultural education in teacher education programs is often a single, required course which puts pressure on teacher educators to help students construct meanings about controversial topics. At one institution, the required course on multicultural education is entitled *Home, School, Community Relationships*. Student resistance to the content is often moderate and the course relevance is often perceived as fair. A theoretical foundation is established, but it is often accomplished at the expense of connections made to practice and from personal anecdotes and experiences shared with students. The use of journal articles and a textbook with diverse critical incidents and teacher case studies expose students to multicultural theory. Students are also required to complete 40 hours of field work in a diverse setting.

Requiring students to take a diversity course is meant to prepare them for a rapidly changing K-12 student population and is common among teacher preparation programs. Theoretically, preparing pre-service teachers to address their possible biases and to recognize and appreciate their future students' multicultural backgrounds will foster K-12 students' academic achievement (Bank, 2008; Grant & Sleeter, 2007). Sleeter (2001) asserts pre-service

programs need to “try to develop the attitudes and multicultural knowledge of predominantly White cohorts of pre-service students” (p. 96). In Sleeter’s review of studies on the preparation of teachers for historically underserved, multicultural student populations, Sleeter found as a whole, white students brought little cross-cultural background knowledge and experience to the classroom. They also held negative stereotypical beliefs about urban children, lacked awareness or understanding of discrimination and racism, and “used colorblindness as a way of coping with fear and ignorance” (p. 95).

Home, School, Community Relationships, as described in the university catalog, “focuses on the relationships within K-12 schools in a diversity of school settings with emphasis on cultural and socioeconomic issues.” Teacher candidates engage in activities which prepare them to teach in a multicultural school setting (i.e. sensitivity training, reflection, discussion, observation, lecture, and media review). These activities are designed to emphasize/foster/develop the sensitivity to an awareness of those issues of diversity which may impact teaching and learning. Upon completion of *Home, School, Community Relationships*, teacher candidates have a better understanding of the problems they might encounter as future teachers. In addition, students become familiar with effective strategies for working in a multicultural setting. Thus course objectives include:

- Examination of personal belief systems and values as they relate to human diversity;
- Involvement in field experiences that focus on teachers’ interpersonal relationships within school communities;
- Examining alternatives involved in working with families, schools, and communities;
- Exploring the benefits of collaboration among agencies and persons working with children;
- Examining the range of alternatives involved in human choice by exploring conflicting viewpoints and values concerning the problems and issues school districts face; and

- Developing an understanding of vibrant partnerships uniting parents, community members, and teachers in educating tomorrow's children.

A description of relevant field experiences and practicum which assist in developing teaching and learning skills and professional dispositions

Cultural competence entails recognizing the differences among students and families from different cultural groups, responding to those differences positively, and being able to interact effectively in a range of cultural environments (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). Cross (1995) defined cultural competencies more explicitly as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, structures, and policies that come together to work effectively in intercultural situations” (p. 4). The term refers to culture in the very broadest sense. The first step for teachers in developing cultural competencies is recognizing how their own perspectives and knowledge of the world are rooted in a particular cultural, racial, and ethnic identity and history (Lindsey et al., 2003).

The term *cultural proficiency* is used instead of *cultural competence* in some instances, however, to represent the highest level of ability to understand and work with people from different backgrounds (Lindsey et al., 2003). The authors of this chapter have chosen to use the term *cultural competency* because we believe it links best to the terminology used in relevant literature to ensure future teachers are prepared to work with a diverse population of students. Ladson Billings (2001) stated cultural competence is present in classrooms where (1) “the teacher understands culture and its role in education; (2) the teacher takes responsibility for learning about students’ culture and community; (3) the teacher uses student culture as a basis for learning; (4) the teacher promotes a flexible use of students’ local and global culture” (p.

98). Thus, it is the teachers' responsibility to be proactive and to take a leadership role in being culturally competent in incorporating the above mentioned concepts into the curriculum.

The past decade has seen increasing awareness and support for programs which promote "cultural competency" (Lum, 2003; Leigh, 1998; York, 1991). Simply having a culture-specific class or two is not sufficient to prepare teachers to meet the needs of today's diverse children and their families. In order for programs to be successful in meeting the needs of students in the classroom, the following must be achieved:

(1) *Infusion of cultural diversity into the curriculum.* Infusion has to occur across the curriculum, and it has to start with the support of administrators, deans, department heads, and faculty. It is important all courses address some component of diversity in culture, language, socioeconomic status, and ability, with specific in-depth courses providing students with knowledge and skills to support all children.

(2) *Variety of field experiences.* Field experiences which provide opportunities to work with diverse children and families with hands-on experiences - working outside their comfort zones.

(3) *Confrontation of beliefs.* Learning experiences designed for students to confront their biases, values, and culture. Students' culture, values and biases are often so subtle they do not realize the impact of their behavior (Lynch & Hanson, 2004). To overcome such biases, students need to have the opportunity to compare their family's child-rearing practices and developmental milestones to those of a different culture or ethnic group.

(4) *School-university partnerships*. Fostering working relationships with school corporations, administrators, superintendents, principals, and teachers is a necessary component in preparing future educators for the challenges in the classroom. School-university partnerships must be nurtured to build a strong and meaningful venue for students to make the transition from a university setting to a diverse classroom. The transition can occur only when administrators allow schools of education the opportunity to place students in their schools as apprentices to receive the needed skills, knowledge and dispositions to meet the needs of all students.

A model for opening doors of communication between the university and public schools

University teacher preparation institutions have long understood the doors of area public schools are not always flung wide open for university personnel and teacher candidates. Schools of education are conditioned to be responsive to the requests of public schools, and they also understand they must respect the protocols laid out for them by school administrators. A solution to this area of distrust and intrusion is to form strong partnerships among specific universities and public schools. Such was the case in the following vignette:

There were four universities located in multiple communities who could and wanted to serve the needs of schools with a large population of disadvantaged students living in poverty. Two major school districts reported well over 50 percent of their students were entitled to free and reduced lunch. The Eli Lilly Company provided seed money for representatives of the two large school districts and the four local universities to begin the exploration of providing full services to families living within the two school districts. There were monthly meetings of the

committee, largely made up of teacher preparers, school psychologists, school counselors, social workers, and school administrators. A proposal for funding was delivered to the Lilly Foundation which asked for funds to facilitate educational support, health care availability, legal counseling, adult literacy programs, etc. The location of the service delivery centers would be connected with two selected middle schools. The planners agreed the locations would provide access to most of the students in need. Young adolescence is a period of time when many of these services are successful, according to *Turning Points* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development Task Force, 1989). It was unfortunate Lilly was not able to fund the grant proposal; however, there was a payoff. Through the interactions of school and university personnel, strong networks were built which resulted in partnerships and benefited both groups.

A school/university partnership cannot be a matter of communication between a principal and a university professor (Ellis, Riffel, & Samelson, 2003). Copies of the "Articulation Agreement" were distributed to the teachers at the partner middle school. Along with the document was a form requesting interested teachers to apply for membership on a central committee of teachers. Ten teachers requested to be on the design and implementation committee. The goal was to design a program which fostered growth in cultural competence in pre-service teachers, provide mentorship in individual middle school classroom for the teacher candidates, and focus on the standards for the development of early adolescence generalists. The candidates were all working toward a grade 5-12 license (senior high/ junior high/ middle school) in specific content core areas. There were also K-12 (all grades) candidates in the related and allied arts. The practicum experiences and course work required the candidates to

learn about young adolescents and adolescents/young adult characteristics and development. The average cohort group size was 20 candidates. The central committee performed the function of aligning teacher candidates with their respective content areas. The assistant superintendent of the school district knew of a source of funding for the development of school/university partnerships. A grant proposal was submitted and federal funds were awarded through the state. The grant included release time for the central committee for planning and activity development and professional growth opportunities for all who participated as mentor teachers. The most effective form of professional growth came when ten teachers attended both the National Middle School Association Annual Conference in the fall and the state affiliate conference in the spring. Each teacher selected a specific strand to study at these conferences. The strands included teacher/mentoring, advisory, teaming, developmental characteristics, and several others. The teachers pre-designed a program for attendance of the break out sessions at both conferences and became strong supporters of a developmentally responsive middle school in their specific areas of study. After the conference attendance the group met to design a full program for the candidates who would be coming into their classrooms.

The classroom field experience was for the first five weeks of the student teaching semester in the middle school. The remaining ten weeks were spent at another school which was generally a high school in their specific content area major or they could remain in a middle school setting if they desired.

There was one unexpected outcome of this experience for the teacher candidates. As the result of a pre/post opinion survey given to the candidates, it was discovered the majority, as high as 80%, went into the semester with no intention of teaching in middle school as a career choice. They wanted to teach in high school classrooms only. Through the candidates' interactions with young adolescents, highly qualified teachers, and continued study of theory through university classroom instruction, the post opinion form showed a reversal in the response to where they desired to teach. The majority at the end of the experience stated they would actively seek out a middle school teaching position at the time they would also be seeking a high school teaching position.

A review of the elements of addressing issues related to children living in poverty or in low socio-economic conditions (reflections on the influence of work by Ruby Payne)

Several models of university class organization for teacher candidates evolved over the course of time. The model which seemed to have the most support and enthusiasm from teachers, candidates, and professors was when the class sessions were moved to the middle school building. Candidates met with their mentor teachers Monday through Friday for five weeks. The professors came to the school and were provided with an empty classroom (team or individual plan times) or a specific room which was rarely used. The time involved in instruction was two academic periods of 42 minutes each. The chosen class periods were rotated so every candidate would not miss the same set of students every day.

The topics of these classes included the elements of a developmentally responsive middle school. Beyond the study of interdisciplinary teaming, advisory, block scheduling, etc.

was the study of the book by Ruby Payne: *A framework for understanding poverty*. Teacher candidates were open in their discussions of their own “brushes” with poverty either, situational or generational. It was almost the continuation of the kinds of topics addressed and discussed in the course *Home, School, and Community Relations*. They continued to study the potential disadvantages the students in their classrooms might be experiencing. These were not issues of race, ethnicity, or social equity, but focused mainly on poverty. Each day the candidates submitted an electronic journal entry of how their readings of Payne were insightful for them, and what evidence they saw or experienced during that day. Candidates would bring in student work samples which reflected many of the ideas presented in Payne’s book, to be discussed by the members of the class. Several candidates selected specific assignments that were suggested by Payne and used them as teaching activities in their classrooms. The cooperating mentor teachers were very supportive of these activities because most of the teachers had already attended conferences and workshops where Ruby Payne’s ideas were presented.

In summary, all of the elements mentioned in this program are intentional. They involved many players in the field of education. Included were strong coursework in the university classroom, meaningful observations and field experiences by the candidates, a formal school/university partnership, and a team of committed teachers, administrators, and university faculty.

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