



Preservice Multicultural Teacher Preparation: Modalities

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Abstract:

India, historically, has been a multicultural society which is indigenous. In such a pluralistic society, teacher education must incorporate the strategies that will address the preservice teachers about diversity in their future classrooms. This article has a purpose of informing the teacher education programs and sensitizing the preservice teachers about multicultural issues in their future teaching.

Introduction:

What, do preservice teachers need to become effective multicultural teachers in our pluralistic society?

Preservice teachers need to become reflective practitioners:

Reflective teachers apply observational, empirical, and analytical skills to monitor, evaluate, and revise their own teaching practices (Irvine, 1990). They develop awareness of their own cultural perspective, thus gaining insight into the cultural assumptions underlying their expectations, beliefs, and behaviour. They also need to realize that their cultural perspective is not a universal norm, nor is it the only right one. In short, teacher candidates need metacognitive strategies to gain awareness, not only of their own knowledge and skills in the classroom but also of the efficacy of their activities on students' learning (Cardelle-Elawar, 1992).

Cultural Competence:

Preservice teachers must gain cultural competence, that is, the ability to function comfortably in cross-cultural settings and to interact harmoniously with people from cultures that differ from their own. Based on the research on effective intercultural communication, culturally competent individuals (a) cope effectively with the psychological and emotional stress of dealing with the unfamiliar, (b) quickly establish rapport with others, (c) sense other people's feelings, (d) communicate effectively with people from varying backgrounds, and (e) respond adequately to miscommunication (Giles, Coupland, Williams, & Leets, 1991). These complex skills require knowledge and the cultural understanding that evolve over time from cross-cultural interpersonal experiences.

Teachers' attitudes and perceptions about students from diverse cultures play a major role in their expectations of students (Gollnick & Chinn, 1986; Hernandez, 1989). Consequently, to be effective and equitable teachers, education students must understand and appreciate human diversity. Appreciation and understanding evolve from direct interpersonal contact and from knowledge of the history and culture of diverse groups, including their values, stories, myths, inventions, music, and art.

Cross-cultural communicators:

Our future teachers need to become effective cross-cultural communicators. Effective cross-cultural communication skills help teachers create a classroom environment that encourages good interpersonal relationships. This important interpersonal skill requires an understanding of the interrelationship between language and cultural meaning. Cultural context and personal experience mediate meaning.

In addition, effective cross-cultural communication requires knowledge of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal cues set the stage for interpersonal communication (Barnlund, 1968; Hall, 1973; Curt, 1976; LaFrance & Mayo, 1978) and "are critical components of participants' messages" (Bonvillain, 1993, p. 37). Although there are some universal nonverbal messages, our interpretations of space, touch, appearance, body language, and time are largely mediated by culture (Hall, 1966; Hecht, Andersen, & Ribeau, 1989) and by context.

Interrelationship between language and culture:

Preservice teachers should understand the interrelationship between language and culture. Language learning is "the means by which individuals become members of their primary speech communities" (Heath, 1986, p. 85) and, consequently, language promotes group identity and individual membership. Because language is a function of culture, it reflects the conventions and values of its speakers.

Culture also provides schemas for acceptable stories, narratives, questions, and requests (Corson, 1992; Heath, 1986). Indeed, the ways of using known language largely determines academic success (Heath, 1986).

Cultural roots of cognition:

Future teachers need to recognize the cultural roots of cognition and its close link to language. Logical reasoning and discourse styles evolve within a cultural context; consequently, they are culture-specific and not universal. Discussion, argumentation, explication, and persuasion follow the culturally accepted rules of behavior and reasoning. As children learn their culture and acquire language, they learn to use the symbols and meanings of a specific culture (Langer, 1987). From the complex "cultural meanings and models that are shared and assumed" there emerges a unique world view that makes sense of the world as it is perceived (Bonvillain, 1993, p. 52). This world view interprets the purpose of life, the nature of life, and the relation of humanity to the universe (Sarbaugh, 1979). Thus culture affects how people categorize and organize the world, as well as what they attend to and consider important (Bonvillain, 1993). Schlesinger (1991) believes this cultural influence on cognition probably

manifests itself more strongly in children because they are still developing the language of thought.

Although culture, to some degree, influences thinking, schools expect students from a variety of cultural backgrounds to comprehend and learn many new and complex ideas even when exposed to language and values that differ from their own (Langer, 1987). Awareness of the cultural underpinnings of logic and thought inclines multicultural teachers to make their thinking explicit to students, to be less judgmental of students' reasoning, and to look beyond learning disabilities to cultural and linguistic differences that may explain students' academic performance.

Above all, teachers need to know how to adapt the content of instruction and teaching style to students' cultural and individual preferences. Curriculum, methodology, and materials should invite students to identify with the educational process and enable them to function biculturally (Cohen, 1969; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987; Singh, 1988). If the content is incompatible with the students' values and cultural norms, misunderstanding and distrust are likely to ensue (Croninger, 1991)..

Meeting Preservice Needs:

The integration of multicultural education within a quality preservice program prepares preservice teachers for increasingly diverse classrooms. Through multicultural teacher education, future teachers begin to see themselves as active participants in the empowerment of students and as facilitators for academic success. A broad interdisciplinary foundation, varied practical experiences, and repeated opportunities to critically analyze ethnic, race, class, and gender issues are key ingredients in producing skilled, knowledgeable, reflective, competent teachers.

The Need for a Liberal Arts Education. Teacher preparation requires the breadth of a liberal arts education in the broadest sense of the term. From this perspective, a good liberal arts education is both liberal as well as liberating. It is liberal in so far as it is progressive, impartial, and comprehensive; it is liberating in that it emancipates us from restrictive, ethnocentric thinking. Herein lies its value for multicultural teacher preparation.

Though undergraduate liberal arts education should be comprehensive, it cannot possibly be all-inclusive given the constraints of time and the magnitude of the task. The purpose of a good liberal arts education is not an intensive study of every human group or field of endeavor, but, rather, an extensive, general framework from which the future teacher, as a continually developing professional, can continue to grow personally and professionally. Through integration of multicultural themes, the liberal arts lay the foundation for cultural competency and cross-cultural awareness. They furnish intercultural knowledge, erode ethnocentric perspectives, highlight human oneness, and validate diversity. Within a multicultural liberal arts framework, preservice teachers acquire the following:

1. Broad knowledge of the contributions to Indian history and freedom struggle of the many people who comprise our nation. Knowing how diverse people built, shaped, defended, and helped our nation increases respect for and valuing of our national diversity. Furthermore,

to bring into the classroom a multicultural perspective that supports diversity, teachers must have the information so they can share it with their students.

2. Comprehensive knowledge of the history and contributions of many people to human society through a broad world history course which incorporates European and non-European history. Such a course expands students' awareness of our international interdependence, increases comprehension of the underlying causes and international conflicts, and illustrates the evolution of sociopolitical philosophies.
3. A global perspective of the arts through local/folk music to global music and art history courses that are broad in scope and comparative in nature. Such courses examine similarities, adaptations, and cross-cultural borrowings. They develop an increasing awareness of how culture mediates our personal interpretations and aesthetic values. Through these courses, future teachers become familiar with the musical traditions of several cultures, explore the variety of musical expression, and examine the meaning music has for its people.
4. Knowledge and understanding of the literary work of both men and women from a variety of cultural, caste, and religious groups through a literature course. Literature recognizes our commonalities while exploring a diversity of literary forms and outward expressions of human emotions. It exposes the future teacher to the values, thinking, beliefs, customs, and behaviours of other people through the words and creative talent of some of the world's most gifted writers. By indirectly studying culture as expressed in literature, individuals clarify their own cultural perspective and world view.
5. Insight into human and cultural diversity through an introductory course on diversity. A diversity course develops intercultural, interethnic, and interracial appreciation and understanding through the exploration of social, cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, and linguistic similarities and differences.

The Need for Multicultural Education:

Since knowledge precedes understanding, preservice teachers need to expand upon the knowledge acquired through the liberal arts and focus on its classroom implications. A general course in multicultural education provides an opportunity for further reflection, self awareness, and development of a personal philosophy. An introductory multicultural education course serves as the mainstay for an integrated multicultural teacher education program. It frames learning, thinking, and behavior within a cultural context and invites preservice teachers to become aware of their own cultural perspective. In short, an initial course in multicultural education encourages the life-long process of developing the necessary cultural competency for bridging the gap between the majority culture and students' natal culture.

A sound introduction to multicultural education furnishes the following:

1. A rationale and philosophy of multicultural education to clarify its nature, premises, and aims. An introductory course explores the multiple interpretations and definitions of multicultural education so that preservice teachers discern the underlying beliefs,

- assumptions, and goals inherent in each perspective. Given a global view of multicultural education, future teachers can clarify their own perspective of multicultural education.
2. Opportunities for reflection on how culture and gender shape our behavior, beliefs, expectations, values, identity, and personal biases. An understanding of our own cultural heritage and world view invites better understanding and acceptance of other cultural groups. Cultural self-understanding evolves in an introductory multicultural education course through repeated intercultural experiences, reflection on personal feelings and expectations, exploration of one's own values and beliefs, and exposure to a variety of ideas, beliefs, and cultural perspectives.
 3. Direct and meaningful experiences with people from diverse backgrounds, including ethnic and linguistic minorities, as well as the physically handicapped and learning impaired. To understand others, people must understand themselves; to understand themselves, people must interact with others. Personal experiences with a diversity of people can lead to better understanding of our own cultural identity through comparison and contrast with other cultural groups. Additionally, intercultural experiences help reduce the anxiety experienced in unfamiliar cross cultural encounters. The reduced anxiety boosts self-confidence, increases cultural competency, and improves cross-cultural communication.
 4. An exploration of issues related to gender, age, ethnicity, family, language, and exceptionality within the multicultural school setting. An overview of the cultural underpinnings in people's attitudes towards females, males, ethnic groups, language differences, and exceptionality develops greater sensitivity and understanding of cross-cultural behaviors and attitudes. It encourages future teachers to examine their own feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about these important issues.
 5. A cross-cultural examination of family roles and family values as they influence learning. Family involvement in and support of education invite academic success. Within-family learning modes, parental expectations, and family roles influence how children learn, what they attend to, how they behave, and what they expect from teachers.
 6. By understanding the historical framework of existing legislation and knowing the legal mandates that impinge upon our schools, teachers are better prepared not only to comply with these laws but also to realize why such laws exist and what remains to be done.
 7. Knowledge of cultural and individual differences in learning styles and how to accommodate these differences in teaching. Subsequent methodology courses expand on this knowledge and offer practical applications. The result is greater professional confidence and, indirectly, an increased willingness to teach children from diverse backgrounds.
 8. Identification of cultural bias in teaching materials towards age, gender, ethnic groups, language, and physical and mental handicaps. Lack of awareness and sensitivity in the selection and use of textbooks, pictures, videos, software, tests, and other materials perpetuate stereotypes and diminish minority students' opportunities for academic success. Through multicultural education, preservice teachers discern the covert messages, misrepresentations, omissions, and misinformation that are sometimes present in educational resources.

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