

What is the Role of Cultural Diversity in the Teacher Education Curriculum?

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A major debate in education continues to revolve around the incorporation of cultural diversity in the curriculum. Currently, there is no major consensus on either the acceptance or subsequent implementation of this material. The reasons for this are complex but there are factors that can influence the degree to which policy is implemented. In this study, the following variables were identified to determine acceptance levels of cultural diversity: ethnicity, exceptional-ity, gender, language, regional/geographical affiliation, religion, social class, and sexual orientation. This study raised the following questions: (1) What is the opinion among university faculty involved in teacher education programs as to what degree cultural diversity should be infused (ideal) and to what degree cultural diversity is being infused (actual) into the curriculum? (2) Is there a statistically significant difference between what should be infused (ideal) and what is being infused (actual) in regards to university faculty perceptions? (3) Does a policy exist for your school in regards to infusing (identified variable) into the curriculum? Surveys were sent to university faculty in teacher education programs. Findings support the contention that curricular infusion of cultural diversity is not universally endorsed or implemented by university faculty in teacher education programs.

Introduction

A major debate continues to revolve around the incorporation of cultural diversity in educational curricula. On one side of the debate, scholars in the field of cultural diversity argue that curricula must recognize the contributions of all groups in U.S. society. In opposition to this position, scholars claim that a revision of the traditional curriculum is particularistic and revisionist (Bloom, 1987; Leo, 1989; Ravitch, 1990). Although the debate shows no signs of abatement, a greater number of professional bodies do agree that diversity should be incorporated into schools. Most, if not all, of the learned societies for the content areas of the curriculum support and disseminate educational materials pertinent to cultural diversity. More specifically, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education mandates the infusion of cultural diversity in the teacher education programs (e.g., see the most recent NCATE Curriculum Guidelines). Therefore, one might assume that there is considerable support for the infusion of cultural diversity in teacher education programs. However, given the nature of personal, intellectual, social, and/or political

constraints, it may be that there is no major consensus about the acceptance and/or implementation of cultural diversity in the teacher education curriculum.

Literature Review

For the past decades, educators have been encouraged and challenged to incorporate cultural diversity into their curriculum and instruction (Banks, 1994a; Gay, 1994; Hillis, 1993). The advocates for infusing cultural diversity contend that the school's curriculum reflects a perspective that mirrors the marginalization of ethnic groups in society (Banks, 1994b; Weiler, 1988). As Carlson (1997) has stated: "Multicultural Education typically has been institutionalized within the curriculum and within public schools in ways that affirm the boundaries between the center and the margins of the curriculum" (p. 65). This limiting process of curriculum infusion fails to remove the subordinate status of multicultural education; a status that has little justification in current U.S. society. Banks (1994a) has argued that one of the primary reasons for infusing multicultural education is because of the changing demographics of U.S.

society – what he terms the “demographic imperative.” Demographers have proposed that by the year 2020, children of color will make up 46 % of school aged children (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989).

Opponents to multicultural education, however, assert that the traditional school curriculum should not be changed (Bloom, 1987; Chavez, 1995; Ravitch, 1990). Schlesinger (1991) argues that such a revision would create a fragmentation of the common core of knowledge. In turn, this fragmentation would cause groups to lose their sense of national identity. As Bloom (1987) declared, “All such teachers of openness had either no interest in or were actively hostile to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution” (p. 13). Rather than infusing diversity into the curriculum, therefore, a traditional curriculum should be emphasized and maintained (Hirsch, 1987).

In spite of the on-going debate, the educational reform movements of the 1980s and 1990s have generated a number of recommendations concerning curricular infusion of cultural diversity (Ginsberg & Berry, 1990). As stated earlier, for example, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education has set standards for the infusion of cultural diversity in teacher preparation programs. These recommendations are helping multicultural education gain greater representation in the curriculum (Hillis & vonEschenbach, 1996). However, as Lipsky (1980) noted in his important work on bureaucracy, mandated policies may not be fully endorsed or implemented at the program level because practitioners may not accept the policy and implement it.

Purpose of the Study

The preceding discussion lays the foundation of this study. Within this discussion, we have proposed that the argument for infusion of cultural diversity in the school's curriculum has not been resolved. Even with recommended or mandated policies, the infusion of cultural diversity is not universal. The discussion of narratives and meta narratives helps us to recognize the forces that can facilitate or inhibit the seemingly innocuous process of curricular infusion. Even at the university level, these personal, intellectual, social, and/or political forces can generate barriers that might impact the professional development of prospective educators regardless of accreditation standards. Therefore, this study was undertaken in an attempt to determine the status of infusing diversity in teacher education curricula. More specifically, the study attempted to answer the following questions: What is the opinion among university faculty involved in teacher education programs as to what degree cultural diversity should be infused (ideal) and to what degree cultural diversity is being infused (actual) into the curriculum? Is there a significant difference between what should be infused (ideal) and what is being infused (actual) in regards to university faculty perceptions? Does a policy exist for the particular school in regards to infusing diversity into the curriculum? The variables that

were identified to substantiate cultural diversity were: ethnicity, exceptionality, gender, language, regional/geographical affiliation, religion, social class, and sexual orientation.

Methods

Sample

Approximately 100 respondents were surveyed for this study. These respondents came from five universities located in the states of Georgia, Tennessee, and Washington who are involved in professional preparation of prospective educators. The respondents represented various roles associated with teacher education institutions. Each participant received a cover-letter, a survey, and a stamped self-addressed return envelope. They were also informed that all responses would remain anonymous.

Instrumentation

The demographic items acquired through the questionnaire were position, ethnicity, sex, years of experience, age, residential setting, and population base. Also, the questionnaire identified eight diversity variables (ethnicity, exceptionality, gender, language, regional/geographical affiliation, religion, social class, and sexual orientation) with an accompanying definition. For each of these variables, respondents were asked:

- (1) To what degree should (identified variable) be infused into the curriculum?
- (2) To what degree is (identified variable) being infused into your school?
- (3) Does a policy exist for your school in regards to infusing (identified variable) into the curriculum?

The choice of responses for questions (1) and (2) were: all courses, most courses, some courses, or no courses. The choices of responses for question (3) were yes or no.

Analysis of Data

Responses for each of the demographic variables and for question c were compiled as frequency scores. Mean scores, standard deviations, and a dependent samples *t*-test were used to describe and test the responses for questions a and b on each of the eight diversity variables. These data were compiled and analyzed by using *The Statistical Package for Social Sciences/SPSS/PC+4.0* (Norusis, 1990).

Results

Of the 100 surveys that were sent to the university faculty, 54 (54%) were returned. Of the 54 respondents, 3 are deans, 9 are department chairs, and 42 are professors. The setting breakdown for these 54 returned surveys are 9 rural, 21 urban, 10 suburban, and 14 unknown. There are 32 male respondents, 21 female respondents, and one with no response. Fourteen surveys were returned from the state of Georgia, 28 from the state of Tennessee, and 12 from the state of Washington. The ages of the subjects ranged from 32 to 67 years. The years of experience in teacher educa-

Table 1
Faculty Perception of Ideal and Actual Infusions of Cultural Diversity into Curriculum

Diversity Variables	n	Ideal		Actual		
		M	SD	n	M	SD
Ethnicity	54	2.83	.841	52	2.37	.658
Exceptionality	52	2.90	.846	49	2.35	.561
Gender	53	2.89	.934	51	2.27	.603
Language	48	3.00	.899	45	2.64	.802
Regional Affiliation	53	2.17	.545	50	2.06	.424
Religion	51	1.90	.538	47	1.83	.564
Social Class	52	2.44	.826	50	2.08	.566
Sexual Orientation	53	1.92	.675	48	1.81	.571

Note. Scale: 4 = all courses, 3 = most courses, 2 = some courses, 1 = no course

tion ranged from one year to 40 years. The ethnic profiles of the 54 respondents are one African American, two Asian Americans, three Native Americans, and 48 Whites. Finally, six surveys came from people in population areas of 25,000 or lower, 33 surveys came from population areas of 25,000 to 100,000, 11 surveys were from areas of 100,000 or more, and four surveys had no response.

The responses from the university personnel concerning to what degree each of the eight cultural diversity variables should be or are being infused into the curriculum reveal that the ideal surpasses the actual infusion.

Since the concept of infusion was measured by the degree of course delivery [all courses (4), most courses (3), some courses (2), or no course (1)], the mean scores indicate an overall weak endorsement and implementation of cultural diversity in the curriculum. The highest variable both for the ideal and actual infusion in the curriculum was language with mean score of 3.00 and 2.64 respectively. Of the remaining seven variables, ethnicity, exceptionality, and gender were ideally endorsed for curriculum infusion with mean scores of 2.83, 2.90, and 2.89, respectively. The actual degree of course implementation for these three variables are 2.37, 2.35, and 2.27 respectively. These mean scores indicate that "some courses" are used for actual infusion. Regional affiliation, religion, social class, and sexual orientation have lower mean scores for both ideal infusion (2.17, 1.90, 2.44, and 1.92, respectively) and for actual infusion (2.06, 1.83, 2.08, and 1.81, respectively). Religion and sexual orientation are two cultural diversity variables that clearly lack support from university personnel as factors that should be and are being infused into the curriculum.

To determine a significant difference between what should be infused (ideal) and what is being infused (actual) in the curriculum of teacher preparation programs curriculum, a dependent samples *t*-test was used to analyze the data. For each individual, the difference between the ideal and the actual was calculated. A dependent samples *t*-test was estimated for each diversity variable and to ensure a rigorous analysis due to problems of multiple comparisons, a *p*-value < .01 was interpreted as statistically significant.

With all eight variables, the mean scores were higher for the ideal perception than the actual account of implementation. Of these eight variables, five have one-tailed statistically significant indices. These five variables are ethnicity, exceptionality, gender, language, and social class. The analysis found significant differences for these five variables between what should be and what is being infused in the curriculum. The mean differences range from .33 to .65 for the five statistically significant variables. These values are relatively large differences since the response is based on a four-point scale. The three diversity variables that do not have statistically significant indices are regional affiliation, religion, and sexual orientation.

The third question addressed in this study is whether a policy exists for the respondent's school in regards to infusing (identified variable) into the curriculum? Only ethnicity and exceptionality have higher percentages of "yes" responses than "no" responses. Three-fourths or higher of the respondents indicated no infusion policy for regional affiliation and sexual orientation. For half or more of the respondents, there are no policies for infusing gender, religion, or social class in their curriculum. The cultural diversity variable of language has 26 "no" responses which is about 48% of the respondents. In essence, the data indicate

Table 2

One Sample t-test for Significant Difference between Acceptance and Implementation of Variable

Variables	<i>n</i>	Mean Difference	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> -value	<i>df</i>	One-tailed Significance
Ethnicity						
Difference	52	.500	.874	4.123	51	.000*
Exceptionality						
Difference	49	.551	.792	4.869	48	.000*
Gender						
Difference	51	.647	.844	5.473	50	.000*
Language						
Difference	45	.333	.674	3.317	44	.001*
Regional						
Difference	50	.100	.505	1.400	49	.084
Religion						
Difference	47	.085	.686	.850	46	.200
Social Class						
Difference	50	.380	.667	4.030	49	.000*
Sexual Orientation						
Difference	48	.167	.595	1.939	47	.029

**p* < .01

Table 3

Existing Policies for Including Diversity Variable in Curriculum

Variables	Yes (%)	No (%)	Missing (%)	Total
Ethnicity	23 (42.6)	19 (35.2)	12 (22.2)	54
Exceptionality	24 (44.4)	18 (33.3)	12 (22.2)	54
Gender	17 (31.5)	31 (57.4)	6 (11.1)	54
Language	20 (37.0)	26 (48.1)	8 (14.8)	54
Regional	6 (11.1)	42 (77.8)	6 (11.1)	54
Religion	9 (16.7)	37 (68.5)	8 (14.8)	54
Social Class	6 (11.1)	39 (72.2)	8 (14.8)	54
Sexual Orientation	5 (9.3)	41 (75.9)	8 (14.8)	54

low support of infusing these eight cultural diversity variables in teacher education curriculum through policy formation.

Discussion

Overall, the findings from this study support the contention that curricular infusion of cultural diversity is not universally endorsed nor implemented by university faculty in teacher education programs. The responses from participants in this study substantiate weak philosophical and pedagogical support for diversity infusion as part of their current teacher preparation curriculum. The responses also support this study's assumption that a discrepancy between personal narratives and metanarratives impedes the curriculum infusion process.

The variables of ethnicity, exceptionality, gender, and language have stronger endorsements for what should be and what is being infused in a teacher education curriculum. Some interesting considerations are the governmental mandates (i.e., Title IX, House Bill 94142) and educational reform programs (English to Speakers of Other Languages, Bilingual Education) that have pushed for the infusion of these three variables in the curriculum. One could expect, and probably does, full or high levels of curricular infusion for these three variables based on the policies. However, the reported low levels of support for both the ideal and actual curricular infusion of cultural diversity from respondents in this study give credence to the influence of personal narratives (Bruner, 1988). One of the explanations of this study's results is that the respondent's personal narratives do not match the metanarratives of society and/or the mandated policy. The personal, intellectual, social, and/or political forces that substantiate their personal narratives have generated a barrier against curricular infusion, regardless of mandated or recommended policies. This can be understood by Bruner's (1988) contention that a person's narrative reflects the prevailing component of one's being. Also, although it was not a focus of this study, prevalent personal narratives may explain the current struggle to have classroom teachers accept the concept of inclusion of students with special needs in their regular classroom curriculum (e.g., see Lipsky, 1980).

Regional affiliation, religion, social class, and sexual orientation are perceived with a higher level of reservation. Apparently, the current anti-discrimination policies, various curriculum standards (N.C.A.T.E. guidelines, etc.), and intellectual justifications have not yet affected the curricular infusion. This inference is supported when one compares the responses for what policies presently exist for infusing these variables in the school's curriculum. Approximately, 69% to 78% of the respondents reported that there are no policies existing. Also, this inference is further supported by the lack of statistically significant mean differences for regional affiliation, religion, and sexual orientation when analyzing the respondents' perceptions of ideal and actual infusion. The low degree of ideal infusion is

closely aligned with the low degree of actual infusion. As a result, this raises additional concern as to the exposure of prospective educators to new knowledge and innovative perspectives.

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