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ABSTRACT

Studies have shown that preservice teachers do modify their knowledge and value dispositions for teaching culturally diverse student populations. Continuing this line of research, this study focuses on pedagogical and methodological conditions in the education of preservice teachers. A class of preservice teachers was assigned to various public schools to observe how issues of cultural diversity were handled. They were asked to reflect on their observations, write an analysis for presentation and discussion, and determine how these observations would influence their future teaching behavior. The written observations of 10 students were randomly selected for analysis. In general, all 10 students exhibited a basic understanding of cultural diversity. Most indicated an understanding that: (1) in the classroom, more than academics must occur; (2) in order to teach a child, one must understand the realities that students bring to class; (3) the classroom is a training center for how students will function in the larger society; and (4) just as prejudice can be learned, so can cooperation and conflict resolution. It is acknowledged that knowledge of students' cultural diversity cannot be imposed; rather, such knowledge must be experienced. The pedagogical and methodological conditions employed supported this supposition. (Contains 14 references.) (Author/LL)

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## Abstract

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 Title: Encouraging Preservice Teachers to Understand Student Diversity: Pedagogical and Methodological Conditions

## Purpose

Studies show that preservice teachers do modify their knowledge and value dispositions for teaching culturally diverse student populations. This study continues this line of research with the focus on pedagogical and methodological conditions in the education of preservice teachers.

## Methodology

What was done with a class of preservice teachers was to discuss cultural diversity in public schools. Then they were assigned to various schools to observe how issues of cultural diversity were addressed. Next, students reflected on their observations and wrote an analysis for presentation and discussion. Finally, students were required to determine how these observations would influence their future teaching behavior.

## Findings

Ten of the students' written observations were randomly selected for analysis. In general, all ten students exhibited a basic understanding of cultural diversity, in that they understand that it exists in the classrooms. Most indicated a basic understanding that: 1) In the classroom, more than academics must occur, 2) In order to teach a child, one must understand the realities which students bring to class. 3) The classroom is a training center for how students will function in the larger society. 4) Also, just as prejudice can be learned, so can cooperation and conflict resolution.

Much the ten students' observations were biased by their personal knowledge of education and schooling. This was expected since they had not completed any of their professional and specialty education courses. It is acknowledged that knowledge of students' cultural diversity can't be imposed. Rather, such knowledge must be experienced. Thus the pedagogical and methodological conditions employed supported this supposition.

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**Encouraging Preservice Teachers to Understand Student Diversity:  
Pedagogical and Methodological Conditions**

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Teaching is a complex activity which requires not only technical knowledge and skills but also the ability to reflect upon teaching and to make decisions based on sound educational principles (Schon, 1987; Carter, 1990; Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). Effective teachers are viewed as decision makers (Morine-Dershimer, 1989). That is, effective teachers are individuals who can analyze the effectiveness of educational decisions, based on their knowledge of theory, curriculum and instructional method. They then make appropriate instructional decisions based on their analysis of the students' instructional needs (Kemp, 1993a).

Following this research tradition in teacher education, Kemp (1992) argues that educating teachers to be responsive to the diversity in student populations constitutes a critical knowledge domain. Kemp's (1993b) study shows that preservice teachers do modify their knowledge and value dispositions for teaching culturally diverse student populations. This study continues this line of research with the focus on pedagogical and methodological conditions in the education of preservice teachers.

### **Why Acknowledge and Teach Cultural Diversity?**

Historically, American educators have served the purpose of transmitting our culture. Culture is the ways of living (Hoopes & Pusch, 1979) that are shared by members of a population (Ogbu, 1988). Culture encompasses and is constituted by rites, rituals, legends, myths, artifacts, symbols, languages, ceremonies, history, and "sense-making devices that guide and shape behavior" (Davis, 1984, p. 10). Culture is characterized by the statement, "It's the way things are done around here" (Kilmann, Saxton, Serpa, and Associates, 1985, p. 5).

At one point in American history, educators thought that schools had a moral and civic obligation to transmit the American culture based on the "melting pot" theory. In its purest form, this is cultural assimilation which takes place when one ethnic or cultural group acquires the values, characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of another culture, while shedding its own cultural values and characteristics.

The melting pot theory has been attacked by many as discriminatory and unethical. However, proponents of cultural assimilation contend that America cannot afford to sacrifice educational quality in the name of serving all immigrant groups equally.

Cultural pluralism is directly opposed to cultural assimilation. This theory asserts that a truly democratic society has an obligation to accept and give equal treatment to all ethnic groups. No matter what view one accepts, every

educator today knows for sure that the scene in the American classrooms have changed. Moreover, it will continue to change.

One important change in student populations is an increase in the number of children traditionally considered members of ethnic or racial minority groups. In 1976, 24% of the total population of American schools was white. By the year 2000, one-third of all students will be a person of color. By the year 2020, they will comprise 46% (National Center for Education Statistics, 1992).

Along with ethnic diversity, educators must also address diversity in linguistics, economics, family structures, lifestyles, health, physical and mental ability, age, and gender. In reference to diversity of gender, educators must note that this fundamental difference has been overlooked for nearly all of our history. Females and males have been together in classrooms since the beginning of the common school in the United States.

A fundamental political and education assumption is that sex makes no difference in schooling. Also, the effect of gender on the actual education received by children has only recently been studied. It has only been in decades that educators have consider gender as a factor in schooling. Shakeshaft (1986) writes:

Two messages emerge repeatedly from the research on gender and schooling. First, what is good for males is not necessarily good for the females. Second, if a choice must be made, the education establishment will base policy and instruction on that which is good for males (p. 500).

For the most part, the problem of gender affects the females more than males. Females are not seen as educationally different

from boys. Thus, it is that females who do the same activities as boys in the classroom are often not treated in the same ways as males. Frequently females do not achieve the same educational outcomes as males. The point here is that besides ethnicity, gender is fundamental to a consideration of diversity.

#### Involvement in Student Diversity

Teachers enter classrooms today face culturally diverse students. To effectively educate all learners, they must first be aware of the issue of cultural diversity. Awareness of the issue, requires critical analysis on what it means to teach culturally diverse students. It also involves a commitment to make sure that all learners successfully participate in their own society and those of others. Finally teachers learn to become positive participants in many other cultures. They too must be afforded opportunities to can learn about the world and how to function creatively in it with their students.

Gollnick and Chinn (1990) propose the following principles to guide educators in providing multicultural education. These include:

1. Multicultural education must increase students' academic achievement in all areas. It must be sensitive to the students' sociocultural background and experiences.
2. Attention to voice must be a part of multicultural education. Description of life experiences must come from the students, not the teacher.

3. Oral and non-verbal communication patterns between students and teachers must be analyzed to increase involvement of students in the learning process.
4. The learning styles of the students and the teaching style of the teacher must be analyzed to increase student involvement in the learning process.
5. Multicultural education must permeate the formal curriculum.
6. Multicultural education must impact the organizational structure of the classrooms well as the interactions of students and teachers.
7. Multicultural education must teach students to think critically, by allowing them freedom to ask questions.
8. Multicultural education requires an understanding of the lived cultures of families in the community. Consequently, teachers cannot stay encapsulated in their own cultural milieu.
9. Multicultural education must use the community as a resource.

Banks (1993) presents a topology of the kinds of knowledge that exists in society and the educational institutions. This topology is designed to help educators identify the types of knowledge that reflect particular values, assumptions, perspectives, and ideological positions. The five types of knowledge are: (1) personal/cultural knowledge, (2) popular knowledge, (3) mainstream academic knowledge, (4) transformative

academic knowledge, and (5) school knowledge.

For this study, personal and cultural knowledge was used as the basis for critical analysis. Personal and cultural knowledge include concepts, explanations, and interpretations that are derived from personal experiences in the students' homes, families, the community, and the world.

### **Educating Preservice Teachers**

What was done with a class of preservice teachers was to discuss cultural diversity in public schools. Then they were assigned to various schools to observe how issues of cultural diversity were addressed. Next, students reflected on their observations and wrote an analysis for presentation and discussion. The focus of this type of activity was to increase students level of awareness of diversity in schools and to examine their personal knowledge and values. Finally, students were required to determine how these observations would influence their future teaching behavior.

Ten of the students' written observations were randomly selected for analysis. In generally, all ten students exhibited a basic understanding of cultural diversity, in that they understand that it exists in the classrooms. Most indicated a basic understanding that:

1. In the classroom, more than academics must occur.
2. In order to teach a child, one must understand the realities which students bring to class.
3. The classroom is a training center for how students

will function in the larger society.

4. Also, just as prejudice can be learned, so can cooperation and conflict resolution.

### Analysis of Student Observations

Excerpts of 1) implications for teaching and 2) applications to teaching critical analyses of students' observations are illustrated in this section. After each student's experts the researcher's critical comments to the class are provided. These comments were provided in class after the student made an oral presentation. The comments are intended to encourage students to expand their level of understanding of the complexity of teaching as well as of cultural diversity among student populations.

### Excerpts from Student 1's Critical Written Analysis

#### Student 1: Implications for Teaching

The co-operating teacher used a very interesting method to get students to interact and relate with different races. Her classroom was arranged so that they were mixed according to gender and race. This teacher's goal was to teach the students to work together regardless of race or gender. They not only sat together, but she gave them assignments that required them to work together.

#### Student 1: Applications to Teaching

My class is culturally diverse. They are amazingly different. Most students in attendance are members of rival gangs, so I have to constantly watch them to make sure there

are no fights. They are very mature minded and know more about adult living that other students seem to know. Some of them need immense attention to make them feel worthy and follow directions. Others try their best to avoid instruction altogether. I try to give all the students a chance to interact by including them all in class discussions. I assign group projects. I give my students opportunities to learn of different cultures by assigning reports. I have them role play students of the same and different social backgrounds.

#### Critical Comments to Student 1

Implications for Teaching - What was observed? This student-teacher looked at (1) Classroom Management, (2) Social Issues that affect teaching, and (3) Gender/Race make-up of class.

Applications to Teaching. These issues are extremely important for (1) getting students to work together. The role playing would help students have empathy for another person. (2) The group lessons are opportunities to train students to think critically. It poses opportunities to discuss racial and personal problems students may have in the classroom.

Other Things To Consider. This student may also have considered: (1) different learning styles of students, (2) teaching cooperation and conflict resolution in the classroom, and (3) from group interactions, teach critical thinking. One of the important things to stress under critical thinking is the

fact that public school students must determine how cultural assumptions influence the ways knowledge is constructed. That is, students must learn from whose viewpoint information is being presented.

### Excerpts from Student 2's Critical Written Analysis

#### Student 2: Implications for Teaching

I know that my students are constantly dealing with poverty. I know that many of my students take on adult roles in the homes. One student constantly slept in class. He claimed that he had to take care of his baby sister each night. Some of the children came to school hungry. Sometimes I felt that the only reason for them coming to school was for breakfast and/or lunch.

#### Student 2: Applications to Teaching

When teaching history from a text, which is written from the European perspective, I try to include the contributions of other cultures (Blacks, Hispanic, Asian) through discussions, I try to make them aware of the world outside the classroom.

Implications for Teaching - What was observed? Student teacher 2 looked at the social, economic issues that arise in classroom. He felt that students living in poverty saw little value in school except for the breakfast/lunch programs. He was learning to sympathize and empathize with students. It is necessary that students become aware of their groups' contributions to history. Through learning about their own

history, eventually they will learn of the history of others.

Applications to teaching. This student teacher must make sure that he/she set high expectations for these students in spite of their situations or "self-fulfilling prophesy" would come true (they are poor and see no value in school and therefore they will fail). This student teacher has the job of motivating students in spite of what they face outside school.

Other Things To Consider. In teaching of the contributions of cultural groups to history, the teacher must make students aware of how cultural assumptions influence how knowledge is constructed. The teacher must make it possible for each child in that class to walk in another person's footsteps. This can be done through discussions and role playing. In dealing with the deficiencies of these students, the teacher can help by referring students to the proper social service agency.

Excerpts from Student 3's Critical Written Analysis

**Student 3: Implications for Teaching**

In class, the students were mixed by gender and race. They lacked many basic skills, so you have to reteach many skills. Besides academic skills, you have to go over basic skills dealing with morals and values before you teach your regular lessons.

**Student 3: Applications to Teaching**

I want the students to know each other as human beings and as friends. I would have different days on which to celebrate a culture. They would dress according to their

cultural background, and talk about their culture. I try to help them understand that everyone is created equal, and everyone should love and be loved.

Implications for Teaching - What was observed? This student teacher noticed: (1) that grouping was done by gender and race, and (2) that skills had to be retaught, and (3) that the teacher had to sometimes teach the difference between right and wrong.

Applications to Teaching. From the narrative, it seemed as if the co-operating teacher was using the grouping situation to teach cooperation and conflict resolution.

Other Things To Consider. The learning styles of boys and girls are very different. What is good for males is not necessarily good for females. Female students are not seen as educationally different from males - but they are. Gender is a consideration that makes a difference in American schools.

#### Excerpts from Student 4's Critical Written Analysis

##### Student 4: Implications for Teaching

The new American family values, and increased cultural diversity affects how the family is structured. Changes in American family patterns will likely influence one's interactions with students and their parents.

##### Student 4: Applications to Teaching

I would teach self esteem. I want the students to be proud of their families and who they are and where they came from.

Implications for Teaching - What was observed? Family structures have changed. These changes have brought about changes

in the student populations. Teachers know that if they are to work with the students, the families must be involved. Students must feel proud of their family. Self esteem must be fostered in the classrooms.

**Applications to Teaching.** Develop some techniques for teaching self esteem. An important issue is that if the teachers show pride in the student, they will begin to have pride in themselves. These practices must occur throughout the entire curriculum. Students must be made aware that they are capable of doing great things.

**Other Things To Consider.** The family is an integral part of the educational process. The family should be included in instruction as much as possible. Assignments can be given that involves the family participation.

**Excerpts from Student 5's Critical Written Analysis**

**Student 5: Implications for Teaching**

I find that most lower income children get less sleep, less nutritional foods, and less academic help at home. Students who came from low economic background did not seem to do as well as those from the middle economic backgrounds.

**Student 5: Applications to Teaching**

The school should try to instill cultural pride in all ethnic groups (Native American, Hispanic, African-American, Asian, etc.). I will try to invite ethnically different guest speakers. I will have different books on different cultures. I will also have different pictures in the

classroom in which all ethnic groups are represented.

Implications for Teaching - What was observed? Social-economics issues are constantly present in classrooms. They are other issues of which teachers must be aware. Many children come to school ill prepared to learn. This student teacher is recognizing the social-economic differences and the cultural differences of the students in the class.

Applications tin Classroom. This student teachers made efforts to address the deficiencies seen in the missing cultural aspect. The social and economic components must also be addressed in the classroom. These issues are very difficult to deal with. However, the student teacher can use every opportunity to train students to empathize with each other.

Other Things to Consider. The classroom is a miniature world. Many times, the child's only opportunity to learn something needed to exist in the world, will be in that classroom. Anti-racist education, cooperation, empathy, conflict resolution are sometimes only taught in the classrooms.

Excerpts from Student 6's Critical Written Analysis

**Student 6: Implications for Teaching**

If I am to handle cultural diversity in the classroom, I must know something about my students.

**Student 6: Applications to Teaching**

I have to organize my classroom and provide activities where the educationally sound students interact with the academically weak students, so that no one feels different

or left out. I'd like to have group project involving everyone, in which students can learn to interact with each other.

Implications For Teaching - What was observed? A teacher must always be aware of the problems that children bring to school.

Applications to Teaching. Involving students in group interactions is important. Students learn how to relate to each other. They learn how to accept others' viewpoints.

Other Things To Consider. An important outcome of a child's education should be critical thinking and conflict resolution. Group interactions in the classrooms are excellent ways to train students in these skills.

#### Excerpts from Student 7's Critical Written Analysis

##### **Student 7: Implications for Teaching**

A child who comes from a poor family, has little parental guidance or supervision of home studies does not feel that school is a priority. A student who is deprived of basic needs is virtually unable to concentrate on school studies. The students who stay up extremely late at night, do not come to class prepared to learn.

##### **Student 7: Applications to Teaching**

It is essential for any teacher in the classroom to be equipped to cope with the many dimensions of student diversity. Students who are hungry, lacking sleep, uncertain of where he and his family will sleep for the

night, cannot concentrate on lessons being presented.

Teachers must be aware of the problems that many of these children face. This is a first step in dealing with cultural diversity.

Implications for Teaching - What was observed? Economics issues and family problems constantly affect students. Sometimes the teacher is not able to handle these problems alone. That is why it is important to make referrals to human service agencies.

Applications to Teaching. The first step in dealing with a problem is recognizing that it exist. A teacher may not be able to handle all of the students' problems, but by the very fact that the teacher is trying, the student may learn how to help someone else through the teachers' efforts. A child can learn kindness, tolerance, understanding, patience, and co-operation from the example of a teacher.

Other Things to Consider. Education does not only involve the transference of factual knowledge. Education involves the whole child. We must make a point of trying to teach the child spiritually, morally, psychologically, and physically. Many times, a teacher can do this through the little actions in the classroom.

#### Excerpts from Student 8's Critical Written Analysis

##### Student 8: Implications for Teaching

In every class, there are differences in students. There are social and economic differences, racial and cultural differences. Some students are handicapped, and some speak

different languages. All these factors must be looked at in educating the students.

#### **Student 8: Applications to Teaching**

I would try to do my best to provide my students with things that help them learn. I would try to be patient and repeat things. I would try to make my lessons interesting, and vary the type of instruction to accommodate the learning styles of the children.

Implications for Teaching - What was observed? This student noticed that (1) classroom management of the classroom conditions, and (2) diversity as it relates to students' physical and language differences.

Applications to Teaching. In classrooms with children who have physical and language differences, the teacher must first accommodate the learning styles of all the students in the class. Students must be taught to deal with each others differences in an open manner. We must create a caring community within the classroom. Classrooms in which there are students with physical handicaps and language differences offer opportunities to teacher "global education" - that is, students can be taught of the multi-diversities of others (gender, health, physical and mental abilities, lifestyles, family structure, class, economic status, etc.)

Other Things to Consider. The learning style of each and every child must be considered. It will not always be possible for the teacher to accommodate all children with each lesson, but

an effort must be made to include as many as possible in lessons.

Excerpts from Student 9's Critical Written Analysis

**Student 9: Implications for Teaching**

Cultural diversity can help to provide the understanding and insight needed for more effective instruction. Recognizing diverse needs will help me to better understand students' behaviors and perhaps increase my insights on how to respond.

**Student 9: Applications to Teaching**

One of my biggest challenges as a teacher will be to provide a variety of experiences and learning encounters to accommodate the learning styles and abilities of my diverse class of students. Schools and teachers provide an anchor or a source of stability for students experiencing rapid change in their lives. I would have some methods to deal with having some basic idea of how to produce a society with understanding.

Implications for Teaching - What was observed? Student teacher 9 sees the important of recognizing the diversity of students and making efforts to respond to student differences.

Applications to Teaching. (1) Varying learning activities to meet differences is very important. (2) Working to produce a society with understanding is necessary if these students are to make contributions to the world community.

Other Things to Consider. Producing a society with understanding begins in the classroom. Students must be taught

how to deal with different viewpoints. They must be given moral training so that they will be able to make good choices. Group activities can encompass these skills.

**Excerpts from Student 10's Critical Written Analysis**

**Student 10: Implications for Teaching**

Teachers do not express the important of teaching students about other cultures. As teachers, we have the responsibility of making sure that students understand each other's culture, and not only the culture, but the person. It is up to us to let them know when someone is experiencing discrimination. Students should understand that each culture has made a mark on society.

**Student 10: Applications to Teaching**

Students must receive more than text book education. Each month, I would focus on a certain culture. We would discuss why different cultures do things differently. Students will learn to respect each other's opinions, contributions, and selves.

**Implications for Teaching - What was observed?** Students must get to know the cultures of others, and the contributions of each culture. They must also know each other personally. They must learn to recognize discrimination.

**Applications to Teaching.** The only place where many students will learn anti-racist education is in the classroom. The only place where students will learn to accept other view points will be in the classroom. The teacher must take every

opportunity to teach these skills.

Other Things to Consider. This student may have realized that: (1) More than academics occur in classrooms. (2) A teacher must understand the problems that a child brings to class. (3) The classroom is a training center for how students will react in society. and (4) Just as prejudice can be taught, so can cooperation and conflict resolution.

#### Summary

This study was one attempt to add to the theoretical literature on the education of teachers as reflective and responsive professionals. Issues involving diversity among student populations require teachers to become positive participants in the events that shape students' lives. Excerpts of preservice teachers' observations of diversity in schools suggest that this domain of knowledge is highly valued by this group of education majors.

Much the ten students' observations were biased by their personal knowledge of education and schooling. This was expected since they had not completed any of their professional and specialty education courses. It is acknowledged that knowledge of students' cultural diversity can't be imposed. Rather, such knowledge must be experienced. Thus the pedagogical and methodological conditions employed supported this supposition.

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