The Role of Teacher Education Programs in Creating Culturally Competant Teachers

a Moral Imperative for Ensuring the Academic Success of Diverse Student Populations

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Introduction

Public education, while still coping with the implications of an accountability system mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), is facing yet another "unprecedented challenge" (D'Angelo & Dixey, 2001) that has far-reaching implications. The increasing diversity of the student populations served by public education systems is already having an adverse affect on overall student achievement and is forcing more and more educators to question their own beliefs and prejudices.

Since many researchers have suggested that the cultural dissonance that exists between home and school is a contributor to poor educational outcomes (Artiles, Trent, Hoffman-Kipp, & Lopez-Torrez, 2000; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007), it is reasonable to infer that if we are to "increase student success, it is imperative that teachers help students bridge that discontinuity" (Allen & Boykin, 1992).

There is evidence that suggests public education is failing to reach our culturally and linguistically diverse student population, particularly those with and at risk for disabilities, including disproportionate academic underachievement, special education referrals, and disciplinary actions

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(Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). An eruption of social consciousness and moral seriousness has occurred about the "savage inequalities" faced by minorities and poor children in so many of America's urban schools today (Kea & Utley, 1998).

Given the prediction that, by the year 2050, American society will be composed of 53% White, 25% Hispanic, 14% Black, 8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian (D'Angelo & Dixey, 2001), the imperative for public education systems to begin addressing the needs of diverse student populations is evident. The need may be even more pressing in Louisiana, where the K-12 student population currently consists of 50.1% White students and 45.4% Black students; the remainder of the student body is composed of Asian (1.4%), Hispanic (2.4%), and American Indian (0.8%) students (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007).

Even while it is clear that culturally and linguistically diverse students have the greatest need for quality instructional programs, many researchers argue that they are less likely to be taught with the most effective evidence-based instruction. Banks (2002) contends that the challenges facing educators in meeting the needs of multicultural students (for the purposes of this article, multicultural refers to culturally and linguistically diverse students, including those with and at risk for disabilities, as well as socioeconomically disadvantaged students) is of highest importance.

The current literature is replete with calls for the need for more culturally competent teachers embracing a culturally responsive pedagogy (Artiles, et. al, 2000; Brown, 2007; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). Given that teachers' lack of awareness of their own limited cultural competence regarding minority and diverse students inhibits the use of effective practices with students and families from diverse backgrounds (Correa, Blanes-Reyes, & Rapport, 1996), and that what teachers perceive, believe, say, and do can disable or empower multicultural students with or without disabilities, the need to elevate cultural awareness among educators seems self-evident.

Cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competency will help both preservice and inservice teachers to understand the sociopolitical problems facing multicultural students in the educational system (e.g., high drop-out rates, low standardized test performance, overrepresentation in special education, etc.) (Kea & Utley, 1998).

An unfortunate convergence of factors (increasing diversity among student populations, lack of cultural awareness among educators, and the resultant negative consequences) in modern classrooms requires that teacher preparation programs in particular recognize their moral and ethical responsibility to reconceptualize multicultural education as it relates to preservice teachers. Banks (1992) defines multicultural education as a reform move-

ment designed to bring about educational equity for all students, including those from different races, ethnic groups, social classes, exceptionality, and sexual orientation.

Although most teacher education programs (TEPs) incorporate multicultural education into their course offerings, evidence suggests that these efforts have not been sufficient to keep pace with the changing public school student populations. Challenges facing educators in meeting the needs of multicultural students include, but are not limited to, developing cultural awareness, identifying pedagogical approaches, and adjusting curriculum content (Banks, 2005).

Further, Brown (2007) argues that teacher education programs should continue to build on the current knowledge bases that contain the special knowledge, skills, processes, and experiences essential for preparing teachers to be successful when teaching students from diverse backgrounds and to use that knowledge to prepare teachers for today's classrooms. Unfortunately, TEPs are expected to prepare mostly White teachers to work with the increasingly diverse student population and to address the chronic and pervasive low academic performance of these students. Special education teachers are particularly impacted as they face the challenge of working in an educational setting where there is an overrepresentation of ethnic minority students while also experiencing a drastic change in their role as they are now expected to work collaboratively with general education teachers in inclusive settings.

Accepting the moral and ethical need for improvement, the question that TEPs must answer is how should they address the demands stemming from the changing demographics, the changing professional roles and identities, and an increase in poor student outcomes? A review of the current literature may provide a framework for a teacher education program model that successfully prepares preservice teachers to confidently enter today's classrooms.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

If the vision of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is to be realized in the face of changing student demographics, then TEPs must embrace and instill in preservice teachers the concept of a culturally responsive pedagogy. Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) state that a culturally responsive pedagogy facilitates and supports the achievement of all students. In a culturally responsive classroom, effective teaching and learning occur in a cultur-

ally supported, learner-centered context, whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student development (p. 64). In order to better describe ways in which TEPs can adapt current practices to achieve this goal, the model I will propose here will be presented within the context of the three dimensions suggested by Richards, et. al. (2007).

Culturally responsive pedagogy comprises three dimensions: (a) *institutional,* (b) *personal,* and (c) *instructional*. The institutional dimension reflects the administration and its policies and values. The personal dimension refers to the cognitive and emotional processes teachers must engage in to become culturally responsive. The instructional dimension includes materials, strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction.

Although many TEPs have been redesigned in an effort to address the challenges facing educators today, such efforts are hampered by the persistence of practices that are counter to the concept of a culturally responsive pedagogy. For example, many teacher educators promote the importance of constructivist and student-centered teaching practices while basing their own pedagogy on the traditional teacher-centered transmission models of teaching and learning, thereby negating the preservice teachers' potential to serve as a change agent when they move into a K-12 classroom.

In addition, in an effort to promote awareness about student diversity, many teacher educators will identify "typical" cultural features of different ethnic groups, thereby implying a monolithic and harmonious view of culture. This emphasis on single group studies does not lead to meaningful treatment of cultural diversity when teacher education students begin teaching, as they will opt instead for the "tourist approach," focusing mainly on superficial features of a culture (e.g., music, food, and celebrations).

Most of what is written about special education focuses on individualized instruction and student ability levels. Therefore special education tends to deal with cultural diversity in the same way. Furthermore, when preservice and novice teachers, who are mostly from White middle-class backgrounds, work in urban schools where the racial makeup is mostly comprised of poor students from diverse backgrounds, the result is an exacerbation of the problem as the experience serves to confirm their erroneous preconceived notions and beliefs about these students. It is interesting to note that multicultural

TEPs have reported a resistance ranging from passive-aggressiveness to open defiance and blatant racism from preservice teachers exposed to culturally responsive pedagogical methodologies.

Institutional Dimension
Setting the Stage
for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) purport that in order to make institutions more culturally responsive, attention must be given to affecting change in at least three specific areas: (a) organization of the school, (b) school policies and procedures, and (c) community involvement.

To illustrate, organization of the school, as it relates to diversity, refers to the use of physical space in planning schools and arranging classrooms, while school policies and procedures refers to policies and practices that directly impact the delivery of services to students from diverse backgrounds. At the same time, community involvement is concerned with the institutional approach that currently places the burden on families and communities to seek out ways to become involved in school rather than the school seeking to become more connected.

Although all three aspects of the institution must become more culturally responsive, of particular interest is the allocation of resources impacting school policies and procedures, forcing us to ask the hard questions such as where the best teachers are to be assigned and which students will have access to advanced courses, etc. These institutional reforms must certainly occur in order to create a culturally responsive environment that fosters the personal and instructional changes that are also necessary.

If transformation is to be realized, according to Brown (2007), partnerships between school districts and university faculty that provide professional development comprised of mentoring, supporting, and evaluating teachers' abilities to practice culturally responsive and differentiated instruction must become a reality. Schools that have been successfully transformed exhibit characteristics such as viewing diversity as an asset of the school, providing staff development on best practices for teaching students with and without disabilities from diverse backgrounds and providing teachers with opportunities to collaboratively explore best practices in culturally responsive pedagogy while resisting political pressures for exempting students from taking tests and pressure to teach to the test.

Additionally, Bazron, Osher, and

Fleischman (2005) suggest that culturally responsive schools set high expectations and provide a scaffold of support for students, as opposed to tracking them into low-level classes. These schools also provide direct instruction in the hidden curriculum while cultivating culturally rich environments that allow students and teachers to connect with one another, which contributes to the creation of a classroom community.

Personal Dimension
How do Teachers Become Culturally Responsive?

Culturally responsive teachers believe that culture deeply influences the way children learn and, when given the responsibility of teaching students from diverse backgrounds, their attitudes reflect an appreciation of the cultural, linguistic, and social characteristics of each of their students. This can be very difficult, especially when students exhibit cultural characteristics that are markedly different from their own.

Gary Howard's book title (1999) sums up the problem: *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know.* This applies as much to the students themselves as it does to the subject matter. Conversely, according to Brown (2007), teachers are inadequately prepared to teach students from diverse backgrounds.

The preparation of a culturally responsive teacher includes both self-reflection as well as exploration of their personal histories and experiences. Teachers must discover for themselves who they are so that they can begin to confront biases that have influenced their value system. What teachers value directly impacts relationships with their students. Therefore, teachers must reconcile negative feelings toward any culture, language, or ethnic group.

Many times teachers are resistant to admitting that they possess prejudices toward certain groups. However, through self-reflection, they can begin to rid themselves of those biases, thereby beginning to build trusting relationships with their students. Those trusting relationships will yield greater opportunities for student success.

The Instructional Dimension
Teaching in a Culturally Responsive Classroom Setting

As Brown (2007) suggests, school administrators, mentors, and teacher educators are faced with increasingly complex social, political, and moral issues.

Their challenge is to prepare teachers who are highly qualified to implement practices and deliver sound programs in the classroom. According to Montgomery (2001), "a culturally responsive classroom is one that specifically acknowledges the presence of culturally diverse students and the need for these students to find connections among themselves and with the subject matter and the tasks the teacher asks them to perform" (p. 4). In addition to defining a culturally responsive classroom, Montgomery provides guidelines for teachers to follow when preparing a culturally responsive classroom. These include: (a) conduct a self-assessment to determine the knowledge base of self and others' cultures, (b) use varied culturally responsive methods and materials in the classroom, (c) establish classroom environments that respect individuals and their cultures, (d) establish interactive classroom learning environments, and (e) employ ongoing and culturally aware assessments.
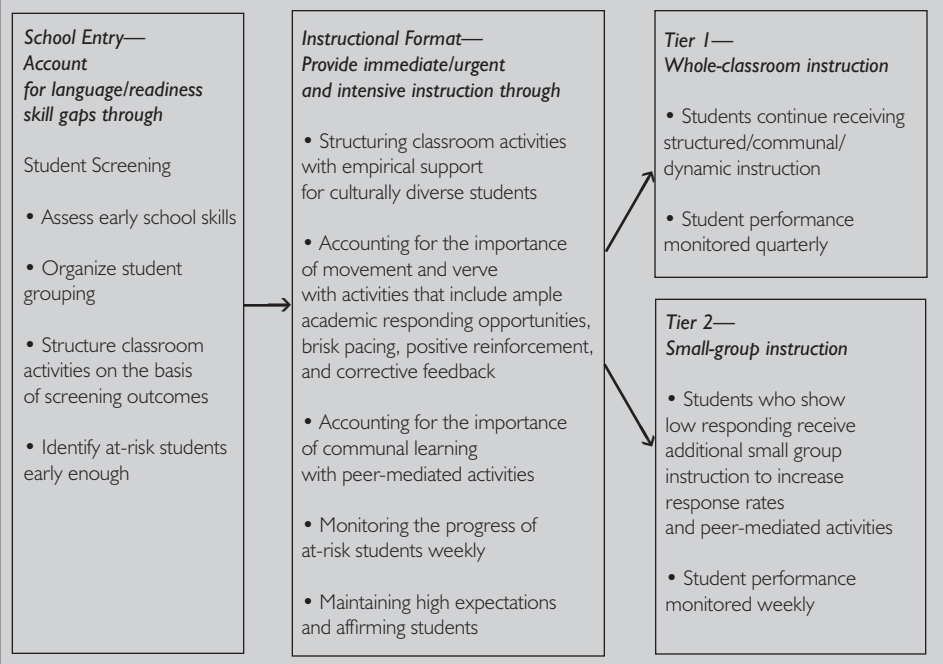
Cartledge and Kourea (2008) incorporate and expand on the aforementioned guidelines in their instructional model that emphasizes prevention, effective instruction, and pupil monitoring. Figure 1 graphically depicts this instructional model and provides a basis for further understanding of what culturally responsive instruction looks like in a classroom setting. These researchers suggest that the first important step in insuring the success of multicultural students is to identify academic and behavioral markers as early as possible and to intervene immediately (p. 356).

They base the urgency associated with this step on research findings that low-income culturally diverse students begin their formal schooling behind their more affluent peers in language and readiness skills. Specifically, their vocabulary knowledge and verbal ability are limited; they have less experience with complicated syntax, and have limited background knowledge. Without immediate identification and intervention, the alarming result is that these students systematically fall further behind as they move through the grades. Given the fact that students who fail to reach grade level in reading by the end of the third grade are unlikely to ever catch up, culturally responsive instruction demands that we intervene as early as possible with sufficient intensity and urgency to remedy existing skill gaps and to prevent further loss.

In addition to the sense of urgency exhibited in culturally responsive classrooms, a high level of pupil academic responding is also apparent. Cartledge and Kourea (2008) report that low-income students from diverse backgrounds spent "significantly less time in the classroom actively engaged in academic subjects" (p. 358). Further, Good and Nicholls (2001) found that students deemed to be less capable had lower academic response rates. Therefore, truly effective and culturally responsive instruction must actively promote high rates of

Figure 1
Components of an Effective Instructional Model for Culturally Responsive Classrooms

School Entry—
Account
for language/readiness skill gaps through

Student Screening

• Assess early school skills

• Organize student grouping

• Structure classroom activities on the basis of screening outcomes

• Identify at-risk students early enough

Instructional Format—
Provide immediate/urgent and intensive instruction through

• Structuring classroom activities with empirical support for culturally diverse students

• Accounting for the importance of movement and verve with activities that include ample academic responding opportunities, brisk pacing, positive reinforcement, and corrective feedback

• Accounting for the importance of communal learning with peer-mediated activities

• Monitoring the progress of at-risk students weekly

• Maintaining high expectations and affirming students

Tier 1—
Whole-classroom instruction

• Students continue receiving structured/communal/dynamic instruction

• Student performance monitored quarterly

Tier 2—
Small-group instruction

• Students who show low responding receive additional small group instruction to increase response rates and peer-mediated activities

• Student performance monitored weekly

observable and measurable responses (e.g., words per minute read aloud, math facts completed correctly, etc.).

Several strategies for promoting active student responses have been identified. For example, Heward (2006) suggests response cards, choral responding, and guided notes are effective. With research indicating that increased response rates result in increases in correct responding and a reduction in disruptive behavior, it is apparent that both teachers and students in culturally responsive classrooms directly benefit from the increased academic responding.

Other characteristics of the culturally responsive classroom, as described by Carteledge and Kourea (2008) find their basis in effective instruction and include:

(a) appropriate pacing—a brisk instruction pace that includes three-second intervals from student responses to the next task improves student learning and reduces the incidence of off-task and disruptive behavior;

(b) timely feedback—teachers correct errors immediately, frequently, explicitly, and directly;

(c) constant academic monitoring—teachers link their explicit instructions with student performance using brief, short, valid assessments that enable them to obtain a comprehensive and reliable picture of their students' skill strengths and weaknesses; and,

(d) building a community of learners—teachers should work to create positive environments that is, a community of learners focused on helping others as well as themselves.

Implications for Teacher Education Programs

Future teachers must be able to create equitable learning environments for diverse student populations (Bennet, 1995). Unfortunately, TEPs often fail to encourage candidates to expand their vision of culturally responsive pedagogy beyond academic material to include classroom management and student discipline. Teacher preparation and professional development programs that remain innocent community-based practices for African-American students risk perpetuating approaches that have little relevance for students who are most at risk for disciplinary action.

The problem facing educators, then, is

that multicultural education in the professional preparation of teachers typically is not integrated in a thorough, persistent, and overt way in program requirements (Grant, 1994). Much of the problem can be attributed to the fact that many teacher educators themselves are not all that comfortable with multicultural education (Jung, 1997). Nevertheless, if the future vision of public education includes insuring that all students experience instruction from a culturally responsive teacher, then the responsibility for accomplishing that goal lies squarely on the shoulders of the TEPs that produce the teachers of the future. Therefore, it must be a clear and important

goal for TEPs that their programs produce *culturally competent* teachers.

Singh (1996) defined the culturally competent person as one who has knowledge and skills that enable him or her to appreciate, value, and celebrate similarities and differences within, between, and among culturally diverse groups of people. TEPs and professional development programs can facilitate the process of achieving cultural competence for preservice and inservice teachers by incorporating, in a meaningful way, a variety of experiences into their training programs.

Specifically, these programs need to provide opportunities to engage in reflec-

Table I
Important Aspects of Programs That Produce Culturally Responsive Teachers

Important Aspect	Program Elements
1. Develop a culturally diverse knowledge base	a. Understand the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups
	b. Look at one's own attitudes and practices (Montgomery, 2001).
	c. Know ethnic groups' cultural values, traditions, communication and learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns (Gay, 2002).
	d. Know how to use multicultural instructional strategies and add multicultural content to the curriculum (Gay, 2002).
2. Design culturally relevant curricula.	a. Be able to identify the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum designs and instructional materials.
	b. Make changes as necessary to improve the overall quality of the curricula.
	c. Be conscious of the power of curricula (format, symbolic, media/societal) as an instrument of teaching, and use it to help convey important information, values, and actions about ethnic and cultural diversity.
3. Demonstrate cultural caring and build a learning community.	a. Use cultural scaffolding – that is, students' cultures and experiences—to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievement.
	b. Create reciprocity in the classroom, in which students and teachers become partners to improve student learning.
	c. Build communities among learners. In which the welfare of the group takes precedence over the individual.
	d. Emphasize holistic or integrated learning. Rather than making different types of learning (cognitive, physical, and emotional) discrete, culturally responsive teachers deal with them in concert.
4. Build effective cross-cultural communications.	a. Be able to decipher students' cultural codes (the way students' intellectual thoughts are coded) to teach them more effectively.
5. Deliver culturally responsive instruction	a. Be able to multiculturalize (match instructional techniques to the learning styles of students from culturally diverse backgrounds) your teaching.

tive thinking and writing and to explore personal and family histories. In addition, these programs need to help participants to acknowledge their membership in different groups while assessing how membership in one group influences the ways they relate to and view other groups. Rich field experiences that provide opportunities to visit successful teachers in diverse settings must be an integral part of any TEP that hopes to produce the level of cultural competence that is necessary to insure that culturally responsive teaching will occur in the classrooms of the future.

If the ethical responsibility of TEPs is to prepare preservice and inservice teachers who can work effectively with students from diverse backgrounds, i.e., culturally competent teachers, then a framework for the design of effective teacher preparation programs is needed to guide the complete redesign of some programs as well as the continued refinement of others who have made progress toward achieving cultural competence as an expected outcome of their program. Gay (2002) has provided an excellent starting point for the development of that framework by identifying several important aspects of programs that promote culturally responsive pedagogy that yields culturally competent program completers. Table 1 provides an overview of these important aspects.

Conclusion

Given the ever increasing diversity of the student population in public education classrooms, and the devastating impact on those students if future teachers enter the profession without the cultural competence necessary to ensure students successes, TEPs have a moral imperative to reconceptualize the multicultural education component of their programs. Clearly, inaction is not an option. Infusing culturally responsive pedagogical training and practices into TEPs will serve to ensure that that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability.

As Cateledge and Kourea (2008) state, achieving success in creating culturally responsive classrooms is "a transformative process of the American educational system" (p. 367). The process will take some time and requires systematic, indepth research investigations of cultural markers and intervention outcomes.

As previously noted, such a transformative process must occur in the institutional, personal, and instructional dimensions. Given the extent to which TEPs impact each of those dimensions, it seems evident that the place to begin the transformation is in the programs that will produce the teachers of the future.

The purpose of this article has not been to explicitly define the ways in which TEPs should be redesigned to embrace cultural competence as an expected outcome for all program completers. Rather, the article will hopefully serve as a beginning point for the self-reflection that must occur within every teacher educator and as a basis for continuing discussions among university faculty as they begin or continue the process of redesigning their programs to be more inclusive of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Finally, TEPs must seek out collaborative partnerships with K-12 schools to support the change process within the schools among inservice teachers. In addition, TEPS can benefit from the rich field experiences, opportunities for case studies, and experiential learning that could further enhance the preservice teacher's educational experience and increase the likelihood that the program will produce the culturally competent teachers necessary to provide all students with the equal opportunity for academic success that is their right.

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