

Multicultural Competence: A Literature Review Supporting Focused Training for Preservice Teachers Teaching Diverse Students

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Abstract

This paper focuses on an in depth literature review based on preservice teachers perceptions of their multicultural competence in teaching diverse students. More specifically, the literature review was framed around findings from a study looking at the gap between increased diversity of students and the level of multicultural competence of preservice teachers at a local university was investigated in this qualitative case study. Inductive data analysis results indicated that preservice teachers perceived a need for additional multicultural competence including increased awareness, knowledge, and skills in working with diverse students. A professional development training workshop design was created to address four dominant themes from the analysis. The literature review supports the prominent components addressed by the professional development training workshop. Adequately preparing preservice teachers for teaching diverse students continues as a focus in teacher preparation programs. As a faculty member at the local university, school of education, ongoing research focused on building preservice teachers multicultural competence remains essential.

Keywords: multicultural competence, diverse students, preservice teacher, awareness, knowledge, skills.

1. Introduction

A recent qualitative case study focused on how pre-service teachers characterized their multicultural competence in teaching diverse students (Lehman, 2016). Four themes emerged from the data collected and analysis of participants' experiences. The four themes centered on multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills. More specifically, theme one, "lack of practice, multicultural experienced, [and] cultural blindness" (p. 105), theme two, "lack of communication skills [and] cultural understanding" (p. 105) theme three, "mentoring and collaborative practice" (p. 105), and theme four, "skills meeting diverse needs"(p. 105). This paper focuses on the literature review that supported the design of a professional development workshop training project in the Lehman's qualitative case study.

To give a brief background of Lehman's (2016) study, a focused look at the gap between increased cultural diversity of students in K-12 public schools and preservice teachers' multicultural competence was researched. The problem identified was found in current student and teacher statistical reports at local and national levels, researched professional literature, and personal conversations with experienced hired teachers. The findings indicated what teacher preparation programs need to revisit continually with preservice teachers' training.

The diverse student population continues to rise according to reports from professional organizations. A report from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2013), indicated a rise of diverse teachers entering the teaching field over the past five years. Although the diverse teacher population has risen, the rise of diverse K-12 student population continues to remain ahead of the diverse teacher hire. A look at local public school districts websites confirmed the rise of the diversity of students attending those schools. The local public school reflects what professional organizations have identified.

Teacher ethnicity reported at local and national levels remain less diverse than diverse K-12 student populations. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2013) reported during 2009-2010, bachelor's degrees in education remained high to White candidates and lower to other diverse candidates. Ethnic populations of teachers in K-12 classrooms at local and national levels continue to reflect national reports.

The K-12 student population continues to reflect a fast growing number of foreign-born residents (He, 2013). The student population represent numerous countries around the world. Pang (2013) agreed with He and included linguistic diversity proved challenging. With the numerous languages represented in diverse K-12 classrooms, many times the native language of the teacher did not match. The diversity of the K-12 student population brought new challenges for teacher preparation programs.

Teacher preparation programs need to reevaluate the challenges facing preservice teacher for teaching diverse K-12 students. Courses offered preservice teacher candidates in undergraduate programs often include multicultural education courses. The concern Miller and Mikulec (2014) expressed about multicultural education courses was lack of depth and explanations. Dedeoglu and Lamme (2011) previously concluded that

preservice teachers needed more cross-cultural training and experiences. A preservice teachers' personal cultural seldom matched the diverse K-12 learners in classrooms. Preparing preservice teachers for multicultural competence remained the responsibility of the teacher preparation programs.

The rationale Lehman (2016) stated for the qualitative case study developed at the local university. Identification of a gap between increased cultural diversity of K-12 students and preservice teachers' preparation. The local university teacher preparation program lacked qualitative or quantitative data focused on multicultural competence of preservice teachers. Personal conversations with previous graduates from the local university teacher preparation program revealed lack of multicultural competence training as undergraduates. Hired teachers in the local school district serving as mentors for the teacher preparation program witnessed preservice teachers' lesson plans lacking support for cultural diverse students in their class. Lessons represented a monoculture design and lacked the use of various instructional strategies to help diverse learners.

In addition to the local findings of a gap between increased cultural diversity of K-12 students and preservice teachers' preparation, professional literature on teacher preparation and multicultural competence supported the rationale for Lehman's (2016) qualitative case study. In the course of a teaching career, teachers work with many different cultural groups and need to find ways to help K-12 students succeed.

Zozakiewicz (2010) and DeVillar and Jiang (2012) "identified a gap between theory and practice, which was exacerbated by three areas of deficiency among preservice teachers" (Lehman, 2016). The areas of deficiency centered on lack of knowledge, personal and professional experiences, and lack of confidence working with diverse student populations (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Zozakiewicz, 2010). Diversity in a classroom setting impacts how teachers plan and teach.

The significance of the qualitative case study findings informed a local teacher preparation program. The findings benefit the local teacher preparation program and local school districts in the surrounding area that hire new teacher yearly. Gay (2013) claimed improving the multicultural competence of preservice teachers would bring about social change producing "equal educational opportunities" (p. 50). The findings benefit the local teacher preparation program and the local communities giving rise to social change and social equality.

2. Literature Review

The following literature review supports a designed professional development training workshop project based on the findings from Lehman (2016) research. The literature review focused on the four themes identified after the data collection and analysis of participants' experiences. Themes centered on multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills. More specifically, theme one, "lack of practice, multicultural experience, [and] cultural blindness" (Lehman 2016, p. 105), theme two, "lack of communication skills [and] cultural understanding" (p. 105) theme three, "mentoring and collaborative practice" (p. 105), and theme four, "skills meeting diverse needs"(p. 105). Moving forward, the reference to *participants* refers to preservice teachers that participated in Lehman's (2016) research.

2.1 Theme 1, Lack of Practice, Multicultural Experienced, Cultural Blindness

Lack of multicultural awareness emerged as a theme during data collection. More specifically, lack of communicating classroom instructional strategies for the diverse student population. Ho-Kyung, Seong Woo, and JuSung (2015) explained instructors influenced students' academic growth either positively or negatively with stated expectations. In cases of diverse students, the instructors' expectations may come from cultural prejudice or lack of cultural understanding (Ho-Kyung et al., 2015). Ho-Kyung et al. continued to surmise that instructors' misunderstandings or negative stereotypes of a diverse population evolved from instructors "living as part of the majority" (p. 112) and a renewed perception needed to occur.

Clark and Zygmunt (2014) suggested teachers' awareness of personal biases or embedded subconscious bias, resulted in students' marred educational experiences. Participants reported personal assumptions how they learned was how everyone learned was incorrect. Clark and Zygmunt also expressed the importance of teacher self-awareness. Changes needed to take place to avoid "the potential for inequitable interaction and practice" (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014, p. 148) that would fall back to a diverse student population. Participants voiced the lack of personal awareness of other cultures and cultural practices was both personally and professionally concerning for future classroom assignments. In addition, participants did not want to unknowingly mislead students who were diverse by the simple lack of knowing. Multicultural awareness prefaced multicultural knowledge and skills.

Participants in the study provided evidence from shared experiences that additional multicultural experiences were needed to enhance developing multicultural competence. Minick and Seeberg (2012) pointed out that as teacher educators are expected to prepare future teachers "who are competent in helping learners function in a globalizing reality" (p. 1) abstract training cannot exist. Active engagement with the world provided more direct experiences (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011) rather than just learning about them (Minick & Seeberg, 2012).

According to Schellen and King (2014), little research literature existed on teacher education programs providing multiple multicultural opportunities for students entering the teaching field. Schellen and King verified that the focus of most literature examined benefited field experiences, in general, terms and little on the amount or types of experiences. Findings in the study revealed personal experiences from two preservice teacher interns were not similar to culturally different students in their field placements. Expectations of parents differed from culture to culture concerning the academic achievements for children. Participants expressed a need for additional experiences with a diverse student population.

Cultural blindness and color blindness exist synonymous in the literature about cultural competence. Ford (2014) explained viewing different racial or cultural groups as same contributed to culture blindness, also known as color blindness (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011). Pang et al. (2011) identified cultural blindness as individuals not recognizing culture differences existed. Neville, Yeung, Todd, Spanierman, and Reed (2011) described cultural blindness as lacking cultural sensitivity. Herczog (2012) discussed cultural blindness occurred when teachers selected content and resources assuming the materials met all students' needs. With cultural blindness [color blindness] sharing similar descriptions in multicultural competence literature, the contribution varied.

Cultural blindness contributes to faulted results. Cultural blindness appeared to conceal identities, history, and legacies (Boutte et al., 2011). An intentional calculation to ignore what is evident. Wang, Castro, and Cunningham (2014) indicated that ignoring privileges and disadvantage related to cultural differences had been common practices for some time. By confronting cultural blindness and allowing for a diverse population to emerge, preservice teachers growth in multicultural competence would diminish such experiences. Cultural blindness masks the value of the created lesson for all students.

2.2 Theme 2, Multicultural Knowledge, Commination Skills, Culture, Cultural Perspective, and Culturally Diverse Parenting.

Multicultural Knowledge emerged as an additional theme during data collection. More directly, lack of mentoring and collaborative experiences. Able, Ghulamani, Mallous, and Glazier (2014) stated that teacher education programs for years operated under the notion if teacher candidates were instructed about diversity and cultural differences that personal beliefs would transition into "culturally responsive practice"(p. 7) for the good of student learning. Unfortunately, teacher preparation programs offer isolated courses far removed from field experiences where direct experience took place (Able et al., 2014). Epstein (2013) claimed a gap between "knowing and doing" (p. 115) impeded creating family connections to schools. A participant in the study shared the experience of lacking knowledge and how the situation almost occurred due to the lack of knowledge of religious and cultural celebrations of a student in the class. Developing an ongoing knowledge of multicultural components and building on that knowledge is a valued aspect of preservice teachers' training.

Preservice teachers need effective communication skills. Chuang (2013) claimed for business leaders to be successful in an intercultural workplace effective communication skills were needed. Chuang's idea of effective communication skills in business could affect teachers and education settings too. Effective communication skills are not always in place, and language barriers exist. According to Language Barriers in the Workplace (2015), "90 percent of organizations struggle with language barriers" (p. 13) each day in the workplace and the problem has the potential to increase with globalization. Preservice teachers experience the same communication problems working with a diverse student population. A participant shared, a parent brought a birth certificate of one of their children to school to comply with a school requirement and the situation ended in confusion and frustration all centered around the language barrier that existed between the parent and the school official. The same language barrier scenario can occur in the classroom as well. Salerno and Kibler (2013) noted teachers not trained in English Language Learning might misunderstand students' silence. Students' silence could indicate lack of cognitive or first-language use and become an academic hindrance. Communication is valuable to understanding culturally diverse families and students.

Customs among a diverse student population vary within today's classrooms. A participant shared differences the students in her class learned about a traditional holiday feast that did not reflect the same found in other cultures. Ford, Stuart, and Vakil (2014) and Bruehler (2014) noted most teachers and administrators lived in communities that do not represent the students they work with daily. The differences further highlight disconnectedness with students and their cultures and customs (Ford et al., 2014). Üselytè and Pivorienè (2013) claimed cultural origin contained a viable aspect of multicultural competence and permitted comparing one's culture with other's culture. Deeper understanding of culture provided a preservice teacher a base to establish multicultural competence.

Cultural perspective differs from teachers and parents in regards to student learning. For a preservice teacher to plan learning experiences for students' success, parents' cultural beliefs and viewpoints need to be considered (Lashley, 2012). By teachers actively listening to parents, the perspective of parents was that their child had a caring teacher. Teachers gain the buy-in of parents based on listening skills (Lashley, 2012).

Winterbottom and Leedy (2014) claimed teachers needed to culturally scaffold to gain a better knowledge of a student needs with parents help. Nelson and Guerra (2014) stated many teacher preparation programs had implemented multicultural education courses meeting accreditation requirements, but few achieved programs that reflect a truly transformed perspective that deepens understanding for preservice teachers. Participants shared that not all culturally diverse parents placed the same emphasis on academics as the educators. For some culturally diverse parents, stronger emphasis is on sports or music. Cultural perspectives vary and preservice teachers benefit from established teacher-parent relationships for the purpose of understanding.

Preservice teachers assigned to a diverse student population work with culturally diverse parents. Sukhbaatar (2014) claimed for teacher-parent relationships to take place, teachers needed to be the first to start the process. Communication played a vital role in parent involvement (Sukhbaatar, 2014). When parents had different backgrounds from the teachers, parents felt less connected and frustrated (Sukhbaatar, 2014). Taking an interest in family structure, the family celebrated traditions, and background needed to be first steps in planning for parent involvement and student success.

Riley, Gichuru, and Robertson (2012) stated families are the primary transmitters of the family cultural practices and beliefs. One of the participants experienced this first hand as a culturally diverse mother insisted her child kiss the cheek of the teacher as a greeting each class. The preservice teacher was unaccustomed to the tradition and needed to work with the parent to communicate the wish that the child refrain from that type of greeting. The preservice teacher expressed the uncomfortable nature of the matter. The relationship between teacher and parents benefits all students in the classroom.

2.3 Theme 3, Multicultural Skill, Mentoring and Collaboration

Multicultural skills develop from individuals' cultural awareness and cultural knowledge. Participants shared experiences, indicated personal teaching skills were weak, and additional training was needed to teach a diverse student population. Reviewed lesson plans and class profiles additionally identified the need for skills training. Povenmire-Kirk, Bethune, Alverson, and Gutmann Kahn (2015) stated the goal of becoming culturally competent centered on developing a skill set. The skill set would assist educators to draw from culturally appropriate strategies in working with students and families from multiple backgrounds. Development of multicultural skills attributes to the learning processes preservice teachers need for success. Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989) identified five basic skill areas for multicultural teaching. Cross's et al. five basic skill areas were

- knowing and accepting of individual differences;
- being self-aware;
- awareness of the wide array of difference;
- knowing the students backgrounds; and
- adaptation of skills.

Learned multicultural skills improves personal multicultural competence in teaching a diverse student population.

Mentoring and collaboration are valued components for preservice teacher training for a diverse student population. Tareef (2013) defined mentoring relationships consisted of skilled professionals supporting and guiding others less practiced in a field. Mentoring relationships were time-consuming and evolved over time (Tareef, 2013). In the case of preservice teachers, assigned classroom teachers during practicum and internship field placements served as mentors. Participants unanimously said that the classroom mentor was the extent of their mentoring experience. Gorman, Durmowicz, Roskes, and Slattery (2010) suggested an informal approach to mentoring could accomplish the same or more in mentee's professional growth. Holland, Major, and Orvis (2012) identified a gap closing between mentors due to similar ages and positions. Mentor relationships offered value for professional growth.

Collaboration with peers and families provides growth opportunities for preservice teachers. Jones (2010) stated that effective home-school collaboration led to highly successful academic outcomes for students. Educators working with the families lessened the gap that exists between schools and homes often. Jones suggested the following characteristics identified in schools established effective collaborative partnerships with families "open communication, open-door policies, active parent associations and advisory councils, parent volunteers, an inclusive school culture, and, shared responsibility for success and failures" (p. 1) of their students. Collaboration contributed value for the educator and families.

2.4 Theme 4, Assessing Needs and Differentiated Instruction

The role of schools has changed. Schools no longer have a solitary focus on students' academic needs (Dewey & Mitchell, 2014). With cultural shifts, schools are the first to experience the effects through the students (Dewey & Mitchell, 2014). Schools face challenges of meeting academic needs as well as psychosocial needs of students (LaRocque, 2013). Needs stem from parents needs that manifest through the next generation of their children

(LaRocque, 2013). To avoid teacher dissonance from diverse students and families, schools benefit by promoting parent involvement programs (LaRocque, 2013). In many ways by meeting parent needs, student needs are minimized.

Dewey and Mitchell (2014) claimed, “it is easy for an administrator to see a child who lacks a school uniform or for a teacher to see which children are missing pencils and paper” (p. 31) while other needs are less identifiable that stem from challenges at home. Participants voiced the same sentiments that simply looking at a student does not always give teachers an accurate view of a child’s needs. The participant went even further by saying what they saw as needs might not be considered needs parents identify. Participants expressed the outward needs such as clothing might not be a need parents would identify as a need. Clothing might look worn and have signs of aging that parents considered still wearable. Undetected needs can undermine children’s academic success. Working with families and involving families affords the opportunity for schools to identify and meet the needs of students and families together.

Differentiated instruction provided learners optional approaches to learning subject content. Watts-Taffe et al. (2012) defined differentiated instruction as “allows all students to access the same classroom curriculum by providing entry points, learning tasks, and outcomes tailored to students’ learning needs” (p. 304) for success. Dixon et al. (2014) added differentiating instruction offered different paths to understanding. Dixon et al. expounded by stating that different paths might lead to the understanding content, process, and products differently based on the learners needs.

My personal review of the lesson plans and class profiles in the study revealed a lack of evidence supporting Watts-Taffe et al. (2012) and Dixon et al. (2014) differentiated instruction components. Maximizing student success (Morgan, 2014) and teacher competence (Dixon et al., 2014; Grant, Lapp, Fisher, Johnson, & Frey, 2012) characterized a valuable skill learned. Tomlinson (2010) described differentiated instruction as encapsulating theory, research, and learner practices. Findings in from participants’ submitted lesson plans showed plans focused on a monoculture approach. Differentiated instruction lacked thus weakening empowerment to the learners with multiple options for learning.

Differentiated instruction benefits learners. Tobin and Tippett (2014) conducted a study looking at benefits of implementing differentiated instruction in teachers’ science classes. The study involved science teachers in a professional development setting. The findings showed teachers agreed differentiated instruction was a “practical approach to teaching science and as an educational framework” (Tobin & Tippett, 2014, p. 439) that was valued. Participants in the study shared students in field placements were more engaged and motivated when implementation of differentiated instruction was used. Tomlinson and Moon (2013) stated the main goal of differentiation was “to ensure that each student has the best possible learning experiences” (p. 9) so they can achieve the most academic growth. Differentiated instruction is valued instruction for all learners.

3 Discussion

The focus of this literature review supports the professional development workshop training project based on data collections from Lehman (2016) research. Local preservice teachers’ experiences with multicultural competence for teaching diverse students was the focus of the doctoral study. After data was collected and analysis was conducted, a three day professional development training project was designed to address the findings. This literature review supports the four broad themes identified by participants and their multicultural competence for teaching diverse students. The four broad themes were:

1. Lack of practice, experience, and cultural blindness.
2. Lack of communication skills and cultural understanding.
3. Mentoring and collaborative practice.
4. Skills meeting diverse needs.

Education aims at preparing today’s children for the future. Zhao (2010) described education as a “future-oriented business” (p. 422) focused on developing the next generation of individuals for labor and service in local, state, national, and international settings. For the most part, education has served at the local level, funded by local or national taxes, supporting the local communities (Zhao, 2010). This concept of local is now considered a thing of the past (Zhao, 2010). Globalization poses challenges for K-12 teachers and teacher educators (Herrera, 2012). Educating today’s children for the future entails a broader focus.

Part of the broader focus in education includes curriculum and instruction. Herrera (2012) saw the course of curriculum and instruction in the United States being contested by the need for “(a) preparedness for global competition; (b) global competence with diversity; and (c) capacity building for global citizenship” (p. 1). Each of these challenges points teachers and teacher educators to the need for students to acquire the skills, knowledge and dispositions that would help them become responsible global citizens. With the disappearance of boundaries due to globalization, communities are now multicultural, and that reflects the student population in public schools (Aydin & Tonbuloglu, 2015). Teacher and teacher educators must impart a cultural sensitivity and equality to all students as they teach or prepare to teach.

Saunders et al. (2015) described developing cultural competence as an “elusive journey that likely has no destination” (p. 20) meaning it is a journey that covers a life time and never completed. Designing a professional development workshop training curriculum and materials for use with preservice teachers meets the ongoing need to develop culturally responsive teachers for equality when teaching diverse students. The peer reviewed materials supporting the four broad themes outlined, provided support for the creation of a professional development training workshop that focused on participants concerns identified in the data collection.

4. Conclusion

Strengthening preservice teachers multicultural competence for teaching diverse students is necessary in today’s global society. The literature reviewed supports the need for an ongoing training of preservice teachers preparing for the K-12 public school student populations. The significance of addressing the four themes identified by participants in Lehman’s (2016) study would potentially produce value to universities colleges or schools of education and local school districts for supporting social change.

The literature review supported the emerged themes during Lehman’s (2016) data collection. More specifically, theme one, multicultural awareness [lack of practice], multicultural experience, and cultural blindness. The reviewed literature identified such components as having more varied multicultural experiences, identifying personal cultural blindness, and simply just gathering more background on students could help with lack of multicultural awareness.

Theme two was multicultural knowledge. The knowledge might be built upon better family connections. Connections that would lead to improved communication skills with a diverse culture. Also, culture and a better understanding of the customs of a diverse student population. Along with family connections and better understanding of the culture, gaining a deeper cultural perspective and parenting perspectives of a culturally diverse parent. Learning how all these components may interplay with developing multicultural competence of pre-service teachers.

Finally, theme three focused on skills. Participants shared that mentoring and collaboration were crucial for multicultural competence. Assessing needs of the diverse student population and learning how to differentiate instruction to all students.

Preservice teachers need to fully understand what multicultural competence fully means and have opportunities to develop the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to teach a diverse classroom of students. The focus of any teacher should be preparing their students to successfully graduate, move into the community, and work within that community as a valued citizen. This literature review is shared to bring awareness to higher education teacher preparation programs and teachers that awareness, knowledge, and skills should be ever present. Teacher preparation courses and other stakeholders training preservice teachers establish an ongoing process to better connect all students in any classroom. Possible future research might focus on the progress participating preservice teachers make post graduation and after they have taught their first year. Further follow up studies could be conducted at three and five years of teaching to identify multicultural competence growth.

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