

Chapter 29

Promoting Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Competence among Preservice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines primary issues confronting preservice teacher preparation in the US public schools. There are several issues confronting teaching and teacher education programs. However, this chapter explores cultural and linguistic diversity issues given the critical need for inclusive education. The increasing nature of demographic changes in the schools and the U.S. society also has ramifications for students' learning and preservice teacher preparation. To that end, this chapter examines efforts by organizations and educational researchers to respond to the phenomenon of demographic changes in US public schools and the need to equip teachers with competencies needed to help students become successful in schools. The author examines how one teacher education program is preparing teachers to meet the demands of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse student population. Finally, the author provides suggestions on how to improve and enhance culturally responsive pedagogical competence among preservice teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The challenges of teaching profession in a contemporary, dynamic, and diversified society are equally challenges of effective teacher education. Teacher education is supposed to prepare pre-service teachers with the experiences: knowledge, skills, attitudes needed to be successful in meeting the contemporary and emerging needs of teaching profession. Teachers need to be successful in terms of their own sense of effectiveness and ability to support the learning of all students. One of the contemporary challenges that confronts both effective teaching and teacher education in modern societies like the United State of

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1933-1.ch029

America is the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of student population. The diversity of student population is a reflection of increasing diversity in the society.

The purpose this paper was to: explore the phenomenon of increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of students population and what it implies for teacher education; examine earlier/current efforts to prepare teachers to meet the challenges of student diversity, with a teacher education program in a University at the Midwest as a case study ; and provide recommendations on how best to organize a robust teacher education program that would provide the pre-service teachers with the experiences that would enable them to effectively support learning needs of culturally and linguistically diverse student population.

TEACHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY TEACHING

There is always a need for highly qualified and competent teachers (Bartell, 2004) since teachers are very important (Haycock & Crawford, 2008) to the success of education enterprise in every country. Even in the age of technology the position of teachers in education will still be non-negotiable. As Leu (2005, p. 22), rightly posited “[i]f the school is the important functional locus of efforts for improving quality, certainly the most critical factor within the school in facilitating student learning is the teacher..”. This confirms the importance of teachers.

One of the fundamental truths in education is that, to a large extent, quality education delivery depends on the quality of teachers in the classrooms. Despite all other inputs, success of education is not guaranteed if teachers are unskilled and incompetent (Jibril, 2007). Put in this way, “[t]eacher quality is still the most powerful school-related influence on children’s academic performance” (Barnes, 2006, p. 93). Teacher quality matters because quality teaching impacts positively on students’ learning outcomes as well as their life chances. The impact of good teaching on students can even offset the effects of factors that relate to a student’s background like income, education of parents etc. (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005). The importance of quality teaching brings into focus the issue of teacher education and how best teachers are prepared to be able to support education of all learners.

What is teacher education and what does it offer? Teacher education refers to the systematic, structured, and professional training that is offered to people for them to qualify as professional teachers. Teacher learning and development is continuum and involves stages like pre-service teacher preparation, induction support, in-service professional training, and renewal (Odell, 1998). The basic purpose of teacher education is to prepare teachers to be able to function effectively in the classroom by facilitating students’ learning. What teacher education does is that, it equips teachers with the competencies, skills, and dispositions needed to function professionally and be able to effectively organize and facilitate students’ learning (Jibril, 2007) in today’s diverse classrooms.

Teaching is a profession that aims at promoting learning in a democracy and that is what teacher education ensures. Teacher education brings the vision of teaching profession (Bransford, et al., 2005) into fruition by ensuring that prospective teachers have acquired the attitudes, values, and skills needed to perform professionally and effectively, to ensure students’ learning. Teacher education ensures that prospective teachers possess adequate content-knowledge they would teach and understand the curriculum goals associated with their area of teaching. This is because teachers require strong academic background to teach. They also need to appreciate the social purpose of what they are teaching.

Teacher education program equips teachers with pedagogical skills so that they would know how to (1) teach the subject-matter, (2) teach diverse learners, (3) assess students learning progress and (4)

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