

Chapter 6

Understanding Teachers’ Cultural Competencies: Supporting the Development of Teachers’ Self–Awareness and Social Awareness

Inna N. Dolzhenko

University of North Texas, USA

Jemimah L. Young

University of North Texas, USA

ABSTRACT

As linguistic and cultural diversity in public schools continues to rise, an increased need for culturally aware teachers is warranted. This chapter informs the development of cultural competencies in teachers by integrating anti-bias education (ABE) goals into teacher preparation. Existing research in preparing teachers to work with diverse student populations tends to focus on how teachers gain appropriate knowledge and practices to work effectively at school. However, there is little evidence that researchers have approached the issue of developing teacher’s cultural competencies with the intent of building a cohesive understanding and providing practical tools, such as ABE goals, to positively influence the development of social awareness and self-awareness in teachers and their students. Consequently, the aim of this chapter is to provide empirical evidence to substantiate the instructional importance of understanding the development of teacher’s cultural competencies.

INTRODUCTION

Social-emotional learning is based on self-awareness and social awareness. The ability to accurately identify and interpret the feelings and thoughts of others when analyzing their behaviors is defined as self-awareness. Social awareness can be described as understanding and taking into consideration cultural differences, following social and ethical norms for behavior, and identifying familial and community support (CASEL, 2016). Given that self-awareness and social awareness are uniquely nuanced by teacher

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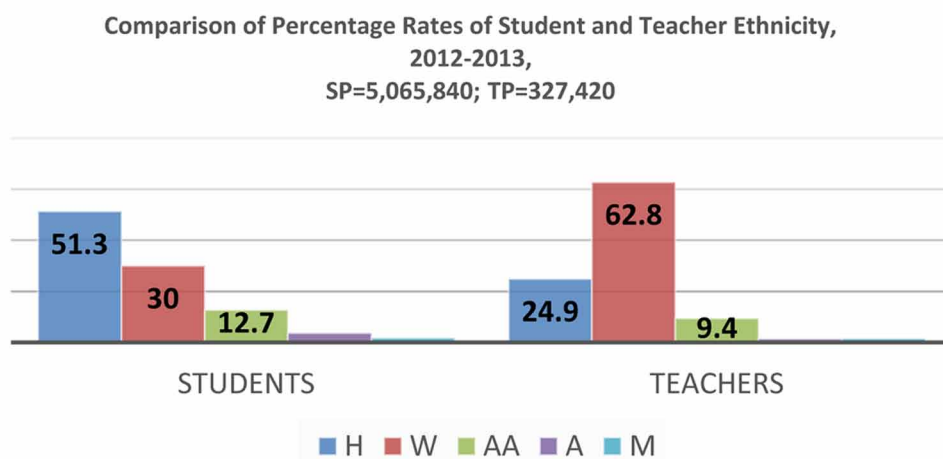
and learner backgrounds, cultural competence is at the core of social-emotional learning. However, recent examinations of state-level teacher certification requirements and coursework in U.S. teacher preparation programs have shown that many state-level teacher education program standards direct little attention to the promotion of self-awareness and social awareness in teachers (Jennings, 2011; Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel, 2015). As a result, the majority of states did not prepare their teachers to help their P-12 students to identify feelings, strengths, and weaknesses or to develop empathy and respect of people from diverse backgrounds. On the other hand, research on prospective early educators' attitudes towards teaching culturally diverse classes showed that participation in courses on multicultural education can significantly impact preservice teachers' attitudes and multicultural perspectives (Tsigilis, Tsioumis, & Gregoriadis, 2006). Given these trends, a substantial number of teachers are not prepared to incorporate anti-bias multicultural curriculum in their classrooms.

BACKGROUND

A continuing rise in linguistic and cultural diversity in school populations has increased the need for anti-bias multicultural teacher education. For many preservice teachers, exposure to anti-bias multicultural curriculum is limited to their personal knowledge, beliefs, and values. American society is multicultural with a rich variety of ethnic and cultural diversity (Izquierdo, Ligons, & Erwin, 1998). In 2012, more than 50 percent of the Texas population represent the minority (38.2 percent Hispanic and 12.3 percent African-American) (Bureau of the Census, 2012). Hispanics became the majority of total public school students in Texas for the first time in the 2010-2011 school year (Ahmed, 2014). According to the report that was written by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) (2014), titled *Enrollment in Texas Public Schools 2012-2013*, ethnically and culturally diverse populations increasingly attend the state's public schools (See Figure 1).

Murdock (as cited in Ahmed, 2014) projects that by 2050, the number of Texas public school students is expected to swell to 9 million and nearly two-thirds of those students would be Hispanic. The overall percentage of Anglo students would drop by half to about 15 percent (Ahmed, 2014).

Figure 1. Student ethnicity vs. teacher ethnicity



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