Chapter 50
Secondary School Teacher Preparation in the Age of Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

All students have the right to quality educational experiences that is inclusive. For this to become a reality, there is a need to have teachers who respect and appreciate diversity and are capable creating inclusive educational experiences that support diverse students learning need. This chapter attempts to look at how secondary teacher education programs can prepare preservice teachers who understand diversity and are capable of integrating inclusive education strategies in their teaching. It examines how inclusive education can become an integral part of the processes and procedure involved in secondary teacher education programs.

INTRODUCTION

Secondary school education is an important component in the educational structure of many nations. Secondary schools serve as a link between primary education and college/University education. These schools include the teen/adolescent population of a country. It prepares youth for entry into both college education and world of work. Quality education at the secondary education level serves a foundation for stronger college education and workforce in a given country. The student population in many secondary schools is diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, linguistics, country of origin, gender, socio-economic

background, learning styles and disability. For purposes of equity and inclusivity, it is important that every student, irrespective of his/her characteristics, is able to benefit from secondary school education.

One cannot talk about effective inclusive secondary school education without mentioning the caliber of teachers in the secondary schools. This is in terms of their numbers and quality. As indicated by Asare and Nti (2014), "central to the educational enterprise is the teacher. The role of the teacher is so crucial that no nation can afford to ignore it" (p. 1). According to Daniel (2011), parents want quality education for their children because they believe it can open up opportunities for them in the future. Quality education cannot be achieved without well-prepared teachers. How teachers engage with diversity in the classroom can play a critical role in student experiences, satisfaction, and learning outcomes (Garibay, 2014). Teachers' ability to engage diversity is dependent on how well they are prepared and how effective they deliver instruction in the classroom. This means teachers have an important role to play in ensuring that all students have better experiences in school and make instructional gains.

This brings teacher education into focus. Secondary teacher preparation becomes important in the discussion about quality and inclusivity in secondary education. Hollins (2011, p.395) noted that "teaching is a complex and multidimensional process that requires deep knowledge and understanding in a wide range of areas and the ability to synthesize, integrate, and apply this knowledge in different situations, under varying conditions, and with a wide diversity of groups and individuals." Preparing teachers who believe in inclusive education and can adapt to appropriate inclusive practices demands conscious effort. We cannot assume that general teacher education experiences can make prospective teachers advocates and practitioners of inclusivity. Naraian (2016) has observed that this preparation, "calls for the development of a stronger pedagogical repertoire for teachers," who will be competent enough deliver effectively and be able to, "support students with disabilities, greater contact with individuals with disabilities within preparation programs, and improved practicum experiences to develop competence and raise levels of confidence in novice teachers" (p.951). Every classroom is made up of children with diverse backgrounds and behavioral difficulties and challenges, so teacher preparation must incorporate techniques that will equip educators to effectively handle not only able-bodied children or children with disability, but also children with emotional and behavioral difficulties. In other words, teacher preparation should train teachers who will be able to bring inclusivity in their lesson delivery, so that every child can benefit, not just some. Secondary teacher preparation over the years seems to have neglected issues of equity and inclusivity both in the curriculum and practice (Naraian, 2016).

Evidence from research shows that preservice teachers who take a course in inclusive education tend to place emphasis on the importance of inclusion, and are confident about supporting and addressing issues of diversity in their future classrooms, more so than those who did not have the same experience in their teacher education program (Mergler, Carrington, Kimber, & Bland, 2016). As has been suggested by Schmidt, Blömeke, Tatto, Hsieh, Cogan, Houang, & Schwille, (2011, p. 2), "preparing highly qualified teachers is a matter of concern and public policy in every society that sponsors public education," since there is a connection between teacher quality and student learning outcomes and experiences (Lukaš, & Samardžic, 2015). It is therefore important to look at the processes through which secondary school teachers are prepared for school. A number of issues need consideration in order to prepare quality secondary school teachers who are able to handle issues of equity and inclusivity.

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