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Preparing Teachers for Cultural Diversity and National Standards of Academic Excellence

Christine I. Bennett, *Indiana University*

The national movement toward standards in the academic disciplines challenges American educators to expect excellence from all students. The challenge is especially important for teachers who work in schools serving racial and language minority students and the poor. There is growing concern that many teachers are neither ready nor able to apply the standards equitably, nor prepared to act as cultural and instructional mediators to help racial and language minority students attain high levels of academic excellence.

The national standards movement provides teacher educators with a vision and a challenge that could strengthen their efforts to prepare teachers for cultural diversity. American educators *must now aim to prove that excellence and equity are not in conflict, that our diversity is our strength, and that we can rise to the challenge of providing excellence for all.* (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1994, iv). Dramatic changes in teacher education are necessary to pursue this vision of excellence and equity. What kinds of changes are needed?

To be successful in helping all students attain academic excellence, teachers must *learn about the content in ways that will be useful to them as they teach and think. The content must be taught differently. It must be taught in depth. It must be integrative, flexible, cross-disciplinary, filled with applications* (OERI, 1994, p. 23). They must develop knowledge, dispositions, and inquiry skills enabling them to create equitable learning environments for diverse student populations, increase their intercultural competence, work effectively with language minority learners, and develop skills in self-reflection necessary for professional growth and appropriate decision making in culturally diverse classrooms.

The changing demographics of United States society create a critical need for teachers

knowledgeable about and skilled in multiculturalism. Nearly 14% of school-aged youth speak a language at home other than English. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1994), the number of Spanish speakers in the United States has increased 65 percent since 1979 with approximately 14.5 million native speakers of Spanish. In many schools across the nation, racial and language minority students constitute a majority of minorities. African Americans and Latinos usually attend schools with large concentrations of economically disadvantaged and/or low-achieving students, schools where teachers often de-emphasize higher order thinking skills and higher levels of teacher questions because of the misconception that low-achieving students must master the basic skills before they can develop higher level skills (Foster, 1989). Other studies suggest that teachers treat racial and language minority students differently from nonminority students and have lower expectations for them (Padron, 1994).

Curriculum reform efforts guided by the standards in mathematics and other academic subjects have proved differentially effective for students depending on their social class, race, ethnicity, language background, gender, and other demographic characteristics (Secada, 1992). For example, in a study undertaken while developing an inquiry-based mathematics and science curriculum for fourth- through sixth-grade bilingual students, researchers found a correlation between the English Language Assessment Scales and mathematics achievement as well as a specialized criterion-referenced test linked to the curriculum in question (DeAvila, 1988). Although authors of the standards caution teachers to think about the possible race-, gender-, and class-stratifying effects of their practices, even the practices the standards suggest

reveal little about how one might prepare teachers to implement them (Apple, 1992). Standards implementation may lead only to the intensification of teachers' work (Apple, 1992).

Teacher Education That Is Culturally Responsive

Jacqueline Jordan Irvine, in a speech entitled *The School Failure of African American Students: Perplexing Problems and Promising Practices* (1994), calls for teacher education reform that is culturally responsive as well as more intellectually rigorous. She proposes *a shift in the discourse on multicultural teacher education from its present narrow, technical focus on curriculum to a broader, more expansive normative and political focus on culture and power* (p. 3). She also points out the need for sensitive and caring schools where teachers are empowered decision makers and all students are respected and *feel a sense of connection, intimacy, visibility, and self-worth* (p. 4).

Culturally responsive teacher education programs must include opportunities for preservice teachers to work in schools where all students learn and develop to their highest potential; where teachers and students understand and begin to develop multiple ways of perceiving, believing, behaving, and evaluating; and where students conform to those aspects of school culture necessary for harmonious social interaction while retaining their own ethnic identity.

In this article, I describe how teacher education programs can become more culturally responsive through joint school-university initiatives grounded in principles of cultural consciousness.

Collaboration

School-community-university collaboration is necessary to develop culturally responsive teacher education programs, especially where large numbers of university students are ethnically encapsulated. Preservice teachers must have authentic experiences in culturally diverse schools and communities over an extended period of time; teacher educators need opportunities to learn from parents and teachers living and working in these communities. Predominantly White universities in White settings must reach

beyond the immediate community to create school-university partnerships. All teachers must be knowledgeable about multicultural education, whether or not they ever teach in multicultural communities. In ethnically encapsulated White communities, teachers may need to work especially hard to counteract the view that multicultural education is not necessary. The preparation of teachers for cultural diversity must enable them to prepare students for a culturally diverse society and world. Indeed, multicultural competence must be in national standards of excellence.

Indiana University provides an example of culturally responsive teacher education in its Navajo and Latino rural and urban projects that began in the early 1970s. Although some program graduates find teaching jobs in Latino, Native American, urban or rural communities, many teach in mainstream schools where they actively develop multicultural content and teaching strategies. More recently, faculty at Indiana University at Bloomington and the University of Texas Pan America (UT/PA) have collaboratively established a bilingual/bicultural teacher certification program. With leadership from new bilingual faculty, we have revised an endorsement in bilingual/bicultural education at Indiana that was placed on moratorium in 1989. The revised endorsement prepares teachers to work in a variety of multicultural settings, with initial emphasis on the preparation of teachers of Spanish-language students.

A special feature of this program is the one-semester cultural immersion and student teaching experience in a predominantly bilingual/bicultural Hispanic setting in the Southeast Texas-Mexican border, Rio Grande Valley areas of Edinburg and La Joya. A cohort of preservice teachers from the Indiana University campus works with mentor teachers in selected elementary, middle, and secondary schools. Faculty from Indiana University and UT/PA collaborate in course instruction and supervision of student teaching. An integral part of the program is the direct connection of many Indiana University preservice students with teachers, parents, and students in the partner communities through fully interactive compressed video technology. Classrooms in Edinburg and La Joya, Texas offer

Indiana University-based faculty and students with a living laboratory.

School-university-community collaboration provides opportunities for teacher education programs to be more culturally responsive, even on ethnically encapsulated campuses. Academic standards can be better understood, conceptualized, and implemented within the context of language, culture, cognition, and assessments that are culturally and linguistically appropriate when teams of parents, teachers, students, and university faculty work jointly. For example, the School of Nursing at Indiana University includes advisers from the African American community in Indianapolis in the development and evaluation of culturally responsive nursing education (Lombard, 1994). The work is based on a conceptual model of university-community collaboration that could be a valuable tool for creating teacher education programs.

Cultural Consciousness

Cultural consciousness is an awareness of one's own worldview and how it has developed and an understanding that one's personal view of the world is profoundly different from the views of people from different cultures. Although individual idiosyncrasies exist, people who share common dialects and primary experiences often learn to see reality in similar ways. They develop similar styles of cognition; similar processes of perceiving, recognizing, conceiving, judging, and reasoning; and similar values, assumptions, ideas, beliefs, and modes of thought (Kraemer, 1975).

Culturally diverse societies such as that of the United States require multicultural schools if all students are to reach their highest potential; yet most of the nation's schools are monocultural. Because schools are patterned after the mainstream culture, a culture steeped in the legacies of racism and colonialism, it is essential to understand how culture and power influence teaching and learning.

Cultural therapy is a philosophy and process Spindler & Spindler (1993, 1994) developed to help teachers and students understand cultural diversity and oppression in the schools, however unconscious. Cultural therapy assumes that when teachers become aware of their own

culture and understand how it shapes their attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors, they become more effective teachers. Likewise, when students understand themselves better and become more aware of the culture of their school and how it interacts with their own personal culture, they will become more empowered as learners. Spindler and Spindler (1993) write, *Cultural therapy is a process of bringing one's own culture—assumptions, goals, values, beliefs, and communicative modes—to a level of awareness that permits one to perceive it as a potential bias in social interaction and in the acquisition or transmission of skills and knowledge. One's own culture, is perceived in relation to other cultures, so that potential conflicts, misunderstandings, and blind spots in the perception and interpretation of behavior may be anticipated. Culture becomes a third presence, removed somewhat from the person, so that one's actions can be taken as caused by one's culture and not be one's personality* (p. 28).

For teachers cultural therapy can be used to increase awareness of the cultural assumptions they bring to the classroom that affect their behavior and their interactions with students—particularly students of color. It can be used as a first step to impact and change behaviors, attitudes, and assumptions that are biased (and often discriminatory) and thus detrimental to students whose cultural backgrounds are different from their own.... For students, cultural therapy is essentially a means of consciousness raising to make explicit unequal power relationships in the classroom, the school, and the larger society. It can be used to help students clarify the steps necessary to obtain the instrumental competencies they need to gain access to opportunities within the school system and the larger society (p. 29).

Cultural therapy is not an assimilationist model. Rather, it is a tool for helping teachers become agents of change and for students to negotiate borders between home and school (e.g., Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1993). Cultural consciousness is a necessary, though insufficient, ingredient in culturally responsive teacher education programs. Next, I suggest a broader context for cultural consciousness and the preparation of teachers for cultural diversity.

A Conceptual Model of Multicultural Teacher Education

Conceptual frameworks can guide the transformation of teacher education programs to ensure that new multicultural programs are comprehensive, cohesive, and responsive to the developmental needs of the preservice and inservice teachers they will serve. Models can provide a platform for discussions among education and arts and science faculty and students, as well as school administrators and teachers who will collaborate in the development of strong multicultural teacher education programs. Conceptual models can help clarify what multicultural education is, question the degree to which we advocate it, and (if we value it) articulate ways of infusing multicultural perspectives into the existing campuswide curriculum or move toward total transformation of the curriculum.

The lack of cohesive and comprehensive multicultural curricula on most college campuses (Gaff, 1992; Levine & Cureton, 1992), the lack of meaningful immersions in multicultural schools and communities, and the lack of attention to the readiness and developmental needs of teachers and students (Haberman, 1991) are important reasons why many multicultural courses and programs are weak or ineffective. Like many multicultural teacher educators, I have experienced these problems in my own teaching. For nearly 2 decades, my multicultural education classes have been filled with graduate students and undergraduates in their third or fourth year who score poorly on a pretest of basic multicultural knowledge; the honors students often score among the lowest. Although most of the students enter with a limited knowledge of basic multicultural concepts and terminology, they differ greatly in their developmental readiness for multicultural education. Like Haberman (1991), I find greater readiness for multicultural education, as well as successful teaching, in multicultural classrooms among adult students and graduate students entering teaching from previous careers.

Thinking, caring, and acting are the heart of my teaching of multicultural education. I am assuming that in addition to the need for teachers who are well informed about their content areas and cultural diversity, the nation needs teachers

who are fair-minded, critical thinkers, who care about the welfare of their students and humanity in general, and who act in ways that encourage all students to learn and develop to their highest potential.

Understanding Multiple Historical Perspectives.

The development of multiple historical perspectives among pre- and inservice teachers is a difficult challenge. Most have been limited to a traditional curriculum that emphasizes the political development of Euro-American civilization dominated by White males. Many people, women and men of all ethnic backgrounds, are oblivious to the ways accepted knowledge operates to maintain the dominant culture and limits political, social, economic, and educational access for people of color and the poor.

Despite extensive scholarship that challenges the traditional curriculum, I have discovered meager growth in my students' knowledge beyond the basic cannon. (An important exception is the field of American literature.) Very few students are aware of contributions by people of color to science, education, and the arts; very few have basic knowledge about the legacies of slavery and colonialism or basic knowledge about differences in the histories of major ethnic groups in the United States. It is impossible to understand the differing social, economic, and educational attainments among ethnic minorities today without understanding their differing historical roots. Teachers ask, for example, why there are so many Spanish-speaking students who have not learned English, or why ethnic minorities like Japanese-Americans are economically and academically successful, while so many African Americans are not.

Some preservice and inservice teachers welcome new knowledge perspectives such as Weatherford (1988, 1991) provides in his work on Native Americans and exploitation, or world maps such as the Peters projection that differ from the familiar Euro-centric Mercator projection. Sometimes educators and students are resistant, angry, or even emotionally distressed, especially when the challenge to previous knowledge and beliefs occurs in the overloaded multi-

cultural course that is often the totality of efforts to prepare teachers for cultural diversity.

An understanding of multiple historical perspectives is developed through processes of inquiry and fair-minded critical thinking. Writing about this transformation of the mainstream curriculum, Banks (1991) states, *We must engage students in the process of attaining knowledge in which they are required to critically analyze conflicting paradigms and explanations and the values and assumptions of different knowledge systems, forms, and categories. Students must also be given opportunities to construct knowledge themselves so that they can develop a sophisticated appreciation of the nature and limitations of knowledge and understand the extent to which knowledge is a social construction that reflects the social, political and cultural context in which it is formulated* (p. 126).

Developing Intercultural Competence.

Intercultural competence is the ability to interpret intentional communications (language, signs, gestures), some unconscious cues (such as body language), and customs and cultural styles different from one's own. Emphasis is on informed empathy and communication. Culturally conditioned assumptions that teachers and students of different cultural backgrounds make about each other's behavior and beliefs hinder communication. The effects of cultural conditioning are sometimes so pervasive that people whose experience has been limited to the norms of their own culture cannot understand a communication based on a different set of norms and cannot *understand why a 'self-evident' communication from them cannot be comprehended by others* (Kraemer, 1975, p. 2).

Gudykunst and Kim (1984) describe intercultural competence in terms of the Intercultural Person, *one who has achieved an advanced level in the process of becoming intercultural and whose cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics are not limited but are open to growth beyond the psychological parameters of only one culture. . . . The intercultural person possesses an intellectual and emotional commitment to the fundamental unity of all humans and, at the same time, accepts and appreciates the differences that lie between people of different cultures* (p. 230).

Interculturally competent teachers are comfortable with their students' cultural styles. They understand their students' verbal communication and body language, preferred modes of discussion and participation, time and space orientations, social values and religious beliefs, and preferred styles of learning. Interculturally competent teachers are aware of the diversity within racial and cultural groups, know that culture is ever changing, and are aware of the dangers of stereotyping. At the same time, they know that if they ignore their students' cultural attributes, they are likely to be guided by their own cultural lenses, unaware of how their culturally conditioned expectations might cause learning difficulties for some children.

Combating Racism.

My hope is that preservice and inservice teachers will develop a commitment to combat racism, as well as sexism and all forms of prejudice and discrimination, through the development of appropriate understanding, attitudes, and social action skills. This goal is an essential ingredient of programs to prepare teachers for cultural diversity because simply acquiring multicultural literacy and an appreciation of cultural diversity will not necessarily move teachers to help put an end to racial prejudice and discrimination or to solve basic problems of inequity.

Emphasis is on clearing up racial myths and stereotypes that foster beliefs about the inferiority of different races and cultures, and on stressing basic human similarities and connections. Also emphasized is an awareness of the origins, persistence, and impact of institutional and cultural racism in the United States and elsewhere in the world. A racist society, such as that of the United States, will have racist schools. I find that many preservice and inservice teachers, primarily White teachers, have never thought about this. Once they recognize the realities of racism, many are moved to take action. The ultimate goal is to develop antiracist teachers.

Antiracist teachers create equitable classroom environments characterized by high achievement expectations for all students, and

culturally and linguistically appropriate teaching strategies and assessments. They also create an antiracist curriculum, one beyond celebrations of cultural diversity to an emphasis on decision making and social action. Making a case for antiracist science teaching, Lindsay (1988) describes the traditional biology approach in words with implications for all areas of the curriculum: *In most texts, Third World countries are used to demonstrate the effects of starvation, gross malnutrition and disease no longer suffered by the most affluent nations. Most texts accept without question the superiority of everything European/American, including farming methods, food processing and distribution, and the Western diet. Third World populations are blamed for their own problems. Students do not learn that prosperous countries, comprising 25 per cent of the world's population, eat two-thirds of the world's food production or that much of the food imported by affluent nations is produced by the poorer nations. Nor do they learn about the large land areas now being used in the Third World to produce these cash crops for export, or about the exchange rates which increasingly tend to favor the industrialized nations* (pp. 95-96).

Antiracist science teachers Gill, Singh, and Vance (1988) write, *Good biology is necessarily antiracist biology... [and should aim to] expose and combat the way that racist, sexist and imperialist ideology is mediated through traditional curricula and textbooks; provide alternative perspectives to the Western capitalist world-view which currently predominates in teaching, especially regarding poverty and 'Third World underdevelopment'; support black and 'ethnic minority' pupils whose confidence and self-esteem have been eroded by the content of biology teaching in the past;... [challenge] the uses of IQ and other normative testing in relation to 'race,' class and gender; expose the concept of 'race' as a fiction devoid of scientific validity, though having a deep ideological purpose* (p. 129).

Teacher Decision Making

Teachers who are effective decision makers in multicultural classrooms bring about the intellectual, social, and personal growth of all students to their highest potential. These teachers exhibit the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors required to provide equitable opportunities

for learning, change the monocultural curriculum, help all students develop some degree of intercultural competence, and enable students to become agents of change in their schools and communities.

The development of effective teacher decision making is a lifelong process. It begins in preservice teacher education programs based on school-university-community collaboration that include partnerships among preservice teachers and mentor teachers who work with culturally diverse students and their families in the quest for academic excellence and equity.

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