THE DIVERSITY DIALOGUE: RETHINKING PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES TO PROVIDE HOPE FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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by

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Abstract

This study examines how a diverse dialogue addresses cultural differences and social injustices and how cultural responsiveness helps teachers approach education more equitably. When teachers use a diverse dialogue, they are able to create a classroom curriculum that includes all voices, experiences, and activities and satisfies the needs of all learners. The study also suggests that teachers adjust their pedagogical practices to the ever-changing multicultural classrooms. Through an examination of best practices, teachers will be able to invest in more creative and diverse approaches that will not only benefit the individual student, but also the entire classroom. Applying positioning theory and social learning theory, teachers can effectively teach today's 21st century learners.

Managing diversity and inclusivity in today's classroom, about which much has been written and said, requires creating a healthy dialogue about teacher education and teacher preparation. As Peter Fenn asserts, "A basic tenet of a healthy democracy is open dialogue and transparency" (Fenn, 2012). The world is rapidly changing and who we are is continually evolving. Who a person is culturally and how he or she interacts with the world is a fascinating complex of language, values, beliefs, behaviors, and experiences that encompass every aspect of one's life. What culture is not is an isolated, mechanical aspect of life that can be used to explain phenomena in the classroom or that can be learned as a series of facts, physical elements, or exotic characteristics (Banks, 2006; Gay, 2000). The study of culture is not an experimental science in search of a law. Rather, it is a highly interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz, 1973).

The brain learns by connecting new information to concepts that it already understands. It naturally searches for meaning; thus, old learning becomes the foundation on which new information is constructed and students become motivated by the newly acquired information. According to literature on culturally responsive teaching, the teacher and student must continually create four motivational conditions in order to enhance learning: inclusion, attitude, meaning, and competence. These conditions are systematically represented in a motivational framework that 1) respects diversity; 2) engages the motivation of a broad range of students; 3) creates a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment; 4) derives teaching practices from across disciplines and cultures; and 5) promotes equitable learning. While respectful of different cultures, the framework enables the construction of a common culture within the learning environment that all learners can accept. The four motivational conditions act individually and in concert to provide a pedagogical ecology that continuously enhances intrinsic motivation to learn (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009), as detailed below:

1. Establishing Inclusion: Creating a learning atmosphere in which learners and instructors feel respected by and connected to one another.
2. Developing Attitude: Creating a favorable disposition toward learning through personal relevance and learner volition.
3. Enhancing Meaning: Creating engaging and challenging learning experiences that include learners’ perspectives and values.

4. Engendering Competence: Creating an understanding that learners have effectively learned something they value and perceive as authentic to their real world.

These conditions work in concert within the framework to influence students and teachers; they occur over time as well as a moment. In a competitive global society characterized by rapid demographic shift, new social and academic challenges are facing higher education. One in three students is a racial or ethnic minority. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2011) projected that 27 percent more Black students will be enrolled at degree-granting institutions in 2015 than in 2004. The growing number of minorities is most dramatic for Hispanic students: the report projects a 42 percent increase by 2015. By 2020, 46 percent of the student population will be students of color (Latino/a), and 10–20 percent of school age youth will self-identify as gay or lesbian (Sapon-Shevin, 2001). According to the National Education Association (NEA), American Public Schools enroll about five million English Language Learners (ELLs) and that number is expected to double by 2015 (Austin, 2012). The implications of this ethnic diversity for higher education are significant. Hence, the ways in which colleges and universities attempt to prepare teachers to respond to these changes are critical.

Colleges of Education have a pivotal role in preparing pre-service teachers for teaching in diverse classrooms. Numerous studies show that faculty and staff success in integrating diversity into their curriculum is intertwined with an understanding and appreciation for culture and depends largely on the level of institutional support (Brown-Glaude, 2009). Through the power of multicultural education, teacher educators have the privilege of providing their students with unbiased, responsive, and critical instruction. Those who employ culturally relevant pedagogy must attend to their students’ cultural and social needs as well.

To begin, teacher educators need to adopt their own pedagogy to the modern needs of students in a diverse classroom. It is essential for academicians to engage in a more diverse dialogue, one that is relevant to the learner, both inside and outside the classroom. Research has shown that no one teaching strategy will consistently engage all learners. The key is helping students relate lesson content to their own backgrounds (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Through a dialogue that addresses cultural differences, social injustices, identity formation, and other forms of diversity, students learn to critically assess society through the perspective of a different lens. This research examines how a diverse dialogue addresses cultural differences, social injustices, and cultural responsiveness and thus helps teacher educators and their students approach education more equitably. Furthermore, this study examines how Colleges of Education across the United States should encourage in-service teachers and veteran teachers alike to adjust their curricular and classroom approaches to meet the needs of an ever-changing society. Through examining best practices, in-service teachers will gain the ability to invest in creative and diverse classroom approaches that will not only benefit the individual student, but also the entire classroom. Positioning theory and social learning theory provide hope that teachers can learn to effectively teach 21st century learners.

**Theoretical Framework**

This paper discusses ways in which teachers can positively position students in the classroom so that students do not view themselves as “outsiders,” as those on the margins frequently do. Positioning theory from research on English Language Learners (ELLs) provides a theoretical perspective for working with students’ social consciousness, classroom views, and classroom participation. ELLs need to be placed in a position of empowerment and encouraged not to remain silent nor isolated but become part of the diversity dialogue. Students’ cultural and social needs must also be considered as teachers attempt to understand how students learn; therefore positioning and social learning theories are the theoretical framework guiding this paper.

**Positioning Theory**

Positioning theory relates to how student and teacher roles inside the classroom are determined. It is defined as “the study of local moral orders as ever shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting” (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 1). Positioning is a metaphorical term originally introduced to analyze interpersonal encounters from a discursive viewpoint (Hallway, 1984). This theory can be twofold: intentional self-positioning theory and interactive-positioning theory. The self-positioning theory details how individuals view their own world from a certain position while the interactive positioning theory explains that “what one person says positions another” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). These two theories can directly relate to the teacher/student relationship. For example according to Yoon (2008), teachers’ pedagogy can directly affect how they believe a student will interact in their classroom. This belief is conveyed to the student and can directly relate to his or her reflexive self-positioning. If a teacher uses dialogue that a student can personally take negatively, the student will then imitate the behavior he or she believes the teacher expects (Yoon, 2008).

In an unequal society where power relations are continuously at work, participation and dialogue do not occur as freely among language learners. The main reason for students’ anxiety, silence, and different positioning has much to do with being outsiders in the regular classroom context. (Yoon, 2008, p. 498).

According to Yoon’s research, a particular teacher believed that the ELL students in her class were not “working as hard as the other students” (Yoon, 2008, p. 513). The ELL students knew they were not succeeding as well in her class as in the others and one of the ELL students even mentioned, “I just keep everything to myself. I don’t think she likes me” (Yoon, 2008, p. 514). How teachers position themselves inside the classroom is critical to the success of their students.

Yoon (2008) also discusses the teaching strategies of three teachers with English language learning (ELL) students in multicultural classes. The teacher with the most profound effect on the students was the teacher who incorporated the new students inside the classroom dialogue. A closed dialogue in a classroom incorporates only American culture examples in the curriculum so only students comfortable and familiar with that aspect of American culture can participate. Inclusivity is key to increasing the dialogue and should be embraced. Inclusivity can mean simply asking students, especially ELL students, to share their lived experiences as they relate to the curriculum. This diverse dialogue allows all students to consider themselves part of the learning community. Such dialogue can create a sense of community not only for the ELL students, but also for the mainstream students who have the chance they have not had before to see similarities in their classmates or hear their classmates speak. When a classroom learning community is established, students have the opportunity to see each other as learners rather than focusing and separating themselves by differences. Teachers have immense power to help all students feel appreciated in genuine ways which is critical.

Garcia, et al. (2010) reflect upon the preparation of English Language Learner (ELL) teachers. Recent research has noted that culturally responsive teaching is
implemented in superficial ways that do nothing to alter the curriculum. Researchers have also focused on institutional reform that can only be achieved through the development of "teacher knowledge through contact, collaboration, and community" (Garcia, et al., 2010, p. 132). A study by Schoorman and Bogotch (2010) looked at teachers' conceptualizations of multicultural education and the implications for practice in K-12 classrooms. Through focus group interviews supplemented by survey data, they found that all teachers viewed multicultural education as a positive concept. However, they also found that teachers associated multicultural education with demographic diversity rather than with social justice. This study is consistent with Banks' (2008) study that discusses ways teachers think and perform regarding culturally responsive teaching. Culturally relevant teachers must utilize students' culture as a vehicle and means for learning.

Social Learning Theory—Efficacy

As in positioning theory, Bandura's social learning theory views students in the social context of learning. Social learning theory is primarily concerned with how individuals operate cognitively on their social experiences and how these cognitive operations influence their behavior and development. Bandura believes that people conceptualize and integrate the information they encounter through a variety of social experiences. Social learning theory deals with the observation of others and the environment in which one may find oneself. According to Bandura, (1977a), students who feel efficacious about their ability to master their schoolwork select challenging activities, expend effort, and persist when tasks become difficult. Human motivation, influences, and behavior all contribute to the thought process and function as the cognitive component of social cognition. Additionally, social cognitive theorists believe that people are neither driven by inner forces nor automatically shaped and controlled by external stimuli (Bandura, 1977a, 1986). Rather, human functioning is explained in terms of a model of triadic reciprocality in which behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other. (Bandura, 1986, p. 18).

Since personal agency is socially rooted, it operates within the sociocultural influences. Therefore, the individual produces the product, creates the construction, decides the discovery, and determines the destination necessary in order to be successful in his or her own environment and social system. The individual, the environment, and the behavior are the key. According to Bandura (1977a), the behavior upon which people base their beliefs can be developed by four types of influences: (1) enacted mastery influence, (2) vicarious influence, (3) physiological and emotional influences, and (4) verbal and social persuasion influence.

The enacted mastery influence experience is the most powerful source of perceived self-efficacy because successful experiences provide tangible evidence that one can accomplish the behavior. Additionally, such experience provides the most authentic evidence of whether one can manage whatever it takes to succeed in spite of circumstances (Bandura, 1982; Feltz, Landers, & Raeder, 1979; Gist, 1989). Obtaining success easily undermines robust efficacy beliefs because one may expect quick results and become discouraged when faced with failure. "A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort" (Bandura, 1995, p. 3). Failure is sometimes beneficial because it teaches that success requires sustained effort. Establishing a sense of efficacy through mastery experiences involves acquiring the cognitive, behavioral, and self-regulatory components for creating and executing the appropriate course of action. Obstacles can provide a chance for people to discover how to turn failure into success by honing their capabilities to exercise better control over events. In addition, many people come to realize with mastery experiences that they are able to persevere and rebound from setbacks.

The vicarious influence experience is partly an appraisal mediated through observing others' attainments. This type of experience is provided socially and offers another way of creating and strengthening efficacy beliefs. It involves watching models perform the task with little adversity. Simply seeing people similar to oneself succeed provides a vicarious experience. Therefore, people appraise their capabilities in relation to the attainments of others. By the same token, observing others fail despite high effort lowers observers' judgment of their own efficacy (Brown & Inouye, 1978). Modeling, for example, can be influential when models or modeled activities are personally relevant to the observer (Bandura, 1986). This is especially true for pre-service teachers: if the modeled activity is personally relevant (e.g., because of culture, gender, age, or class), the probability of the observer's learning vicariously is enhanced (Hackett & Byars, 1996).

The physiological and emotional influence experience refers to how the emotional state of individuals affects their behavior. Physiological and emotional influence is effective because health functioning and affective states can produce widely generalized effects on one's beliefs in different realms of human functioning. Many people experience physical stressors that affect their perceived efficacy. Bandura's (1995) theory views stress reactions in terms of perceived ineffectiveness to exert control over threats and taxing environmental demands.

The social and verbal persuasion influence experience occurs when someone convinces the individual that he or she is capable of accomplishing the task. People who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given skills are likely to demonstrate greater effort and endurance than if they entertain self-doubts and dwell on insufficiencies when problems arise. Teachers have enormous verbal persuasive influence. It is easier for someone to sustain a sense of efficacy, especially when difficulties arise, when significant others express faith in him or her and others convey the idea that he or she has the ability to master the skill. However, the positive message must be within realistic bounds if change or influence is to occur. When an individual already believes that he or she can produce an effect through his or her action, social persuasion can have one of the greatest impacts for the individual (Chambliss & Murray, 1979a, 1979b). Developing students' efficacy, provides long-term academic benefits, motivation and persistent learning behaviors (Liew & McTigue, 2010).

Creating a Community of Learners

The classroom is much more than simply a place where students come to learn how to read and write. The individual classroom is a community of learners. Through this community, learners learn how to socialize, adapt, and integrate knowledge in every capacity. Without a sense of belonging and assurance, a classroom is quite simply a room of individuals. Bringing this sense of "community" inside the classroom requires implementing a rich and diverse dialogue. Every single student inside a classroom is an individual with different ideas, talents, backgrounds, and home lives. These differences should not be pointed out or noted to make others feel different or isolated but rather these differences and unique perspectives should be celebrated. A diverse dialogue includes incorporating these differences into curriculum and classroom criteria.

A diverse dialogue can also do more than give students a voice in the classroom; it can provide hope to students who feel they have none. In a recent study, new language was introduced in the classroom in order to inspire minority
Parents recommended teachers whose classes their children were enthusiastic about attending and from whom the children enjoyed learning as well as teachers who consistently demonstrated respect to parents. Additionally, parents perceived that the teachers’ practices prepared students to operate both in the home and broader communities. Principals, on the other hand, recommended teachers with high student attendance, few discipline referrals, and high standardized test scores. Ladson-Billings (1992) explains that both parent and teacher lists generated nine teachers and eight consented to participate. She posits (1994) that the eight teachers in her study shared what she calls a “culturally relevant pedagogy,” which she defines as a “pedagogy of opposition” that is committed to collective rather than individual empowerment of students.

Ladson-Billings (1995a) describes culturally relevant pedagogy as a way of teaching that incorporates various aspects of the students’ culture into the schooling process. This type of dialogue is a part of the diversity dialogue that teacher educators need to practice and should be discussed in teacher education programs. Ladson-Billings (1995a) study found that teachers who were family oriented, cultivated relationships beyond the classroom, encouraged collaborative learning through building a community of learners, and created an atmosphere of trust and support were successful with African American students, largely because of the greater match between these techniques and the cultural background of the students.

Ladson-Billings (1995a) articulated three criteria for culturally relevant pedagogy, the first of which is academic achievement. The eight teachers in her study found ways to get students to choose academic excellence by valuing students’ social skills and abilities and channeling them in academically important ways. The second criterion of culturally relevant pedagogy is that curriculum must demonstrate respect for, and encouragement of, students’ ability to operate within their cultural context. For example, one of the teachers in her study used non-offensive rap songs to teach poetic devices and figurative language. The students’ understanding of poetry far exceeded local and state expectations. Another teacher in the study allowed students to use their home language while acquiring standard English. Students could express themselves orally and in writing in their own language and were then required to translate into standard English at the final editing. By the end of the year, students demonstrated improvement in both languages (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

The third of Ladson-Billings’ (1995a) criteria for culturally-relevant pedagogy, and the one most critical to this study, is that students must be taught to critique social inequalities. Freire (1970) developed the term “conscientization,” which is a process that invites learners to “engage the world and others critically” (McLauren, 1989, p. 195). Several of the teachers in Ladson-Billings’ (1994) study and their students engaged in a letter-writing campaign to the editor of the local newspaper to inform the public that their textbooks were outdated and to question the system of inequitable funding that allowed more privileged school districts to have newer texts. If schooling is about preparing students for active citizenship, what better citizenship tool than the ability to critically analyze society? Cultural identity is a large aspect of helping students to celebrate cultural differences. But it is also important for students to learn to respect cultural identities other than their own. Instilling multicultural respect can be done through many classroom activities. For example, students may be asked to research and present on a culture they are unfamiliar with, such as researching school life for Egyptian students, and then sharing with the class what they learned compared to their own classroom. Higher level thinking activities such as this one can encourage students to critically view the world around them in a
positive manner and to think pluralistically. Higher-level multicultural thinking can also be implemented in other subject areas. A physical education teacher, for example, can introduce sports that are popular throughout the world but with which American students may not be familiar, such as cricket. Many times these experiences are eye-opening for students who may have had previous negative misconceptions or misunderstandings about a culture other than their own.

**Role of Teacher Education**

The role of teacher education is to provide models and hope to pre-service teachers. We as teacher educators must develop a healthy discourse as we discuss matters of race, social economic status, gender differences, sexual orientation, disabilities, and religion in order to debate in an unbiased and welcoming classroom. It is critical to initiate a higher demand for culturally responsive teaching because despite the demographic changes nationally among students, teacher demographics have remained relatively stable, with the majority of teachers being White (83 percent) and female (75 percent). The 2008 National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) reported selected results based on almost 380,000 randomly sampled students attending 722 US baccalaureate-granting institutions.

Disappointingly, only 57 percent of first year students and half of seniors reported receiving substantial encouragement from their institutions to interact with students of different economic, social, racial, or ethnic backgrounds. Although it is important to implement ways of assisting children and encouraging them to explore their ethnic identity, it is also important for teacher educators to create a safe and unbiased atmosphere for developing student teachers. Atkinson and Sturges (2003) state that teachers need to understand how their own backgrounds influence their teaching and interactions with students. For example, a White middle-class female teacher may bring with her a set of assumptions about students' backgrounds and how people learn based on her own background and membership in a majority group. (p.33)

Teachers need to be unbiased and offer equal opportunities to all students no matter what their background. Atkinson and Sturges (2003) also state that low teacher expectations are resulting in a gap between academic achievement levels among children of African American and Hispanic descent in comparison to their White counterparts: “African American and Latino adolescents also report being graded unfairly, discouraged from joining advanced level classes, and disciplined wrongly by their teachers because of their ethnicity, and they often perceive themselves to have been discriminated against in public settings" (p.464). It is so important that teachers have a genuine care and love for their students and a desire for them to succeed. No student should feel discriminated against, especially when teachers are creating a safe haven in schools and providing hope for those who might feel there is no hope.

**Transformative Education**

So how do we provide hope in order to transform our classrooms? In what ways can teachers open up classroom dialogue to ensure all students' voices are heard? Donna Ford (2005) asserts that teachers must assess themselves as educators, examine their biases, adapt their teaching modalities, and use formative assessment to ensure what they do is fair and equitable. Additionally, teachers must partner with families respectfully, respect and value cultural norms and traditions, listen with an empathic ear, and adapt the appropriate curriculum (Ford, 2005). Banks (2008) posits four approaches to multicultural reform. The contributions approach, often referred to as the celebration approach, highlights specific cultural elements such as heroes, holidays, folk tales, food, and clothing but leaves the core curriculum untouched. The contribution approach, found to be most popular with White teachers, is said to gloss over real conflict issues of power and injustice (Banks, 2008; Halagao, 2004).

Secondly, in the additive approach, teachers believe they honor diversity and celebrate differences by treating all students the same. This approach was not considered culturally responsive by teachers in Banks' study because it was simply an "add on" and the cultural information was taught in isolation. Culturally responsive teaching should be integrated and appreciated throughout the daily lessons. The lessons should be authentic, consistent, creative, constant, and relevant. The additive approach could do more harm than good when it does not meet the appropriate guidelines as previously stated. The next approach is the transformation approach, in which the school and the teachers' classroom practices relate to diversity. The transformation approach embraces equity for all students and the curriculum shifts to an inclusive model. This approach involves critical thinking and an exploration of diversity (Banks, 2008).

Finally, the social approach, which is the most challenging approach, deals with choice, inequality, and oppression by helping others develop the skills needed for social action. Banks' study signifies the importance of using literature and other daily activities as a method to integrate culture in our everyday routine to demonstrate to students the importance of cultural differences, value, and purpose in the world. This approach could include having students write letters to government officials, encouraging voice for empowerment in policy making, and helping students develop a sense of personal and political efficacy (Banks, 2008).

Ford, Tyson, Howard, and Harris (2000) assert that an important goal for multicultural education should be to include teaching with a multicultural perspective, which requires educators to challenge assumptions and stereotypes. Multicultural literature can be a tool for redesigning an underlying framework of stereotypes and misconceptions students may have about particular races, ethnicities, and cultures. Authenticity in multicultural literature is highly important for promoting healthy and empowering dialogue inside the classroom to help undermine stereotypes and promote classroom harmony. This type of dialogue can provide voices, empowerment, and community closeness by using students to create a multicultural classroom. The students can learn from the experiences of one another and many times realize their similarities rather than focusing on their differences, thus celebrating one another. "The real test of culturally responsive teaching may lie in its ability to create classrooms where race, culture, and ethnicity are not seen as barriers to overcome but are sources of enrichment for all" (Phuntsog, 2001, p. 63).

**Strategies For Providing Hope**

Inviting speakers to share their authentic experiences from various races, cultures, ethnicities, religions, and genders is one strategy for encouraging dialogue in class. Incorporating music, art, etc. and using electronic resources (i.e. Facebook, twitter, YouTube videos, discussion boards etc.) are other ways for encouraging students to share privately what they may not share openly in class. Discussion boards can serve as a wonderful way to invite meaningful dialogue and spark additional discussion. When asked what the discussion board meant to my student teachers, they replied:

The discussion board has really turned out to be a meaningful outlet where my peers can discuss ideas and thoughts they have about various topics in the field of education. We talk about giving children "a voice" to be heard when it comes to bullying, and someday we will become teachers and we will have to act as that "voice" for those kids. It's been nice to be given the opportunity to
The discussion board has meant a lot to me because it allows me to see everyone's opinions on the different subjects during the course of our class. I also see that it is a way for people to share their experiences to the whole class in a positive manner and to connect their story to the topic in a coherent manner. I really enjoyed doing the discussions every week this semester for this class. (An Anonymous Student, November 15, 2012)

Creating a dialogue of “trust” and openness so that all voices can be heard and a “safe space” is created is priceless. Students’ dialogue will not only become a diverse dialogue, but an “empowered dialogue” that can change the world.

Additional recommendations by Gayle-Evans (2004, p. 14) that may be a starting point for diverse dialogue include the following.

For teachers:
1. Become co-learners with your students regarding your own cultures as well as different cultures, and
2. Use the community and its resources.

For schools:
1. Offer varied and consistent professional development opportunities that address culturally responsive teaching, and
2. Make a commitment to form family-community-school relationships.

Finally for teacher educators:
1. Model how to move culturally responsive teaching from theory to practice,
2. Provide students with opportunities to teach in a culturally responsive manner,
3. Have an open dialogue regarding the commitment needed for teaching and the importance of tension and discomfort as integral parts of change and of understanding, and
4. Encourage students to develop the attitudes and skills needed to successfully implement culturally responsive teaching.

References


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