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## **Preservice Teachers' Awareness of Multiculturalism and Diversity**

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*In the present study, we attempted to replicate an earlier study (Larke, 1990) that sought to estimate preservice teachers' general awareness of cultural differences. Data from 99 preservice teachers who completed the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory were utilized to examine the extent to which teacher education programs were helping future teachers to become more multiculturally competent. Using the Larke study as a foundation, results from the present study revealed that preservice teachers' attitudes about cultural diversity improved. The article concludes with discussion and implications for preservice teachers and teacher education programs.*

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The demographics of United States PreK-12 schools are dramatically changing as students are becoming more diverse. That is, the racial, ethnic, socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic orientations of students are more varied now than ever in the past. It is projected that by the year 2020, 48% of the nation's school-age children in grades one to 12 will be students of color (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). Moreover, Banks and Banks (2001) remind us that, as the nation's students become increasingly diverse, "most of the nation's teachers remain White" (p. v). Indeed, approximately 87% of the nation's teachers are White or European American (Gay & Howard, 2000). A report from the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (1997) suggests that the majority of the school-age population in 50 or more major U.S. cities are from language minority and marginalized backgrounds.

Preservice teachers—those individuals who are teacher candidates in teacher education programs—often enter classrooms culturally, racially, and ethnically incompetent (Larke, 1990). In other words, these teachers have not developed the skills necessary to be sensitive to cultural differences. Moreover, many preservice teachers have never had significant interactions with students from diverse backgrounds and, as a result, their knowledge and understanding where diversity issues are concerned are nebulous and often result in cultural and racial mismatches. In short, many preservice teachers

have never attended schools themselves with individuals from diverse backgrounds, or lived in racially diverse neighborhoods. In light of this lack of exposure to diverse populations, and in the absence of intense study and reflection, preservice teachers may rely on stereotypical conceptions of diverse students to inform their future work as teachers (Milner, 2003).

Indeed, the task of helping preservice teachers become culturally sensitive is one that teacher preparation programs must continually address. To be sure, some attention has been paid to issues of multiculturalism and diversity in PreK-12 schools and in teacher preparation programs. However, in Ponterotto, Baluch, Greig, and Rivera's (1998) words: "Despite the increase in attention to multicultural training, little empirical attention has been paid to issues of evaluation and accountability in these training efforts" (p. 1002). This study attempts to extend our knowledge about evaluation and accountability in hopes that we might broaden our understanding about how to enhance preservice teachers' awareness of multiculturalism and diversity as we progress in an increasingly diverse society.

Accordingly, the purpose of this inquiry was to assess the cultural sensitivity levels of preservice teachers. In particular, this study sought to replicate Larke's (1990) study, which included 51 female preservice teachers, that was published in *Action in Teacher Education*, to compare current preservice teachers' attitudes with similar data reported more than ten years ago. Thus, the following research questions guided this study: (a) How culturally sensitive are preservice teachers?; (b) Are preservice teachers more culturally sensitive in some areas than in others?; (c) To what extent are preservice teachers culturally aware?; and (d) In what areas do preservice teachers need the most improvement in developing multicultural awareness?

### Methods

The discussion shifts now to the participants and the instrumentation.

#### *Participants*

The preservice teachers in the present study were drawn from a teacher education program at a large midwestern university. After obtain-

ing approval from the appropriate human subjects review board, data were collected during the spring 2002 semester. Overall, the student sample consisted of 99 students. The sample included 17 sophomores, 24 juniors, 48 seniors, and 10 graduate students. The student sample included 84 females and 15 males. The sample consisted of 1 African American student, 97 White or European American students, and 1 Latino student.

#### *Instrumentation*

The Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) was used to measure preservice teachers' attitudes about multiculturalism and diversity (Henry, 1986, Larke, 1990). According to Henry (1986), the CDAI "is designed to assist the user in looking at his/her own attitudes, beliefs and behavior towards young children of culturally diverse backgrounds" (p. 4). The CDAI contains 28 Likert-type items. Respondents may indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5-point scale (e.g., 5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*). Because this study sought to replicate Larke's (1990) study and compare differences in preservice teachers' cultural attitudes, the present study employed the same subscales used in the Larke study: (a) General Cultural Awareness, (b) the Culturally Diverse Family, (c) Cross Cultural Communication, (d) Assessment, and (e) the Multicultural Environment.

The General Cultural Awareness subscale tapped preservice teachers' perceptions of their cultural sensitivity (e.g., "I believe I would prefer to work with children and parents whose cultures are similar to mine.") The Culturally Diverse Family subscale measured the extent to which preservice teachers felt the need to include parents in a child's learning process (e.g., "I believe I sometimes experience frustration when conducting conferences with parents whose culture is different from my own.") The Cross Cultural Communication subscale assessed preservice teachers' perceptions of their ability to communicate with persons from diverse backgrounds (e.g., "I believe I would be uncomfortable in settings with people who speak non-standard English.") The Assessment subscale explored preservice teachers' beliefs

concerning testing and measurement in the classroom (e.g., "I believe a child should be referred for testing if learning difficulties appear to be due to cultural differences and/or language.") The Multicultural Environment subscale measured the extent to which preservice teachers were willing to utilize teaching strategies to ensure an equitable and just learning atmosphere (e.g., "I believe in making adaptations in programming to accommodate the different cultures as my enrollment changes.") Higher scores on the CDAI are associated with higher levels of cultural awareness and respect for diversity. In the present study, the CDAI yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .56.

**Results**

Tables 1-5 displayed the results of the descriptive statistical analyses. As stated earlier, the primary purpose of this study was to replicate the analytical procedures used in the Larke (1990) study to compare the extent to which teacher education programs have made progress in training culturally competent teachers to work in diverse school settings. As shown in Table 1, 76% of the participants felt that they were likely to teach children that had different cultural histories and experiences from their own. This finding is consistent with Larke who found that 90.2% of the individuals in her sample shared this belief. Data also showed that 38% of the preservice teachers in the current

study disagreed when asked, did they prefer to work with children and parents who share their cultural background. In contrast, Larke found that 21.6% of the preservice teachers disagreed with the statement. It was also found that only 10% of the sample in the present study agreed that they were uncomfortable with people who had different values; 75% disagreed with the statement, and 15% of the preservice teachers were neutral. In comparison, Larke found that 68.6% of the preservice teachers reported that they agreed with the statement that they were uncomfortable working with people whose values were different from their own.

Table 2 showed that 60% of the preservice teachers agreed that it was important to establish parent interactions outside school activities, 17% disagreed, and 23% were neutral. In contrast, Larke found that 76.5% of her sample agreed that teachers should establish parent contact, 9.8% disagreed, and 13.7% were neutral. A large number of preservice teachers reported that it was necessary to include parent input in program planning (87%) and that the family view should be included in school program planning (83%). Similar findings were reported in the Larke study. When preservice teachers were asked whether they would experience frustrations in conferences with parents of different cultures, 15% agreed with the statement, 29% disagreed, and 56% were neutral. In

Item	Strongly Agree & Agree N (%)	Strongly Disagree & Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)
Cultural differences between the teacher and student	75 (76)	14 (14)	10 (10)
Identify students by ethnic groups	56 (57)	18 (18)	25 (25)
Prefer to work with children and parents who share my culture <sup>a</sup>	20 (20)	38 (38)	41 (41)
Uncomfortable with people who have values different from me	10 (10)	74 (75)	15 (15)
Surprised at minority participation in traditional non-minority school activities	17 (17)	70 (71)	12 (12)

<sup>a</sup>Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

**Table 1. Preservice Teachers' Responses Regarding Cultural Awareness**

contrast, Larke found that 34.0% of the preservice teachers reported that they would experience frustrations with parents of different cultures, 14.0% disagreed, and 52.0% were neutral. When asked about the extent to which parents were knowledgeable about assessing their children, 8% agreed with the statement that parents knew little about assessing their children, 73% disagreed, and 19% were neutral. Larke's findings were very different. In her study, she found that 68.6% of the preservice teachers agreed that parents knew very little about assessing their children, 13.8% disagreed with the statement, and only 17.6% were neutral.

When asked how they felt about cross cultural communication, 16% of the preservice teachers agreed that they were uncomfortable with people who speak non-standard English, 65% disagreed with the statement, and 19% reported the neutral response. Data from Larke's study revealed that 45.1% of the preservice teachers agreed with the statement that they were uncomfortable speaking with people who speak non-standard English, 23.5% disagreed with

the statement, and 31.4% were neutral. When asked should students' spoken language be corrected by modeling without explanation?; 15% of the preservice teachers agreed, 62% disagreed, and 23% were neutral. In contrast, Larke reported that 49.0% agreed with the statement, 23.5% disagreed, and 27.5% were neutral. Consistent with the Larke study, a large majority of preservice teachers (73%) in the current study reported that the regular curriculum should include ESL for non-English speaking children.

Table 4 shows the results of preservice teachers' responses concerning the assessment of their students. Approximately 23% of the preservice teachers agreed that students should be referred for testing if learning difficulties appeared to be based on cultural differences, 50% disagreed with the statement, and 27% were neutral. Larke, in contrast, found that 66.6% of the preservice teachers in her sample agreed that students should be referred for testing if learning difficulties appeared to be cultural. Thirteen percent of the preservice teachers in the present study agreed that translating standardized

Item	Strongly Agree & Agree N (%)	Strongly Disagree & Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)
Teachers should establish parent interactions outside school activities	59 (60)	17 (17)	23 (23)
Necessary to include parent input in program planning	86 (87)	5 (5)	8 (8)
Schedule IEP conference or program planning at parent convenience	63 (64)	6 (6)	30 (30)
Should include family view of school and society in school program planning	82 (83)	5 (5)	12 (12)
Experience frustrations in conferences with parents of different cultures	15 (15)	29 (29)	55 (56)
Parents know little about assessing their own children	8 (8)	72 (73)	19 (19)
During initial meetings, teachers should ask families their preference for ethnic identification*	25 (25)	36 (36)	38 (38)

\*Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

**Table 2. Preservice Teachers' Responses Regarding the Culturally Diverse Family**

achievement or intelligence tests to a child's dominant language gives the child an added advantage, 68% disagreed, and 19% were neutral. Again, different results were found in the Larke study (e.g., 68.6% agreed with the statement, 27.4% disagreed, and 3.9% were neutral).

Table 5 reports preservice teachers' responses to questions about the extent to which preservice teachers believed it was important to develop and maintain learning environments that incorporated and celebrated diversity and multiculturalism. When preservice teachers were asked, would they accept the use of ethnic jokes, 4% agreed with the statement, 80% reported disagreement, and 16% of the students were neutral. Larke's findings were very different. In her

study, 76.5% of the preservice teachers agreed that they would accept the use of ethnic jokes by children, 15.7% disagreed, and 7.8% were neutral. In the present study 7% of the preservice teachers agreed that it was not the teacher's responsibility to provide opportunities for children to share cultural differences, 79% disagreed, and 14% were neutral. Larke found overwhelming support for the notion that teachers should provide opportunities for children to share cultural differences (98%). Data from Table 5 also revealed that the majority of preservice teachers (64%) agreed that teachers should make program adaptations to accommodate diversity; however, 5% disagreed with the statement, while 31% were neutral. In contrast, Larke found that 84.3% of preservice teachers

Item	Strongly Agree & Agree N (%)	Strongly Disagree & Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)
Uncomfortable with people who speak non-standard English	16 (16)	64 (65)	19 (19)
Students' spoken language should be corrected by modeling without explanation	15 (15)	61 (62)	23 (23)
Sometimes non-standard English should be accepted	64 (65)	9 (9)	26 (26)
Regular curriculum should include ESL for non-English speaking children	72 (73)	9 (9)	18 (18)

**Table 3. Preservice Teachers' Responses Regarding Cross Cultural Communication**

Item	Strongly Agree & Agree N (%)	Strongly Disagree & Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)
Students should be referred for testing if learning difficulties appear to be cultural or language differences	23 (23)	49 (50)	27 (27)
Adaptations in standardized assessments are questionable since it alters reliability and validity*	26 (26)	35 (35)	38 (38)
Translating a standardized achievement or intelligence test to a child's dominant language gives the child an added advantage	13 (13)	67 (68)	19 (19)

\*Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

**Table 4. Preservice Teachers' Responses Regarding Assessment**

agreed that teachers should make necessary adaptations to the learning environment to accommodate diversity, 5.9% disagreed, and 9.8% were neutral.

**Discussion and Implications**

The present study yielded two major findings. First, the study showed that preservice teachers were more likely to agree with statements that emphasized cultural inclusion and respect for diversity in the classroom. Based on an earlier study conducted by Larke (1990), this study suggests that preservice teachers' attitudes are improving with respect to cultural diversity. Second, the data also revealed that a large proportion of preservice teachers reported neutral responses suggesting that they were not quite sure how they felt about integrating their learning environments with curricula, assessments, and programs that support multiculturalism in the classroom. Perhaps this neutrality results from the lack of experiences preservice teachers had engaging in these activities. It is also likely that preservice teachers were unsure of their abilities and feelings in this respect because they had not had the opportunity to attempt such strategies.

While the present study is significant, the study contained limitations. First, data were obtained from only one teacher education program from a large university in the midwestern part of the United States and, thus, findings may not be generalizable to all teacher education programs in other parts of the country. Second, this study was conducted with two different groups of preservice teachers at different times and it was likely that some of the comparisons made between the Larke (1990) study and the present study were not valid. However, because we were interested in examining the current perceptions of preservice teachers around diversity and multiculturalism our goal was to use the Larke study as a point of reference.

While the level of sensitivity among preservice teachers has increased in recent years, there still remains room for improvement. Teacher education programs, around the country, bear tremendous responsibility to help preservice teachers become more comfortable with and sensitive to issues related to multiculturalism and diversity. In terms of diversity issues in PreK-12 classrooms and teacher education programs, Banks and Banks (2001) charged that:

Item	Strongly Agree & Agree N (%)	Strongly Disagree & Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)
Accept the use of ethnic jokes/phrases by children	4 (4)	79 (80)	16 (16)
Sometimes ignore racial statements	24 (24)	56 (57)	19 (19)
Solution to communication problems of certain ethnic groups is child's own responsibility	9 (9)	75 (76)	15 (15)
Teachers should not provide opportunities for children to share cultural differences	7 (7)	78 (79)	14 (14)
Teachers should make program adaptations to accommodate diversity	63 (64)	5 (5)	31 (31)
Displays and materials should reflect at least three cultural groups	41 (41)	6 (6)	52 (53)
Student job assignments should rotate regularly and equally in job assignments	84 (85)	5 (5)	10 (10)
Cultural knowledge should affect teacher expectation	14 (14)	50 (51)	35 (35)

**Table 5. Preservice Teachers' Responses Regarding Creating A Multicultural Environment in the Classroom**

[a]n important aim of teacher education in the first decades of the new century is to help [preservice] teachers acquire the knowledge, values, and behaviors needed to work effectively with students from diverse groups. [Preservice] teachers also need to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to help students from mainstream groups to develop cross-cultural knowledge, values, and competencies (p. vi).

We conclude this article with implications and recommendations for teacher education programs and teacher educators to facilitate the improvement of preservice teachers' awareness and sensitivity to issues of diversity and multiculturalism.

#### *A Charge to Teacher Education Programs*

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that attention is still needed to address Banks and Banks' (2001) recommendations. At present, most teacher education programs offer one or two courses in multicultural education. This point was made more than a decade ago in Larke's (1990) study. The low numbers of courses available to preservice teachers in this regard point to obvious barriers and shortcomings among teacher education programs across the country. In short, more opportunities for students to enroll in multicultural education courses are needed. Perhaps even more appropriate, the majority of courses offered in teacher education programs should have elements of multiculturalism and diversity infused throughout the course curriculum.

Teacher education programs should also consider increasing preservice teachers' opportunities to interact with diverse groups of students. In fact, preservice teachers should be exposed to a variety of teaching contexts from the very beginning of their programs. This means that multicultural placement opportunities should be available to students through practicum, context observations, as well as student teaching. In this regard, preservice teachers may build on theory that they are learning in courses at the university with practice "in the trenches." Perhaps the need for praxis (the merging of theory and practice) is even more important when we think about preparing teachers to

teach in culturally diverse contexts. This suggestion is a policy issue that teacher education programs may consider while attempting to better prepare preservice teachers in this regard.

#### *Pedagogical Considerations for Teacher Educators*

Teacher education programs cannot accomplish the task of improving preservice teachers' attitudes and sensitivity without the commitment of teacher educators. Indeed, preservice teacher educators must become proficient and competent in the cultural realities of public schools. As teacher educators work to meet these needs, they may:

a) *Authentically reflect.* This reflection should lead to self-realization through reflections that focus on self, other human beings (e.g., the oppressed, the affluent, and so forth), and power structures. Thus, it is not enough for preservice teachers to be challenged in this way. Preservice teacher educators must also address these issues through critical self-reflections if serious improvements are to be made.

b) *Keep pedagogy connected to the students.* In this sense, teacher educators should learn the life worlds of their preservice teachers and help them understand their own racial and cultural capital. This may occur when teacher educators develop teaching approaches that allow preservice teachers to come to terms with personal beliefs that may have been suppressed otherwise.

c) *Reflect on practical and pedagogical power structures.* Teacher educators should demystify their power by participating in the tasks (such as journal writing) that they ask of their students and be models, not perpetuators, of power structures. In this way, they may develop important skill sets and genuine respect for all students.

In conclusion, teacher education programs and teacher educators must continue including multicultural issues and interests on the agenda at their respective colleges and universities. There should be a thematic permeation of the teacher education programs' commitment to



diversity. Fortunately, there has been some improvement where diversity, multicultural awareness and preservice teachers are concerned. However, there is still much work to be done.

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Dr. H. Richard Milner is an Assistant Professor in the Peabody College at Vanderbilt University. Professor Milner's research interests concern teacher thinking, reflection and beliefs in curriculum decision making and in cultural contexts.

Dr. Lamont A. Flowers is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education at the University of Florida. Professor Flowers is also an Associate Director of the Institute of Higher Education at the University of Florida. His research interests focus on investigating the effects of the college experience on student learning and examining the impact of organizational factors and racial diversity on students' educational outcomes in college.

Eddie Moore Jr. is a doctoral candidate at the University of Iowa. Eddie Moore is also the Director of the Office of Intercultural Life at Central College in Pella, Iowa. He has facilitated diversity training sessions for more than 2,800 municipal employees in Iowa, as well as training sessions for many Iowa colleges and universities.

Dr. James L. Moore III is an Assistant Professor in Counselor Education in the School of Physical Activity and Educational Services in the College of Education at The Ohio State University. Professor Moore's research agenda is centered on black male issues; academic persistence and achievement; cross-cultural counseling issues in schools; counseling student-athletes; and using innovative technological approaches in counselor education.

Tiffany A. Flowers is a doctoral student at the University of Iowa in the Department of Language, Literacy, and Culture. Her research areas include children's literature, literacy development, and African American literacy.

