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Teacher Education's Responsibility to Address Diversity Issues: Enhancing Institutional Capacity

FOR NEARLY A DECADE, a plethora of education reform strategies in the United States have steadily gained momentum in pursuit of a singular goal: high and rigorous standards for teaching and learning. Threaded through the public, professional, and political conversation is an explicit concern for educating *all* students to higher levels of understanding and competence once reserved for the privileged few. As Darling-Hammond, Wise, and Klein (1997) explain it:

This new mission for education requires substantially more knowledge and radically different skills for teachers. . . . If all children are to be effectively taught, teachers must be prepared to address the substantial diversity in experiences children bring with them to school—the wide range of languages, cultures, exceptionalities, learning styles, talents, and intelligences that in turn requires an equally rich and varied repertoire of teaching strategies. In addition, teaching for universal learning demands a highly developed ability to discover what children know and can do, as well as how they think and how they learn, and to match learning and performance opportunities to the needs of individual children. (p. 2)

While nearly every quarter of the education enterprise has been engaged in the growing conversation, the role of teacher education in pursuing the goal has become increasingly apparent. Quite

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simply, it is the responsibility of teacher educators to help all teachers, novice and experienced, acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions needed to work effectively with a diverse student population. Demographic projections suggest that, in the coming years, students in U.S. schools will be even increasingly different in background from their teachers, making the task of teacher education one of educating largely “typical” candidates—White, monolingual, middle class—to teach an increasingly diverse student body composed of many poor students of color.¹

What Is the Problem?

The concern for preparing all teachers for diversity has not emerged as a result of the current interest in education reform. Nearly 30 years ago, Smith's *Teachers for the Real World* (1969) identified three problems in preparing teachers to teach poor students: (a) teachers were unfamiliar with the backgrounds of poor students and the communities where they lived, (b) teacher education programs ordinarily did little to sensitize teachers to their own prejudices and values, and (c) teachers lacked preparation in the skills needed to perform effectively in the classroom. Smith concluded that most teacher education programs prepared students to teach children much like themselves, and he called for a major overhaul of teacher education programs with respect to diversity and equity issues.

Despite the passage of time, little has changed. Most teacher education programs acknowledge in principle the importance of pluralistic preparation, but in practice most are characterized by what Goodlad (1990) has called a monocultural approach. Such programs perpetuate the kinds of teaching practices that have historically benefited middle-class, White students but have largely failed to provide quality instruction for poor and ethnic and linguistic minority students. Teacher candidates, for the most part, come to teacher education with limited direct interracial and intercultural experience, with erroneous assumptions about diverse youngsters, and with limited expectations for the success of all learners (Melnick & Zeichner, 1997; Zeichner, 1993; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996a). They generally seek to avoid teaching in urban schools and other schools serving the poor where the need is the greatest and the work is the most demanding (Grant, 1993; Haberman, 1988; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996). As Ladson-Billings (1990) notes:

Schools and colleges of teacher education are turning out class after class of young, white, female teachers who would rather work in white, middle class suburbs. Unfortunately, their services are most needed in low-income schools, whose students come from races, cultures, and language groups for whom these new teachers feel unprepared. (p. 25)

These feelings of unpreparedness can be traced to the faculty who have responsibility for preparing new teachers. The problem is that most teacher educators are like their students. They are limited in cross-cultural experiences and understandings, and they are overwhelmingly Caucasian, monolingual, and culturally encapsulated (Ducharme & Agne, 1989; Villegas, 1993). Thus, the ability of teacher education programs to promote an understanding of diversity and equity among prospective teachers is problematic (Hixson, 1991). The work of teacher educators and the institutional environment in which teacher education is embedded are critical in determining the success of efforts to prepare teachers to work with diverse students. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, efforts to reform U.S. teacher education to address diversity is severely hampered by the cultural insularity of the bulk of the education professoriate (Melnick & Zeichner, 1997).

In addition to the limitations posed by faculty characteristics, there is also a lack of a broad

institutional commitment to diversity in the college and university environments that offer teacher education programs. The degree of institutional commitment to diversity is evidenced in such things as an institution's hiring practices, student recruitment and admission policies, and curricular programs. Making issues of diversity central to the intellectual life of the broader institution legitimizes efforts within programs to educate teachers for diversity. As Villegas (1993) notes:

The success of any teacher education program in restructuring for diversity is largely influenced by the norms and processes of the host institution. Teacher education programs found in institutions actively committed to the inclusion of people from diverse backgrounds are more likely to succeed in addressing issues of diversity than those located in institutions that are insensitive to or silent on matters of cultural inclusion. (p. 3)

Given the current makeup of teacher education faculty in the 1,200+ institutions that prepare teachers, and the current concerns about higher education reform in a time of diminishing resources and competing priorities, the prospects for widespread and immediate change are unlikely. There are, however, a few exemplary efforts designed to prepare teachers for diversity that give ample food for thought as we, as teacher educators, struggle with realizing our charge.

What Are Some Possibilities?

From 1990 to 1995, we co-directed a research project for the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning (NCRTL), entitled "Educating Teachers for Cultural Diversity."² In this project, we conducted case studies of several preservice teacher education programs across the country that have had some success in preparing typical teacher education students to teach poor students of color.³ We also investigated a number of institutional issues to explore ways in which the limitations of faculty could be overcome.

The purpose of our project was to make the practices of these exemplary teacher educators more visible and to direct more substantive attention to issues of diversity in preservice teacher education programs. It was our sense that, although much of teacher education had serious deficits, there was also some good work going on that was getting

little public attention beyond program sites. This was either because of fugitive publications such as funded project reports that languish in filing cabinets or because faculty were busy doing the work and not writing about their efforts. We made serious attempts to go beyond traditional data sources in identifying program strategies and worked to make the voices and struggles of teacher educators public when their work had previously received little notice in the literature or outside their immediate collegial networks.

We began our project with a review of the literature in the area (Zeichner, 1993), which focused on three major questions:

1. What do teachers need to be like, to know, and to be able and disposed to do to teach poor ethnic and language minority students successfully?
2. What strategies have been used in U.S. teacher education programs to prepare prospective teachers to work with diverse students?
3. What do we know about the success of different approaches to teacher education for diversity?

When we began our review of different approaches to educating teachers for diversity, we focused only on the identification of different curricular and instructional approaches to the problem. We soon came to understand that the problem was much broader and thus we extended our focus to define the problem of teacher education for diversity as a three-fold problem, one of *selection*, one of *socialization* through curriculum and instruction, and one of *institutional environment*. While we have written about all three problems elsewhere (see, for example, Melnick & Zeichner, 1997; Zeichner, 1996), the third problem warrants attention here.

In our research, we uncovered four different approaches to dealing with the institutional aspects of teacher education for diversity and the limitations of cultural insularity of most teacher educators. The first is the *active recruitment of faculty of color* through the establishment of institutional policies and programs such as the Madison Plan at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and MSU IDEA at Michigan State University. These programs provide incentives to departments, such as specially funded positions, to hire qualified faculty of color when new faculty positions are limited in number. The primary purpose of such incentives is to diversify faculty composition.

A second approach involves the provision of systematic *staff development for teacher education faculty* to help them examine their own attitudes about diverse people and learn about various aspects of teacher education for diversity and ways to infuse it into their institutions and programs. With funding from the U.S. Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs, the Multicultural Education Infusion Center at San Diego State University, for example, provided teams of 3-4 faculty from 15 teacher education institutions with a 2-week intensive institute in June 1993 and a follow-up network experience, designed to increase institutional capacity to prepare teachers for work with diverse students (Pang, Anderson, & Martuza, 1997). During these seminars, faculty were challenged to examine their beliefs about issues of class, race, gender, language, and sexual orientation as they relate to institutional policies and practices and to their own teaching. Each university team developed an institutional plan for the infusion of multicultural and bilingual issues into their teacher education programs.

George Mason University, in conjunction with the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) and with funding from the U.S. Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs, offered a series of 3-day institutes across the country for school and university teacher educators. These institutes, which included content focused on language acquisition and second language learning as well as examples of innovative practices in teacher education programs, were designed to encourage teacher educators to give more explicit attention to language-related issues in the preparation of all teachers.

A third approach is *partnership agreements* between predominantly White teacher education institutions and other colleges or universities with significant numbers of faculty and students of color. This approach was exemplified in the 1970s by the partnership between Louisiana Tech, a formerly White segregated institution, and Grambling State University, a historically Black institution, which shared a common geographical area (Mills, 1984). Another form of partnership is one between a teacher education program located in a predominantly White area and K-12 schools and school

districts that provide teacher education students with field placements in schools serving students of color. Examples of these partnerships include the American Indian and Latino Immersion Projects, coordinated by Jim Mahan and Laura Stachowski at Indiana University in Bloomington, which placed students in Navajo Reservation schools and in San Antonio respectively (Mahan, 1982), and the partnership between Moorhead University in Minnesota and the San Juan-Alamo School district in South Texas (Cooper, Beare, & Thorman, 1990).

The fourth approach is the creation of a *consortium*, where a group of institutions combine their resources to hire staff with expertise in teacher education for diversity to provide part of the teacher education program, usually field experiences and a few courses and seminars related to teaching diverse students. The Cooperative Urban Teacher Education program (CUTE) and the urban education semester of the Venture Consortium (Levine & Pignattelli, 1994) are examples. The CUTE program, begun in 1967 and based on an earlier program at Central Missouri State College (McCormick, 1990; Soptick & Clothier, 1974), has involved more than 20 colleges and universities in six states. This program has graduated more than 2,000 teachers.

The Urban Education semester of the Venture Consortium in New York City, coordinated by Bank Street College, is an experience for college juniors who have not yet made a commitment to a career in teaching. This program involves interdisciplinary coursework at Bank Street and field experiences in East Harlem schools. A somewhat closer look at one of our case study sites, the Urban Education Program in Chicago, shows how one exemplary consortium effort works.

The Urban Education Program

The Urban Education Program of the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (UEP), which has existed since the fall of 1963, has provided courses in multicultural education or in instruction for limited-English-proficient students, and school and community field experiences to hundreds of prospective teachers from small liberal arts colleges that were unable by themselves to offer these experiences. Located in a former convent in the Edge-

water Community on the North Side of Chicago, UEP draws students from 15 member colleges: Beloit, Carleton, Coe, Colorado, Cornell, Grinnell, Knox, Lake Forest, Lawrence, Macalester, Monmouth, Ripon, St. Olaf, Gustavus Adolphus, and Ohio Wesleyan. The program offers several experiences that are viewed as extensions of teacher preparation on the home campuses for students committed to working in and learning from urban communities. The experiences typically culminate in semester- or term-long elementary or secondary student-teaching field placements in Chicago public, private, alternative, and parochial schools.

Unlike many of the partnership arrangements that merely place students in urban settings and provide supervision in the field setting, UEP has a core of local faculty whose expertise is in preparing teachers to work with diverse students. While they extend what students have learned on their home campuses, the UEP faculty focus specifically on teaching and learning in urban environments. The program is committed to the belief that "teaching requires both technical skills and serious reflection . . . [and is thus] concerned with helping teachers develop consciousness of their involvements on several levels" (Director's Report, 1988, p. 3). The learning opportunities for teacher candidates are arranged carefully with the intention of enabling them to develop the following skills and attitudes:

- Consciousness of oneself (beliefs, perspectives, patterns of behavior, coping and learning styles);
- Attentiveness to others (observation and listening skills, encouragement skills, analytic and diagnostic skills);
- Ability to collaborate and communicate with others (students, colleagues, administrators, parents);
- Resourcefulness (use of ideas from a wide range of sources);
- Openness to change (self-evaluation and use of feedback from others);
- Understanding of the cultural dimensions of people's lives and their impact on learning;
- Ability to analyze educational systems and their impact on the learning environment; and
- Sense of self-confidence balanced with the courage to question oneself and the content of schooling (Director's Report, 1988, p. 3).

The student teaching portion of the program includes full-time work in schools, small- and large-group seminars twice weekly in late afternoons and evenings, and several immersion experiences in Chicago's ethnic communities. In addition, the students live together in the former convent in an environment that is designed to foster feelings of collaboration and support. For students who come from these small midwestern colleges, the experience in Chicago is one of total immersion in a setting that differs radically from the one they are used to on their home campuses.

From extended fact-finding "neighborhood walks" in ethnic communities, reflective journal writing, peer teaching about community experiences, and conversations with community representatives, teacher candidates experience first-hand and think hard about the contexts within which their school experiences are embedded. The faculty not only carefully design and structure these experiences but are committed to making the experiences truly transformative for students. Interview data from our research with program graduates and student teachers indicate that the majority were profoundly affected by their UEP experiences. The following comments are illustrative (for a more comprehensive discussion, see Zeichner & Melnick, 1996b):

I think they taught me how to look at things in different ways. . . . In the program, they taught us to turn [not feeling safe] around and expose yourself. And when you feel safe with another person, and then grow from that and go out to find more things. . . . I just felt like they're always trying to get us to learn more about things, if not necessarily another culture, then just a different way of looking at things. (p. 53)

I felt very much a sense of necessity to sensitize us, to where we had come from and how that comes into play with the students that we're working [with]. . . . If we were going to teach in Chicago, we weren't going to be teaching people who were like us. . . . I find that other people who haven't had that kind of sensitizing experience . . . have no sense that it even exists, that it even comes into play with what's happening with the dynamics of a classroom or a school as a whole. (p. 52)

They took us to ethnic neighborhoods, and I had no idea that Chicago even had that. . . . Just to be aware that there's such a sense of community that they are bringing into school. Maybe that has a lot to do with why kids interact the way they do in class. (p. 53)

They really pulled out of me a new way of thinking. And it's really impacted the way I teach today. (p. 52)

What Are the Prospects?

Despite the testimony of the UEP students and graduates, there is little empirical evidence in program reports or in the literature of widespread long-term success as a result of this or any of the other approaches we uncovered in our research. While each has some promise in its own right and warrants empirical investigation, all four approaches have their particular problems as well.

What about changing the institutional environment by recruiting and retaining faculty of color in largely White institutions? It is both a critical need and a moral imperative, but opportunities for such practices clearly are limited. Despite specific institutional policies to diversify faculty composition, higher education in this country is severely constrained by financial restrictions, and recruitment of any new faculty is subject to intense scrutiny and debate. The current climate of anti-affirmative action policies further exacerbates the issue.

What is perhaps more troublesome is that White institutions with few faculty of color often offer little more than inhospitable environments for new faculty of color, especially those who come with expressed commitments to address issues of diversity. There is often the assumption that issues of diversity should be "their" concern and not the concern of the entire faculty, thereby militating against the kind of collaborative work that preparing teachers for diversity requires.

Many faculty also share the perception that faculty of color have few, if any, "mainstream" interests, and they often are automatically relegated to limited roles and responsibilities in education schools, finding themselves marginalized at best. While seemingly well intended, such recruitment policies fail to provide opportunities for all faculty and students to learn from the variety of perspectives on a number of educational issues that faculty of color bring to White institutions.

The practice of teacher education itself is typically not highly valued within academe, and most college and university norms and reward structures fail to provide the incentives needed to sustain programmatic efforts of faculty to bring about the kind

of personal and professional transformation that teacher education students need (Liston & Zeichner, 1991). Promotion and tenure decisions depend heavily on criteria related to research and scholarship in most institutions, and faculty who devote large amounts of their time to teaching and teacher education program development have little time to spend on activities necessary for academic success.

Some of these same problems point to shortcomings in the staff development approach that exports a small group of faculty to another location and then returns them to an unchanged environment in which they are expected to assume responsibility for teacher education for diversity. As Pang et al. (1997) note, without continuing experiential opportunities and interactive, problem-posing dialogue back on campus, the obstacles related to power differentials between administrators and faculty and conflicting expectations evidenced in their institutes will thwart lasting and real change. Without a concerted effort to create a culturally diverse learning community and programmatic and personnel practices committed to the promotion of diversity and equity throughout the culture of the teacher education institution, there is little hope for success of either the faculty recruitment or staff development approaches.

The consortium approach also runs the risk of relegating concerns about diversity to "them" rather than to "us." Despite the purpose of the Urban Education Program and the testimony from its graduates, such an arrangement can largely segregate teacher education for diversity to experiences outside of students' home institutions. The 15-member colleges are geographically unable to provide field experiences in diverse settings for their students, and the solution supports the real estate industry's claim that "location is everything."

The problem is that concerns about diversity may be given over to the "on-site specialists" rather than systematically treated throughout the undergraduate experience. Teacher education for diversity should be the responsibility of the *total institution*—in general education, in disciplinary majors and minors, in experiential education or service learning options, as well as in each aspect of the formal teacher preparation program. While consortia can provide opportunities unavailable through the home campus,

the home institutions should not abdicate their responsibilities for the full scope of a student's liberal education in preparation for teaching.

The partnership approach also has limitations. Many of the early efforts resulted from federal and state legislation and judicial decisions to desegregate racially separate colleges and universities. Others resulted from a need to restructure state educational systems in response to shrinking revenues and declining enrollments. Although some such partnerships continue to exist, the lessons learned from prior efforts indicate that governments cannot legislate cooperation among institutions, especially those that historically have been unequal.

Evidence from current work to establish professional-development-school partnerships between local schools and colleges or universities shows that unequal power relationships still stand in the way of much potentially successful collaborative work (see, for example, Fraser, Melnick, & Murrell, 1998). Success of partnerships demands a commonly desired goal in the education of teachers, a commitment to shared responsibility, an acknowledgment of shared expertise, the "creation of a climate of mutual trust and cooperation, and a willingness to break with tradition by combining and reorganizing existing resources" (Mills, 1984, pp. 22-23).

Conclusion

Were we able to overcome the specific limitations of each of the foregoing approaches, an underlying problem still demands redress. As the glut of new books on race and class⁴ published recently attest once again—and President Clinton's town meetings on race relations vividly showcase—a profound separation in this country perpetuates the inequalities that shame this nation. Schools are not the sole reason why such inequities exist, but the failure to provide quality education for all students signifies a crisis that is intolerable in a democratic society. The issue of social justice is relevant not only for pluralistic settings but for all areas of our country, for historic inequities affect—and diminish—us all, regardless of our "neighborhood." For teacher educators, the social crisis clearly means shouldering the responsibility for preparing teachers to teach diverse students in ways that we have not yet done. What will compel us to assume our responsibility?

Notes

1. Despite the large number of projected teacher retirements in the next 5-10 years, Banks (1991) has pointed out that a significant increase in the percentage of teachers of color, even under the most optimistic scenario, is unlikely. Nonetheless, we believe that it is important to continue to recruit and retain more people of color in teaching.
2. While diversity includes many factors such as social class, gender, race, ethnicity, language, age, religion, exceptionalities, and sexual orientation, our work focused primarily on social class, race, ethnicity, and language differences under the heading of "cultural diversity."
3. In limiting our focus to the preparation of White teachers to teach poor students of color, we did not assume that teachers who are members of a minority group can necessarily translate their cultural knowledge into culturally relevant pedagogy (see Montecinos, 1996). Our study focused on a small aspect of a much larger issue related to the preparation of teachers for diverse students.
4. See, for example, Appiah & Gutmann's *Color Conscious* (1996), Patterson's *The Ordeal of Integration* (1997), and Shipler's *A Country of Strangers* (1997).

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