Can We Create Dreamkeepers For Diverse Classrooms?

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This article deals with preparing teachers for diversity in the classroom that will help them meet the challenges of racial disparity. The authors emphasize the price of freedom is true vigilance that requires effective education for all members of the democracy.

This article describes a 2-year action research project, Preparing Teachers for Diverse Classrooms, that addressed the preparation and development of teachers. The North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction supported the project and a consortium of universities and public schools implemented the project. The project had two components: a preservice component that focused on students in the East Carolina University Model Clinical Teaching Program (MCTP), and an in-service component that focused on participants in an East Carolina University program on multicultural education and organizational change. The results of the action research project illuminated the challenges that face teacher educators in preparing teachers for diverse classrooms.

The Model Clinical Teachers Program had won several national awards for its innovative practices, but several of its graduates reported that they did not feel prepared for the diversity that they faced in their classrooms. The summer program on multicultural education and organizational change had received very positive evaluations, but its alumni reported serious difficulties when they tried to implement their new knowledge when they returned to their schools.

Project Context

In 1835, De Tocqueville (1898) wrote: "If I were called upon to predict the future, I should say that the abolition of slavery in the South will, in the common course of things, increase the repugnance of the white populations for blacks" (p. 481).

DuBois (1903/1989) stated in the Souls of Black Folk that the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line. The rising tide of race-based violence (Klanwatch Project, 1996) suggested that the problem of race has not been resolved in this century and will be a major challenge of the 21st century.

... African Americans find themselves on a downward spiral. African American students lag far behind their Caucasian counterparts on standard academic achievement measures. At the same time, the very society that experienced a civil rights revolution finds itself locked in the grips of racism and discrimination. Almost 40 years after a Supreme Court decision declaring separate but equal schools to be illegal, most African American students still attend schools that are in reality segregated and unequal. (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. x)

However, there are Dreamkeepers—those who keep the dreams of parents and children alive—in our schools who can effectively educate all children (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ladson-Billings (1994) studied a group of excellent teachers, who were able to educate effectively all their students. Ladson-Billings called them Dreamkeepers. She argued that their effectiveness was based on an understanding of themselves, their students, community and school culture, and effective instructional practices. Can teacher educators consistently create more Dreamkeepers?

By the year 2010, approximately 62,644,000 children will attend American public schools. Thirty-eight percent of those children will be classified as minorities. Ten years later in 2020, students of color are predicted to make up nearly half of the nation’s student population (Hodgkinson, 1989). The 1990 census showed that one out of four persons living in the United States is a person of color. By the turn of the century, one out of every three American citizens will be a person of color. While the percentage of school
children of color is increasing, the percentage of teachers of color is decreasing steadily (Mosher & Sia, 1993). Analysis of the teacher education population reveals an enrollment that is 92% Caucasian and 85% middle class (Hinchey, 1994). Typically, the average American teacher is a Caucasian person, approaching her 40th birthday, married, and the mother of two children (Dana, 1991). Teachers, generally, are not prepared to teach effectively a culturally diverse student population, because they do not know how to provide culturally relevant instruction to their students (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

In sum, culturally relevant teaching fosters the kinds of social interactions in the classroom that support the individual in the group context. Students feel a part of a collective effort designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence. (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 76)

The concept of race may have little scientific validity, but the concept has major political and societal implications (Hodgkinson, 1995). Can teacher educators help the average American teacher become a Dreamkeeper; that is, effectively educate all children? The North Carolina Professional Practices Committee believed the answer was yes and began exploring that issue in the early 1990s.


1. What attitudes, knowledge, and skills are necessary for teachers to meet the needs of multicultural student populations?

2. How can teachers acquire the necessary attitudes, knowledge, and skills?

3. What will ensure that teachers acquire the necessary attitudes, knowledge, and skills? (North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction, 1992, pp. 2-3)

A consortium of colleges, universities, and school systems came together with some financial support from the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction to develop a project that would begin to address those questions. The project participants collaborated in the development of models and strategies for the preservice education of future teachers and the in-service education teachers and administrators.

**Project Objectives**

The project participants focused on three objectives:

1. To identify attitudes, knowledge, and skills that are necessary for teachers to educate effectively all students in a culturally diverse classroom for productive lives in the 21st century.

2. To develop a model of preservice education that will provide education and socialization necessary for effective education of multicultural student populations and to identify the systemic issues that must be addressed to implement successfully the preservice education model.

3. To develop a model of in-service education that will provide education and socialization necessary for effective education of multicultural student populations and to identify systemic issues that must be addressed to implement successfully the in-service education model.

**Project Strategies**
The general strategy for the project was to build and strengthen collaborative relationships among university faculty, graduate students, and public school teachers to address needs and objectives, which the collaborators had identified. Project participants emphasized databased decision making and the production of products and tools that would enable effective instruction. They tried to establish double-loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974) among the project collaborators. Double-loop learning attempts to create situations "in which the basic assumptions behind ideas or policies are confronted, in which hypotheses are tested publicly, and in which the processes are disconfirmable, not self-sealing" (Argyris, 1983, pp. 103-104).

The end result should be increases in the effectiveness of decision making, in the monitoring of decisions and policies, and in the probability that errors and failures will be communicated openly and that actors will learn from the feedback. (Argyris, 1983, p. 104)

Project participants worked on the two concurrent areas related to the preparation of preservice teachers and the growth and development of teachers and leaders who are already in the schools. As they explored the literature related to these areas, an important concept emerged; that is, people are often unwilling to change, even when logic suggests that the proposed change would help them.

Human beings generally have a strong commitment to the status quo. Schon (1971) called it a desire for the stable state.

Belief in the stable state is belief in the unchangeability, the constancy of central aspects of our lives, or belief that we can attain such a constancy. Belief in the stable state is strong and deep in us. We institutionalize it in every social domain. We do this in spite of our talk about change and our approval of dynamism. (Schon, 1971, p. 1)

Most organizations develop a culture designed to protect the stable state in organizational members, that is, protect them from information overload and uncertainty (Schein, 1985; Schon, 1971). Yet the rapid rate of change in most societies suggests that the reality of the stable state will be lost to most people (Schon, 1971). If an organization’s culture, structure, and procedures do not adapt to meet changing needs, the organization will become ineffective (Schein, 1985). The culture, structure, and procedures of many public schools and teacher education programs have not adapted to meet changing needs (North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction, 1992). An analysis of one of the author’s research logs indicated that the project participants discussed often the failure of educational reform to actively engage the culture of teacher education programs and the culture of schools as an explanation for the discrepancy between the lip service and practice of preparing teachers for diverse classrooms.

Project Process & Outcomes

The project was successful in that it achieved the three specified objectives. However, one of the limitations of the project was that the project participants did not achieve the level of collaboration that was originally planned because of major funding changes for some of the participant organizations during the life of the project. The inference that participants made from these events was that the success of some important initiatives was a function of the collaborative resources that participants committed to them. Although unforeseen obstacles did develop, the project did achieve the planned objectives: to identify attitudes, knowledge, and skills; to develop a model of preservice education and to identify the systemic issues that must be addressed to implement successfully the preservice education model; and to develop a model of in-service education and to identify systemic issues that must be addressed to implement successfully the in-service education model.

Identify Necessary Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills

The research literature provided ample information for the first objective of the project that addressed identifying necessary attitudes, knowledge, and skill that are necessary to educate all students in a diverse
classroom. Schlosser (1992) emphasized the importance of how teachers treated students. The most
effective teachers are those who demonstrate that they understand the culture of their students, who
understand the developmental stages and needs of their students, and whose students believe them to be
caring human beings. Ogbu (1982, 1983, 1992) pointed out the personal knowledge of some students is in
conflict with school knowledge, that is, the assumptions, norms, and beliefs that students may bring to
school may conflict with the norms of the school. Banks (1993a) discussed the various types of knowledge
that actually guides behavior in school (Table 1).

Based on the review of the literature, the project’s participants concluded that preservice and in-service
education programs must address personal/cultural, mainstream academic, transformative, and school
knowledge to prepare teachers for diverse classrooms. The personal/cultural and popular knowledge that
many minority students bring to school conflict with the personal/cultural and popular knowledge of
administrators and teachers and are ignored by the mainstream academic and school knowledge (Ogbu,

Teacher educators need to develop the transformative academic knowledge (Banks, 1993a) that enables
teachers to produce personal/cultural knowledge and school knowledge. Teachers with that foundation
could produce culturally relevant instruction for all students. An individual teacher has an important
responsibility in the delivery of culturally relevant instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teachers must be
able to understand how their own personal/cultural knowledge affects their perception and implementation
of school knowledge. Teacher educators should model and teach their students of the process of awareness
of self and awareness of context.

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<tr>
<th>Knowledge Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Personal/cultural</td>
<td>The concepts, explanations, and interpretations that administrators, faculty, and students derive from personal experiences in their homes, families, and community cultures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>The facts, concepts, explanations, and interpretations that are institutionalized in the mass media and other cultural institutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream academic</td>
<td>The concepts, paradigms, theories, and explanations that constitute traditional Eurocentric knowledge in history, the behavioral sciences, and the social sciences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative academic</td>
<td>The concepts, paradigms, theories, and explanations that constitute a broader, more inclusive perspective in history, the behavioral sciences, and the social sciences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>The concepts, paradigms, theories, and explanations that are presented in teachers’ guides, other media forms, and lectures by teachers.</td>
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(Banks, 1993a, p. 7)

Preservice Education Model

One of the necessary conditions for this process is engagement in reflective practice (Dewey, 1904;
Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Schon, 1983). The idea of involving the learner and the learner’s own
experience in the learner’s education and growth has a long history in education. It can be a very effective process. The project team used this concept, reflective practice, in development and implementation of the preservice and in-service education models.

The demographic and cultural differences between typical in-service and preservice teachers and the culturally and economically diverse students whom they teach make multicultural teacher preparation a necessity if effective teaching is to become a reality. Cultural discontinuities between the community and the school (Ogbu, 1982, 1983, 1992) and lack of cultural relevance in instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1994) contribute to the lack of success that some members of minority groups experience in schools.

Diverse students require diversity in teaching methods, styles, and materials. America’s students are becoming increasingly multicultural at the same time teachers are becoming more monocultural (Ladson-Billings, 1994). How do teacher educators address this phenomenon of cultural diversity and effectively facilitate instruction for all students?

A Model Teacher Education Program Seeks Transformation. The preservice model of this project emerged from an assessment of the multicultural components of a model teacher education curriculum. The Model Clinical Teaching Program (MCTP), School of Education (SOE), East Carolina University (ECU) was the object of the evaluation. MCTP, an innovative model of teacher preparation, allowed senior elementary education majors to choose between a year-long collaborative experience and the traditional student teacher training. Although it offered a curriculum congruent to the traditional student teaching program, the MCTP’s avenue of instructional delivery is quite different (MCTP, 1993). MCTP interns were assigned clinical teachers, visited their assigned schools and made plans with their assigned clinical teachers before the public school year begins. The mentorship element of the program allowed the providers (SOE faculty, program director, clinical teachers, and school administrators) to prepare a cocoon of instruction for the interns.

However, the MCTP interns reported that they did not have adequate access to instruction to prepare them for effective instruction in diverse classrooms. Results of faculty (SOE and clinical teachers) interviews and surveys indicated a lack of multicultural training and knowledge. A case study analysis of the MCTP written, taught, supported, and learned curricula produced a well, that for purposes of multicultural education, was bone dry. Classroom observations of the interns’ teaching methods classes demonstrated little evidence of multicultural concepts. Two administrations of The Beliefs About Diversity Scale (Pohan & Aguilar, 1994), an instrument designed to measure professional and personal beliefs about diversity, substantiated the failure of the MCTP’s curriculum to provide multicultural teacher education for its preservice teachers.

An exasperated MCTP intern said, "I know that I am culturally illiterate. Now, what do I do about it?” The preservice component tried to provide knowledge and tools to the MCTP interns. One objective of the preservice component of the project was to create a series of curriculum modules, resource guides and materials to assist in the preparation of preservice teachers for culturally diverse classrooms.

The MCTP director, five clinical teachers, one in-service teacher (former MCTP intern), an undergraduate assistant, and a graduate research assistant worked on the development of the materials. Teachers began their work with staff development activities focusing on knowledge bases for cultural diversity in teacher education and learning styles research. Jointly, these educators created a series of curriculum modules that incorporated multicultural themes, followed competency goals from the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, and utilized diverse learning strategies. The materials had a successful pilot test. The North Carolina State Department of Public instruction received the materials for more extensive testing.

Setting the Stage for Change. Data collected during this study supported a need to restructure teacher education programs to include knowledge bases for cultural diversity. Workshops on multicultural education offer some benefit for preservice teachers, but they are not adequate for preparing students to teach in diverse classrooms (Grant, 1994). Preservice teachers need to be placed with clinical teachers who
possess a strong background in multicultural education, who know how culture impacts learning, and who employ a variety of teaching techniques in their classroom to benefit diverse learners.

Preservice multicultural education should take many forms: readings, practicum experiences in multicultural settings, clinical experiences in schools where diversity abounds, and living in multicultural communities.

It is not a difficult proposition to make any school or educational setting multicultural. Practically all American schools are already multicultural since White students, Black students, and Brown students are socialized within diverse cultures each calls his own. Teachers often think of schools as possessing a dominant culture that contains a variety of microcultures. These microcultures, though often repressed, can be resurrected and shared for the benefit and enrichment of all students and teachers (Banks, 1993a).

Teacher educators hold the key. Restructuring teacher education programs to include an infusion of the philosophical tenets of multicultural education must begin with teacher education faculty. Teacher educators should pursue personal and professional development that helps them perceive how their own culture affects their perceptions and interactions with others. Spindler and Spindler (1994) called this process cultural therapy. Teacher educators should be able to serve as models for teaching to diverse populations. Both teacher educators and preservice teachers would benefit from this transformation.

This model was based primarily on the research of Etzioni (1993), Gay (1995), and Ladson-Billings (1994). Etzioni (1993) argued that multicultural education can create a population that is culturally pluralistic yet united toward common goals. He called this concept "pluralism-with-unity" (p. 152). The preservice curriculum must contain the curriculum content that gives teachers the knowledge to teach a multicultural curriculum to all students. Gay (1995) and Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) pointed out that the teacher education curriculum must develop a theoretical and practical link between culturally relevant pedagogy and the academic success of diverse students. Munn (1996) made these suggestions:

Teacher education faculty should plan to:

1. Integrate diversity education in all aspects of teacher education curriculum, written, taught, supported, and learned.
2. Provide preservice teachers with practicum experiences that provide an opportunity to apply diversity education and training.
3. Include appropriate instruction in diversity for all teacher education faculty.
4. Develop a systematic evaluation of the impact of the innovation on the learned curriculum. (p. 86)

These suggestions may assist preservice teachers, but what assistance can teacher educators offer to whose who already work in schools?

In-Service Education Model

This in-service education model was based primarily on the work of Banks (1993b), Bennett (1990), Comer (1988), Ogbu (1982, 1983, 1992), and Sleeter (1992). Banks (1993b) and Bennett (1990) argued that multicultural education for all students is a necessary condition for a pluralistic, democratic society in the 21st century. Comer (1988) contributed the concept of collaborative effort within the school and between the school and the community. Ogbu (1982, 1983, 1992) provided the prism through which the project team examined minority status and schooling, that is, the potential impact of various cultural discontinuities on the education of some minority students. “School learning and performance of minority children are
influenced by complex social, economic, historical, and cultural factors" (Ogbu, 1992, p. 7). Sleeter’s (1992) work emphasized the importance of restructuring the culture and operation of the school.

The project staff worked with teams of teachers and administrators. They used their schools as clinical settings. The project staff worked with them on multiphase simulations, case studies, seminar discussions, the development of instructional materials, and the development of action plans that would be implemented in the schools. The focus of the action plan was based on the diagnosis that was conducted at the clinical setting. The theme that ran through process of the in-service section of the project was *let’s solve the problem, not fix the blame*. The in-service participants began to internalize the knowledge base and skills that would enable to shape the culture of their school to facilitate effective education for all students.

**Results and Implications**

As a result of the project, East Carolina University School of Education has begun revisions of its preservice teacher education program and institutionalized the in-service model in two graduate courses: *Managing Organizational Change* and *School and Community Cultures*. The first course is required in the Masters in School Administration Program and is designed to prepare educational leaders who understand their schools as open systems that are affected by many forces. The second course focuses on the issues of diversity in more detail. Students who participate in the course use their own schools as clinical sites and collect data from colleagues in their organization. Feedback from students who have taken the courses indicates that many of them are using the knowledge and skills that they developed to facilitate the growth of educational programs that are effective for all students.

The success of the project, *Preparing Teachers for Diverse Classrooms*, indicates that it is possible to prepare teachers for diversity and help them meet the challenge of the color-line. Do we have the will to make it happen? The price of freedom is vigilance and true vigilance requires effective education for all members of the democracy. The demographics of United States in the 21st century are a given (Mosher & Sia, 1993). Schools where faculties can educate all students to become productive and effective students of a thriving democracy are not a given. The future of the schools of the United States; the status of the democracy of the United States may be in the hands of teacher educators.

The tolerance necessary for a functioning democracy can come only from respect and knowledge (Gates, 1992). Perry and Fraser (1993) pointed out that much school knowledge (Banks, 1993a) does not lead to respect and tolerance and emphasized the connection between education for all and freedom for all. They used Langston Hughes’ poem, *Freedom’s Plow*, as the title and the introduction to their work. Hughes’ (1959) poem should have special meaning to teachers and teacher educators at the end of the 20th century.

_A Long Time ago,_

An enslaved people heading toward freedom made up a song:

Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!

_That plow plowed a new furrow_

_Across the field of history._

_Into that furrow the freedom seed was dropped._

_From that seed a tree grew, is growing, will ever grow._

_That tree is for everybody,_
For all America, for all the world.

May its branches spread and its shelter grow

Until all races and all peoples know its shade.

Keep Your Hand on the Plow! Hold on! (p. 294)

References


