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Is Cultural Responsiveness Part of Effective Teaching?: Preservice Teacher Perspectives

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which preservice elementary teachers integrated culturally responsive pedagogy into their perspectives on effective teaching and being an effective teacher and if these perspectives changed over time. Data were collected from 53 preservice teachers in the form of a perspective paper written in two consecutive semesters at the end of field experience courses. Data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Findings indicated that preservice teacher integrated issues of cultural and linguistic diversity into their perspectives minimally. Linguistic diversity was more integrated than cultural diversity. Their perspectives included less integration of cultural and linguistic diversity over time.

Keywords

Preservice teacher beliefs, culturally responsive pedagogy, preservice teacher education

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Introduction

One might say that one important role of teacher educators is to change future teachers' beliefs about teaching. Literature on preservice teacher beliefs indicates that preservice teachers enter teacher education programs with a set of beliefs about teaching based on prior experiences as students (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Rust, 1994). These beliefs tend to impact their future teaching practices (Kagan, 1992; Kissau, Rodgers, & Haudeck, 2015; Pajares, 1992), be resistant to change, and impact what they learn during their teacher education (Anderson & Piazza, 1996; Dunkin, Precians, & Nettle, 1994; Lortie, 1975). Pajares (1992) in his highly regarded article about teacher beliefs pointed out the difficulty of defining teacher beliefs and suggested that beliefs be studied using proper assessments. He also pointed out that beliefs are not easy to change unless they are challenged. Demonstrating that preservice teachers' beliefs are not in line with what they should be has been suggested as ways to change them (Pajares, 1992; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000). This is especially important in studying preservice teachers' beliefs about diversity. Educating future teachers' for culturally diverse classrooms has been an important issue in teacher education for good reasons.

While changing demographics brought more diversity into American classrooms, the current and future teaching force has remained mainly White, female, and middle class (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Limited understanding of multiculturalism and diversity issues by preservice teachers has been noted by researchers (e.g. Guillaume, Zuniga-Hill, & Yee, 1995; Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Neuharth-Pritchett, Reiff, & Pearson, 2001;

Zeichner, 1993). Silverman (2010) found in her research that preservice teachers held limited understandings of diversity which affected their sense of efficacy, responsibility, and advocacy. Furthermore, preservice teachers' ethnic, cultural and racial beliefs tend to be problematic (Gay, 2010). For example, Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, and Gordon (2006) discovered in their research with novice teachers that they tend to hold deficit-laden and stereotypical views of urban students. Terrill and Mark (2000) found that White female and suburban preservice teachers had significantly different expectations from students of different racial and linguistic backgrounds. They expected schools with high percentage of minority students to have more discipline problems, less parental involvement, and low levels of student motivation. Kumar and Hamer (2012) discovered in their study of preservice teachers' attitudes and beliefs toward diversity that some of their participants endorsed stereotypical views about poor and minority students.

Many preservice teachers lack experience with diverse cultures until they go to college (Vaughan 2005; Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse 2006; Jennings 2007; Trent, Kea, and Oh 2008). Most of the time their early beliefs are based on stereotypical images they had seen in various forms of media. Considering changing American classrooms and role of beliefs in preservice teacher education, it is important to study preservice teachers' perspectives on diversity and use the information gathered from these studies to reform teacher education. As Garmon (2004) pointed out, studies on this issues report conflicting findings. There is a need to better understand what happens to preservice teachers' beliefs about diversity in teacher education program in different contexts. To contribute to this goal, the purpose of this study was to examine preservice teachers' perspectives on teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students in the context of their beliefs about effective teaching.

Background of the Study

I have been a teacher educator and taught multicultural education courses for about 15 years. Within the context of my multicultural education courses, most of my students presented culturally sensitive ideas in classroom discussions and assignments most of the time. However, I did not always know if these views were still present when they were in other contexts such as field experiences and other courses. It is reasonable expect that if preservice teachers internalize positive beliefs and attitudes about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students they will integrate such perspectives to their overall beliefs about what effective teaching and effective teachers should be like. Therefore, studying the extent to which preservice teachers integrate issues of cultural and linguistic diversity into their perspectives on effective teaching and effective teachers is justified. Following is a discussion of the literature on preservice teacher education on cultural diversity, and preservice teachers' beliefs about effective teaching.

Preservice Teacher Education for Cultural Diversity

Teacher education programs take different approaches to educating preservice teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students ranging from full infusion of multiculturalism throughout a program (Potts, Foster-Triplett, & Rose, 2008; McHatton, Keller, Shircliffe, & Zalaquett, 2009) to offering stand-alone courses (Scott & Mumford, 2007). Moreover, emphasis placed on different types of student diversity varies among programs. Jennings (2007) indicated that ethnic and racial diversity were the most emphasized diversity topics in teacher education programs based on data gathered data from 142 elementary and secondary teacher education programs in the United States. Regardless of the differences among teacher education programs, it is well-understood that preservice and inservice teachers need to be prepared for working with

linguistically and culturally diverse students (Banks, 2006; Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2009; Garmon, 2004; Keengwe, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2008).

The impact of multicultural course and field work on preservice teachers is unclear. While taking a course in multicultural education can bring positive changes in the beliefs and attitudes of preservice teachers or inservice teachers (Author, 2012; Acquah & Commins, 2013; Bollin, 1996; Martin & Dagostino-Kalniz, 2015; Sleeter, 2001), some studies suggested stand-alone courses are insufficient to impact preservice teachers' awareness significantly (Brown, 2004; Pohan, 1996; Ukpodoku, 2003). Kyles and Olafson (2008) studied reflective writings of preservice teachers as part of a field course in a diverse setting and found that their participants did not display significant changes in their efficacy and personal and professional beliefs about diversity. Kumar and Hamer (2012) pointed out the unstable nature of changes that occur in preservice teachers' beliefs. For example, they reported that while preservice teachers showed much less bias and prejudice at the end of their teacher education program compared to the beginning of the program, some of the gains they made midway through the program were lost by the end of the program.

Certain personal and experiential factors impact preservice teachers' beliefs about diversity. Garmon (2004) identified six factors as critical in changing preservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes about diversity. These factors were openness to diversity, self-awareness, commitment to social justice, intercultural experiences, support group experiences, and educational experiences. Validating Garmon's points, Kyles and Olafson (2008) explained that preservice teachers with multicultural schooling and life experiences were more likely to have favorable views about cultural diversity. Yang and Montgomery (2013) emphasized the

importance of attitudes toward diversity as a possible baseline to build bridges between the gaps in preservice teachers' attitudes.

A lot of the studies on preservice teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity have been conducted in the context of a multicultural education or cultural diversity course and mostly by the instructor. Such contexts may result in socially desirable responses from study participants. Studying such beliefs in a more neutral context like a position statement on effective teachers and effective teaching may provide a more realistic picture of preservice teachers' beliefs about these issues.

Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Effective Teaching

Research on preservice teachers' beliefs about effective teaching and effective teachers is scarce. Studies found in the review of literature for this study indicate that preservice teachers' beliefs about effective teaching and effective teachers are characterized by optimism and center around affective elements. Feiman-Memser, McDiarmind, Melnick, and Parker (1989) qualitatively analyzed the pre/post essays of elementary education majors on "What is teaching?" The researchers found that, for most preservice teachers "loving children" was all teachers needed. Weinstein (1990) conducted both qualitative and quantitative analyses, pre and post, of open-ended responses to "what it means to be a really good teacher". In her data analyses, Weinstein discovered three predominant views of effective teachers: caring; enthusiasm; and control. Although teacher knowledge was among the top four cited attributes of effective teachers, she noted concern over preservice teachers' "unrealistic optimism" and an emphasis on interpersonal relationships, with less regard for the academic dimensions of teaching.

A more recent study of preservice teachers' perceptions of effective teachers was conducted by Onwuegbuzie, Minor, Witcher, and James (2002). They administered an open-

ended response survey to education majors in an introductory education course. These researchers conducted multistage qualitative/quantitative data analyses. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2002) found that preservice teachers, in general, regard the interpersonal context as the most important aspect of teaching. Their analyses of perceptions revealed seven themes: (1) student centered (55.2%); (2) effective classroom and behavior manager (33.6%); (3) competent instructor (33.6%); (4) ethical (29.9%); (5) enthusiastic about teaching (23.9%); (6) knowledgeable about subject (19.4%); and (7) professional (15.7%), suggesting that, in their sample ($N = 132$), preservice teachers rated being student centered as the most common characteristic of effective teachers.

Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, and Gordon (2006) studied novice teachers' understanding of effective teaching in general and effective urban teaching. Their findings indicated that novice teachers viewed these differently. For example, participants asserted that effective urban teaching required more classroom control and more external motivators.

Research Questions

As the literature indicates, preservice hold beliefs about all aspects of teaching. On the issue of cultural diversity, although they have certain beliefs, they do not think deeply about their beliefs and when asked, they either avoid discussion or turn to color-blind explanations of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students (Gay, 2010). It is imperative to study their beliefs appropriately and understand whether their beliefs on diversity actually become a part of their perspective on effective teaching. The following questions guided this study:

1. To what degree, if any, do preservice teachers integrate culturally responsive pedagogy into their perspective about effective teaching and being an effective teacher?

2. How do these perspectives change over time?

For the purposes of this study culturally responsive pedagogy was defined as a teaching and curriculum perspective that takes into account the needs and backgrounds of culturally and linguistically diverse students, and makes necessary accommodations to provide equal success opportunities for such students and promotes social justice.

Method

A longitudinal approach was utilized in the study. Participants were 58 elementary education preservice elementary teachers at a major research university in the southeastern United States. All the participants were females and the majority of them were White (83 %). Elementary education majors came into the program in cohort groups and progressed through the program in three blocks of coursework and one final block of internship. The first block was composed of 16 hours of coursework and related field experience that emphasizes diversity. One of the courses in this block was specifically designed to study linguistic and cultural diversity and emphasized culturally responsive pedagogy. The accompanying field experience allowed preservice teachers to work with an elementary level English Language Learner. The second block of courses emphasized the teacher and the act of teaching. Corresponding field experience and assignments to be completed in the field were designed to focus on topics such teacher expectations, teacher questioning, classroom management, and instructional methods. The third block of courses and the accompanying field experience focused on effective curriculum planning centered around science and math instruction. The final block was a full time internship in an elementary classroom with accompanying seminar meetings. The current study focuses on the perspectives of the preservice teachers who completed the first and second blocks of the program.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from the participants in the form of a written perspective paper. At the end of both first and second semesters, preservice teachers were asked to write a formal paper to describe their perspectives on effective teachers and effective teaching as part of field experience course requirements. They were given the same exact prompt both semester with one difference: in semester one they were asked to write their perspective on being an effective teacher and effective teaching while in semester two they were asked to write their perspective on being a great teacher and great teaching. The perspective paper in both semesters was assigned to be completed at the end of the semester. By the time the participants wrote the perspective paper, they had already completed the course work and field experiences.

The researcher purposefully presented a neutral prompt that made no reference to multicultural education or culturally responsive teaching with the belief that this approach to data collection reduced the possibility of receiving "socially desirable answers" on culturally responsive teaching and provided the researchers with a better opportunity to examine truly the extent to which preservice teachers integrated multicultural ideas into their views on effective teachers and effective teaching.

Data analysis was conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively. A rubric was developed to score the degree to which culturally responsive pedagogy was integrated into the beliefs about effective teaching and being and an effective teacher. The scores on the rubric ranged from zero to five. Table 1 presents the rubric used for scoring.

Table 1

Scoring Rubric

Point	Description
0	No mention of cultural or linguistic diversity
1	Mention of either cultural or linguistic diversity
2	Mention of either cultural or linguistic diversity with some elaboration (i.e. If the response states that English Language Learners should be accommodated, then it explain how and why they should be accommodated.)
3	Mention of both cultural and linguistic diversity with one elaborated.
4	Both cultural and linguistic diversity are mentioned and explained.
5	In addition to all above, the paper makes reference to big concepts and ideas such as equity, social justice, racism, discrimination, cultural pluralism.

Each paper was read and scored according to the rubric. For a paper to receive a score on the linguistic or cultural diversity element, the researchers looked for specific mention of linguistic or cultural diversity. In other words, general statements, such as "all students should be accommodated" and "teachers should care about all students" were granted no points. To assign a point on linguistic diversity, the researchers looked for words and phrases such as ESOL, English Language Learners, Language Minority, language proficiency, language barrier, immigrant, and language background. To assign a point on cultural diversity, the research looked for words and phrases such as cultural diversity, cultural background, multicultural education, cultural responsiveness, non-biased teaching, non-stereotypical teaching, equity, social justice,

etc.

Before the perspective papers were scored, the researcher reviewed second semester papers for evidence of cutting and pasting from first semester papers considering these were written by the same preservice teachers. Although the content of the two papers written by the same person in two consecutive semesters was expected to be similar, in obvious cases of submitting the same paper as previous semester or extensive cutting and pasting (50% or more verbatim) the paper was excluded from the analysis. As a result of this early examination, 5 papers were eliminated; thus, the analysis was conducted on two sets of perspective papers from 53 preservice teachers.

After all the papers were scored, frequencies mean and standard deviations were determined to examine the extent of the integration of culturally responsive pedagogy. Also, first semester papers were and second semester papers were compared using a paired samples t-test procedure. The papers were also examined for commonalities in their emphasis regarding effective teaching.

Results

Findings in general indicated that culturally responsive pedagogy was integrated into beliefs about effective teaching and being an effective teacher to a very limited degree. More importantly, about half of the preservice teachers in the sample did not make any reference to either cultural or linguistic diversity in their perspective statements. Table 2 presents the score frequencies.

Table 2

Total score frequencies

Score/		
/Group	Semester I	Semester II
0	23 (43 %)	35 (66%)
1	10 (19 %)	7 (13.2 %)
2	16 (30 %)	7 (13.2 %)
3	1 (2 %)	2 (2 %)
4	0 (0 %)	1 (2 %)
5	3 (6 %)	1 (2 %)
Total	53 (100 %)	53 (100 %)

A visual inspection of the table indicates that those who made no reference to either cultural or linguistic diversity comprised a big portion of the sample. As preservice teachers moved to the second semester, a decline in the already limited integration of culturally responsive pedagogy is evident. A comparison of first semester and second semester perspective papers indicated the overall group mean score fell from 1.13 to 0.67. A paired samples t-test revealed that the difference in the mean scores was a statistically significant difference (t= 2.125, df= 52, p< 0.03).

In addition to the overall mean scores, participants' scores on reference to culture and language diversity was analyzed. Table 3 presents the frequencies of scores in culture and language categories (these scores were out of 2 as the rubric was divided into two)

Table 3

Frequencies of culture and language reference scores

Score	Semester I		Semester II	
	Language	Culture	Language	Culture
0	23 (44%)	45 (85%)	39 (74%)	47 (88%)
1	14 (26%)	5 (9%)	7 (13%)	3 (6%)
2	16 (30 %)	3 (6%)	7 (13 %)	3 (6%)
Total	53 (100%)	53 (100%)	53 (100%)	53 (100%)

As the table indicates, integration of language diversity and language related issues was more evident than the integration of cultural ones. However, in either case, few preservice teachers included linguistic and cultural diversity in their beliefs and seemed to move away from both language and culture in their second semester. A paired samples t-test indicated a significant decrease in the mean scores in the linguistic diversity category from semester one to semester two (t=3.460, df= 52, p< 0.001), whereas there was no significant difference in culture related beliefs. Possible reason for not finding a significant difference in the culture related beliefs is that because the first semester scores were very low, there was not much room for decrease in the score, though there was much room for increase.

One pattern that was observed in the responses was that majority of the participants included developmentally appropriate teaching, classroom management, providing a safe environment for students, teaching to different learning styles in their responses. Although most of the participants mentioned the importance of accommodating individual needs of students, the

focus of such statements were on students with special needs.

Discussion

One would expect that preservice teachers would view culturally responsive pedagogy as a necessary component of effective teaching and being an effective teacher after having taken a course on cultural and linguistic diversity and spent about 80 hours in public schools working with English Language Learners. However, as the findings indicate, that was not the case. Also, the findings revealed that as the participants spent more time in the teacher education program, they spared less space for cultural responsiveness in their perspectives.

Findings of this study suggest that preservice teachers are more open to issues of linguistic diversity than cultural diversity. This could be due to the fact that participants of this study spent approximately 80 hours in public schools working with English Language Learners. It is very likely that the participants observed accommodations English Language Learners. However, culturally responsive teaching is a rare occurrence in public schools and not as easily noticeable to novice eyes.

The major issue the current study suggests is that preservice teachers do not see culturally responsive pedagogy as an ingredient of effective teaching and being an effective teacher. As Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, and Gordon (2006) discovered in their study that novice teachers viewed effective teaching and effective urban teaching differently, perhaps the participants in this study view culturally responsive teaching as a separate entity. On a similar note, Gay and Kirkland (2003) noted that even though preservice teachers may express positive views about cultural diversity when asked, they usually do not think about these issues deeply and view race types of matters as an afterthought.

The structure of the teacher education program where the participants studied may also explain the results. Because multicultural education was integrated into this teacher education program as a separate block, preservice teachers may perceive that multicultural education is divorced from other components of the teacher education program. A better way to address this issue in teacher education institutions could be an infusion model where all courses and field experiences address culturally responsive pedagogy in relation to other variables that define effective teaching (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Supporting this view, Brown (2004) pointed out that in changing diversity awareness of preservice teachers, method had greater influence than the message.

Conclusion

Most studies in preservice teachers' beliefs about multicultural education are conducted in the context of a multicultural education course, and usually by the instructor. When asked about multicultural education, participants will provide their beliefs about multicultural education. However, such studies cannot assess whether the multicultural beliefs participants presented are a part of their overall teaching beliefs. In order to understand whether or not preservice teachers actually integrate the knowledge presented in multicultural education courses into their overall system of beliefs about effective teaching and being and an effective teacher, such beliefs should be studied in neutral context such as the one used in this study to get accurate results. The results of this study should be interpreted for program improvement purposes rather than blaming the preservice teachers. As Lowenstein (2009) explained very well, White, female preservice teachers should be constructed as learners and any shortcomings found their perspectives should guide reform in teacher education. As a result of this study, one can easily recommend that teacher education program infuse issues of cultural diversity into their programs

and monitor possible changes in preservice teachers' perspectives to assess if these changes reflect a commitment to teaching in a culturally responsive manner. Furthermore, collecting multiple forms of data throughout the program can provide a more complete picture of the issue.

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