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Oct 16th, 9:00 AM - 10:15 AM

"I Hate You, and I Hate This School": The Argument for Cultural Proficiency in Developing Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Mary Elizabeth and McKinney, Barbara, "I Hate You, and I Hate This School": The Argument for Cultural Proficiency in Developing Culturally Responsive Classroom Management" (2015). *Georgia Educational Research Association Conference*. 27.

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“I Hate You, and I Hate This School”: The Argument for Cultural Competence in Developing Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Skills in Pre-service Teacher Candidates

Any Student who emerges into our culturally diverse society speaking only one language and with a monocultural perspective on the world can legitimately be considered educationally ill-prepared.

Sonia Nieto (2004, p. xv)

The cases of Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddy Gray, and numerous others have garnered international attention to the plight of young Black men in the United States. While these young men's lives were shortened in young adulthood, scholars and educators argue that stereotyping of young men of color, particularly young Black men, begins when they enter the public school systems of the United States. According to Jacqueline Jordan Irvine, “Because the culture of Black children is different and often misunderstood, ignored, or discounted, Black students are likely to experience cultural discontinuity in schools, particularly schools in which the majority or Eurocentric persons, control, administer, teach” (p.xix). Moreover, Irvine argues that Black students respond in ways that can be traced to African cultural norms, and this may lead Eurocentric teachers to dismiss or react negatively to Black students' language patterns, inter-personal space, body movements, and learning styles, which may also influence the discipline choices and consequences for behavior made by Eurocentric teachers. Irvine's argument becomes particularly salient because 82% of the current teaching force is non-Hispanic White. Conversely, students enrolling in public schools are becoming increasingly diverse (The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. 2013).

In this article, a case is made for improving teacher candidates' cultural competency using the Cultural Proficiency Continuum and therefore; improving new teachers' classroom management skills. While the authors acknowledge the need for continuing focus on culturally responsive teaching pedagogy, the need for the same "lens" in teaching classroom management is critical to teaching in the diverse classroom settings of today and the future. A report from the National Council on Teacher Quality focusing on classroom management (2014, p.2) notes:

"A 2003 survey of teachers found that nearly half indicated that "quite a large number" of new teachers need a lot more training on effective ways to handle students who are discipline problems.

In 2012, over 40 percent of surveyed new teachers reported feeling either "not at all prepared" or "only somewhat prepared" to handle a range of classroom management or discipline situations.

In a 2013 survey, classroom management was "the top problem" identified by teachers."

If our goal is to train highly qualified teacher candidates to be successful in an increasingly diverse public school setting, we must continue to focus upon culturally responsive teaching, but we must also focus on the relevance of cultural proficiency and its importance in developing effective classroom management and discipline. Howard (1999) stated, "We cannot teach what we don't know." There is scant argument that Howard's words apply to content and pedagogy, and it also applies to knowing and understanding our students. Yet, what structures are specifically in place in our current teacher education programs to address how our personal cultural proficiency affects how we "see" and discipline students of color? The question we must ask is: how do we discipline those we do not know and understand? We cannot teach students who are not in our classrooms because they are serving in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions and school expulsions. The Civil Rights Data Collection (2014) notes that students of color, particularly Black students, are disciplined at much greater rates than their peers. These

dramatic differences begin in pre-school. Black students represent about 16% of the public school student population, but 32% of students serving in school suspension, 33% of those serving out of school suspension, 42% of those serving multiple out of school suspensions and 34% of those serving expulsions. In comparison, White students represent a similar range of between 31-40% of students serving suspensions or expulsions, but they represent 51% of the public school student population.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Attribution theory provides the theoretical framework for the argument that Pre-service teacher candidates must be more aware of their cultural biases. Attribution theory is a cognitive theory of motivation that views human beings as conscious decision makers. According to Pintrich and Schunk, (1996) attribution theory operates on two major tenets.

The first tenet of attribution theory states human beings are motivated by a desire to understand and master their environment and themselves. Humans wish to make their world predictable and controllable. Kelley (1971) noted, “The attributor is not simply an attributor, a seeker after knowledge; his latent goal in attaining knowledge is that of effective management of himself and his environment” (p.22). This desire to master the environment and oneself enables humans to adapt successfully to their environment.

The second tenet of attribution theory states that humans are trying to understand the causes of their own behavior as well as the behavior of others. Humans want to know why things happen and why people behave in certain ways. When humans attribute causes to events or behavior, the cause attributed may be what the individual perceives is the causal determinant and not necessarily the actual cause. An individual’s perception of reality is important and can have

psychological and behavioral consequences. The accuracy of the attribution does not influence its effect (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

Pintrich and Schunk (1996) expanded upon the second tenet and noted that perceived causes and the causal dimensions that underlie them is the centerpiece of the model. Moreover, two types of antecedent conditions influence the perceived causes of an event: environmental factors and personal factors. The influence of these two factors on the formation of attributions is called the attribution process (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Environmental factors include specific information given to an individual as well as social norms and knowledge. Personal factors include a variety of beliefs and schemas that individuals might have about a particular situation. Both environmental and personal factors influence the actual attributions individuals assign to a particular event. These factors help explain the attributions teachers' form about student behavior and affect how teachers predict future student behavior or performance. Once explanations for a student's behavior have been assigned and teachers begin to predict future behavior, attribution theorists argue that the consequent behavior of the person making the attribution is influenced by the explanation. Consequently, a White teacher who perceives the behaviors of Black students, particularly Black males, as a fixed set of actions based upon his or her racial or ethnic identity may react by requesting more severe behavioral consequences.

Heider (1958) was the first researcher to formulate a theory of causal attribution. He theorized that the development of attributions was influenced by culture; thus, members of different cultural groups might find significantly different causal explanations for an identical event. The significance of Heider's work was that he placed attributions within the social context.

Jones and Davis (1965) refined Heider's theory by suggesting that people speculate about choices for the behavior of others and develop generalizations or stereotypes based on those expectations. For example, a math teacher might believe that students will choose to do their homework or they will choose not to do their homework. The teacher might decide that students who do their homework are intrinsically motivated, hardworking, and studious. The teacher may view the students who did not do their homework as lazy, nonchalant, and rebellious. Jones and Davis (1965) refined their argument further by noting that when teachers make these assumptions, they do so within a cultural context and belief that certain behaviors conform to certain cultural definitions. Thus, if teachers define Black students as typically being lazy, nonchalant, and rebellious, then the Black student who does not turn in his homework is seen as operating within a culturally defined norm.

H. H. Kelley (1971) made another important contribution to attribution theory. Kelley suggested that there are three variables present in the formation of attributions: a) the person making the attribution, b) the person to whom the attribution is assigned, and c) the context in which the behavior occurs. Kelley purported that the process of assigning attributions is intertwined in all of these variables. Researchers interested in the assignment of attributions have attempted to hold two of the variables constant while manipulating the third. For example, a teacher will view a Black male wearing sunglasses and having his hat turned sideways in class in a particular way. Researchers would then be interested in the same teacher's reaction to the same type of dress in the classroom if the young male were White.

An important contribution to attribution theory by Weiner (1986) notes that an infinite number of attributions are possible; however, all attributions can be categorized along three causal dimensions: locus, stability, and control. The locus-of-causality dimension focuses on

whether a cause is perceived to be external or internal to the individual. For example, ability and effort are classified as internal causes, whereas good fortune and task complexity would be classified as external causes. The stability dimension focuses on whether the cause is fixed and stable or whether it is variable and unstable across different situations over time. Specifically, does a perceived attribution represent a trait of a person, or a reaction to a particular situation? The last dimension of causality controllability refers to the degree of control a person has over a cause. For example, aptitude and effort would be classified as representing an internal locus of control. Effort is seen as a factor that humans have a great ability to control, whereas aptitude is viewed as a factor that humans have little ability to control. These causal dimensions can influence one's expectancy for success and self-efficacy beliefs as well as affect actual behavior.

In summary, attribution theory suggests that the process of assigning attributions is influenced by culture and that options for behavior are linked to inferences about underlying personality traits. In addition, individual behaviors reveal personality characteristics and can confirm or fail to confirm our understanding of consistent cultural norms. The assignment of attributions is a process that is influenced by three variables: the person assigning attributions, the person receiving the attribution, and the context of the behavior used to assign the attribution. Perhaps most importantly, human beings have a strong impetus to assign attributions to others in order to aid their understanding about the world and to help manage their environment (Kelley, 1971). Teacher candidates, particularly White teacher candidates must identify biases that may affect how they assign attributions to the behaviors of their students.

Making the Case for using the Cultural Proficiency Model in Teacher Education

According to the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (2013), undergraduate degrees in education were awarded to the following: 82% White candidates, 6%

African American candidates, 4.2% Hispanic candidates, and 4.2 race/ethnicity unknown or more than two identifications. Moreover, the small number of minority teachers entering the field are leaving at higher rates than their White peers. Conversely, an analysis of Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2012), found that students of color make up more than 45% of the public kindergarten through grade twelve population.

In light of these data, the use of the cultural proficiency model as a vehicle for individual teacher candidate's to assess and monitor their cultural adeptness is a strong step in the right direction. It is not the authors' assertion that classroom management and discipline can be improved by using a formulaic approach. Rather, The the use of a cultural proficiency model sets us on the path of self-empowerment; providing us with a vehicle for reflection that can change how we view the students in our classrooms. In short, pre-service teacher candidates must develop culturally competent behaviors if they are to move toward more culturally proficient interactions with their students.

Tools for Developing Cultural Competence

According to Lindsey, Nuri-Robins & Terrell, (2009), there are four tools for developing cultural competence:

1. The Barriers: Caveats that assist overcoming resistance to change
2. The Guiding Principles: Underlying values of the approach
3. The Continuum: Language for describing both healthy and non-productive policies, practices, and behaviors
4. The Essential Elements: Behavioral standards for measuring and planning for growth toward cultural proficiency

Lindsey, Nuri-Robins & Terrell, (2009) define each of the tools:

The Barriers

In order for pre-service teacher candidates to become more culturally competent, we must begin by focusing on the barriers that assist resistance to change. The presumption of entitlement and privilege which is a belief that all of our personal achievements and stature are earned based solely on merit, hard work, and character. This idea can make us unaware of the obstacles experienced by those who are racially, ethnically, or culturally different.

A second barrier is the lack of recognition of Infrastructural systems of oppression and privilege. Often in discussions of equality, teacher candidates' express personal disdain of prejudice and racism. It is difficult for them to understand systems of oppression and privilege operate via policies and protocol and don't require intentional acts by an individual. In short, institutional racism exists via policies and procedures.

The final barrier is that too many teacher candidates do not see the need to adapt to the changing world. They simply believe the world, the classroom, and the students should adapt to them. In order for real change to occur, schools of education must directly address the barriers to creating cultural competency among its teacher candidates.

The Guiding Principles

Lindsey, Nuri-Robins & Terrell, (2009) argue the guiding principles are the counterpoints to the barriers of achieving cultural competence. These principles provide a framework for doing the difficult work. The guiding principles are:

- Culture is a predominate force; you cannot not have a culture.
- People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.

- Group identity of individuals is as important as their individual identities.
- Diversity within cultures is vast and significant
- Each group has unique cultural needs.
- The family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children.
- Marginalized populations have to be at least bi-cultural, and this status creates a distinct set of issues to which the system must be equipped to respond.
- Inherent in cross-cultural interactions are dynamics that must be acknowledged, adjusted to, and accepted.
- The school system must incorporate cultural knowledge into practice and policy making.

The Continuum

According to Cross (1989), the Cultural Proficiency Continuum provides six points that indicate unique ways of seeing and responding to differences. The first three points on the continuum represent unhealthy values, behaviors, policies, and practices that arise because of the barriers to cultural proficiency. The first three points are:

Cultural Destructiveness - Viewpoint seeking to eliminate the cultures of others in all aspects of the school and the community being served.

Cultural Incapacity – Stereotyping and minimizing other cultures and seeking to make the cultures of others appear inferior to the dominant culture.

Cultural Blindness – Not noticing or acknowledging the culture of others and ignoring the dissimilar experiences of cultures; treating everyone the same way without recognizing there may be a need for different modes of interaction

The three points at the end of the continuum represent healthy individual values and behaviors, as well as healthy policies and practices in organizations such as college programs and schools:

Cultural Pre-Competence- acknowledging lack of knowledge, experience, and understanding of other cultures limits one's ability to interact with people whose cultures are different from their own.

Cultural Competence- Owning the attitude that everyone's culture matters and insisting the society one lives in has policies and practices that promote inclusivity (especially classrooms and schools).

Cultural Proficiency- Viewpoint that you and the institutions where you work (schools) are agents for change and are engaging in creating social justice for everyone.

The Essential Elements

The essential elements of cultural proficiency provide the framework for change within an organization. In order for schools of education to achieve the goal of graduating teacher-candidates who are more culturally proficient, we have to have a set of guiding principles, or essential elements for getting us to our destination. According to Lindsey, Nuri-Robins & Terrell, (2009), the essential elements we must embrace are:

Assessing Culture- Schools of education must assess, identify, and accept the differences in our own faculties, thereby creating the tone for helping our teacher candidates to do the same.

Value Diversity- Once we identify the differences, we must embrace the notion that the differences make the group stronger and is valued added.

Manage the Dynamics of Difference- Diversity is not a "problem" to be solved. It is a valued part of the American consciousness.

Adapt to Diversity- We must teach and learn about differences, and practice ways to respond to them effectively.

Institutionalize Cultural Knowledge- Change our institutional system to ensure healthy and effective responses to diversity.

It should be the goal of every teacher-candidate to achieve the viewpoint of cultural proficiency. The idea that one is teaching in order to create social justice and democracy in their classrooms, schools, and communities is a goal worthy of striving to meet. In order for teacher-candidates to embrace the viewpoint of cultural proficiency, schools of education must commit to making the Cultural Proficiency Continuum an integral part of the classroom management curriculum. In higher education, we must teach these concepts with intentionality. The current data showing the disproportionate number of students of color, especially Black males, who are receiving in-school and out of school suspensions, and expulsions must serve as our rallying cry for change.

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