

Diversity in Education:
A Dialogue or Monologue?

Karina Kwan

State University of New York at New Paltz

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On a Friday night over a year ago, my friends and I settled around the dining room table, desserts sprawled around us, talking about arranged marriages. Both of my friends are Muslim, but one is from Bangladesh, and the other one is from Pakistan. Both of their parents have very different views on love. We talked until 4:00am that night. When they left, I kept questioning how much diversity and communication go together. No boundaries were crossed when talking to my friends for hours, and it was an extremely open space where any type of question could be asked. As a teacher candidate at SUNY New Paltz, I began to think about how conversations are facilitated in the classes I took, and it made me wonder: how can a safe space like this be replicated in a classroom, and why would it be beneficial?

Statement of Purpose

Teacher educators must prepare teacher candidates with the necessary tools for seamlessly integrating diversity strategies in their curricula, but it can be debatable whether that preparation is effective or not (Au, 2009, p. 3). Through lesson plans and methods classes, teacher candidates are frequently told that empathy is needed to teach children and that many of their future students will have different ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and learning abilities (Au, 2009, p. 4). Despite the scholarship on teacher education that points to the importance of differentiation in theory, not much is taught in practice on how to effectively incorporate diversity in a class.

In a 2016, the Department of Education released a study called *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Work-Force*, and it “revealed that more than 82% of public school teachers are white, while students of color will make up more than 54% of the population of

public schools by 2024” (Bartely, 2018, p. 3). It is important that all students feel comfortable enough to bring their experiences into their classrooms, regardless of the race, culture, or ethnicity of their teachers. Classroom and learning pedagogies are rapidly changing, demonstrating that “there is an urgent need to recognize whiteness as an inaccurate blueprint against which human experience is often measured” (Greene, 2017). According to well-established research on multicultural education, teachers must apply culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies when working with all students (Au, 2009; Paris, 2012). Together, this helps foster a more productive and learning environment.

Many researchers of multicultural education explain that students benefit from connections in learning to the outside world and space for students to engage with each other’s voices (Au, 2009, p. 3). As teacher candidates, we are told that students must connect with the outside world but are not taught different strategies on how we can approach this. We often hesitate in wondering if we are doing the right thing and are approaching a topic the right way. Many educators remind us that when it comes to students sharing their experience, “we must keep the perspective that people are experts on their own lives” (Delpit, 2006, p. 47). Having a diverse, multicultural classroom library and actively making space for class discussions are different strategies that teachers and teacher candidates can use to bring more awareness to their classrooms for their students.

Having empathy cannot be taught easily, but teacher candidates must know that while “it is not possible to feel what people in other times or circumstances felt... it’s crucial that we attempt to understand how the conditions in people’s lives affect them” (Au, 2009, p. 303). Teacher candidates must make an effort to intentionally bring diversity into the classroom in a

genuine way because “every child deserves an education that guarantees the safety to learn in the comfort of one’s own skin” (Simmons, 2015).

Research Question

How do teacher candidates experience learning about teaching diverse populations in teacher preparation?

Literature Review

An article in Rethinking Schools anthology, *Rethinking Multicultural Education*, titled “Race: Some Teachable-and Uncomfortable-Moments” by Heidi Tolentino introduces a scenario that every teacher dreads. In her reflective piece, Tolentino wanted to read *The Secret Life of Bees* with her class due to the interracial perspective and themes offered in the text. However, the classroom environment became uncomfortable when one of her students said, “I don’t understand why white people always say, ‘I want to know what you’re feeling and know what it feels like’... You can’t want to know because its’ horrible” (Au, 2009, p. 299). Teachers must know how to take action when situations like this come forth, but it can be difficult to foster a positive environment while making sure every student feels heard. How is it possible for teachers to find a balance in teaching diversity without being racist or discriminating, especially in a society that constantly recenters and privileges whiteness? There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but as Au and other researchers argue, it starts with the different pedagogies taught in teacher preparation programs.

Traditional Pedagogies

“Traditional” pedagogies infused in most teacher preparation programs require that teacher candidates learn to make sure students’ needs are met in social-emotional, cognitive, and

physical contexts of learning. This includes checking up on their health, their homelife, and differentiating instruction according to their varied learning styles. Some examples of traditional learning theories that teacher candidates typically are expected to know include Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Jean Piaget's Schema and Constructivism, and B.F. Skinner's Behaviorism. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development explains how there is a difference between what learners can do independently and what they can do with guidance. Piaget's Schema and Constructivism theory explains how learners benefit from having new experiences taught to them through existing knowledge, so that they are able to build on what they already know. Lastly, B.F. Skinner's Behaviorism theory states that positive reinforcement is beneficial to learners.

When making lesson plans and commentary to support why a candidate is teaching a lesson a certain way, these learning theories often make an appearance. Rather than solely focusing on how these traditional education theories connect with how candidates teach their lesson, why are multicultural theories often overlooked?

Teacher Candidate Class Readings

"Sociological and Philosophical Foundations of Education" and "Education of Diverse Populations in Early Childhood and Elementary Schools" are two required classes for Elementary Education majors at SUNY New Paltz before entering their method classes. Students who pass these education foundations-based classes then continue with the course "Teaching Reading in Elementary School I" as their first methods-based course. While there are few readings that discuss how culture can be incorporated in a classroom across these three classes, which formed the foundation for this study, a majority of them still include vague descriptions

about educational oppressions that students may face in their schooling. Topics of articles read in these classes are rather more specific about poverty and race theoretically, but not necessarily offer different teaching strategies for how to implement these ideas in practice.

Class stereotypes. Further diving into the concept of race in a Philosophical and Sociological Foundations in Education class, Wright and Yeskel (2007) demonstrated in their article titled “Teaching for Social Justice and Diversity” how candidates can benefit in learning about stereotypes of different socioeconomic classes; however, no strategies are shared on what to do if a student comes into the classroom affected by their socioeconomic situation (which one can assume happens for many students every single day of the lives). Many facts also specifically relate to the workforce: “the racial wealth divide is even wider than the income gap: People of color own about 18 cents for every white dollar in assets,” and gives a list of stereotypes each class is known for (Wright and Yeskel, 2007, p. 310). This information can be beneficial for teacher candidates in raising awareness of misleading characteristics. For instance, the article lays out many assumptions about class, including that working class families are assumed to suffer from weak health, long working hours, and “the stress of living in a society that looks down on them” (Wright and Yeskel, 2007, p. 311). Further, the article presents the assumption that middle-class families must be superior to the working class and be in charge, while the wealthy only connect with each other due to money, and that they may also have trouble trusting others (Wright and Yeskel, 2007, p. 311). While this article describes how each class has its own stereotypes, it also states that, “it is true that there is some class fluidity, and that class status may change over the lifetime...the reality is that class is much less fluid than most people think” (Wright and Yeskel, 2007, p. 312).

As adults, class fluidity may be hard to overcome but it can be fostered in education. Inclusion in the classroom is important because if students are able to show sensitivity with one another regardless of socioeconomic class, they are able to further take these habits and awareness with them into their adult lives. Despite the fact that outside information is needed for teacher candidates to learn more about future types of students, this article gives extremely little detail on how educators can help students that are facing issues of a particular socioeconomic class. However, the most important takeaway from this article is that “history is typically taught from the perspective of the privileged” (Wright and Yeskel, 2007, p. 314).

Questioning the visual. The idea that history is taught from the perspective of privilege is also demonstrated in the article “Questioning the Visual in the History of Education” by Kate Rousmaniere, which candidates read in some sections of “Teaching Reading I.” The article questions the idea of how a school and a teacher are portrayed through physical photos and how “when we look at a photograph of what appears to be a familiar, typical classroom...we may develop conclusions about the kind of school that this was, the period in which it was taken, the nature of the curriculum” (Rousmaniere, 2001, p. 111). Photos of schools and classes are powerful in giving an explicit visual to a classroom atmosphere and can give an insight to the past, but do not share much information on past classroom dynamics, including multicultural narratives or experiences.

In a comparison of three images given in this article, the first picture consists of a traditional “school photo”, the second consists of a posed smiling class photo, and the third is a candid smiling class photo without a teacher pictured. While the first picture can be analyzed as having control of a classroom, the second and third pictures show genuine joy and energy of

being in school. It is argued that the first photo traditionally looks like a school due to how posed and proper the students and teachers are while the third photo does not. The author sees the third photo and gushes how happy it makes her feel and even makes her nostalgic for when she went to school. She praises the third image for how humanistic the children are portrayed through this photos and how “this makes me think about the role of the photographer in posing students to ‘look like students’” (Rousmaniere, 2001, p. 115).

There is a certain essence projected when it comes to capturing a class photo. Teachers must make students stand properly and may have to corral distracted students to get ready. Though this article focuses on how history of the past can connect with the present, it also challenges a teacher candidate to reflect through a diverse lense of how their class may look visually or how a teacher candidate may want their class to look since “images can be used not only to document, but also to mobilize emotion and political analysis” (Rousmaniere, 2001, p. 111). If a photographer were to step inside the classroom to take a picture, what does a teacher candidate’s mental image become? Their reflection on how they wish their class would look can actually say a lot. One may imagine a strict environment where students are well-behaved like the first picture, and another may picture an energetic and outspoken class filled with cooperative learning like the second and third pictures. In a photo where many of the girls and their teacher are white, Rousmaniere writes how the photos made her question “where this image is and more to do with how children experience schooling, how they move and play even in a setting that demands stationary seriousness” (Rousmaniere, 2001, p. 115). Would having a photo where the class is predominantly filled with culturally diverse students change her questioning or create assumptions for her? What about a teacher of color instead of a stereotypical white teacher

standing in front of the class? Would the teacher of color be praised? In reality, a picture that shows a predominately all-white teacher and students may be glossed over by viewers whereas a picture with more students of color may raise eyebrows and questions.

Teaching the “other” students. Within current societal norms, students of color will always be perceived differently compared to white students. When teachers are unfamiliar in working with different ethnic groups, they create assumptions and may lower their expectations. In Lisa Delpit’s *Other People’s Children*, she writes about her graduate learning and teaching experiences, and about how many black and other children of color can be misunderstood. As a student, she learned through skill-oriented approaches in writing, but as an educator she finds herself teaching through a more process-oriented approach.

In Delpit’s essay “Skills and Other Dilemmas,” she writes about the ongoing debate of the Skills versus Process method and how minority and white teachers feel. Many teachers, hers included, would realize that many of their white students would “zoom ahead. They worked hard at the learning stations. My black students played the games and some even learned how to read, but none of them as quickly as my white students” (Delpit, 2006, p. 13), despite using the same strategies for all students. The more Delpit spoke with many of her fellow colleagues, the more she learned that teachers were “eager to teach ‘skills’” (Delpit, 2006, p.18) to their black students and force them to have certain literacy skills rather than scaffolding them with the language they already know.

Delpit states that “I believe that skills are best taught through meaningful communication, best learned in meaningful contexts” (Delpit, 2006, p.19) and realizes that many minority teachers’ voices do not get heard themselves. The idea that all voices should be heard are always

in the back of our minds as educators whether it be students or teachers. The action of physically being heard, however, does not always happen. Regardless of what strategy educators want to enforce with students in a classroom, it is important that there is communication between both perspectives, and “it is vitally important that non-minority educators realize that there is another voice...many of the teachers whom they seek to reach have been able to conquer the educational system because they received the kind of instruction that their white progressive colleagues are denouncing” (Delpit, 2006, p. 19). Delpit received many responses from her “Skills and other Dilemmas” article from professors, teachers, and many more regardless of race and from white respondents. Many white respondents wanted to talk more about the skills versus process approaches while many non-white respondents spoke up about their voices not being heard (Delpit, 2006, p. 23). These responses led her to the theme “culture of power.”

The “culture of power” consists of five aspects of power in which Delpit (2006) believes that “good teachers of all colors typically incorporates a range of pedagogical orientations” (p. 24). The “culture of power” includes: 1) issues of power are enacted in classrooms, 2) rules for participating in power, 3) rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power, 4) being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier if one is already not a participant in culture of power, and lastly, 5) those with power are least aware of its existence while those with less power are often most aware of its existence. While many “traditional” theories are scientifically based on how students learn cognitively, regardless of race, Delpit’s culture of power concept gives educators a different theory on how to connect with culturally and linguistically diverse students. When certain culture of powers are established in a classroom, students and teachers are able to work together more in understanding

one another with mutual respect and also have efficient class discussions. Different powers in a classroom include power from the teacher with their students, power from textbooks and curriculum developers, and “power of an individual or group to determine another’s intelligence or ‘normalcy’” (Delpit, 2006, p. 25). Being aware of the correct rules in communication and how one can represent themselves through writing, talking, and dressing can help influence the way one participates in the above powers.

Delpit’s culture of power theory gives educators a new perspective on how to involve their culturally and linguistically diverse students more and give them the attention they need. Cultures need to be openly shared and acknowledged in order to have mutual understanding, for “members of any culture transmit information implicitly to co-workers” (Delpit, 2006, p. 25). Delpit gives the example of how she found it easier to be informed about how to dress and different meanings of words and actions when working with members of Native Alaskan cultures, demonstrating that it was easier to be accepting in a culture when explicitly informing someone what is appropriate. Some groups may already be accustomed to having a culture of power but those who are not may have trouble in thinking and reasoning critically with others in interaction. In an education setting, educators must not strip minority students’ culture away in order to fit middle-class values as a way of “wanting the same thing for everyone else’s children as I want for mine” (Delpit, 2006, p. 28). It is not the school’s job “to attempt to change the homes of poor and nonwhite children to match the homes of those in the culture of power” (Delpit, 2006, p. 30) but rather incorporate classroom strategies that welcome *all* students.

Sociocultural Approach and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

Reading articles like Lisa Delpit's *Other People's Children* and "Skills and other Dilemmas" provides a breakthrough in pedagogy that teacher candidates can use. Articles that teacher candidates are required to read touch base on the core learning theories of education but also introduce a sociocultural approach in teaching.

Sociocultural approach. A sociocultural approach is used to describe awareness of circumstances surrounding individuals and how their behaviors are affected specifically by their surrounding, social and cultural factors. Developed by Vygotsky, sociocultural theory "focuses not only how adults and peers influence individual learning, but also how cultural beliefs and attitudes impact how instruction and learning take place" (Cherry, 2018, p. 1). Human behavior can be affected by different social groups, thus explaining the practical application for these articles. These articles dive into different populations and aspects of schooling but all demonstrate how different classroom strategies are needed to create inclusiveness in a classroom. However, many of the articles do not give teacher candidates specifically useful strategies to create inclusiveness. Delpit's *Other People's Children* and "Skills and other Dilemmas" not only include a sociocultural approach to education and making sure that black and other minority students are able to get the literacy skills they need, but they also include culturally relevant pedagogies.

Culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy was introduced by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings during the 90s and focuses on how students can be more engaged through the school's curriculum when "they more fully understand and feel affirmed in their identities and experiences and they are equipped to identify structural inequities" (Escudero, 2019, p. 1). When teaching lessons, educators use the background, knowledge, and experiences of the

students to connect with teacher's lessons and pedagogy. Students are then able to relate to coursework in their own cultural context. Three fundamentals included in this pedagogy include academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (Escudero, 2019, p.1). In contrast to sociocultural approaches, there is a deeper way to teach materials and educators know their students well enough as a person and student to scaffold them into “actively creating knowledge influenced by their own lived experiences and articulate what they are learning and why” (Escudero, 2019, p. 1). Educators are also aware of cultural background, thus providing cultural competence in their own classroom and with their students. “The classroom can be described as full of mirrors and windows. Students see themselves reflected in the classroom (mirrors) and also have opportunities to learn more and see into the lived experiences of others (windows)” (Escudero, 2019, p.1).

With a culturally relevant pedagogical approach, there is an extra level of respect that students must have with their own identities and between one another. Sociopolitical consciousness is the last fundamental pillar in culturally relevant pedagogies and requires teachers and students to “educate themselves on the personal and sociopolitical issues that impact their students, their students’ communities, and the world and incorporate this into their teaching” (Escudero, 2019, p. 1). Critical thinking becomes even more useful. Rather than learning through activities and play, students learn through conversations and listening from one another. Educators constantly question about different topics, situations, and reasoning to “help strengthen their students’ mindset and belief that they can be agents of social change and transformation” (Escudero, 2019, p. 1).

Culturally sustaining pedagogy. Culturally sustaining pedagogy builds on culturally relevant pedagogies and was proposed by Django Paris in 2012. In a podcast, Paris states that this pedagogical approach “seeks to perpetuate and foster-to sustain- linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling”.

In 1970, schools were 80% white, but today there are over 50% of students of color (Paris, 2017). With this demographic shift, schools can still receive backlash from white supremacy since schooling in the United States is “still centered around white, middle class, heterosexual, monocultural, cis and hetero, patriarchal ableist norms of achievements” (Paris, 2017). When used in teaching preparation programs, teaching has to reflect on students’ identity and personality. Content that is taught to students becomes more of a framework and position than a lesson plan. There is a specific purpose when doing literacy-based content, like “what does it mean to be reading this article right now in today’s time and in this classroom?” and students are encouraged to actively think critically. “Culturally sustaining pedagogies is sustaining and granting a space for voices that are present in our community but are marginalized and often ignored” (Paris, 2017). Teachers are invited to use culturally sustaining pedagogies to “fit the color mainstream and to resist ongoing institutional racism as it plays out in schools, whether through curriculum, instruction, or policy” (Paris, 2017).

Putting Strategies into Practice

Wayne Au’s *Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Racial and Cultural Justice* is an extremely beneficial publication for teacher candidates due to all of the different articles and topics it covers in Multicultural education. In his introduction, Au writes that multicultural education “draws on the voices and perspectives of those ‘being studied’, invites

students to engage in real social and political issues, creates classroom environments where students can meaningfully engage with each other, and explores how social, economic, and cultural institutions contribute to inequality” (Au, 2009, p. 2). Progressing from Delpit’s idea of how teaching children of color becomes teaching “other people’s children,” Au writes “I worry that multiculturalism has been equated with ‘diversity’ and has become the ‘everyone else’ category” (Au, 2009, p. 3). The book’s table of contents is separated into five sections: 1) Anti-Racist Orientations, 2) The Fight for Multicultural Education, 3) Language, Culture, Power, 4) Transnational Identities, Multicultural Classrooms, and 5) Confronting Race in the Classroom. Teacher candidates can benefit from reading the different articles included in the volume because not only are they written by educators that have been in classrooms, many of them also are case studies and personal experiences that educators have faced. In the collection of articles, the strategies for employing a culturally sustaining pedagogical approach are not explicitly shared but rather demonstrated through the different stories that students and educators have chosen to write about. Teaching is not perfect, and the “creation of space for marginalized voices” according to (Paris, 2017) can be messy, as demonstrated by the texts included in the book.

In a different interview with Lisa Delpit written by Jody Sokolower, the author talks about her recent book *Multiplication is for White People*. She discusses different aspects of education like standardized testing, behavior disorders, the importance of critical thinking, and the diversity of teachers in a school. Delpit really puts into perspective how representation is important along with culture stating, “if the culture of the school is set up so that sharing is important and collaborating is important, the children will be the beneficiaries” (Au, 2009, p. 22). Not only are students able to learn if their culture is involved but “we really have to look at

the specific teacher and what the teacher's beliefs are and how the teacher sees the culture of the children, regardless of the teacher's ethnicity" (Au, 2009, p. 22). It becomes fitting as this article is introduced in the very beginning of *Rethinking Multicultural Education* because it creates an opening for other educators to talk about their feelings in the classroom when there is a potential culture clash.

Educators and Their Stories

In the beginning of this literature review, a quote was taken from Tolentino's article when a student felt uncomfortable by her peer saying "I want to know what it feels like" (Au, 2009, p. 299). In her reflection piece, Tolentino wanted to read *The Secret Life of Bees* with her class because of the interracial relationships and perspectives. However, the classroom environment became awkward and uncomfortable when she and her students broached the subject. Taken aback by the sudden shift in energy of the class and its students, Tolentino had to find a way to redirect her classroom discussion effectively. She had a main goal to help students, predominately white students "recognize that life in our society confronts us with choices about whether or how we will act to counter racism" (Au, 2009, p. 298). From showing a documentary to initiating a discussion about one of the African American characters getting arrested for voting, Tolentino had an entire lesson planned. While setting the scene, a student, Jessie, mentioned "I want to know what it was like" (Au, 2009, p. 299). In response to this, one of Tolentino's African American students, Carmen, glared at Jessie and said "You can never know what it's like. You will never understand." Tolentino acknowledged her feelings and encouraged the student to further explain what she means. "I don't understand why white people always say, 'I want to know what you're feeling and know what it feels like.' You don't want to know what

it feels like to walk down the street and have white women clutch their purses. You don't want to know what it's like to be different every single day," Carmen responds. Jessie responds "But should I just remain ignorant then? Don't you think it's important for me to try and understand so that things can change" (Au, 2009, p. 299). Tolentino thanked them for being honest and assured them that this would not be the end of the conversation.

As they continued going back to the book, Tolentino states that she has a strict policy when doing read alouds and that the N-word will only be used as N. Another dialogue opened up when a different student asked, "I have a question about the N-word. Why can black people use it and white people can't" (Au, 2009, p. 300). This led to an outburst from her students. Being the resourceful teacher that she was, Tolentino was able to tackle the situation by being patient and sharing how words have a historic record of being used against a community. Referencing Delpit's Culture of Power idea, she tells her class, "but if you are not a member of that community and have never had that word used against you in hate, you don't get to be part of the debate" (Au, 2009, p. 301).

Delpit's Culture of Power also connects with Wayne Au's "Decolonizing the Classroom" when she states that "the teacher cannot be the only expert in the class. To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them" (Delpit, 2006, p. 32). Au's article is a prime demonstration of this idea when he shares his story of his 9th-grade teacher. When the class was studying about China, Mr. Anderson would tell the class about his trip and a fruit he ate called, lychee, and pronounced it LEE-chee. Au, having had the experience of eating this fruit himself and having nostalgic memories of going out with his father in San Francisco to buy them, had noticed his teacher pronouncing the word incorrectly. Wanting to share that his family

pronounced it correctly as “LIE-chee,” Au raised his hand and attempted to tell Mr. Anderson this. “He wasn’t having it. This white teacher had been to China and knew better. So he told me (and the class) that I was simply wrong, that I didn’t know what I was talking about” (Au, 2009, p. 84).

As an Asian American, Au’s article opened up a lot of emotions and questions for me. As a teacher, when a student tells you that they pronounce the word as “LIE-chee” instead of “LEE-chee,” it is only considerate for the teacher to listen to the student of that Chinese culture...right? Au continues and writes, “student knowledge about communities, cultures, and diversity didn’t matter, especially if it contradicted to his own” (Au, 2009, p. 84). As recalled from Delpit, denying a student’s knowledge disempowers them, which is exactly what Mr. Anderson has been doing in his classroom. “My own authentic cultural knowledge and perspective as a Chinese American had no value, and he actively disregarded my own lived experiences,” Au describes. Further, Au (2009) asserts, “as students in Mr. Anderson’s class, we were always on the outside looking in, and he and the textbooks were the sole authorities” (p. 84). It almost seems extreme that Mr. Anderson has created a dictatorship in his classroom where students are unable to share themselves authentically. It may also be seen as extreme but this type of classroom atmosphere dangers a student of color’s learning and gives the wrong perspective to white students especially because:

“When classes are not grounded in the lives of students, do not include the voices and knowledge of communities being studied, and are not based in dialogue, they create environments where not only are white students

miseducated, but students of color feel as if their very identities are under attack”

(Au, 2009, p. 85).

Teacher candidates need to read articles similar to this because as much as there is to discuss how to prevent misunderstanding in the classroom, stories like Au’s prove that white supremacy is still reflected through teaching.

Au then shares that he went to Garfield High School which has been known as Seattle’s “black high school” (Au, 2009, p. 85). Au did not get to experience multicultural education until taking Mr. Davis’s class. Dr. Davis would teach two “secret” classes and in order to get into them, it would secretly be listed under Language Arts 10b and a Social Studies elective. “For the first time in my schooling experience, I was one of only two non-African American students in a class” (Au, 2009, p. 85) he recalls. True history was taught and the class would look at black history through poetry and literature. Au cannot help but wonder what his classmates must have thought since he is a mixed white Chinese-American sitting in a classroom that is predominately black in a black studies class. Questions like “Why was this half-Asian kid doing in the black studies classes anyway? Why does he care? Isn’t race and racism mainly about black and white?” (Au, 2009, p. 86) arose. Mr. Davis’s class taught Au that multicultural education connects with social issues and creates a space for students to converse with one another. Au talks about how this class was rigorous not only through the amount of work given, but intellectually (Au, 2009, p. 87).

While a normal class may focus on the actions from the government during the U.S war with Mexico, “a multicultural perspective asks about the Irish American soldiers, mexican

women in conquered territories, etc” (Au, 2009, p. 87). Au learned that many teachers in the social studies department had looked down at the African Studies course and when Mr. Davis had left to become principal, there was a chance that the classes would not be offered anymore. Au had fought for the keeping of this class, and had taught it himself but writes “there shouldn’t have been a fight to being with. My experience fighting for African Studies taught me another lesson: multicultural education is rooted in an anti-racist struggle over whose knowledge and experiences should be included in the curriculum” (Au, 2009, p. 89).

Au’s article shows how multicultural education holds huge importance and necessity in schools: “As all good multicultural education should do, we were asked to consider the variety of our own experiences and relate them to the complexities of history and society” (Au, 2009, p. 88). Although not explicitly listed, there are different takeaways from Au’s article that connect with culturally sustaining pedagogies. He states how there are two different aspects when teaching the U.S war with Mexico, showing how perspective makes things not only more interesting, but more validated because other voices will be studied. When Mr. Anderson simply showed the movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy* as a way to entertain his class to learn about Africa, teacher candidates can learn that no shortcuts are allowed. Lastly, just as many other readings have stated, “Multicultural education creates a space for students to meaningfully engage with each other...it inherently connects learning to the world outside of your classroom” (Au, 2009, p. 89).

Au and Delpit both mention the uncertainty of educators having to teach “other people’s children” and in Stan Karp’s article “Arranged Marriages, Rearranged Ideas,” he shares a story about a student named Jihana. Karp is a teacher at Paterson, New Jersey, where the school had a

predominately white student population at first but later had a growing Black and Latino student population. Karp has worked with many Bengali students before also, including Jihana. When Jihana had told him through conversation about post graduation that she wanted to go to college but “a lot dependent, on whether she had to get married” (Au, 2009, p. 238), Karp was disquieting. It was obvious that Jihana was not ready to get married and was anxious about college due to all the duties she had at home. Hearing this, Karp felt “unsure of just what my role, as a white male, high school teacher, could possibly be in this situation. I halfheartedly offered to speak to her family about her college potential if she thought it would help” (Au, 2009, p. 238). Regardless whether she wanted to published it or not, Karp had encouraged Jihana to write an article about arranged marriages for their student magazine. He recalls how he felt wanting to intervene with her family telling her that marriage was not substantial so early on but knows he does not have the right due to their culture. It angered him that a young woman’s future and education had to be in effects with a cultural practice. “No matter how I tried to come to terms with it, the custom of arranged marriages was completely alien to my own sensibilities to my expectations for my students” (Au, 2009, p. 238).

Fully aware of his white privilege and being as considerate as he can to cultural traditions, Karp is able to honestly reflect about being unsure of how to care for his students in the proper manner saying:

“I also thought, and not for the first time, about what my responsibilities were as a public school teacher, and how I should manage this mix of my own strongly held personal opinions, concern for my students’ well-being, and

respect for the cultural differences that were increasingly evident in my school community” (Au, 2009, p. 239).

As a teacher, he discusses how he has also helped other students work through related issues that are brought to him. In Jihana’s case, he simply could not call her parents to interfere. “The more I thought about it, the more I realized the problem wasn’t finding diplomatic ways to voice my options, it was figuring out the dividing line between responding to the needs of my students and interfering inappropriately with ‘other people’s children’” (Au, 2009, p. 240). A similar student had been expected to go through an arranged marriage ten years earlier but at the time, Karp had recalled not handling the situation well which was mainly “expressing my outrage that women were oppressed this way in her culture” (Au, 2009, p. 240). But with Jihana, Karp had learned to take a step back. “I was showing off the ‘superior’ values and ‘advanced’ thinking of ‘progressive western culture,’ especially of radicals like myself, and contrasting it to the ‘underdeveloped practices’ of her own community, which I encouraged her to reject” (Au, 2009, p. 241).

Karp’s article not only represents the determination and care an educator has for their students but also the unrealistic belief that as educators, they hold superpower effects in saving each and every one of their students. Karp demonstrates that it is not the teacher’s responsibility to make decisions for students but to guide them. Educators have to have the ability to see where their student is coming from, respect where their background, and guide them to follow their gut in seeing the issue presented. Karp’s understanding of his privilege and respecting that he was not able to intervene with Jihana’s plans is not apparent in many educators. Internally, we like to believe what we are doing is right or that our thinking is right. Internally, we mean

well. However, the way we externally take action with our students may say differently if not enough cautions is there. Not only does this article relate to the memory of friends sharing about their arranged marriage perspective, but it shows that diversity does not have to be explicitly taught through classrooms and lesson plans. It can be incorporated through conversation with a simple “how are you doing?”

Other Resources

When looking at bookstore selections and googling different types of articles that discuss “up to date” diverse and multicultural education pedagogies, a wide variety of content is easily accessible to teacher candidates. “The Role of Education in Advancing a Diversity and Inclusion Breakthrough: Linking Education to the Workforce of the Future” by Trudy Bourgeois is a Huffington Post article that first comes up when searching “diversity in education.” She writes, “Millennials and Gen Zers care about social issues and are deeply concerned about the future...They are recognizing inequalities on college campuses and some universities are stepping up to address the issues” (Bourgeois, 2018, p. 1). Millennials and Gen Zers taking action demonstrate that students who are fostered into awareness of inclusiveness at an early age are able to make a judgement of what is just and unjust. Although mostly focused on a College level education, the article gives excess resources about how diversity and inclusion affects other schools, how to incorporate a more welcoming environment for upper level education. The information given is broad and specifically geared toward college campuses, but teacher candidates can reflect on their own education and take these challenging skills and simplify them for an elementary level. It also widens the horizon of affective

incorporating specific skills and topics into lesson plans makes students become critical thinkers that are able to see the outside world more in depth.

Also showing up when researching about diversity in education, a TED talk given by Dena Simmons also appears. Simmons lived in the Bronx where many drugs and marijuana were sold. The poverty of the neighborhood eventually led them to move to Connecticut and Simmons then attended a boarding school. Although she was a lot safer, “Very quickly, I felt like I didn’t belong. I learned that I didn’t speak the right way, and to demonstrate the proper ways of speaking, my teachers gave me frequent lessons, in public, on the appropriate way to enunciate certain words” (Simmons, 2015). Simmons got called out for pronouncing “asking” as “axing,” and her classmates would watch their valuables around her when entering the dorm; and another classmate would make a comment when Simmons would apply hair products. “There is emotional damage done when young people can’t be themselves, when they are forced to edit who they are in order to be acceptable. It’s a kind of violence” (Simmons, 2015). Simmons shares how she has studied abroad in New England and Chile, went back to teach middle school in the Bronx, received a Truman Scholarship, a Fulbright and a Soros Fellowship, earned her doctorate at Columbia University, and also landed a job at Yale. Despite all these achievements, she tells the audience that she has eternal imposter syndrome and that “either I’ve been invited because I’m a token, which really isn’t about me...but a box someone needed to check off. Or, I’m exceptional, which means I’ve had to leave the people I love behind” (Simmons, 2015).

As an educator, Simmons frequently asks “What are our students of color learning about themselves?” (Simmons, 2015). Through research, students of color are “suspended and

expelled at a rate three times greater than white students” and “an analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics found that 45 percent of our nation’s pre-K to high school student were people of color, while only 17 percent of our teachers are” (Simmons, 2015). Using culturally sustaining pedagogies, Simmons would incorporate histories and identities of her students so “while I could not control the instability of their homes, the uncertainty of their next meal...I provided them with a loving classroom that made them feel proud of who they are, that made them know they mattered” (Simmons, 2015). Simmons then ends her TED talk explaining how there is a better way to teach kids without having them forcefully look at the consequences of what their identities are, “a way that teaches them to trust their instincts and to have faith in their own creative genius” (Simmons, 2015).

Simmon’s TED talk is not inspirational, but informational because as educators, it is easy to get lost in how a student performs academically rather than socially. Simmons can also be an example and product of “other people’s children” that educators get nervous about teaching due to their cultural difference. Her imposter syndrome led her to believing that she did not deserve the accomplishments she achieved which many other students of color may relate to. She teaches us that many factors of who a student may be really ties together with who they are as a learner and person.

Methodology

This qualitative research project took place during the fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters and takes a thematic analysis approach. Data was collected from: 1) syllabi from three required early childhood/childhood foundations and methods courses; 2) existing educational foundations literature in the fields of multicultural education, diversity, and inclusion; and 3) an

interview with Dr. Wayne Au, a well-respected and renowned expert in the of multicultural education and ethnic studies. Data was then analyzed thematically.

I first collected as many articles from required early childhood and childhood foundation courses, including *Sociological and Philosophical Foundations of Education*, *Education of Diverse Populations in Early Childhood and Elementary School*, and *Teaching Reading in Elementary School I* that have multicultural-education- and diversity-related reading assignments for teacher candidates. I focused on what type of readings different professors have assigned, and paid close attention to the application of theory in practice. When collecting articles, I reached out to Sharon Countryman, Secretary for Early Childhood/Childhood and asked to see past syllabusi. I then began to read each article and analyzed its content and craft to see consider the theoretical and practical impacts on teacher candidates' pedagogical practice. The various articles were then separated into three categories; 1) Traditional pedagogies; 2) Sociocultural Approach; and 3) Culturally Relevant and Sustaining pedagogies.

Many articles that teacher candidates must read for class are influenced by the pedagogies of Vygotsky and Piaget where teachers must differentiate for their students' learning styles. When collecting data from sociocultural approach articles, there was a larger emphasis on how students' ethnicities plays a role in classrooms. Teachers often felt like they were teaching "other people's children" due to their language and academic difference and it then became challenging to find a cultural appropriate way to teach. Data collected from these articles include the different socioemotional approaches educators would use and the responses they would get from other educators and students in their classrooms. The desire to do more for

students of color and creating a space for them then lead to reading articles about culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies.

Educators became more aware that diversity needed to be addressed in classes and lesson plans start to become more in-depth. According to the data collected, many educators often found themselves not knowing what to do or where to start when they found themselves in disagreement with one's culture. Educators showed more emotional concern about whether what they were doing was right or just enough thus giving more information that teacher candidates may benefit from. By organizing the various articles into the different type of educational pedagogies, similar themes emerge on how to tackle diversity in classrooms, giving teacher candidates a more clear approach on what to do when teaching their own students.

Data and Results

Diversity is a dialogue. Students benefit from critically thinking about how their communities and school work can politically and socially tie together. When reading *Rethinking Multicultural Education*, many educators did not turn away from publishing their emotion about how they felt and the reality of the hardships in being a different race from their students. Empathy is through the heart and cannot be taught. Teacher candidates can not be taught to have empathy and learn that an open mind is needed. At the same time, teacher candidates know should know that it is okay to not be so hard on themselves when something does not go right or when they go through misunderstandings.

Interviewing Wayne Au

In my interview with Wayne Au, a main takeaway was how communities between student and teacher must be bridged. "You can't take the same presumptions, you need to listen

and be open in that type of space [when talking about being in a space that is not yours] he says when asking about being the only half-Asian kid in an African American culture class.

“I guess as teachers we struggle because as teachers we want all those spaces to be welcoming spaces, we want everyone to feel like we belong there, and I think it’s an inherent challenge of teaching because really as teachers, especially in higher education, you’re in context where that it not neutral. You’re in context that are institutionalized. You’re in a space that do reproduce institutionalized racism, sexism, class, and equality. It raises a question of “is it possible to make a space where everyone feels welcome because automatically some people may not feel welcome due to the nature of the institution. That’s why it’s less about making this ideal welcoming space but more about this space that has the disposition that’s working towards justice”.

Going into the Deaf Community

Many different myths have been assumed of the Deaf community and their students. As a hearing teacher candidate who plans to study Deaf Education as a Masters, it always dawned to me that I will be teaching in a space that is not “mine”. Different myths that are associated with deaf people include how they cannot talk, “American Sign Language is just English on the hands, hearing aids enable people who are deaf to hear speech” (Scheetz, 2012, p. 21-24), and that all deaf people know sign language. While the term “diversity” can be an umbrella term various groups of people, people with medical disabilities can be forgotten in the mix.

Similar to what many other experience educators say about teaching, Dr. Au had told me “You’re going to mess up and you’re going to do it”. When talking to Dr. Au about being a

hearing person in a dominant deaf environment and the worry of misteachings and exclusion of classroom space he specifically said “It’s true for all teachers anyways because when you go to these spaces, you’re going to screw up. We’re human beings that’s what we’ll do”. He reverts back to how important communities can be and how educators must be aware of whose space they’re in saying:

“It’s more of making sure disposition, self-reflection, and caring for students.

Students will understand care, and even if you mess up, if you’re expressing true care and they feel supportive from you, then they’ll give you grace and I think that’s what one needs to work on; The relationship with their students so they are willing to give you grace in case you do mess up.”

Going into a foreign cultural community can be unnerving. There are different fields for educators to explore and find insight to see how different students of a particular community are constructed. Dr. Au shares that going into the Deaf community is similar to going into a Black or Latinx space in NYC and that it is important to know those communities. It is impossible to fully know about a cultural community especially when you are not originally a member. However, “you can go learn about it and get, for a lack of better term, go as culturally confident as you can and be better prepared to interact with that space. Never presume you’re an expert, always presume you’re not because you want to go in as a learner.”

As I continually become a learner of this community, I specifically research about different mainstream and inclusive Deaf education classrooms. Although all “deaf kids are just like hearing kids. They just can’t hear so good” (Neisser, 1983, p. 150), many deaf children do not interact with hearing children in a mainstream classroom. Many of the hearing children do

not sign and the deaf children cannot speak or hear to them (Neisser, 1983, p. 150). However, as a teacher, the two populations can interact with each other through guidance, patience, and the educating within one another. Creating a communication bridge in both the deaf and hearing student population is also a simple way in how important diversity can be incorporated in classrooms. Introducing American Sign Language to the entire class regardless of whether they are hearing or deaf helps both students and teachers go into a new foreign culture community less unnerving.

A Second Perspective on Teacher Preparation Programs

Dr. Wayne Au is a respected author, publisher, and professor in the world of education. When asking that given everything he has learned and contributed, how can teacher educators do better in preparing teacher candidates for teaching in a multicultural society, he simply said “everything I told you really.” “If we’re going to be helping our future teachers be really ready to work with the students in front of them, then we need to help develop that disposition about what their orientation should be”. It important to for teacher candidates to learn “who are the students in front of me”, “what are these communities”, “what are the resources along with critical self learning”, and remember the disposition of learning constantly. These aspects should be included into teaching programs because “our teaching programs really need to be just like our teaching, it should be understood as partnership in our communities with kids. We’re helping people raise their babies and we need to be teaching our teachers in that kind of way”, Au says with a smile.

There is no doubt that teacher candidates in the program all want the best for their students but it is possible that their intentions and actual practices may fall through the cracks. Dr. Au shares that he knows many well-meaning teachers that want to support the Black Lives

Matter movement at schools but when diving into it, they are not aware of its true meaning. “They have this whopping desire but when it turns back to practice, it gets really hard so I don’t want to be romantic. We can we love out students, and their communities, and those partnerships but how do we operationalize that? That can be a lot harder”. The type of candidates schools recruit into their teacher preparation programs can be considered more important according to Au because “the vast majority of teachers we know actually came into teaching with this orientation about communities and kids and they understood teaching as political and they went to and for that. And I’m talking about that as a transrational way because of teachers of color. There is also white teachers that come into teaching because they’re like ‘I wanna be down with communities and I see myself as an activist, this is what I want to do.’”

Discussions

With the vast information teacher candidates can receive about how to teach diversity in their classrooms, it may be hard to find where to start or even what is the “right” way to teach. The answer? There is no “right” way. Teacher candidates simply have to keep an open mind, open discussion, and open classroom when trying to implicate multicultural education into their lessons. Class discussions are important to encourage students to critically think about themselves socially and politically in today’s world. Similar to teaching in general, implicating diversity is extremely “trial and error”.

Through observations collected throughout this thesis, I have learned that no matter what personal opinions one may have about culture, it is important that teachers must put their student’s perspective first. Teacher candidates cannot be afraid of learning either. Whether it is simply questioning and asking about one’s culture, mutual understanding, and vulnerability

between the two must be appropriately acceptable. A genuine safe space must be created for dialogue to happen and being apologetic must be recognized. As students get older, they become more aware of their cultural differences and it is important for educators to honor that and encourage their own identity. When students' critical thinking "has been consciously nurtured, they are in the habit of noticing and pursuing contradictions. They ask more questions...in person when the answers they're given don't make sense. They gain experience in investigative reporting and learn the importance of ...research to help them clarify where the real story is" (Cowhey, 2006, p. 121). Reverting back to Dena Simmon's TED talk, it is important that students do not get imposter syndrome and get recognized for the achievements because of their intellectual academics. Another thing learned is that students will understand compassion but educators must work towards earning that trust and compassion. Messing up will be a little less discouraging when one is able to subside their power relations with their students and have their students support them.

While teacher preparation programs are doing an efficient job in teaching how curriculum can be created through creativity, they are not doing exposing candidates to many other populations. Differentiation is known to be important and must be implemented for lesson plans, however, many overlook at the types of differentiation that may be made. Students with disabilities, students of color, students with IEP/504, or students that come from low economic statuses all need differentiation. Despite having a Special Education program available for teacher candidates, they would also benefit in learning more about the different populations and how to teach them.

Where to Start

In *A Different Vision: A Revolution Against Racism in Public Education* by Susan Anglada Bartley, there is an emphasis of how storytelling can be universally used as a classroom management technique and when incorporating diversity in classrooms, it is important that teacher candidates be aware of this strategy. “The experience of acceptance that students feel in your presence will lay the foundation for openness to the content material that you are trying to deliver” (Bartley, 2018, p. 50). Storytelling will give the opportunity for communication between students and teachers to be presented and help create a space for sharing since, “the purpose of sharing one’s story is not to show that we, as adults, exceed the level of suffering experienced by diverse young people, *it is to connect by having experienced having challenges and navigating through them*” (Bartley, 2018, p. 53).

Showing representation in a classroom is also an extremely simple way to expose students to other cultures and be able to read about these “other children” that are not predominantly white. In Dr. Kiersten Greene’s article titled “The Overwhelming Whiteness of Transitional Chapter Books”, she discusses how books are the “mirrors and windows” for young readers but many books only reflect whiteness. Transitional chapter books help guide readers into developing fluency and “as readers develop the ability to read more independently, they also rapidly develop as social beings” (Greene, 2017, p. 1). When I was a student, I did not realize the lack of representation we had in classroom libraries. Even when reading for fun, I would not pick up a book with a character of color simply because there was not any access to one. “Whiteness discourse is repeatedly reinforced with little to no effort. Children of color do not see themselves and white children do not see children of color” (Greene, 2017, p. 1). Looking at the different books children can access in their libraries is already a small but powerful step in incorporating

diversity into classrooms and how to expose representation to elementary students. “Take a look at classroom libraries and material you chose to teach and acquire and assign more texts so that voices of color can also tell history and give multiple perspectives” (Greene, 2017, p. 1).

Dialogue vs. Monologue

The title of this thesis is heavily inspired by Au’s “Decolonizing the Classroom” and he furthers expresses in this interview how a teacher’s relationship is one of power. Educators are granted with this authority through the degrees one has earned. Students are considered to have significantly less power than educators so “when monologuing as a teacher, you are essentially resting upon your differential power over your students and you are essentially forcing them to engage with you”. However, when creating a dialogue, teacher candidates are honoring student’s perspectives and subverting their power relation best to their ability. With dialogue, teacher candidates are actually hearing their students and bringing them into a space where they are learning in a way that a monologue does not. “That’s why pedagogically if you’re going to bring more than just approach to education, then we need to think of more interactive things for students about themselves and their identities, their perspectives and their lives into teaching. You can’t do that through monologue, you need to facilitate space for students to bring into that learning”.

Conclusion

Teacher candidates must actively look at different outside educational sources when learning about incorporating diversity into the classroom because what we are reading in class, simply is not enough. We can not simply be told to have “empathy” when going into teaching and we can not be consistently advised to make sure our class is diverse without any instruction.

Although it may seem intimidating, scary, and confusing on where to start, it is important to keep the students care in mind. As educators, we must make sure to bridge the gap between students and their communities, help them critically think about their identities in a political and social aspect, and most importantly, open up discussions about their cultures. Teachers are still learners similarly to their students. Through dialogue, diversity can make a more active role in classrooms.

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