Chapter 88

International Conceptualizations of Diversity in Multi–Cultural Teacher Preparation:
A Review of the Literature 2006–2015

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ABSTRACT

This literature review updates and expands the authors' previous synthesis of empirical research on pre-service multicultural teacher preparation (MTP) conducted from 2006-2011 in settings outside the U.S. (Liu, Baker, & Milman, 2014). In this review, the authors synthesized research conducted from 2006-2015 about (a) how diversity is conceptualized in teacher education, and (b) how MTP is practiced across international settings. Their analysis demonstrates that researchers in non-U.S. settings conceptualized diversity as: (a) unspecified or undefined; (b) connected to self; and (c) a social justice issue. MTP practices similar to their prior review included: critical reflections on self and other, culturally relevant pedagogies, and theory-to-practice transfer. The authors' updated analysis additionally revealed a new approach that they termed interdisciplinary MTP. Implications call for initiating innovative collaborations in teacher preparation to explore complex, evolving definitions of diversity shaped by global and local discourses, and learning from each other about meaningful, effective MTP across international settings.

INTRODUCTION

With globalization comes increasingly mobile populations and evolving national demographics, cultivating a societal heterogeneity in ways before unimagined. In the U.S., holidays celebrating different cultures sprinkle calendars and grocery store aisles are stocked with ethnic foods. However, tolerating ethnic holidays and foods is not equivalent to fostering a diversity of cultures and groups in mainstream discourses and in positions of power. Phillips (2014) recounts disagreements regarding diversity among Supreme Court justices and corporate struggles to hire diverse leadership to demonstrate that "in the U.S., where the dialogue of inclusion is relatively advanced, even the mention of the word 'diversity' can lead to anxiety and conflict." Speaking to a range of professions, Phillips highlights how "interacting with individuals who are different forces group members to prepare better, to anticipate alternative viewpoints and to expect that reaching consensus will take effort." Her encouragement prompts leaders across fields to persist in the struggle not only to embrace diversity, but also to explore, imagine, and comprehend diversity in new ways.

The field of education is central to Phillips' (2014) call to understand diversity with depth and breadth and to interrogate the evolving conceptualizations of diversity. Globalization's impact on economic, social, and political systems compels education stakeholders to no longer function in isolation but to embrace innovative collaborations that bring new complexities to the work of teaching in the 21st century. (Wang, Lin, Spalding, Odell, & Klecka, 2011). As Apple (2011) contended, educators must recognize that:

…nearly all educational policies and practices are strongly influenced by an increasingly integrated international economy that is subject to severe crises; that reforms and crises in one country have significant effects in others; and that immigration and population flows from one nation or area to another have tremendous impacts on what counts as official knowledge, what counts as responsive and effective education, and what counts as appropriate teaching. (p. 223)

Education practitioners thus cannot afford to encapsulate themselves within classrooms, schools, institutions, or even national borders when determining what curricula to teach, pedagogies to employ, or policies and empirical inquiries to guide practice. New generations of teachers need to be able to navigate diverse classrooms skillfully in ways that respond to the rapid changes brought about by globalization. As such, research is needed that investigates multicultural teacher preparation (MTP), or how teacher education faculty across national and international contexts prepare teacher candidates (TCs) for classrooms with students who are more culturally, ethnically, intellectually, linguistically, physically, and racially diverse than ever before (Kilbane & Milman, 2013; Liu & Milman, 2013). Although researchers around the world recognize the importance of placing student diversity and equity issues at the center of teacher preparation programs (Banks et al., 2005; Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004; Gay, 1997; Melnick & Zeichner, 1998), not all teacher educators share understandings of diversity or multiculturalism. The various, and sometimes competing, social and economic interests among nations means educators around the world may comprehend and use discourse on multicultural education in different ways. As technology and globalization has enabled educators to share ideas more easily than ever before, taking stock of current understandings (and misunderstandings) of key concepts related to MTP is imperative. A deeper, more nuanced understanding of the different interpretations of MTP can guide further research that is needed to prepare TCs to tap into the resources and funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 1995) that diverse populations bring to school. A first step in this process is to uncover

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