

Chapter 15

Multicultural Curricular Frameworks for Preservice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

One in four children in the US has a parent who is an immigrant. Studies indicate that by and large such students are at-risk for learning and their increasing numbers continue to significantly impact the labor force and the future of the country in multiple facets. Additionally, teachers shoulder a huge responsibility in educating immigrant learners, and their performance is a function of how well teacher education programs prepare them for their work. In contemporary scenario, the performance of teachers depends on how their teacher education programs prepare them for multicultural Pre K-12 classes. To this end, a social justice orientation is useful for teachers working in multicultural classrooms because it allows teachers to strive for equity by employing culturally responsive curriculum. The chapter author presents multicultural frameworks and models with a social justice orientation that could assist preservice teachers to become more effective in their instructional practices.

INTRODUCTION

UNESCO (2012) defines early childhood as “the period from birth to eight years old. A time of remarkable brain growth, these years lay the foundation for subsequent learning and develop-

ment.” In the US about 38 million children are in the age group of 0-8 years old (based on the data from the American Community Survey, 2011 for 0-9 years old). Twenty four percent of US children [including early childhood] are from immigrant families (Hernandez & Cervantes, 2011). That is, one in four children in the US has a parent who is an immigrant. In 2011 the foreign born population

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residing in the US was about 40 million — there were 0.5% from Oceania, 2% from North America, 4% from the continent of Africa, 12% from Europe, 28% from Asia, and 53% from Latin America and the Caribbean (US Census, 2012).

Children are likely to be less ready for US schools and are said to be at risk, when they are from low-income families, with parents who are not highly educated, and parental English proficiency is less than desirable (Greenberg & Kahn, 2011; Tienda & Haskins, 2011). In the 0-8 year age group of immigrant children in the US, about 51% are from low-income families; 22% have a parent who has a high school degree or its equivalent, 17% have a parent who has a four-year college degree, and 15% have a parent who has an advanced degree; and 60% have an English Language Learner parent (Fortuny, Hernandez, Chaudry, 2010). Effective early childhood education programs can help children with school readiness (Golden, 2011; Haskins & Tienda, 2011; Lahai, 2008; Tienda & Haskins, 2011).

In fall 2008 about 15 million children were enrolled in K-3 US public schools (NCES, n. d. a). Twenty-two percent of elementary students attended high-poverty schools. “High-poverty schools are defined as public schools where more than 75 percent of the students are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) program” (NCES, 2011, p. 87). In 2008–09, 6% White, 17% Asian, 31% American Indian/Alaska Native, 44% Black, and 45% Hispanic attended high poverty elementary schools (NCES, 2011). These numbers indicate that Latinos, African Americans, and Native American students are generally found in high-poverty schools as compared to White and Asian students. While the percentage of both Latino and Asian immigrants has increased in the US, the kinds of schools these two groups attend appear to be different.

In 2007-08, 84% of elementary teachers who worked in both high-poverty and low-poverty public schools were female; in high-poverty elemen-

tary schools, the racial composition of teachers was 62% White, 16% Black, and 18% Hispanic. For the same years, in low-poverty elementary schools, the racial composition of teachers was 93% White, 3% Hispanic, and 2% Black (NCES, n. d. b). While there are relatively more African American and Latino teachers in high-poverty schools than in low-poverty schools, there are more White teachers teaching cultural groups that are less like them in background. Park (2009) posits, “Children need role models with whom to identify and they need to be able to see themselves in the faces of their teachers. They also need teachers who can relate to their backgrounds and build links between those backgrounds and a culturally meaningful curriculum” (p. 124). For example, Irvine (1989) states that in school districts with large numbers of black teachers it was found that “fewer black students being [were] placed in EMR and TR classes, fewer blacks receiving [received] corporal punishment, fewer blacks being [were] suspended or expelled, [there were] more blacks in gifted and talented programs, and more blacks graduating [graduated] from high schools” (p. 55). She also adds:

[black teachers] decrease minority students' school alienation and contribute to their academic success by serving as cultural translators for monocultural at-risk black students who often fail because the culture of the school is vastly different from the culture of their home and community. Second, black teachers demonstrate unique African-American teaching styles that appear to be related to black students' achievement and school success (Irvine, 1989, p. 55).

Irvine (1989) calls for teachers to be “cultural translators” and “cultural brokers” (p. 57). Jaime Escalante of Bolivia whose math program brought success to poor Latinos in the East Los Angeles area writes:

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