

# Chapter 44

## Equity and Inclusion in Today's Diverse and Inclusive 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom: Fostering Culturally Responsive Pre- Service Teachers with the Tools to Provide Culturally Responsive Instruction

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter shares the odyssey of one African-American teacher educator at a predominately white institution in a diverse learner's course fostering culturally responsive pre-service teachers with the tools to provide culturally responsive instruction for today's diverse and inclusive 21st century classroom. Early on in this journey, the instructor found that resistance, fear, and anxiety often ruled student perception of diverse learners in the inclusive classroom. Therefore, through action research the African-American teacher educator collected data, and subsequently planned, implemented, and monitored various actions designed to lessen pre-service teacher resistance, anxiety, and fear of student diversities in the classroom while fostering culturally responsive teachers for the diverse and inclusive 21st century classroom. Ultimately, these experiences mitigated the fears and concerns of preservice teachers around the enormity of diversities in the classroom and equipped them with tools for success.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The United States continues to become increasingly diverse. This diversity is reflected in today's public schools. Today, diverse learners make up a significant portion of public school enrollment. According to the Public Education Primer (Kober & Usher, 2012) and Condition of Education (2014), 46% of public

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school students are non white, 6% are gifted, 9% are English language learners, and 13% have a disability and receive special education services.

In contrast, the teaching force is less diverse. The Public Education Primer (2012) states, "Public School teachers are a far less diverse group in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity than the students they teach." (p.66). Their profile of public school teachers culled from National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Condition of Education 2011 indicates: 75% female, 25% male, 83% white, 7% African-American, 7% Latino, 2% other, and 1% Asian-American. Therefore, today's pre-service teachers must be prepared for the realities of today's inclusive general education classroom. A typical classroom in today's public school will contain a variety of students such as multicultural students, students from a variety of socioeconomic statuses, gifted students, students with very limited English proficiency, students with disabilities such as autism or emotional disturbance, and it is the role of the teacher to create a positive learning environment in an equitable manner for these diverse learners.

Historically, teacher education programs have been cited as having an overwhelming presence of whiteness (Cochran-Smith, 1995, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). Whiteness is generally described in terms of W.E.B. DuBois' and Theodore Allen's writings on the social construction of white identity and Allen's multi-decade writings on white privilege and white supremacy. Sleeter (2001), an eminent multicultural scholar in education, intimated the following, "The great bulk of the research has examined how to help young White preservice students (mainly women) develop the awareness, in-sights, and skills for effective teaching in multi-cultural contexts." (p. 101). Recently, another education scholar, Heather Hackman, posited at the 2015 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education (NCORE) that whiteness undergirds the core of teacher education and denies teacher education a racially just pedagogy.

These diversities exist in the inclusive 21 century classroom, so what are the implications for practice? What do these diversities mean for the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom? What should teachers be mindful of? What are teachers going to do in order to address these diversities in an era of inclusion? If instruction solely focuses on the practices of the dominant culture, then other students are excluded and denied opportunities of learning. This exclusion exacerbates the opportunity gap and lessens the possibility of closing the achievement gap.

## **CONTEXT: LIBERAL ARTS AND TEACHER EDUCATION**

Imagine walking in to a teacher preparation program at a liberal arts university where the introduction to education course and subsequent diverse learners' courses are both university designated diversity intensive courses, thus diversity centered. According to the university's website, diversity-intensive courses are defined as:

*Diversity intensive courses are diversity-centered, rather than diversity-inclusive or enhanced. DI courses focus on the meaning and experience of diversity and difference and the implications of living in a diverse society whether one is advantaged or oppressed. DI courses emphasize the complex and problematic processes of identity formation. These courses encourage awareness of the relationships between self and social institutions, both of which rest upon as well as reify difference and hierarchy.*

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