Chapter 14
Preparing Teachers to be Effective in Cross–Cultural Learning Environments

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ABSTRACT

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 18.9 percent of elementary and middle school teachers are from diverse backgrounds. Only 15 percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers are minority ("Household Data Annual Averages," 2008). The current teacher workforce remains predominantly white, middle class (Hughes & Kwok, 2007), and female (Kearney, 2008; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clark & Curran, 2004; Garmon, 2005; Thomas & Kearney, 2008). Another problem that affects teacher workforce is that half of new teachers leave their jobs within their first five years of teaching (Kearney, 2008). Because of high burn out due to improper working conditions and lack of support, teachers are leaving schools with a high minority rate (Horng, 2009). Therefore, this chapter is intended to stimulate reflections on strategies to deal with the increasing diversity in the national teacher educator workforce. Further, since diversity is a complex issue, issues that teachers of all ethnicities (including white) come across in working with culturally diverse learners are also examined.

INTRODUCTION

Statistics have shown that the current demographics of classrooms have become increasingly diverse. An examination of findings by the National Center of Education Statistics of all United States public schools and of their jurisdictions found, in the 2006-2007 school year, that 56.5 percent of students in K-12 public schools were white and 43.5 percent were from different racial/ethnic backgrounds (Sable & Noel, 2008). More recent research by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards concluded that 42 percent of students in the public schools are minority (NBPTS, 2009). For some states these percentages are more prevalent than in others. Horm's report on "Early Childhood educator preparation," estimated that by 2010, children of color would represent the majority of young people in California, Florida, New York, and Texas" (2003). In the western states, 57% of K-12 public school enrollment consists of racially and ethnically diverse students (National Center for Education Statistics and American Institutes for Research, 2009). According to research by Piker and Rex (2008) "34 percent of children served by Head Start were Hispanic."

With high minority population numbers, issues such as economic status and language barriers come into light. Some statistics show that teachers and schools with lack of knowledge on how to deal with language barriers end up placing them in special education. Xu and Drame (2008) found that English Language Learners were 27 percent more likely to be placed in special education in the elementary grade. Some states may feel not affected by these issues because of the low minority population numbers in their state. For example, some people think that the Midwest is not demographically diverse. However, between 1972 and 2007 the population of minority students in the Midwest increased from 12 percent to 28 percent (National Center for Education Statistics and American Institutes for Research, 2009). This figure has increased in the recent years. Nevertheless, it is critical to understand that populations change and shift all the time, and as pre-service teachers and those teachers currently in the workforce look to continue their careers, they will look to where the job opportunities will present themselves. The current need will most likely be in places with a high minority population. Consequently, since there is major increase of minority students in public schools, there is need to prepare teachers to be successful in cross-cultural learning environments.

Similarly, there are concerns as to whether more diversity in the national educator workforce would help to deal with the growing diversity. However, the statistics show that this may be a long time in coming. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 18.9 percent of elementary and middle school teachers are from diverse backgrounds and only 15 percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers are minority (2008). The current teacher workforce remains predominantly white, middle class, (Hughes & Kwok, 2007) and female (Kearney, 2008; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clark & Curran, 2004; Garmon, 2005; Thomas, & Kearney, J., 2008). Another problem that affects teacher workforce is that half of new teachers leave their jobs within their first five years of teaching (Kearney, 2008). Because of high burn out due to improper working conditions and lack of support, teachers are leaving schools with a high minority rate (Horng, 2009). As diversity is such a complex issue, this literature review includes issues that teachers of all ethnicities (including white) come across in working with culturally diverse learners, teacher perceptions of the minority students and families, diversity student perceptions of the classroom teachers and classroom management issues with diversity students.

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