

Tracking Attitudinal Changes Among Teacher Candidates in Support of Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education

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ABSTRACT This paper reports on a university cohort model designed to ensure inclusive and equitable fieldwork experiences for teacher candidates. Using a three-fold multicultural model (TFM), pre-service teachers worked to bridge their experiential gaps to learn to provide future inclusive and equitable quality education for children. The TFM model provided class based, cohort fieldwork experience, and reflective journal writings and discussions. The researchers assigned undergraduate teacher candidates as an instructional cohort to our local diverse schools located within a ten-mile radius for their field work hours. The schools nearby offered inclusion and self-contained classes for children with and without disabilities within a high needs multicultural community. Pre-questionnaires were used to learn about the backgrounds, characteristics, attitudes, and beliefs of all the teacher candidates enrolled in the course. Teacher candidates completed a pre-questionnaire regarding their placement and a post-questionnaire after their fieldwork experience. All the teacher candidates also discussed their experiences, questions or concerns in class during the course of the semester. The teacher candidates also completed a formal observation report and a reflective daily journal regarding their experiences. The pre and post-questionnaires allowed for multiple choice and open-ended responses. Findings indicated that the TFM model effected change over time in four areas among teacher candidates and mentor teachers: 1) beliefs and assumptions about the diverse community school were challenged and changed, 2) learned stereotypes were rejected, 3) teacher candidates developed deeper cultural responsiveness and 4) mentor teachers improved effectiveness.

Keywords: Teacher preparation, inclusion, diversity, dispositions, cultural responsiveness

Introduction

Preparing effective teachers for diverse and inclusive populations remains a conundrum for schools of education in the United States and around the globe. Often, the homogeneity of experiences brought to the table by candidates entering the teaching profession creates an experiential gap that directly impacts teaching and learning in the classroom. According to Hollins and Guzman (2005) in *Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education* national trends indicate the teacher population as overwhelmingly white, female, middle class, from suburbs or small towns, with limited experience with those from cultures different from themselves. Teacher candidates in predominantly white institutions

(PWIs) similar to the college of education where the study was conducted, fit this national trend, being overwhelmingly white, female, middle class, with limited life experience in interactions with people from diverse backgrounds. This is a concern when prospective teachers perceive the diversity as either a deficit model or hold low expectations for achievement, and teacher preparation programs are unable to effectively engage culturally and linguistically diverse teacher candidates in the teaching and learning process (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). The public school student population is increasingly majority-minority in demographic with projections of children of color accounting for 57% of the public school population by 2050 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). The need for inclusive and equitable education demands the preparation of teachers with not only knowledge and skills but the dispositions necessary for effective interactions with students.

A fallacious assumption would be that because of the homogeneity of the teacher workforce there will automatically be a disconnect between the teachers and students or that the preservice teacher harbors a deficit model of diverse cultures (Lowenstein, 2009). However, the socially constructed systemic underpinnings of race and ability in society have an indelible impact on interactions within the classroom and therefore, the effectiveness of the teaching and learning that goes on (Henfield & Washington, 2012). Our teacher education programs must then, purposefully, provide preservice teachers with a means to not only experience working in a diverse setting, but also, support for the reflective exploration needed to address the cognitive dissonance resulting from stereotypes being challenged. A constructivist mindset reminds us that knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes are impacted by experiences that allow the learner to interact, reflect, and construct new knowledge that can then be effectively put to use in the classroom. Our preservice teachers are learners, who if provided with constructivist opportunities will be prepared to provide effective inclusive educational opportunities for children around the country.

Inclusive education aspires to change entire systems to enhance educational access, participation, and outcomes for students from all backgrounds, independent of any form of difference that students purportedly embody (Artiles & Kozleski, 2016). The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards within its Five Core Propositions of Accomplished Teaching states that teachers should have a disposition that allows them to be a model for fostering student self-esteem, motivation, character, civic responsibility, and respect for individual, cultural, religious, and racial differences (NBPTS, 1989, 2016). This means rejecting a deficit view of students and the information they bring into the classroom (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Hawley & Irvine, 2011; Conrad & Gasman, 2015). Although much has been written about the need to meet these standards, university teacher preparation programs have proven to be inadequate in addressing the concept of preparing teacher candidates to be effective teachers in diverse, multicultural, and inclusionary settings, as this involves addressing the concept of dispositions (Ladson & Billings, 1999; Zeichner & Hoelt, 1996; Taylor, Kumi-Yeboah, & Ringlaben, 2016).

Studies have shown that providing teacher candidates with a class that focuses on addressing multiculturalism or working with diverse students is ineffectual in creating a change in disposition (Cho & DeCastro- Ambrosetti, 2006; Mills & Bal-lantyne, 2009; Taylor, Kumi-Yeboah, & Ringlaben, 2016). The purpose of this longitudinal study is to present a cohort model designed for promoting inclusive and equitable fieldwork experiences for teacher candidates in the higher education system across the country. The three-fold multicultural model, TFM that we have adopted is unique in that it provides a framework designed to place pre-service teachers in an effective experience to support the development of cultural responsiveness. This

three-fold class based, cohort fieldwork experience, and reflective journal model will bridge their experiential gap and prepare future teachers to work effectively in culturally diverse high needs classrooms.

Culturally Diverse Communities

Culturally diverse communities can be defined differently depending on the context and the community where a person resides; however, the definition of culture has similar meanings across the globe. Culture can be defined as values, ideals, language, artistic expressions, religion, social, interpersonal relationships, ways of thinking, perceiving and behaving by people (Manning, Baruth & Lee, 2017). It is also important to accept the fact that there are differences among people and all people have cultures that are similar or different from one another. These differences or similarities among people residing in one community may not be familiar or appealing to people who reside outside that community. In other words, it will be challenging for an outsider to work effectively with children or families in a culturally diverse community especially if the person lacks knowledge or history of that community. The historical perspectives could range from injustices towards American Indians by destroying their culture or seizing their land, racism and discrimination of African Americans and Hispanic Americans in education, housing and employment, and cruel treatment of Asian American immigrants to name a few (Manning, Baruth & Lee, 2017). These historical experiences that caused deep scars might have forced families or community members to have less trust in outsiders. These researchers have already acknowledged the challenges faced by elementary and secondary school educators to provide responsive multicultural experiences for learners in classrooms (Manning, Baruth & Lee, 2017). This challenge of teachers will continue to be an unresolved issue if future teachers are not prepared to work effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse students from the early years of teacher preparatory programs across the country. It is evident during this study that the participants who attended the four-year college for their teacher certification lacked knowledge regarding the needs of some communities in their region. For example, students who were living in communities that were less than ten miles away from the field work placement sites lacked any knowledge or understanding of the schools in those neighborhoods. This lack of understanding or misinformation regarding these communities created biases leading to refusal to observe or learn about the culture, climate or education system in these schools.

Teacher Education Programs

The landscape of teacher education program models and their outcomes provide a foundation of evidence for the need for the three-fold multicultural (TFM) model: class based, cohort fieldwork experience, and reflective journal writing that the researchers have explored. The elements of class based instruction, fieldwork experience, and reflective journal writing and discussion are researched.

Hawley & Irvine (2011) examined the need for class based instruction to foster culturally responsive instructional practice. They postulated that teachers who had culturally responsive pedagogy were better able to maximize student learning in racially and ethnically diverse classrooms and cultural experiences underpinning cognition, behavior, and dispositions in students. Such teachers rejected a deficit view of students and moved from “the known”, making connections with “the unknown” to facilitate learning. They also expressed concerns regarding teacher prepa-

ration programs and their need to better address the development of culturally responsive pedagogy. The researchers also found that when teacher candidates were required to participate in multicultural/ diversity courses offered as standalones focused on sensitivity to and awareness of cultural differences, they didn't make practical connections to classroom lessons and pupil interactions Hawley & Irvine (2011).

Although, Hawley & Irvine (2011) did not go so far as to recommend a class coupled with fieldwork for effective teacher preparation as in the current TFM model, they did suggest that fieldwork take place in diverse settings for it to be most effective in preparing teachers to be culturally responsive. They also emphasized the need for teacher candidates to be able to interact with families and other community members with cultural experiences different from their own as part of their preparation. In addition, they insisted on the need for ongoing professional development to support each teacher candidate in the classroom for the first two years.

Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti (2006) worked with 25 pre-service teachers to determine the impact of a multicultural course on their dispositions for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Eighteen of the 25 students completed the pre- and post- test questionnaires which consisted of demographic questions, and multi-cultural curricular issues rated on a 5-point Likert type scale. The post-test questionnaire also included open-ended questions that were categorized to determine the emergence of themes. The findings indicated that most students experienced an increased awareness, understanding, and appreciation of other cultures as a result of taking the multicultural class. Some students indicated that their dispositions did not change because they had positive attitudes about working with CLD students prior to the class and maintained those perceptions subsequent to taking the class. The post-survey, also, revealed that 83% of those pre-service candidates believed that a major reason for the pattern of low academic achievement among poor minorities is the structure and values of the home. One can infer that these candidates would come into the classroom with a deficit view that would negatively impact student achievement. Another interesting finding was that across-the-board, the pre-service teachers acknowledged that they still felt ill-equipped to teach CLD students. Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti (2006) acknowledged that based upon their findings, one multicultural education class was insufficient in preparing pre-service teacher candidates to be culturally responsive. They recommended the inclusion of field experiences with diverse student populations in addition to a course. They did not, however, suggest that the course place pre-service teachers in a TFM model; class based, cohort fieldwork, reflective journal experience to bridge the experiential gap and provide future inclusive and equitable quality education for children.

Mills & Ballantyne (2010), also, found that discrete, short courses were ineffectual in changing dispositions of pre-service teachers in Australia. They dug deeper in examining whether pre- service teacher candidates had the underlying potential to develop the ability to teach CLD students. They postulated the need to inherently possess three dispositions factors before being able to develop cultural responsiveness as a teacher. These factors were: 1) openness and receptiveness to diversity and other's ideas, 2) self-awareness/ self-reflection, and 3) a commitment to social justice, equity, and equality for all members of society. These levels of growth were seen as developmental in nature, progressing from self-awareness/ self-reflection at the basic level, openness and receptive to diversity being an intermediate level, and a commitment to social justice at the advanced level. A modified form of reflective journal was used in an ethnographic approach, in which 48 pre-service teachers wrote autoethnographies, using one of three creative artifacts, a TV Guide, a restaurant menu, or a CD cover. They documented and reflected upon their own gender, race, and class

identities and gave consent for their writing to be analyzed. The findings indicated that while 36 (75%) of the writings demonstrated self-awareness, only 19 (40%) progressed to being demonstrative of openness. Of those 19 pre-service teachers, only three (6%) were identified as having progressed to a level of commitment to social justice. Mills & Ballantyne (2010) suggested that pre-service teacher candidates who lacked the identified dispositions would need more than a class to prepare them to be effective in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students; they would need additional time and richer reflective experiences that allow engagement in diverse educational settings.

In western Georgia (United States of America), Taylor, Kumi-Yeboah & Ringlaben (2016) examined the dispositions of 80 pre-service teacher candidates through online surveys. As a modified version of the Diversity Orientation Survey, a Likert scale was used. The focus was on perceptions towards Multicultural education and the teaching of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The findings appeared to indicate a majority of students (56%) disagreeing with the importance of exploring cultures other than their own. This was a disturbing finding considering that the United States Department of Education (2007) reported that 86% of all elementary and secondary teachers self-reported as white. Taylor, Kumi-Yeboah & Ringlaben (2016) asserted that a different model was needed in teacher preparation programs that fosters culturally responsive perspectives in our pre-service candidates.

After a review of the literature, it is apparent that a nuanced model is needed for implementation building upon identified best practices. The literature suggests that an isolated class or fieldwork are least effective in supporting teacher candidates. The reported TFM model is unique in its three- fold approach. First, pre-service candidates are enrolled in a requisite 15 session class, 2) they are given 125 hours of fieldwork in a diverse, inclusive educational setting, and 3) they are allowed discourse with peers and a professor in a classroom setting with opportunities to reflect in formats of classroom writings, a journal, and the pre-/ post- questionnaire. This model will bridge the experiential gap, providing future inclusive and equitable quality education for children.

Purpose and Overview

Inclusive education aspires to change entire systems to enhance educational access, participation, and outcomes for students from all backgrounds, independent of any form of difference that students purportedly embody (Artiles & Kozleski, 2016). Recognizing that only inclusive education is equitable education, as professors in a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the metropolitan area of New York City, additional support for pre-service teacher candidates was deemed especially necessary to prepare them to successfully teach culturally, linguistically diverse students and those with disabilities.

The purpose of this study was to present findings related to the use of the uniquely developed TFM model. This cohort model was designed by the researchers in response to the teacher preparation community's needs and the evidence from the literature. It ensures the consistent utilization of three elements in fostering cultural responsiveness in teacher preparation: 1) Inclusive and equitable fieldwork experiences for pre- service teacher candidates, 2) Class discussions of attitudinal shifts that took place through shared cohort fieldwork experiences in diverse placements, and 3) Tracking of attitudinal changes that took place as self-reported through the reflective journal, and the pre- and post-questionnaires.

Methodology

A mixed methodology was adopted for this study. A list of pre- and post- questionnaires was used to identify the demographics, biases, religion, living status, microaggressions and their reflective experiences before and after placement. The questionnaires were used mainly to learn about the characteristics, attitudes, and beliefs of a group of students (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The data were collected using anonymous responses on a Google Form in the pre- and post- questionnaire format. The questionnaire design included a Likert scale to respond to questions using Never, Rarely, Occasionally, Very Often, Frequently. Open-ended responses were gathered with an ethnographic intent on self-reflection and gauging of attitudinal changes (Zou & Trueba, 2002). Cross case analysis was used in “grouping together answers from different people to common questions or analyzing different perspectives on central issues” (Patton, 1990). A reflective journal was also analyzed to learn about the teacher candidates’ experiences. All the participants also discussed their experiences informally in class. Themes and sub themes emerged from the data.

Participants

A total of 261 teacher candidates were surveyed using a pre- and post- questionnaire to learn about their experiences observing in a diverse classroom in a school located in a town on the eastern coast of the United States of America.

School of Education: Undergraduate Enrollment Fall 2018

University enrollment in the private predominantly white institution (PWI) consisted of 5391 undergraduates and 2755 graduates for a total of 8146 students in the total university enrollment. The school of education represented 435 undergraduates, 773 graduates, for a total of 1208 (15 % of total enrollment). Based on the anonymous survey completed by teacher candidates themselves, 86% are under 20 years old, and 75% reside with family. They self-identified as 80% White/ Caucasian and 94% female.

The school of education enrollment of 1208 (15%) of 8146 students enrolled in the university is culturally homogeneous. The responses of the teacher candidates indicated a self-identified homogeneity of experiences as follows: 75% reside with family, 86% ages 19-21 years old, 80% White/ Caucasian, 94% female, 73% Christian, 95% heterosexual, 39% having spent most of their life in a predominantly White/Caucasian setting before coming to the college/university.

The data suggest that teacher attitudes, diverse schools, and student learning must be considered in effectively preparing teacher candidates. Often, the homogeneity of experiences brought to the table by candidates entering the teaching profession requires a model for fieldwork designed to place them in a cohort experience to bridge the experiential gap and provide future inclusive and equitable quality education for children such as provided by the TFM model.

Methodology

Students enrolled in the teacher preparatory required course and were placed in diverse settings. Self-placement in schools that they were familiar with was not permitted. Students were instructed to discuss their reflections in class and to record their attitudes in the pre-questionnaire, the journal, and the post-questionnaire. The study collected data on the findings related to the implementation of the TFM model over

the past three years for five semesters. The data collected on 261 teacher candidates self-identified as follows on the pre-questionnaire.

African American/Black	8	3.1%
American Indian/Alaskan Native/ Aleut	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	18	6.9%
Middle Eastern	0	0%
Chicano/Latino/Hispanic	17	6.5%
White/Caucasian	209	80.1%
Other:	9	3.4%

Findings #1- Shifts in Beliefs and Assumptions

The Majority of participants who were surveyed for this study had strong beliefs and assumptions related to their own safety because of the racial, socio-economic status of the community.

This study revealed that these were learned assumptions or beliefs supported by lack of experiences or understanding regarding the community. Students referred to the community as “...worst school district ..., unsafe... not the best in the area...extremely dangerous...a neighborhood with high crime rate...underprivileged... only black and hispanics with high needs...dangerous...school with negative reputation... untrained teachers...intimidating students...” to name a few. Class discussions and data analysis revealed that these assumptions or beliefs were not rooted in facts but were learned through friends and family members. One of the participants shared that “the children in the school district don’t want to learn and so there’s no point in teaching them...”. These kinds of assumptions were shared by many students during the class discussions. There were also wide assumptions among the students that the neighborhood is not the nicest area due to socioeconomic situations. These kinds of assumptions regarding people and community based on lack of evidence was commonly seen among students enrolled in the program.

Research supports these kinds of biases or learned stereotypes have a direct negative impact on student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2004; Glock, 2016). Assumptions regarding people and communities based on a socioeconomic status race or color is an ongoing issue around the world, but is especially impactful upon the education of students. The findings from this study reveal that initially students were preoccupied with safety and demographics of the community which they thought were not safe and meaningful. These learned preconceptions shifted once teacher candidates built relationships through their observations in diverse classrooms. Teacher candidates’ post- observation comments revealed a focus on children and their learning instead of their learned biases regarding the community and the culture. These kinds of shifts in attitude and beliefs support the need for implementing the TFM model in teacher preparatory programs across the

nation. This model will not only help shift one's attitude but also provide each teacher candidate with a unique hands-on experience to learn about a situation, community or culture in order to be a more culturally responsive educator.

During this study, the researchers also identified long term effects among a few students. This included accepting teaching jobs in diverse communities, and a willingness to volunteer and return to the same school that they had refused to observe in previously.

Initial Resistance

In the pre-questionnaire, students stated an unwillingness to be placed in diverse school districts. One of the students stated "I feel it would be more beneficial for me to place myself in districts that I would potentially accept job offers in...I would not accept the offer ... not somewhere I would work. Therefore, the connections I make at...(name omitted) would not be as beneficial as it would be for me to observe at another school, where I would actually accept a job offer at. In other words, it would be more beneficial for me to observe at a district I would accept job offers..."

This lack of willingness to be placed in a diverse school community was evident in many students during the class discussions. The researchers also believed that this unwillingness was also a result of one or two students in the class voicing their negative opinions regarding the community.

There were students who defined the people in this community as "...Everyone is African American or Spanish"

- I have never had observation experience before and neither have all of my class mates. I feel as if we have been thrown too far into this and too fast into this all without much guidance and its unnerving for a lot of us. I feel as if since we are all not experienced or comfortable yet we should not have to be forced to go to only one school district that is not the safest, and not close in distance to all of us. I would have preferred to make my decision on that to make this whole process less stressful and easier

-It is a low income school district with lower than average test scores in a predominantly Black neighborhood. I have heard by another student who observed in this school that the students were given heart shaped pencil sharpeners for Valentines day and they took the blades out to stab someone after school.

The post-questionnaire revealed a changed attitude.

-I had never heard of the district of ...(name omitted) and so only knew what others told me of it which was mostly that it was a "bad" area and that the children would be difficult. However, I kept my mind open and was surprised to see children ready to love and ready to learn everyday. This completely challenged everything I had heard of the district.

-I didn't think I would enjoy the observation hours, but I walked out with a smile every single time. Although many of these students have problems outside of school, they did not let it interfere in the classroom. Their class was their safe zone, and they were so comfortable with one another. They were eager to learn and participate in class. The experience in general was eye opening.

-I heard that this placement was in a bad area and school district however, while I was observing I thought the school was a welcoming experience and it brought children together.

-At first I did not feel completely safe in this area . However, I realized it was all worthwhile because I fell in love with the experience, with the kids presence , and things I learned that will benefit me as a future teacher. For example, I learned through this observation that I want to teach in a diverse school.

-Part of me believed that students with special needs would struggle too much beyond improvement, however, this assumption was totally wrong. Within the weeks that passed, I saw immense growth in the students that I observed.

-I think about returning to this placement- 79% (combined Occasionally, Very often, and Frequently)
-I consider recommending this placement for other students- 86% (combined Occasionally, Very often, and Frequently)

Attitudinal Transformation towards culturally diverse communities

Although very few students continued to struggle to adapt to the new community and culture, a majority of student teachers shared the placement experience as a transformational experience.

There were students who expressed their willingness to return to the community for more observations and possible job opportunities. This attitudinal change took place mainly due to the TFM model that offered teacher candidates placement in a diverse community for observations. This placement included ongoing support through weekly classroom discussions, and journal reflection that was facilitated by the lead researcher teaching the class. This might encourage teacher candidates to seek employment working in districts that they would not have previously considered, thus bridging the gap and providing future inclusive and equitable quality education for children.

Teacher candidates reflected on attitudinal change and personal growth and development.

-Before coming to the school, I was told that the community was bad and that the students would also be bad or rowdy. Though they were rowdy at times, I found that they were good kids.

-I felt that a child with disabilities would be unenjoyable to work with, but I actually enjoyed myself.

-Children were not as misbehaved as I was originally told.

- I was afraid of scary situations as ... (name omitted) is primarily a Hispanic and African American neighborhood.

However, all the students were nice and welcoming, and the Hispanic co-teacher was extremely kind.

- “Many people had told me it was an awful, violent district with rough kids and children that didn't want to learn. However, I can honestly say...it's very false. These kids need motivation and help, but they're very ready to learn...”

Finding #2 - Rejection of Learned stereotypes

Teacher candidates started to reject their assumptions after their first few weeks of observations in their fieldwork assignment. During the class discussions prior to their placement, there was a tension and unease among students to start their observation in an unfamiliar community. This was also evident in their pre-questionnaire. A few teacher candidates voiced their refusals to start their placements, giving several excuses. These included: lack of transportation to get to the school, no parent approval, concerns for safety, extreme anxiety resulting in physical ailments in one case to name a few. These excuses from teacher candidates prior to their placement were supported by the existing literature that lack of experience regarding a culture and community can create fear and anxiety (Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2004; Glock, 2016).

These preconceived notions or fear among students regarding the school and community changed significantly after their placement. This was evident in the class discussions and post-questionnaire responses. After their first day of observation, class discussions included teacher candidates' acknowledgement that they had a safe and productive learning experience and were misinformed about the community. Students shared that they were "...surprised to see a beautiful school building...". This was acknowledged by several other students that they did not expect a nice building in such a community. They also shared that children are children irrespective of their community of residence. The teacher candidates who also believed that "The children in the school district don't want to learn and so there's no point in teaching them" changed their perspectives. There were also beliefs among a few other teacher candidates that all the students in the school always maintained a low GPA." However, there were fellow teacher candidates who also believed that they would learn new things and have a positive experience. According to one candidate "I believe that although I have never been there before, my school placement will turn out to be a good experience. I have heard a few good things about the district from friends that have taken this course. I am concerned though about driving to a place I have never been to".

By the end of their fieldwork teacher candidates reported "...all children deserve a fair, safe, and complete education." A majority shared that it is safe to work in the community and school. There was a lack of resistance to returning to the community when they were asked during class discussion. Teacher candidates at large readily accepted that most of them learned about the community only after their fieldwork experience. This included students who were residents in communities that were less than a five-mile radius from their placement setting. This is strong evidence to support the fact that insulation from childhood to one's own culture may fail to prepare teacher candidates to be culturally responsive. This TFM model of immersion not only prepares future teacher candidates to work successfully in culturally diverse communities but also bridges the experiential gap created from insular experiences since childhood.

Finding #3- Teacher candidates developed deeper cultural responsiveness that will have a positive impact on their effectiveness as a teacher.

Teacher candidates acknowledged that they learned disciplinary practices that were culturally responsive. All participants in the study, acknowledged that their learning started from the moment they drove into the community. Many teacher candidates

had never been to a similar neighborhood prior to the placement. During a class discussion, a few teacher candidates shared that their, "... fear of going to the neighborhood disappeared...". It was acknowledged by a large number of teacher candidates that their fear was created by people around them and most of them were willing to go back to the same neighborhood for future placements or job opportunities. They also shared that this change had occurred in them only as an outcome of the opportunity afforded through this TFM model.

Teacher candidates also shared how they learned how teacher responses to students' behaviors in communities could be different. Examples included the teacher's tone of voice, body language or facial gestures while responding to student behaviors

Recognizing the inclusion of students with disabilities and differences

The TFM model experience offered teacher candidates an opportunity to learn about differences and disabilities in children first hand. The teacher candidates who initially rejected inclusion of children with disabilities changed their perceptions to include all learners in future classrooms. This was a major finding as these were all future teachers who were taking their first class on special education and many believed in some sort of segregation for educating children with disabilities. This shift in perspective could also be due to the ongoing class discussions on inclusion, their placement experience, and journal reflection implemented through the TFM model. For example, one of the teacher candidates shared "I learned to understand the whole child. You need to understand not just how the child performs academically, but their personalities, their family backgrounds, and more, in order to give them the best opportunities". In other words, this was a reflection of one of the teacher candidates who supported inclusive education after her placement and highlighted the importance of valuing all children. The teacher candidates also shared their ability to learn from the children in the classroom they observed. This is another major finding as some of the teacher candidates did not think that they could learn anything from the school or community prior to their placement. As one teacher candidate shared "I was with a group of students who have lived such different lives than my own and that was an eye opener for me... I think it's important to get experience in these types of environments, especially when there is a lot of prejudice about the school community..."

It was also revealed that the majority of teacher candidates supported the inclusion of children as beneficial over segregated education. The teacher candidates also admitted that they not only became more understanding of the children and the community but also were more culturally responsive towards new people around them. All the teacher candidates admitted that it is not fair to segregate children based on a disability. According to one of the teacher candidates, diversity is lost the moment we segregate any child due to a disability. She further shared that inclusion is a two-way learning process where children with and without disabilities learn from one another. It was also agreed by the majority of the teacher candidates that the success of inclusion depends on the classroom teacher. A well-informed teacher can create successful classrooms where all children are included. It was also shared by the teacher candidates that a few mentor teachers also failed to properly accommodate students in classrooms, leading students with special needs to spend more time outside of the general education classrooms with typically developing peers. The teacher candidates at large also admitted in the post-questionnaire that all children need a fair chance to receive education which supports equity and inclusion in society. This was another major finding as the same teacher candidates had second thoughts

about inclusion prior to their placement. It is important to acknowledge that a few teacher candidates continued to question whether inclusion or segregation is the best for children with special needs. These uncertainties could be the result of this being their first time observing a diverse inclusion classroom.

This placement also led teacher candidates to have a discussion in class regarding the education of all children irrespective of color, cultural background, or special needs. Teacher candidates by and large after their observation experience acknowledged that children are children irrespective of the community in which they live.

Teacher candidates who participated in this study also admitted that they were able to better understand disability and the benefits of inclusion through this observation experience. Class discussions also identified that students' lack of exposure to culturally diverse classrooms was one of the reasons that led to their assumptions and beliefs that the placement in this community will not help them learn anything new from this experience. In other words these findings support the fact that all future teacher candidates are not necessarily racist or perceive themselves as one but exhibit microaggressions because of their lack of experience in diverse communities.

Finding #4

Two-way transformational learning and growth.

This study led to two-way transformational learning and growth among all participants and supervising teachers in the school. The teacher candidates' reflection journals and discussions in class revealed that at times mentor teachers' responses to student behaviors or classroom management were contrary to current best teaching practices. These responses were shared with the school administrators and university supervisors, who discussed the same with the mentor teachers. This observation and discussion helped with reflection upon teacher attitudes and consciousness of responsive classroom interactions.

There were also occasions where teacher candidates were sent back home by the school administration for not dressing appropriately. This helped the teacher candidates grow in dispositions and made them aware of their professional appearance in interacting with all communities.

The teacher candidates also shared this as a learning opportunity where they acquired the skills of "differentiating instruction...being patient... organizing and planning for the day... adapting curriculum... using technology... responding to behaviors...use manipulatives and other hands- on activities..." to name a few. According to one teacher candidate, "...You can't fight with the students all the time; sometimes it is better to wait until they are ready to learn..."

According to one teacher candidate: "I learned that in order for students to understand concepts fully, they need to be able to use manipulatives and other hands-on activities to represent information in different ways (visually, verbally & written) and to relate topics to other disciplines and society so that they can discover and think about other connections." According to one of the teacher candidates, "A teacher is the biggest advocate for a child whose parents do not speak English or come from America". It was also acknowledged by some teacher candidates that they learned about the importance of planning and sticking to a schedule, especially in classes with children with special needs. "The other thing I learned was that the students will act out for teachers beside their own."

Conclusion

The findings from this study continue to echo other research that supports the need to educate teacher candidates using a culturally responsive model. When our nation at large continues to educate millions of children from diverse backgrounds in our public school systems, it is clearly evident that many of our teachers are not well equipped to effectively engage diverse students at all levels within the classroom. This study encourages higher education institutions preparing future teachers to adopt a community based TFM model to equip strong teachers to prepare a new generation, culturally responsive and respectful of each other. This model encourages every institution to partner with culturally diverse schools in the local community and immerse teacher candidates into environments that are new or unfamiliar to them. This study revealed that several teacher candidates were not at all familiar with the culturally diverse communities in their neighborhood and refused to observe or work in those communities as they considered them unsafe. This preconceived belief regarding the community and the schools changed only after their placement through this TFM model. This model did not give students another option to choose a school in their own neighborhood. This careful placement along with ongoing support from the student placement office, the lead researcher and co-researcher made this model a success. In other words, careful placement with ongoing support and opportunity for student teachers to discuss concerns and reflect on their experiences on a weekly basis helped students to evolve in their degree of cultural responsiveness. This three-fold multicultural model (TFM) effectively required the components of class based, cohort fieldwork experience, and reflective journal to concurrently support each student's growth. This model is rooted in the belief that resources exist in all communities and higher education institutions should identify those resources and create platforms for future teachers to become culturally responsive educators. The willingness of many teacher candidates to go back to the community they refused at the initial phase of placement is a clear testament to the effectiveness of TFM model. It is important to highlight that some of the students during class discussion acknowledged that they continued to struggle with being in a diverse community and preferred to teach in their own neighborhood. They were, however, an exception in this transformational experience.

Inclusive education aspires to change entire systems to enhance educational access, participation, and outcomes for students from all backgrounds, independent of any form of difference that students purportedly embody. The TFM model supports the development of culturally responsive teachers who can be change agents within systems. In each teacher's effectiveness, every school will transform into an oasis of hope to foster successful learning communities across the nation. Our children deserve no less.

Recommendations for Practice

- All three elements of the TFM model (class based, cohort fieldwork experience, and reflective journal) must be implemented concurrently with integrity for effective support of teacher candidates as they evolve in developing cultural responsiveness.
- University faculty should consider learning the cultural background of students in the classrooms so that the discussions can be tailored accordingly.

- Invite the school principal or local community liaison to speak with the teacher candidates prior to their placement
- Invite former teacher candidates who were placed in the community to share their experiences
- Diverse placements and reflective conversations should be embedded in coursework
- Student placement offices in universities should consider placement of teacher candidates in culturally diverse communities as a requirement rather than an option.
- Teacher candidates should write reflective journals to foster an awareness of their cultural and professional growth and experiences
Teacher candidates placed in diverse communities should be offered ongoing support to discuss concerns or questions regarding their placement
- Universities should work as partners with schools in local communities to enrich teacher candidates' experiences in teacher preparation programs
- Universities should make a conscious commitment to diverse placements
- Universities should identify the needs of local school districts and develop coursework appropriately
- University faculty should visit local schools and meet with school administrators, teachers and teacher candidates to learn about the school and community

Limitations

While the design of the study offered the opportunity to examine in depth and complex phenomenon of cultural responsiveness among teacher candidates, this approach to research has limitations when viewed from a traditional scientific perspective. The sample was one of convenience, and involved only one professor, who may or may not reflect teaching techniques utilized in other settings. Qualitative data through face to face interviews with mentor teachers, administrators, and teacher candidates were not included. The research was restricted to three schools in one school district on the east coast of the United States of America. Lastly, 94% of participants were female, reflective of the homogeneity of the PWI where the study was conducted and more male participants could change the findings.

Despite the limitations of the current study, the results point to highly acceptable levels of reliability for use of the TFM model across teacher preparatory programs in the United States. The current study has also yielded potentially critical information about the importance of immersing teacher candidates into culturally diverse school settings with the support of class discussion and a reflective journal to gain knowledge regarding the lives of people who share a different cultural experience.

Future Study

- Increase the amount of qualitative data through face to face interviews with supervising teachers, administrators, and students
- Broaden the scope of teacher candidates participating by increasing the number of classes offered to include this type of fieldwork and collaboration with other universities

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