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Primary and early childhood teacher education and multicultural efficacy

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Abstract

Society is ever more characterized by increasing mobility, swift social and technological transformation. The number of children from immigrant and migrant families attending schools throughout many European countries has increased during the last two decades. This increase has changed classroom demographics moving them from cultural and linguistic homogeneity to one more markedly heterogeneous. Teachers dealing with the changing landscape of the culturally diverse class have to be in a position to address the needs, recognize the experiences and ways of thinking of their students to help them become active citizens. It should be noted though that serious concerns have been voiced about teachers' readiness to meet these new realities. In many cases these concerns focus on who well their training has prepared them to meet these challenges. Several researchers appear to argue that teachers are inadequately prepared to teach culturally diverse students.

Research evidence suggests that teachers who have not been adequately trained to work with diversity tend to have lower efficacy in terms of working with children different from themselves. Important issues in this area have to do with the multicultural efficacy of future teachers, what types of experiences positively influence the development of this efficacy and what role university teacher education preparation programmes play in relation to this. This paper discusses the definition of multicultural efficacy and its relationship to active citizenship, and presents the qualitative analysis of data derived from a multicultural efficacy questionnaire administered to teacher education students at three European universities and the type of courses offered at each institution. The paper concludes with suggestions on the how these findings can be used by teacher educators to enhance university and continuing education courses in an effort to develop the multicultural efficacy and active citizenship of teacher education candidates.

Key words: Teacher education, Multicultural efficacy, Three country study

Introduction

Modern society is characterized by increasing mobility, swift social and technological transformation. The number of children from immigrant and migrant families attending schools throughout many European countries has increased during the last two decades. This increase has changed classroom demographics moving them from cultural and linguistic

homogeneity to one more markedly heterogeneous. Teachers dealing with the changing landscape of the culturally diverse class have to be in a position to address the needs, recognize the experiences and ways of thinking of their students to help them become active citizens. As Peterson and Knowles (2009:42) point out, "the term active citizenship can be understood as referring not only to the nature of citizenship, but also to a process of experiential learning" wherein there is a need to "provide opportunity for them to learn through active, participatory activities." Concerns have been voiced about teachers' readiness to meet these new realities. Teachers need to work successfully with diverse learners. Including multiculturalism as a fundamental component of teacher education programs is relevant.

This paper discusses the need for more diversity relevant teacher education programs, multicultural efficacy and outlines the parameters and procedures of a study using a language and cultural experience questionnaire as well as a multicultural efficacy scale with teacher education students at three European universities and the type of courses offered at each institution. The research questions of the study are linked to multicultural efficacy and teacher education programs and seek to identify what factors influence the multicultural efficacy of preservice preschool and primary education teachers by looking at: a) what is the multicultural efficacy of the 4th year teacher education students and b) what factors appear to influence the degree of their multicultural efficacy.

This research has a potential of adding to the existing body of research to teacher education practice. Preservice teacher's beliefs and attitudes are considered to be valid indicators of future efficacy (Richardson, 2004) and as such are an important area of study.

Situational and Demographic Realities

Diversity is clearly a key dimension of Europe today (Turon & Gonźalez, 2000:12-13) with its inhabitants representing many different backgrounds and a wide variety of cultures, languages and life experiences. Many Pre K-12 schools are dramatically changing as students are becoming more diverse. The introduction of a multicultural dimension in educational policy is a relatively recent facet in the educational systems of Greece (Nikolaou, 2000), Turkey (Şahin, 2003)and Finland (Ojala, 2010) and is a particularly slow and complex process. This is true for most countries that tend to have recently become focal points for immigration. The changing demographic realities of all three countries have led to the appearance of an increasing number of children and parents of multicultural backgrounds, thus leading to a situational reality that has a direct impact on the overall educational system and consequently on their teacher education programs. A brief review of the numbers brings to light the fact that of the somewhat over 11 million person living in Greece over 10% are of non Greek heritage and areas of Athens the percentage jumps to well over 50% with commensurate percentages related in the school age population most arriving in the last 20 years (Spinthourakis & Katsillis, 2003); Turkey has long been a country of immigration and asylum. From 1923 to 1997, more than 1.6 million people immigrated to Turkey, mostly from Balkan countries (Kirisci, 2003) and in some parts of Turkey,

especially the Eastern and Southeastern regions, the majority of the population is of different ethnic origin (Şahin, 2003); in Finland estimates place the percentage of school aged children with multicultural backgrounds at around 25% (Ojala, 2010), while in the capital area of Finland (Helsinki and some smaller cities), the percentage of immigrants jumps to 40% (Ministry of the Interior, 2009).

Effectiveness of Preservice teacher education and issues of diversity

The need for qualified teachers in an increasingly multicultural world has led many to examine the degree to which issues related to diversity make up part of the curriculum of higher education programs. A question that university teacher education programs look at is how well teachers are being prepared to meet these changing realities (Cochran-Smith *et al*,2004; Spinthourakis,2007). Teachers tend to feel that they aren't adequately prepared and may need more focused professional development on how to adapt their teaching specific to the needs of the changing societal realties (Lynch & Hanson, 1993; Zeichner,1994; Spinthourakis & Katsillis,2003). As the diversity of the classroom has increased, instructional practices to address diversity have often remained unchanged. Here tertiary teacher education has a role to play.

In many cases concerns on issues related to teachers' readiness focus on who well their training has prepared them to meet these challenges. Increasingly researchers argue that teachers are inadequately prepared to teach culturally diverse students (Futrell *et al*,2003; Spinthourakis & Katsillis,2003; Cochcran-Smith,2000; Valli & Rennert-Ariev,2000; Zeichner 1994; Lynch & Hanson, 1993). Existing ideologies and pedagogies have been seem as inadequately preparing teachers for diversity (Ladson-Billings,2000; Nieto,2000; Vavrus,2002). There has been criticism of higher education institutions which while seemingly adopting the premise that they have a responsibility to prepare students to meet the challenges that changing demographics bring about and instead implement policies and practices reinforcing assimilation by socializing preservice teachers into the status quo climate of existing school cultures that by default maintain the status quo (Ukpokodu 2007:9; le Roux & Möller, 2002). Often the multicultural component is nothing more than merely a superficially, fragmentary, "tokenistic" and limited add-on to a traditionally dominant culture-oriented curriculum (le Roux & Möller, 2002:184).

A number of higher education institutions have put into practice multicultural preservice training programs. According to Gibson (2004) these programs tend to be directed at: 1) ensuring cultural knowledge of different groups; 2) addressing the beliefs and attitudes of pre-service teachers and, 3) training in cultural- relevant pedagogical skills. The literature also supports the need for preservice teachers to learn how to analyze their beliefs and attitudes on cultural differences; to be able to do so through guided introspection; and to be taught to become change agents with skills that include critical self-analysis, self-reflection, and understanding culture (Gay & Kirkland,2005). This has led to an infusion of courses related to multiculturalism/identity/diversity. Whereas some researchers such as Zeichner and Hoeft (1996) have suggested that employing that this tends to result in little more than a

surface treatment. Thus, introducing specific courses on teaching for social justice will provide opportunities for in-depth exploration of issues and practices of equity/inequity. These courses can help pre-service teachers develop habits of critical reflection.

Consequently, we would argue that it is of critical importance that teacher education programs regroup and realistically and not merely superficially readdress issues related to diversity and multiculturalism if they are to prepare competent teachers. We need to point out that there are examples of higher education institutions and programs within institutions that are working to reorganize their teacher education programs to meet these new challenges. However, it is also evident that there are institutions that have policies in place that aren't being actualized in ways that seek to challenge the status quo.

Culture, multiculturalism and teachers

According to Lestinen, Petrucijová, and Spinthourakis (2004:3 & 7), multiculturalism comes as a result of population and cultural migration and brings with it the dilemma of balancing acceptance, tolerance and openness to cultural pluralism with fear that traditional ways of life will be eroded. Contemporary multiculturalism expects individuals to deal with cultural contacts and to face possible tensions between different worlds in a constructive and positive manner (Spinthourakis,2006). Lynch and Hanson (1993:50), describe cross-cultural competence as "the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build upon ethnic, [socio] cultural and linguistic diversity". In short having cultural competence means that one is able and willing to learn new patterns of behaviour, to effectively apply them in the culturally appropriate settings and to recognize that this doesn't happen overnight.

Assuming that we agree on the need for understanding the culture of others-it follows that what we need is a three pronged framework of multicultural competence which encompasses awareness, comprehension and competent skills (Sue et al., 1998). Culture is more than race or gender as it can include values, beliefs and language. This framework includes knowing your own culture in relation to others, having an awareness of culturally learned assumptions; understanding based on the correct facts and information about the specific cultural context and the correct skills to use. All of which are based on an accurate assessment of what is going on to thus be in a position to effectively act in the given cultural context.

Research evidence suggests that teachers who have not been adequately trained to work with diversity have feelings that range from sensing that they are ill-prepared and thus have lower efficacy in terms of working with children different from themselves (Spinthourakis & Katsillis,2003; le Roux & Möller,2002) or go so far as to have a peripheral awareness of the issues arguing that their students are doing just fine with the traditional teaching methods currently employed (Moustairas & Spinthourakis,2005). Teachers cannot be expected to teach multicultural content successfully and work effectively with ethnically diverse students without being professionally prepared for this task. As le Roux and Möller (2002:185) point

out, "Knowledgeableness is the first and utmost minimum condition for effective teaching. How can inexperienced newcomers to the teaching profession be expected to teach what they do not know?" Programmes perpetuate teaching practices that have historically benefited white middle-class students. In this way they fall short, thus failing to deal with the learning needs of the culturally and ethnically different.

Teachers are in a unique position to prepare children for life in a diverse society, and to help protect them from bias and discrimination. Teachers' effectiveness or the lack thereof, with a culturally diverse group of students is a correlated with the calibre of their professional preparation. As Banks and Lynch (1986 cited in le Roux & Möller, 2002:185) state "teachers can't teach what they don't know".

Important issues in this area have to do with the multicultural efficacy of future teachers, what types of experiences positively influence the development of this efficacy and what role university teacher education preparation programmes may or may not play in relation to this.

Multicultural Efficacy

Teacher efficacy has been discussed and measured for many years. Bandura (1977) defined it as a teacher's belief about his or her capabilities to facilitate desired effects on student learning especially among those who may be considered difficult to motivate. Pajares (1992) argued that beliefs are developed over time through experience and cultural transmission. According to Tschannen, Moran & Hoy (2001:783) it affects the effort teacher's 'invest in teaching, the goals they set and their level of aspiration'.

While self-efficacy is the belief in one's competence to cope with a broad range of stressful or challenging demands, a more specific efficacy is limited to a particular task at hand. Interestingly, there appears comparatively limited research looking at how to identify and build a dynamic sense of efficacy for working with diverse populations, about what constitutes diversity and the implications of understanding diversity in becoming advocates for social justice as world citizens (Silverman, 2010:324). And yet as Guyton and Wesch (2005:23) state, "Just as personal teaching efficacy (the confidence that one can effectively teach children) has been shown to be an important teacher attribute… teachers need similar confidence to be effective in multicultural settings—a concept of multicultural efficacy."

Guyton and Wesch (2005) found a relationship between self-efficacy and multicultural efficacy (ME) forming the foundation for the development of multicultural efficacy. Multicultural efficacy refers to teachers' perceptions that their multicultural competence will lead to positive teaching outcomes. They conclude by stating that for students to construct a multicultural perspective and thus an enhanced multicultural efficacy, "teacher education must meet students at their current conceptual levels and provide information and experiences (including many opportunities for reflection) designed to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be multiculturally efficacious" (Ibid: 26). Finally as McFadden *et al.* (1997:8, as cited in Mahon, 2006:393) point out: "multicultural

understanding is measured by the teacher's depth of cultural self-awareness, affective response to difference, capacity for cross-cultural relations, and the degree to which her or his teaching style is multicultural as opposed to ethnocentric."

Methodology of the Study

Our study attempts to identify factors that influence level of multicultural efficacy of pre-service early childhood and primary school teacher education students at three universities in Greece, Turkey, and Finland which are indicative of tertiary teacher education programs in the respective countries. To varying degrees and through different processes all three departments have courses which have as an objective understanding the diversity around them and how they influence identity and active citizenship (see Table 1).

Table 1: Three University Teacher Education Programs: duration, courses and populations

Country	Greece	Turkey	Finland
University	University of Patras	Canakkale 18 Mart University	UniversityTurku (Rauma)
Preschool Teacher Ed	8 semesters/4 yrs	8 semesters/4 yrs	6 semesters/ 3 yrs
Primary Teacher Ed	8 semesters/4 yrs	8 semesters/4 yrs	8 semesters/4 yrs
Cultural Diversity Course(s)	*Primary:* Intercultural Education (Required)) Multilingual/Multicultural Education (Elective) Greek as a Second Language (E), Special Topics Immigrant Education (E)	*Preschool:* Language Development in the Early Years (E) [diversity themed modules: bilingualism, intercultural issues] *Primary: (E)* Comparative Education, Globalization and Education	*Preschool & Primary)* (E) No Specialized Courses. Topic Integrated in other courses, e.g. Child and Society, Ethics, Religion, Social Education, History and Culture.
Student #s	Primary: 1000+ Preschool: 800+	Primary: 682 Preschool: 393	Primary: 320+ Preschool: 120
Student Gender %	Primary: 60 (F) – 40 (M) Preschool: 90 (F) – 10 (M)	Primary: 62 (F) - 38 (M) Preschool: 86 (F) -14 (M)	Primary: 80 (F) – 20 (M) Preschool: 90 (F) – 10 (M)

The Greek sample was comprised of 100 university students (50 preschool teacher education students and 50 primary school education student teachers); the Turkish sample was made up of 131 university students, 67 preschool students and 64 primary school education student teacher while the Finnish sample of 100 university students included: 60 preschool education student teachers. Participants were asked to fill out a language and cultural experience questionnaire presented and to complete two other data collection instruments, the findings

of one of the two latter instruments will be used in our data presentation. All participants completed the complete packet during the period February to April 2010.

The data was collected using two instruments, the Language and Cultural Experience Questionnaire (Spinthourakis,2009) and the Multicultural Efficacy Scale (Guyton & Wesch,2005). Both instruments were translated from English to Greek, Turkish and Finnish and back translated to improve the reliability and validity of the research. The 35-item Multicultural Efficacy Scale (MES), was designed using Bennett, Niggle, and Stage's (1990) four dimensions of multicultural teacher education. According to Bennett et al. (1990), these four dimensions include: knowledge, understanding, attitude, and skill. The MES (Guyton & Wesche 2005: 23) was developed as a tool for measuring this concept, along with the multicultural teacher education dimensions of intercultural experiences, minority group knowledge, attitudes about diversity, and knowledge of teaching skills in multicultural settings. Along with measuring self-efficacy beliefs it also measures respondents' experiences with diversity and attitudes about diversity. According to the developer's, the MES can be a "useful tool in measuring changes in preservice teachers as they are trained in multicultural education, pointing out relative strengths and weaknesses of multicultural teacher education programs, predicting teacher success in teaching diverse learners, and diagnosing levels of multicultural efficacy as indicators of kinds of teacher education needed (Ibid: 26)."

Selected preliminary findings

- ME means upper range of low (0-54) to average (55-66)
- Girls have higher ME than do boys (M = 51.7 vs. 49.5)
- Foreign born higher multicultural efficacy than native students(M = 57.5 vs. 51.27)
- Primary Education Students higher ME than Preschool (53.36 vs. 49.68)
- Further along in studies-the higher ME becomes (M = 37 vs. 52.13)
- Students with parents with post graduate education highest ME, M = 65.33

While the overall ME scores were not on the whole high, the preliminary findings are generally consistent with other studies which looked at the issue of self-efficacy of teachers in relation to working with culturally diverse students. Several variables appeared to play a role in the student's multicultural efficacy and warrant data analysis; these included language, program of studies, ethnicity and travel.Our results should be considered as a first attempt to look at the multicultural efficacy of pre-service preschool and primary school teacher education students. Although Greeks, Turks and Finns are different, they share the common commitment to the social and cultural precepts of the European Union if not to the background of Western culture.

Conclusions

The task of preparing teachers for diversity, equity and justice is both complex and challenging. If the findings of teacher efficacy research, as it relates to culturally responsive teaching, are to improve the preparation of culturally responsive teachers, it is important to focus on those pedagogical aspects in which preservice teachers feel less efficacious and the related practices that they do not believe will lead to positive outcomes. In an era of growing cultural diversity, teacher educators and the institutions they serve need to take into consideration the needs of future teachers by realistically including issues related to multicultural efficacy and cultural diversity. This is a matter that takes on increased importance when we consider the social, political and demographic changes that have found expression in our respective countries as well as through our borders onto the broader world scene. As Nieto (2000, p. 338) argues, if we are to make a viable case for future teachers to have increased multicultural efficacy we as teacher educators must become multicultural persons. Simply put, to become multicultural educators we first have to become multicultural persons as "without this transformation of ourselves, any attempts at developing a [teachers with a] multicultural [social justice] perspective will be shallow and superficial".

Teachers in contemporary society need to have multicultural efficacy if they are to effectively support learning for all. As Silverman (2010: 324) points out, "To build teachers' efficacy around teaching for and about equity, it is essential that teachers recognize their capacity as individuals and as a profession to bring about desirable outcomes for students...and ways to teach students to become stewards of democracy through the pursuit of social justice. Our study supports the idea that higher education teachers need to continue to research how teacher education programmes impact preservice teachers' multicultural efficacy and by extension reflecting on their own beliefs about designing more effective teacher education courses. Learning to live with others is learning to maximize each person's abilities and opportunities, and preservice teacher education courses should be taught with this in mind.

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