

## **Teaching Anti-Bias Curriculum in Teacher Education Programs: What and How**

**By Miranda Lin, Vickie E. Lake, & Diana Rice**

One goal educators have is to empower students at all levels in this diverse and changing society whether they work with teacher candidates or with P-12 students. Teachers are seeing increased differences in race, ethnicity, culture, and special needs in children in their classrooms (Corso, Santos, & Roof, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2005; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998). The changing composition of early childhood classrooms challenges educators to be more responsive to the diverse needs of all children. Therefore, implementing a curriculum that is culturally responsive and inclusive to assist children's needs is imperative (Gay, 2002; Hein, 2004). To prepare teacher candidates to integrate anti-bias or diversity curriculum with the regular curriculum then becomes a crucial goal of every teacher preparation program (Van Hook, 2002; Wasson & Jackson, 2002).

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Unfortunately, many teachers currently in the classroom report that they feel inadequate to teach multicultural or anti-bias curriculum (Au & Blake, 2003; Ukpokodu, 2004). "Most teachers admit they have had little or no training at all to work with culturally diverse children and lack the necessary pedagogical strategies to enable them to obtain good results with these students" (Aguado, Ballesteros, & Malik, 2003, p. 58). The national survey data revealed that while

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more than 54 % of teachers taught students who were either culturally diverse or had limited English proficiency and 71 % taught students with disabilities, only 20 % of these teachers felt they were very well prepared to meet their needs. Eighty percent of teachers indicated that they were not well prepared for many of the challenges of the classroom (Parsad, Lewis & Farris, 2001). For this reason, university and college courses should be tailored to provide teacher candidates the skills and content needed to meet the needs of a diverse classroom.

Implementing a diversity curriculum may not be easy because of the fear, uncertainty, or discomfort of many teachers and teacher educators. Teachers' beliefs influence and affect their teaching practices and may become barriers that prevent the integration of anti-bias curricula (Van Hook, 2002). However, previous research found that teacher candidates' level of intercultural sensitivity could be enhanced by their teacher preparation courses and activities (Mahoney & Schamber, 20004; Sobel & Taylor, 2005) and from teacher educators who encouraged teacher candidates to discuss and reflect upon issues (Conle et al., 2000; Milner, 2003). In this paper, the authors discuss what an anti-bias curriculum is, provide the theoretical framework and rationale for involving teacher candidates in certain activities that promote the anti-bias curriculum, and offer additional anti-bias strategies for teacher candidates and teacher educators to implement in their classrooms.

#### **Anti-Bias Curriculum**

Anti-bias education is based on Paulo Freire's notion of the "practice of freedom" which is "the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 2000, p. 34). Freire believes that freedom can only occur when the oppressed reject the images and fears they have adopted from their oppressors and replace them with autonomy and responsibility. Therefore, developing cultural consciousness and an understanding that we have the power to transform reality must begin at the earliest stages of education. It is clear that the preparation of teacher candidates to implement anti-bias curriculum is crucial to any process of change.

Anti-bias *curriculum* may be defined as:

...an active/activist approach to challenging prejudice, stereotyping, bias, and the 'isms.' In a society in which institutional structures create and maintain sexism, racism, and handicappism, it is not sufficient to be non-biased (and also highly unlikely), nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviors that perpetuate oppression. (Derman-Sparks, 1989, p. 3)

In keeping with Freire's (2000) concept of "practice of freedom," Corson (2000) maintained that value based, anti-bias curriculum embraces the practice of freedom. Derman-Sparks (1989) points out that the goals of an anti-bias approach are to enable every learner to construct confident identity, develop empathic and

just interactions with diversity, and develop critical thinking and the skills for standing up for oneself and others in the face of injustice. Hence, the aim of anti-bias education is inclusion, positive self-esteem for all, empathy, and activism in the face of injustice.

Anti-bias curriculum acknowledges differences as fundamental and confronts troublesome issues rather than covering them up. Based on the notion that teachers must confront their own racial prejudice and biases (Banks, 1997; Derman-Sparks, 1992) and at the same time learn about their children's cultures and needs, anti-bias curriculum should, without question, be integrated into all levels of teacher preparation programs (Corson 2000; Hohensee & Derman-Sparks, 1992). The goal, however, is to help teacher candidates develop positive self-concepts without acquiring attitudes of superiority and ethnocentrism (Thomson, 1993).

## **Theoretical Framework for Anti-Bias Strategies**

### ***Critical Cultural Consciousness***

Given that teacher educators have great impact on both teacher candidates and the children they will teach (Killoran et al., 2004), it is critical for teacher educators to develop a self-awareness of culture, bias, and discriminatory practices as well as to examine the effects of their beliefs, attitudes, and expectations on teacher candidates.

If we are going to promote an appreciation for diversity and equity in the organization and content of our programs, it must be simultaneously reflected in the make-up of our programs, both among students and faculty. Prospective teachers will be better prepared to help students appreciate cultural diversity, if they have learned through experience to appreciate it as a reality and not an academic exercise—a reality they experience through interactions with a diverse faculty and student body. (Hixon, 1991, p.18)

Teacher preparation programs should provide insight into how teacher candidates view their roles in a diverse classroom and prepare these novice teachers to become reflective practitioners (NCREL, 1998). According to the Southern Regional Education Board (1994), teacher candidates should have formal training in child development, language acquisition, appropriate instructional and assessment techniques, curricular development, parent involvement, and cultural sensitivity. In addition, as Horm (2003) suggests, emphasis should be placed on appropriate classroom methodology for teaching content for young children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

As the makeup of the society becomes increasingly diverse (NCES, 2006), there is an increased number of researchers trying to examine teacher candidates' social attitudes related to race, gender, age, and ability (Garmon, 2004; Rios, Trent, & Castaneda, 2003). Other researchers have promoted the idea that rather than fostering political correctness, intellectual conflict should be part of the university's

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objectives whereby teacher candidates are actively engaged in exploring a range of ideas and worldviews (Goulet, 1998; Van Hook, 2002; Wasson & Jackson, 2002). Wasson and Jackson, for example, examined some of the core attitudes and beliefs of teacher candidates underlying some critical incident in their lives involving multicultural bias. These researchers believed that critical issues of diversity and multiculturalism should be integrated into all areas of teacher candidates' preparation including academics, social skills development, and building relationships with the community at large. The aim of such a study was to understand the university students' awareness of and sensitivity to multiculturalism so that appropriate curricula might be developed to enhance their knowledge, awareness, as well as their cross-cultural communication skills.

In addition to inculcating increased sensitivity and awareness related to multiculturalism, Goulet (1998) emphasized the need for teacher candidates to also make connections to their own cultural pasts. She noted that this approach helped teacher candidates to develop the pride and strength needed for their own struggles for social justice as educators. When teacher candidates are aware of their own strengths, they are better able to face daily challenges. The goal of teacher preparation programs, then, should be to enable teacher candidates to question and examine their own beliefs and values concerning their children, as well as about whether they can see all children as learners regardless of their race, class, gender, home language, or disability (Cozart, Cudahy, Ndunda, & Van Sickle, 2003). This ideal is what we are defining as *critical cultural consciousness*.

#### **Internalized Dialogue**

When teacher educators discuss reflection as it relates to anti-bias curriculum, they often have teacher candidates reflect on how they are adjusting and modifying lessons to be more inclusive. However, an equally important tactic is to have teacher candidates reflect and recognize aspects from their own culture (Milner, 2003), to "see that Euro-American or 'White' American ethnicity is not universal and that even within the ethnic group there are great differences in each family ethnic culture" (Hyun, 1998, p. 59). This stand point is supported by Gunderson's (2007) studies which concluded that immigrant populations differ dramatically in various ways and it would be misleading to perceive them as the same.

Framing and reframing one's thinking in order to improve upon children's learning is basic to the active process of reflection. Connelly and Clandinin's (1994) work with teacher candidates shows how they develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their practice through the process of reflection. Yet, one of the hardest things to do is to reflect on our personal cultural values and understand that many ideas that we hold as truths are culturally based.

As teacher candidates explore the process of incorporating anti-bias activities with children and parents, they are also continuing their own personal growth on these issues. Ongoing support for reflection throughout their university work

remains critical for sharing the successes, evaluating the mistakes, providing encouragement and emotional support, and planning the next steps for implementing an anti-bias curriculum (Hohensee & Derman-Sparks, 1992). Pulido-Tobiassen and Gonzalez-Mena (n. d.) note that by exchanging experiences and sharing with colleagues ideas for responding to children's questions, teachers gain new ideas and insights. It takes time for people to acknowledge and make the commitment to "take personal responsibility or action in the face of inequities and/or intolerance" (Wasson & Jackson, 2002, p. 273). Therefore, teacher educators should begin step-by-step in their own courses with teacher candidates by developing strategies for reflection in order to create an environment that is supportive and inclusive.

#### **Field-Based Practices**

It is a commonly held belief that people—children and adults—learn best from first-hand experiences (Pulido-Tobiassen & Gonzalez-Mena, n.d.). Hence, teacher candidates should be given opportunities to interact with and teach children who are different from themselves to learn to appreciate these differences and to become more accepting and tolerant of diversity. As a result, they begin to see the value in a more inclusive environment. Developing inclusive attitudes and environments supports the goal of anti-bias curriculum to teach children to respect all people and to accept them for who they are regardless of their gender, skin color, home language, family structure, religious practice, and mental and/or physical disability. This can be achieved if both method courses and field based practices are dovetailed to assist teacher candidates to discuss, reflect upon, and reexamine their belief system. The method courses can be carefully tailored to incorporate concepts and strategies that help teacher candidates examine and reexamine their attitudes. As a result, when teacher candidates are engaged in field based practices, they will be better prepared and less overwhelmed dealing with the real world.

Successfully doing so also supports Cochran Smith and Lyttle's (1999) argument that the most powerful way to bridge the research to practice gap and to sustain reform and improve teacher preparation is to use a "knowledge of practice" model. This model views teacher preparation as developmental, so evidence based practices would be taught sequentially: (1) learning the theoretical rationale, (2) seeing such practices modeled, (3) applying practices receiving coaching with feedback and guidance as they teach children in classroom settings, and (4) reflecting on how well evidence based practices work for their own children (Brophy & Good, 1986; Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1987).

Teacher candidates would also learn by implementing, under the guidance of university faculty, an anti-bias curriculum with children in a classroom setting. Sobel and Taylor (2005) discovered that "preservice teachers found value in their guided exposure to real-world factors of broad cultural diversity" (p. 85). Teacher candidates also reported wanting more opportunities to solve real-world problems, to observe more anti-bias demonstration lessons, to role-play in their teacher educa-

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tion classes, and to learn more about specific educational pedagogy. Brown (2005) also found that field experiences embedded in teacher preparation can positively influence the multicultural perceptions, cross-cultural communication skills, and social justice cognizance of future teachers. It is evident from these findings that some forms of field-based experiences can assist teacher candidates to make connections between theory and practice.

### ***Rationale Summary***

It is well known that in most Western countries teacher candidates tend to be English-speaking, middle-class females of European descent (Sleeter, 2001). In contrast, their future students are likely to be culturally diverse (Gay & Howard, 2000). Therefore, there is a need for teacher candidates to engage in cross-cultural experiences and internalized dialogue for learning about themselves and those who are from diverse backgrounds (Brown & Howard, 2005; Garmon, 2005; Killoran et al., 2004; Milner, 2003) in order to become more culturally responsive (Hyun, 1998). Participation in field-based practice has traditionally been an essential element in any teacher preparation program. However, opportunities to develop cultural critical consciousness and to engage in internal dialogue may or may not have been part of these programs. We argue that combining these three factors together within a program will move teacher candidates along the path towards becoming more competent in promoting social justice and will significantly increase the likelihood of their teaching anti-bias curriculum. The following strategies act as a springboard for implementing anti-bias curriculum in teacher education programs.

## **Anti-Bias Teacher Education Strategies**

### ***Invite Parents into Teacher Education Programs***

To successfully implement an anti-bias curriculum or multicultural education strategies in school, parental involvement is believed to be essential and required (Barta & Winn, 1996). Parents can be great tools for changing the classroom environment. To help teacher candidates understand the potential contributions of parents to implementing an anti-bias curriculum, teacher educators must include the subject of parental involvement in program coursework. Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2000) suggest that by collaborating, sharing resources, and generating strategies to overcome obstacles with parents, both teacher educators and teacher candidates can improve their practices.

One strategy for utilizing parents in the university program is to invite parents as guest speakers to university classes to share their own and their children's experiences. Parents may then provide teacher candidates with specific strategies that they could then implement in their future classrooms to address their students' cultural, ethnic, racial, and special needs. This is especially true when working with bilingual parents. When bilingual parents volunteer in a school as guest speakers,

the mainstream teacher candidates benefit from the cultural input of the bilingual parents. Haynes (2004) found that bilingual parents also benefit in terms of self-esteem and pride in their culture. Therefore, everyone can gain if parents are invited to college classrooms.

### **Home Visits**

Most parents are like teachers; they place a high value on education and expect their children to do well in school so they will succeed in the mainstream culture as well as their home culture. Aguado et al. (2003) found that even though parents came from different cultures, they all wanted their children to do well in school. Yet, these researchers also found that many teachers mistrusted the support provided at home, which seemed to reflect how little these teachers knew about their students' family structures and backgrounds.

Teachers' views of teaching and learning often differed from those of parents because these views are imbued with features of their cultures (Gunderson, 2007). Frequently, in fact, it is not what teacher candidates do not know, it is what they *assume* about certain cultures or particular children that limits their ability to provide quality instruction for all children in their classrooms. Further, they are unlikely to change their mindsets unless they have first-hand contact with these cultures or get to know these children. "In order to improve the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students, it is fundamental that teachers understand the relationship between the pupil's home culture and school learning" (Peralta-Nash, 2003, p. 112). This notion is supported by Gunderson who stresses the need to meet the needs of students. McIntyre, Kyle, and Moore (2001) showed that when teacher candidates visited children's homes, assumptions about the children's culture disintegrated and that subsequently the children began to achieve better in school.

The capacity for effective teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse communities requires multiple opportunities for exposure to children's lives and perspectives as well as those of their families (Peralta-Nash, 2003). Aguado et al. (2003) discussed the need for mediators and volunteers who can interpret information given to parents and the need to make the school environment more inviting and comfortable. Mediators (family members or qualified professionals) were found to be effective in fostering open and trusting communication between the school and home.

It is evident that home visits and other significant forms of interaction with parents can provide teacher candidates with a better understanding of the families' lives and the social, emotional, and academic needs of their children. As noted in the previous section, teacher preparation programs must take the lead in orienting teacher candidates to the important role parents can play in their children's educational success and in providing teacher candidates with strategies for utilizing this resource as they implement anti-bias curricula.

**Reflection**

Garmon (2005) notes that “regular reflection on one’s teaching is considered an essential practice for teachers, and it is equally important in developing multicultural knowledge and sensitivity” (p. 278). In a longitudinal study, Causey, Thomas, and Armento (2000) found that teacher candidates who displayed a disposition to thoughtfulness and reflection are the most likely candidates for acquired knowledge, skills and perspectives needed to become insiders within the communities in which they teach.

In order to facilitate and support reflection, journals could be an integral part of the structure of each college or university course (McIntyre & Tlusty 1995). Teacher candidates can be encouraged to explore and to respond to content themes in a way that promotes their growth as professionals and deepens their thinking on the role of anti-bias curriculum in the classroom and its effect on children.

Teacher candidates can also benefit from keeping journals to reflect upon their teaching practices in general, as well as the specific anti-bias strategies they have implemented, how each strategy worked, and how to improve their use. Journals can be used not only to obtain information about teacher candidates’ learning, but they can also provide information about the quality of the instruction in their teacher education courses and the opportunities they were afforded to learn anti-bias strategies. Teacher educators may thus use teacher candidates’ journals to assess their own teaching and to adapt preparation of their teacher candidates. In their three-year qualitative study regarding the developmental process of teacher reflectivity in elementary and secondary novice teachers, Pultorak and Stone (1999) concluded that teacher candidates’ reflections could help teacher educators find descriptions of how “individuals transform from novice thinking to expert understanding” (p.5).

In addition to reflective journals, mental reflection as well as discussions with teacher educators and peers all require teacher candidates to reflect upon what they perceive, fear, hear, gain, or confront after home visits or first-hand experiences with children and families of different backgrounds. Previous research found that teacher candidates who cognitively, emotionally, and mentally think through their thought processes regularly were more likely to change their attitudes toward teaching children of diverse backgrounds (Benson, 2003; Milner, 2003). Reflection is therefore required for teacher candidates to become aware of their attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences, which may in turn be critically examined and perhaps changed.

**Role-Play**

Early childhood educators know the importance of role-playing with children. Children play or act out roles based on incidents that happened in the classroom or stories read to them. Kolh (2002) states that role-playing can lead children to confront their own racism. Yet, role-playing as a model of learning is less common at the university level (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2003; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). When teacher candidates “do not have extensive opportunities to



rehearse valued skills...we should not be surprised to see that their behavior does not meet our expectations” (Elias et al., 1997, p. 52). Role-playing or rehearsing provides opportunities for teacher candidates to develop a better understanding of how other persons might think or feel, to increase the range of their responses to what others say or do, and to practice appropriate gestures and language (Elias et al.). Furthermore, Lamson, Aldrich, and Thomas (2003) suggest that by incorporating role-play scenarios and predicaments into teacher preparation courses, teacher candidates are engaging in social inquiry, higher order thinking, and self-reflection. Seemingly, this strategy can help teacher candidates develop confidence and appropriate dispositions for negotiating the many facets of the field education.

When in place, anti-bias curriculum helps teachers and children to confront and overcome their own prejudices and bias and to practice new behaviors rather than covering them up (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2000). Role-play is useful in developing cultural competence because participants may experience diverse roles. Role-play then becomes a great tool for teacher candidates to shape their identities, attitudes, and appropriate dispositions as educators.

#### **Service Learning**

Though reading theoretical literature is necessary for teacher candidates, practical field-based experiences are equally important. Service learning is one such experience. According to Kaye (2004), a service learning project can be classified in one of four different approaches: (1) direct service: students’ service directly affects and involves the recipients; (2) indirect service: students do not provide service to an individual but to the community as a whole; (3) advocacy: intent is to create awareness of or promote action on an issue of public interest, and (4) research: involves students finding, gathering, and reporting on information in the public interest. Service learning is a wonderful tool to be utilized for teacher candidates as it provides them with both a general and concrete foundation about how to make sense of differences, social injustice, and what they can do about it (Reneer, Price, Keene, & Little, 2004).

Service learning provides teacher candidates with opportunities to develop pedagogical skills and to confront culturally different stereotypes and beliefs (Pang & Park, 2003). Having teacher candidates engage in service learning also allows teachers educators to make the connections between theory and practice, raises their level of multicultural consciousness, provides them with insight into the hierarchy and political agendas driving educational policy, increases their ability to negotiate and form partnerships with culturally diverse groups in the school environment and encourages the practice and educational equity (Brown & Howard, 2005, p. 7).

To meet these goals and objectives, Brown (2005) suggests that teacher candidates need to ask themselves whether they have produced a tangible product or service that will benefit the school or community and thus whether they have bridged theory to practice. Have they been reflective practitioners and modified

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their own perceptions and behaviors to become more culturally relevant professionally and personally? To answer these questions, teacher candidates should be given opportunities to assess their learning by evaluating: (1) the degree to which the goals and objectives of their service learning projects were met; (2) the level of involvement of community members; (3) changes in themselves as a result of the project; and (4) changes observed in the children.

The specific strategies that have been shared are examples of “knowledge-of-practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lyttle, 1999) and help to bridge the research to practice gap and sustain teacher reform efforts. They raise teacher candidates’ levels of multicultural consciousness and their willingness to help their children question and confront bias issues. When service learning is used in structured ways with teacher candidates, it allows them to apply academic, social, and personal skills to improve anti-bias instruction; to make decisions that have real, not hypothetical results; to grow as individuals, gaining respect for peers and increasing civic participation; to experience success no matter their ability level; to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their community, and society; and to develop as leaders who take initiative, solve problems, and work as a team (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2004; Howard, 2003; Kaye, 2004).

### **Conclusion**

This article is a springboard for implementing anti-bias curriculum in teacher preparation programs. Used alone, the strategies are good, but to promote anti-bias principles teacher candidates must reflect upon how effective each strategy is relative to themselves and their children, and particularly upon how much they may have changed in their attitudes, beliefs, or practices. They must have an *internalized dialogue* under the guidance of a teacher educator. However, it is incumbent upon teacher educators to actively confront prejudice if they want their classrooms to become places where teacher candidates celebrate diversity. The teacher educator’s role must be to plan activities in the classroom to confront teacher candidates’ notions of “whiteness” and to help them question and examine their beliefs and values about race, class, gender, home language, and disability (Hyun, 1998). Strategies such as role-playing, having guest speakers, and service-learning projects compel teacher candidates to move outside their comfort zones and to take on another’s role or to hear someone else’s point of view. These anti-bias activities are powerful and assist teacher candidates to develop *critical cultural consciousness*, an understanding of and respect for their own identities and cultural values, as well as for those of others.

Certainly, teacher candidates and inservice teachers should constantly question themselves about whether they are modeling fairness and understanding through their verbal and nonverbal actions. Integrating and implementing an anti-bias curriculum is an ongoing process and will require teachers to adapt curriculum to the changing needs of children, consult with parents about issues of importance to

them, and deepen their own awareness of anti-bias issues. It is not enough to teach multicultural and anti-bias curriculum in a theoretical format. Teacher candidates must be actively and consistently engaged in cultural critical consciousnesses, internalized dialogue, and field-based practices throughout their teacher preparation programs.

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