

## INTRODUCTION

It has been nearly thirty years since our nation first turned its attention to the task of providing meaningful and equitable educational opportunities for all of our children. Over the course of these years, the struggle to develop the political will, the resources, and the educational strategies required to meet this challenge has been, at best, only partially successful. While it is possible to point to improvements in both access and outcomes for segments of the youth population whose educational needs previously had simply been ignored, the overpowering fact is that our system of education continues to distribute benefits inequitably among its students. And the interactions of such factors as social class, race, ethnicity, gender, language, and disability remain powerful predictors of the types of educational benefits children are likely to derive from their school experiences.

This book has been developed in response to the need for teacher education programs to reconsider how they prepare beginning teachers to contribute more affirmatively to this continuing struggle for educational equity in the schools. The role which teacher education should or even can play in confronting the problems of poverty, discrimination, and exclusion in school settings has never been clear (Weiner 1993), and this book makes no pretense of offering a comprehensive resolution to that important debate. Rather, the more limited purpose of this book is to explore ways of redesigning teacher education coursework to better prepare preservice students to respond to the diverse array of students they are likely to work with in the schools and to examine critically relationships among diverse sociocultural groups in the broader society.

In recent years, both scholarly journals and the mass media have devoted considerable attention to the rapidly increasing cultural diversity and escalating poverty among the school-aged population in our country. These demographic profiles are commonly associated with predictions of tremendous growth in the social costs and taxes that can be expected unless the schools find ways to effectively provide educational success for far more students than they currently do. Regardless of the questionable legitimacy of the expectation that the schools should be primarily responsible for addressing this change, there is little question that this scenario has created renewed interest among teacher education programs in developing new strategies to prepare teachers to work with culturally diverse students. This interest has been reflected both in the popularity of “diversity” as

a conference theme across the country and in the recent publication of several books relating cultural diversity to various aspects of teacher preparation (Dilworth 1992; Grant and Gomez, in press; Kennedy 1991; O'Hair and Odell 1993).

While the focus of this book is on developing multicultural curricula in teacher education, we feel it is important to express our belief that this is only one of a number of fundamental changes that will be needed if programs are to prepare beginning teachers to work with the poor and students of color in urban or isolated rural school districts. For example, given the rather weak track record of university programs in affecting the attitudes and beliefs of mainstream teacher education students, it should be a priority for programs to recruit aggressively preservice teachers of color and others with cross-cultural life experience and a positive orientation to working in culturally diverse settings. Likewise, as many teacher education faculty, themselves, have weak affiliations with oppressed populations and communities, faculty recruitment and faculty development are other areas that need to be addressed.

Beyond revising curricula and course syllabi, it is also likely that programs will need to undertake more fundamental program restructuring efforts. If programs are to equip new teachers realistically to work in urban, multicultural settings, it seems clear to us that the locus of that preparation will need to shift away from the isolation of the campus toward greater interaction and collaboration with the schools and other agencies which know and serve urban communities. These same cooperative mechanisms will be needed to provide teacher candidates with the experiential opportunity to develop the cross-cultural knowledge which is required for multicultural teaching. Rarely do the time and scheduling restrictions of traditional university-based courses and school-based field experiences allow for the type or degree of collaboration which is probably necessary.

Moreover, these types of changes in professional preparation programs cannot be considered apart from the context of the broader university or college in which they are located. Indeed, the programmatic changes being suggested here would hardly be possible without the leadership and strong support of institutional administrators willing to discuss alterations in such basic issues as faculty teaching loads, faculty reward structures, and student graduation requirements. And, it must be kept in mind that teacher candidates obtain a majority of their credits and academic content knowledge from faculty in the liberal arts and sciences. Therefore, it will be difficult to establish a credible multicultural teacher education program or curriculum if most of the students' education is conducted within a narrow dominant-culture perspective.

The curriculum revisions discussed in this book are not intended to provide an alternative to these other fundamental changes. Rather, they are offered with an awareness that curricular issues are part of a broader agenda that must be addressed by teacher education programs willing to face the challenges of

cultural diversity and educational equity. At the same time, with this acknowledgment we certainly do not want to diminish the significance of developing multicultural teacher education curricula. Regardless of the progress programs make in these other areas, we believe that the curriculum activities presented in this volume represent a type of change that is both possible and necessary.

In this book we conceptualize multicultural education as an approach to school reform which attempts to support, build on, and adapt to the strengths and aspirations of various oppressed social groups. Multicultural education can be conceptualized in different ways (Sleeter and Grant 1993), and the chapters in this volume vary somewhat in the main concepts they emphasize. While some authors emphasize building congruence between classroom instruction and children's cultural backgrounds, others stress the teaching of skills in social critique and social action. While some chapters focus mainly on racial and ethnic culture, others speak also to gender, social class, and/or disability. Nevertheless, authors in this volume agree that, unlike more traditional efforts to repress, remediate, or compensate for cultural differences which students bring to school, multicultural education works to accommodate those differences in cultural patterns and life experiences through adaptations in curricula, instructional activities, communication styles, and other educational components. Following from this definition, therefore, the goal of a multicultural teacher education curriculum should be to develop in preservice students the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to teach within the framework of multicultural education.

The concept of multicultural education is certainly not new and most teacher education programs have already incorporated at least some of its tenets into their curricula. But, the typical means of doing so has been to add on to the traditional program a discrete and usually isolated course with a title such as "Teaching the Culturally Different," "Bilingual Education," or "Multicultural Education." However, we believe that this approach trivializes and marginalizes multicultural education and does little to prepare beginning teachers to move beyond traditional approaches to teaching culturally diverse students.

Rather than viewing it as content to be covered in a course, this book has been developed on the assumption that multicultural education represents a basic reconceptualization of the process of preparing teachers. As such, it has implications for all components of a program, including those identified above. Moreover, it requires that the principles and practices of multicultural education be infused throughout all courses in the curriculum.

Over the past twenty years, significant research on the influence of culture on cognition and on the teaching-learning process has led to important developments in K-12 education in such areas as goal setting, instructional activities, assessment, and the preparation of multicultural curriculum materials. Ironically, however, this research has not had the same influence on the development of or on the literature relating to curriculum in teacher education. One consequence of this fact is that university professors wishing to redesign their coursework within

a multicultural perspective have limited literature to draw upon which is directly related to their work.

This book is intended to address that problem. In chapters which follow, teacher educators working in a wide array of curricular areas describe and explain some of the curriculum modifications and pedagogical activities they have implemented in order to bring a multicultural perspective to their skill or content area. Rather than focusing on theoretical issues or literature review, the emphasis in these chapters is on illustrations of concrete practice drawn from the authors' own teaching experiences. It is our hope that sharing these ideas and strategies will provide some guidance to other teacher educators and will stimulate further development and discussion of multicultural teacher education curricula.

The opening chapter provides a brief overview of the literature on multicultural teacher education. Its purpose is to identify common themes and issues contained within that literature and, in so doing, to offer an intellectual framework within which the following chapters might be considered. One of the themes discussed in this chapter concerns the pressing challenge for teacher education programs to help teacher candidates grapple with and understand such things as prejudice, institutional discrimination, and the alternative life experiences and perspectives of oppressed peoples, all of which are fundamental to our concept of multicultural education. Thus, in chapters two to six the authors discuss ways in which they approach these complex issues. Most of the authors work within what are traditionally considered to be the sociocultural and psychological foundations areas, and they relate a variety of university activities and community-based field experiences which they employ in their courses.

Just as the language skills of speaking, reading, and writing are a central part of culture, so too are they rightfully considered basic to education and the school experience. For this reason, the ability to work with and build on cultural diversity in literacy development is an important part of multicultural teaching. In chapters seven and eight, the authors present strategies which they use to foster multiculturalism in coursework which focuses on literature and on reading and language arts methods. These are supplemented by chapter nine in which the authors report on a research effort to assess the impact of various approaches to multicultural literature on elementary preservice teachers. In chapter ten, the author discusses some of the issues faced in trying to develop a secondary English methods course within a multicultural framework.

Multicultural teacher education attempts to help prospective teachers, not only to develop a variety of teaching styles and methods, but also to develop a multicultural knowledge base in the academic subject areas they will be teaching. In chapters eleven through sixteen, therefore, education methods instructors describe both pedagogical exercises they have used and ways in which they have expanded or modified academic content in the subject areas of social studies, science, mathematics, technology, fine arts, and health. Chapter seventeen describes an introductory course on exceptional education, and it provides a good

illustration of how reconceptualizing an academic discipline within a multicultural framework may well lead to nontraditional approaches to course organization and pedagogy.

In most teacher education programs, student teaching serves as a transitional experience between preparation and professional practice. It is an experience which provides a significant opportunity to help teacher candidates bring together the various components of their training into a more holistic teaching performance and gain some insight into the types of orientations the candidates are likely to bring to their work as teachers. Thus, student teaching is a crucial part of any program which is attempting to establish a teaching paradigm which differs from the deeply rooted patterns of traditional practice. In chapter eighteen, the authors discuss ways in which teacher education programs can enhance the likelihood that student teaching will strengthen and reinforce, rather than undermine, the preparation of multicultural educators.

None of the chapters claims to offer the definitive formula for restructuring the curriculum. Indeed, we believe there is no single way that a multicultural curriculum should look. Rather, the authors share ideas, struggles, and experiences, as well as syntheses of research literature, in order to provide departure points for teacher educators in the quest for developing their own multicultural curricula.

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