

2011

The "Other" Teacher: Navigating Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Teacher Education

Chinwe Ikpeze

St. John Fisher College, cikpeze@sjfc.edu

[How has open access to Fisher Digital Publications benefited you?](#)

Follow this and additional works at: http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_facpub

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Publication Information

Ikpeze, Chinwe, "The "Other" Teacher: Navigating Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Teacher Education" (2011). *Education Faculty Publications*. Paper 15.

http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_facpub/15

Please note that the Publication Information provides general citation information and may not be appropriate for your discipline. To receive help in creating a citation based on your discipline, please visit <http://libguides.sjfc.edu/citations>.

This document is posted at http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_facpub/15 and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at St. John Fisher College. For more information, please contact fisherpub@sjfc.edu.

The "Other" Teacher: Navigating Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Teacher Education

Abstract

Purpose of study: One of the most critical issues facing teacher education today is how to effectively prepare teachers for the increasingly racial, cultural and linguistic profiles of today's students across the country (Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries, 2004). Much discussion on culturally responsive teaching had centered on preparing mostly White middle class teachers to teach in highly diverse urban classrooms (Chicola, 2007; Cockran-Smith, Davis & Fries, 2004; Gay, 2000, 2001, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). However, what has not been addressed in the research literature is how foreign born teacher educators negotiate culturally responsive teaching, especially in predominantly White teaching colleges. Foreign born scholars of color may add the needed enrichment and learning opportunities necessary for novice and in-service teachers to adopt culturally responsive teaching because of their diverse life experiences and global knowledge perspective which might help bring to the fore salient issues pertaining to cultural education (Amobi, 2004; Florence, 2010; Skerrett, 2006). However, they also face challenges. Differences in educational backgrounds as well as cultural and linguistic disparities can create environments fraught with misunderstanding and conflict (Amobi, 2004; Florence, 2010, Gay, 2010; Obiakor and Gordon, 2003). This study documents how a foreign born professor of color negotiated culturally responsive teaching in a predominantly White teaching college. The study is guided by the following questions: How can I help my teacher candidates acquire cultural knowledge? How do I improve my teaching practice to make it responsive to the needs of the candidates? What roles if any, do my race, gender and prior experiences play in my pedagogy and students' perception of my teaching effectiveness?

Disciplines

Education

Comments

Paper presented at the 2011 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The “Other” Teacher: Navigating Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Teacher Education

Purpose of study

One of the most critical issues facing teacher education today is how to effectively prepare teachers for the increasingly racial, cultural and linguistic profiles of today's students across the country (Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries, 2004). Much discussion on culturally responsive teaching had centered on preparing mostly White middle class teachers to teach in highly diverse urban classrooms (Chicola, 2007; Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries, 2004; Gay, 2000, 2001, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). However, what has not been addressed in the research literature is how foreign born teacher educators negotiate culturally responsive teaching, especially in predominantly White teaching colleges. Foreign born scholars of color may add the needed enrichment and learning opportunities necessary for novice and in-service teachers to adopt culturally responsive teaching because of their diverse life experiences and global knowledge perspective which might help bring to the fore salient issues pertaining to cultural education (Amobi, 2004; Florence, 2010; Skerrett, 2006). However, they also face challenges. Differences in educational backgrounds as well as cultural and linguistic disparities can create environments fraught with misunderstanding and conflict (Amobi, 2004; Florence, 2010, Gay, 2010; Obiakor and Gordon, 2003). This study documents how a foreign born professor of color negotiated culturally responsive teaching in a predominantly White teaching college. The study is guided by the following questions: How can I help my teacher candidates acquire cultural knowledge? How do I improve my teaching practice to make it responsive to the needs of the candidates? What roles if any, do my race, gender and prior experiences play in my pedagogy and students' perception of my teaching effectiveness?

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks informed this study. There are the culturally responsive teaching and self study research.

Research in culturally responsive teaching

The need for a culturally responsive teacher education curriculum cannot be over emphasized (Chicola, 2007; Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries, 2004; Garcia, Arias, Murri & Serna, 2010; Gay, 2000, 2001, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). It has in fact been described as both demographic and intellectual imperative (Garcia, Arias, Murri & Serna, 2010; Townsend, 2002). Garcia, Arias, Murri and Serna (2010) suggest dividing culturally responsive teaching into two broad categories (1) working on the beliefs and values of teachers, and (2) implementing responsive teaching practices. However, CRT is not restricted to multicultural teacher education. From a broader perspective, it is a comprehensive, multidimensional, transformative and empowering pedagogy (Gay, 2000,

2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), that requires a complete re-socialization of prospective teachers toward becoming self reflective and self knowledgeable of teaching and learning.

Self-study research (Clark, Erickson, Collins, & Phelan, 2005; LaBoskey, 2004; Loughram, 2007; Skerrett, 2006), provide ideas and perspectives that help educators understand, facilitate and articulate the teaching-learning process (LaBoskey, 2004). Quality self-study is a disciplined and systematic inquiry that values professional learning and help develop metacognition (Loughram, 2007). Teacher educators are increasingly using self study to examine and improve their beliefs about teaching and learning process in both K-12 and college contexts (Berry & Loughran, 2002), including inquiry into issues of diversity and cross cultural teaching and learning (Sakamoto & Chan, 2006; Skerrett, 2006).

Methods

Context and Participants: During my first semester as a new faculty in a teaching college, I co-taught a course, albeit successfully with a White colleagues. The course, *Nature and Acquisition of Literacy*, was a required introductory course and a prerequisite for the majority of the other courses in the graduate literacy program. The course was dominated by the sociocultural perspectives as well as diversity issues. When I inherited the course, I utilized the same syllabus and other course materials that my colleague and I used. However, my course evaluation scores were well below departmental and college averages and the qualitative comments were mostly uncomplimentary. Comments that drew my attention included “She did not connect with her students,” “the course is too theory-based and no connection to real life,” and “she is hard to understand.” The low evaluation numbers and comments spurred me to systematically examine my beliefs, assumptions, practices, and students’ learning. Although this study was conceived as a self study, the evolution of self is partly dependent on the experiences of others (Brunner, 1994). Therefore, the other participants in this fourteen month’s study were sixty five teacher candidates, which consisted of four cohorts of teacher candidates (TCs) that took the course in four semesters. Out of this number, fifty seven percent (n=37) were pre-service teachers and 43% (n=28) were in-service teachers. Ninety eight percent of the students were European Americans while 2% were African Americans.

Data sources or Evidence

The primary data source was the researcher’s reflective journal in which I analyzed my sense making of the teaching and learning process for each class session. Entry into this journal generally followed Hiebert, Morris, Berk & Jansen’s (2007) four-step framework for analyzing each teaching session which included setting learning goals; assessing if the goals were achieved; developing a hypotheses about why the lesson did or did not work well; and, revising the lesson on the basis of the hypothesis. Another major data source was the survey of teacher candidates as well as structured reflective paper written by teacher candidates at the

end of each semester. Others included course syllabi and students' course evaluation. The survey had yes/no, open-ended and Likert type questions. The survey enabled me to collect demographic information of students, their expectations for the course, and perceptions about course activities.

Data analysis

Data analysis was on-going and occurred in stages. Each semester, data were analyzed and compared to previous semester(s). In studying my practice, I was involved in a cyclic process of inquiry, awareness, reflection and refinement. Through the inquiry process of asking questions, I became more self aware of the impacts of my instructional decisions and interactions with students. Constant reflection on my teaching and students' learning helped me to refine my pedagogy. These reflections, questions, decisions taken, changes implemented and personal transformation became part of my analysis because they were directly related to students' actions and feedback.

I used thematic analysis (Elly, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991) and Fitzgerald's (1995) systematic interpretive procedure to analyze the data. Steps in thematic analysis include establishing thinking units, categories, themes and integrating findings. I created two thinking units "self" and "TCs" which were used as broadly framed sorting files (Elly, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991). Within each thinking unit, tentative categories were created based on evidence from data and research literature. For example, using "self" as a thinking unit, I first articulated my beliefs and assumptions about the TCs, all ideas considered in the course, actions taken, changes made, challenges and personal transformations. These were used as initial categories. This process was applied to the TCs. In addition, some sentences and phrases from students' written artifacts were aggregated into a separate document in order to "listen" to their collective voices. This analytic strategy is called a choir metaphor. Finally, all data were reread for clarification, confirmation or disconfirmation of emerging hypothesis and for consistency or discrepancy. I shared the findings with each cohort to confirm some of their assertions or my own analysis of their behavior. The application of this systematic approach to analysis was to add credibility to the study.

Results

The findings from this study suggest that implementing a culturally responsive teaching in a graduate teacher education course hinged on the following: (1) understanding students' backgrounds and perspectives, (2) self and reflexivity, (3) using my biography as a teaching tool and, (4) an emphasis on content relevancy.

Understanding students and their perspectives

Several data sources revealed the following (1) a mismatch between the teacher candidates' assumptions/expectations about the course and actual course objective. While the course was designed to give students broad perspectives on various theoretical models and issues in literacy acquisition, the teacher candidates wanted to learn and in fact, assumed that the course would equip them with practical teaching tips and strategies that they would use immediately in their classrooms. In addition,

the TCs were concerned about the theoretical nature of the course. In addition, balancing personal, familial and academic responsibilities accounted for much of the frustration expressed by the candidates (2) the TCs harbored some biased perceptions about the instructor based on linguistic, cultural and racial issues. This was complicated by the fact that the TCs nurtured a sense of entitlement or ownership of the English language. This perception led to a cascade of other problems. (3) Cultural differences also created some misunderstanding and led to miscommunication. These experiences corroborate that of other foreign born educators (Amobi, 2004, Florence, 2010; Obiakor and Gordon, 2003).

Self and reflexivity: Findings indicate that reflection was critical and instrumental to implementing cultural responsive pedagogy because it enabled me to look inwards to examine the totality of my personal, professional and course experiences; texts read, ideas considered, changes made, for their connections with and relationships to my practice (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). By looking inwards, I was able to uncover my own biases and assumptions. Through self-study, I developed some metacognitive strategies, listened more carefully to students and created a better learning community.

Using self as a teaching tool:

My experiential reality as accent-speaking, foreign- born person of color provided a springboard for discussing the impact of linguistic and cultural variations on literacy acquisition. I discussed relevant aspects of my cultural heritage and how it impacted my world view. This provided a lens through which the students viewed cultural minorities. At the same time, it provided a global perspective in which candidates learned about the unique practices of diverse cultures (Chicola, 2007; Gay, 2010). I have experienced both subtle and overt discrimination and those experiences became entry points into class discussions about the experiences of people of color and the TCs were challenged to articulate and discuss their own beliefs and cultural heritage as well as confront their cultural biases and perception of others.

Emphasis on content relevancy: As I continued to reflect on my pedagogy, students' perspectives, the research literature and my personal hunches, continuous adjustments were made to instructional method, course structure, assessment techniques and relationship with students. I experimented with both the course structure and learning activities that I thought the TCs would find relevant and motivating; and one that would help them make theory-practice connection. This included the use of Socratic seminars, video cases, guest teachers and integration of technology and sociocultural issues.

Scholarly significance

- The voices of foreign born faculty of color have largely been marginalized in the discourse of culturally responsive teaching in American colleges and universities. This missing piece needs to be recognized in an effort to better

understand the dynamics of teacher education in a multiracial and multicultural society.

- The study underscores the importance of self study in improving teacher education practices especially non native language teachers. Teacher educators can systematically study their practice by working through a cyclical process of inquiry, awareness, reflection and refinement.
- This study demonstrates that deliberately working on the beliefs and values of the TCs is critical in promoting culturally responsive teaching. This can be achieved by understanding the students and their culture as well as infusing student-centered activities and those that challenge TCs to think critically about their cultural and racial biases.
- The study highlights the need to recruit diverse faculty and support them as they navigate the first few years in the academia. It also underscores the need for foreign born professors of color to work very hard, demonstrate academic, professional and social competence as well as understand their students' and institutional culture in order to overcome markers of difference.
- The study adds to the extant literature on the experiences of non native language teachers in American colleges.

References

- Amobi, F.A. (2004). Crossing borders: Reflections on the professional journey of a teacher educator in Diaspora. *Intercultural Education*, 15(2), 167-178.
- Berry, A. (2004). Self-study in teaching about teaching. In J.Loughram, V. LaBoskey, & T.Russell (Ed.), *International Handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (Vol. 2, pp. 1295-1332). Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Brunner, D. D. (1994). *Inquiry and reflection: Framing narrative practice in education*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Chicola, N. A. (2007). A view beyond tolerance: Teacher candidate experiences with culturally responsive education. *The International Journal of Learning*, 14 (8), 211-219.
- Clark, A., Erickson, G., Collins, S., & Phelan, A. (2005). Complexity science and cohorts in teacher education. *Studying Teacher Education: A Journal of self-study of Teacher Education Practices*, 1(2), 159-177.
- Cochran-Smith, M., Davis, D., & Fries, K. (2004). Multicultural teacher education: Research, practice and policy. In J. Banks (Ed.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 931-975). San Francisco: Jossey-Bas
- Cockrell, K. S., Placier, P. L., Cockrell, D. H., & Middleton, J. M. (1999). Coming to terms with “diversity” and “multiculturalism” in teacher education: Learning about our students, changing our practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 5, 351-366.
- Crouther, L. A. (2002). Results matter": When the other teacher teaches English in the Bluegrass state. In L. Vargas (Ed.), *Women faculty of color in the white classroom: Narratives on the pedagogical implications of Teacher Diversity* (pp. 219-232). New York: Peter Yang.
- Dixon, A.D., & Dingus, J.E. (2007). Tyranny of the majority: re-enfranchisement of African American teacher educators teaching for democracy. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20 (6), 639-654.
- Elly, M., Anzul, T., Friedman, T., Garner, D., & Steinmetz, A. (1991). *Doing qualitative research: Circle within circles*. Philadelphia, PA: Routledge Falmer.
- Fitzgerald, J. (1995). English as-a -second language learners' cognitive reading Processes: A review of research in the United States. *Review of Educational Research*, 65
- Ferdman, B. (1990). Literacy and cultural identity. *Harvard Educational Review*, 60,

181-204.

- Florence, N. (2010). A matter of habit: Unraveling the teaching/learning knot. Paper delivered at the ATE conference, Chicago, IL.
- Garcia, E., Arias, M.B., Harris Murri, N. J., & Serna, C. (2010). Developing responsive teachers: A challenge of a demographic reality. *Journal of Education*, 61 (1-2)132-142.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G. (2001). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Education*, 53 (2), 106-112.
- Gay, G. (2010). Acting on beliefs in teacher education for cultural diversity. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1-2), 143-152.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- eaching practice: Self study in teacher education* (pp.235-246). London: Falmer.
- Hiebert, J., Morris, A. K., Berk, D., & Jansen A. (2007). Preparing teachers to learn from teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58 (1), 47-61.
- LaBoskey, V. K. (2004). The methodology of self-study and its theoretical underpinnings. In J. J. Loughran, M. L. Hamilton, V. K. LaBoskey & T. Russell (Eds.), *The International Handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (Vol. 2, pp. 817-869). Dordrecht: The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Ladson-Billings, G (1992). Reading between the lines and beyond the pages: A culturally relevant approach to literacy teaching.
- Lenski, S. D., Crumpler, T.P., Stallworth, C., & Crawford, K. M. (2005). Beyond awareness: Preparing culturally responsive preservice teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 32 (2), 85-100.
- Loughram, J. J. (2007). Researching teacher education practices: Responding to the challenges, demands, and expectations of self-study. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(1), 12-20.
- Manrique, C. G. (2002). A foreign woman faculty' s multiple whammies. In L. Vargas (Ed.), *Women faculty of color in the white classroom: Narratives on the pedagogical implications of Teacher Diversity* (pp. 145-162). New York: Peter
- Obiakor, F. E., & Gordon, J. U. (Eds.) (2003). *African perspectives in American higher education: Invisible voices*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Pacet, D. (2006). 'Personality not nationality': Foreign Students' perceptions of a non native speaker lecturer of English at a British University. In E. Llurda (Ed.), *Non Native Language teachers: perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession* (pp.243-262), Educational Linguistics, volume 5.
- Porter, R. E., & Samovar, L.A. (1993). Basic principles of intercultural communication. In L. A. Samovar, & R.E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (6th ed.) (pp.5-22).Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln

- (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 923-948). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Seidl, B. L., & Conley, M. D. (2009). (Re)writing new possibilities for teaching lives: Prospective teachers and multicultural apprenticeships. *Language Arts*, 87 (2), 117-126.
- Skerrett, A. (2006). Looking inward: The impact of race, ethnicity, gender, and social class background on teaching sociocultural theory of education. *Studying Teacher Education: A Journal of self-study of Teacher Education Practices*, 2(2), 183-200.
- Townsend, B. L. (2002). Leave no teacher behind: a bold proposal for teacher education. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15,
- Vargas, L. (2002). Introduction. In L. Vargas (Ed.), *Women faculty of color in the white classroom: Narratives on the pedagogical implications of Teacher Diversity* (pp. 1-13).
- Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T.C. (2002). Educating culturally responsive teachers: A coherent approach. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Wang, J., Spalding, E., Odell, S. J., Klecka, C. L. & Lin, E. (2010). Bold ideas for improving teacher education and teaching: What we see, hear and think. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62 (1-2)3-15.
- Wong, P. (2008). Transactions, Transformation and Transcendence: Multiculturalservice-learning experience of preservice teachers. *Multicultural Education*, 31-36.

