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# What Do Graduates Say About Multicultural Teacher Education?

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# What Do Graduates Say About Multicultural Teacher Education?

## **Comments**

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## What Do Graduates Say about Multicultural Teacher Education?

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### Rationale for the Study

The former president of Teachers College, Columbia University, Arthur Levine (2006) questioned the connection between what one learns in pre-service teacher education programs and what one does as a teacher. From a meta-analysis of several studies he found that:

A shockingly low percentage of principals said that their teachers were very or moderately well prepared to meet the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (28 percent); to work with parents (21 percent); and to help students with limited English proficiency (16 percent). (p. 4)

Since we have also been concerned about the education of diverse student populations in California, his question is consistent with the purpose of this study. We wanted to assess the impact that our teacher preparation course on multicultural education has had on teachers' self-perceptions and practices as multicultural educators. Lowenstein (2009) stated that not enough work has been done to determine the impact of multicultural education courses on teacher candidates once they are in the field. Although California assessments for teachers assess content background and instruction, there is a

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dearth of assessments on teachers' capacity to work with culturally diverse learners.

In teacher education programs in California, multicultural education has been included as part of credentialing programs for more than two decades, and yet little is known about what effect these programs have on teachers' epistemologies and practices. While there have been national studies that have evaluated the connection between teacher education and classroom practices (Levine, 2006), the overall research base for teacher education is thin (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2003; Lauer, 2001; Wilson & Floden, 2001; Zeichner, 1999). There is little research (Ambrosio, 2001) that explored the sustainability of multicultural ideology and practice among alumni. As Lowenstein (2009) stated, "What continues to remain absent are systematic studies of teacher candidates' reflections on their learning about issues of diversity" (p. 177).

According to Banks and Banks (2001), multicultural education has a specific purpose:

... [I]ts major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups. One of its important goals is to help all students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate, and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and moral community that works for the common good. (p. xi)

While most teacher education programs claim to prepare teachers to work with a diverse student population and incorporate practices that are consistent with the principles of multicultural education, the profession has generally had little data to verify that teachers prepared in these programs actually identify themselves as multicultural educators and use multicultural education practices in their school settings. Christine Sleeter, former Vice President for the American Educational Research Association's Division K, issued a call to action for more research to follow teacher education graduates into the classroom, especially with regard to multicultural education (Sleeter, 2001). Thus, the intent of this study is to add to the knowledge base on the impact of multicultural pre-service education on classroom teachers' beliefs and practices.

The authors mailed surveys to alumni and, based on the responses to these surveys, located teachers who volunteered to participate in the qualitative component of the study. We conducted interviews with these teachers using questions about how they used multicultural principles in their practice, what support they received from their school sites, and what courses/activities in the teacher preparation program were significant to their practice. The authors also asked teacher participants

to provide suggestions on how to improve the teacher preparation program. The results of the study provided us with program direction and prompted a re-examination of the salient features of the multicultural course and multicultural strands within our teacher credentialing and masters degree programs. The research goals included the following:

1. To identify the attitudes, beliefs, and self-perceptions of graduates on their role as multicultural educators.
2. To determine the extent to which graduates from our program are implementing multicultural principles and practices (curricula, pedagogical strategies, and activities that sustain multicultural education).
3. To determine whether multicultural principles and practices are attributed to our teacher preparation program.
4. To discover whether school conditions support multicultural principles and practices.
5. To learn how faculty might improve the program course/s to better prepare and support future teachers and student learning.

### Review of the Literature

Multicultural education is well defined by researchers, teacher educators, and policy makers (Banks, 1995; Chisholm, 1994; Dilworth & American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1992; Gollnick, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 2007, 2009; Smith, 1998). While Banks (1995) explained that from its origin, “Multicultural education grew out of the ferment of the civil rights movement of the 1960s” (p. 5), Banks and Banks (2001) reported that, “the term multicultural education (now) describes a wide variety of programs and practices related to educational equity, women, ethnic groups, language minorities, low-income groups, and people with disabilities” (p. 6). They pointed out that, at one school, multicultural education could mean a curricular adaptation, at another school, it could mean a comprehensive school reform effort to increase educational equity.

Though there is great variance in the literature on multicultural education, the authors chose to use Banks and Banks’ (2001) essential five dimensions of multicultural education as an organizing template for this study: (a) content integration—the extent teachers use cultures in their curriculum; (b) knowledge construction process—the extent to which teachers help students to understand the various frames from which knowledge is constructed; (c) prejudice reduction—action or activities that

teachers use to help students develop positive attitudes toward difference; (d) equity pedagogy—teachers' modification of instruction to facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds; and (e) an empowering school culture and social structure—school culture that promotes equity and empowers its multiple stakeholders to participate in the examination and reform of school practices. In sum, multicultural education is a field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students (Banks & Banks, 2001).

Studies documented by Cochran-Smith et al. (2003) in the category of attitudes, beliefs, and conceptions about diversity have focused extensively on pre-service teachers (Barry & Lechner, 1995; Bhargava, Hawley, Scott, Stein, & Phelps, 2004; Easter, Shultz, & Neyhart, 1999; Montecinos & Rios, 1999; Neuharth-Pritchett, Reiff, & Pearson, 2001; Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996a, 1996b; Wiggins & Follo, 1999). The research includes programs that range from those in which pre-service teachers have unsophisticated notions about multiculturalism, diversity, and democracy (Goodwin, 1994) to those in which the pre-service teachers have a fairly sophisticated understanding of multicultural education practices (Rios & Montecinos, 1999).

There are several studies on the pedagogical practices promoted in multicultural teacher education to help develop multicultural educators. For example, Florio-Ruane (1994) has suggested reading about others and writing ethnic autobiographies, while others have suggested integrating multicultural material into content areas in social studies (McCall, 1995) and science (Bullock, 1997).

Whereas few empirical studies or data-based inquiries describe or assess the actual practice of teacher candidates and their work in schools and classrooms (Cochran-Smith et al., 2003), the most recent comprehensive national survey conducted by the Education Schools Project (Levine, 2006), indicated that a majority of teacher education alumni (61%) reported their schools of education did not prepare them well to cope with the realities of today's classrooms. Because of the limited number of studies on the impact of multicultural teacher preparation on teachers' actual work in schools after they complete pre-service preparation (Lowenstein, 2009), there is a large gap in the research base on the practice of multicultural education in schools. There is also a need to examine the school's culture and norms and its potential to support or discourage multicultural education, given the enormous pressures from No Child Left Behind policies for schools to respond to standards and high stakes testing. Moreover, questions arise about the need for multicultural teacher education, because while colleges of education are asked to prepare teachers for an increasingly diverse population, the

stakes for keeping a narrow focus on what can be taught and measured has resulted in a return to traditional course content in schools (Au, 2003). Thus, depending on the school, teachers are thrust into making decisions about the kinds of risks they might take to maintain their stance as multicultural educators. Although this study addresses only one college's teacher education program in relation to multicultural education, it serves to inform the field as an example of how we might address these important areas as teacher educators.

### Background: The Multicultural Teacher Education Program

The program identified in the study consisted of coursework and fieldwork that integrated seven areas of study: (a) Foundations of Education; (b) Voice, Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice; (c) Collaboration and Inclusion; (d) Teacher and Learning in the Diverse Classroom; (e) Literacy and Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom; (f) Second Language Acquisition in the Diverse Classroom; and (g) Student Teaching.

In the class, *Voice, Diversity, Equity and Social Justice*, the course of study included the following topics: the study of otherness as a means to know marginalized populations and understand privilege in schools (SooHoo, 2006); the use of narrative pedagogy as means to examine identity and ideology; the history of disenfranchised groups in the U.S.; and the development of social justice projects to demonstrate culturally responsive pedagogy.

The goals of the course were to (a) reduce ambivalence of social justice perspectives (i.e., deficit of intellectual capital); (b) reduce marginalization of students in schools; and (c) develop/identify instructional strategies/curriculum/school structures that support student diversity- not merely through remediation but also through preventive, structural, and policy/systemic change. For the course, diversity was interpreted in its broadest sense. Race, culture, class, language, religion, and ableness were social constructions that regularly appeared on the course syllabus and were the foundation for class readings, activities, and assignments.

One of the principal assignments of the course was to have students identify a time when they were *othered* from what was considered the norm. Another key activity was to have students work in groups on a social justice theme ideally associated with schooling or community, in which they addressed an area to improve social justice through any number of action projects. They also planned and taught lessons at local schools. The course materials typically included books, articles, essays, and videos providing many different perspectives on the key topics.

### Research Design and Methods

The research design was a single case study using a mixed-methods approach, comprised of a survey of teacher education graduates (see Appendix A), analyzed quantitatively, as well as follow-up interviews conducted with individual teachers at their respective school sites, which were analyzed qualitatively. While the survey data were intended to demonstrate trends and indicate any areas that appeared to stand out as significant, the interviews were designed to give us the more personal side of the teachers' stories relative to their role in schools as multicultural educators.

The survey focused on the following four major areas:

1. Self-perceptions of the role of multicultural educator.
2. Self-perceptions of using multicultural education practices.
3. Attribution of multicultural practices.
4. School support for multicultural education.

The survey was distributed in spring 2005 to all alumni in the program database who had graduated at least five years prior to the study. Of the 930 surveys sent to alumni, we received 200 responses, for a return rate of 29%. Simple descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyze the responses. The follow-up interviews focused on the same major areas noted above, adding a fifth area regarding course and program recommendations. These interviews were conducted with 25 of the surveyed teachers who volunteered to participate in the qualitative component of the study. Teachers who were interviewed represented 12 school districts in southern California and one school district out of state. All of the interviews were held at the teachers' school sites, except for one that was held in a residence. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. The interviewers took notes of the responses, which were immediately transcribed. The constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to determine the major themes that emerged from the interviews.

The research team consisted of the instructor of the multicultural course, the instructor of second language acquisition course, who will lead a future research effort in the assessment of a second language acquisition course, and the former associate dean, who was responsible for program assessment and improvement.

#### Survey

Survey respondents used a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree,



neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) to express their level of agreement with each of the statements. The survey asked for descriptive information (e.g., years taught, level of teaching) followed by 30 questions about personal beliefs and practices in multicultural education and the school climate in relation to multicultural education.

The initial step in this investigation was to develop questions or statements about multicultural preparation and the school conditions that support multiculturalism. A review of the literature of existing surveys was conducted and resulted in a 30-question instrument that integrated one doctoral study (Olson, 2003) and one master's degree study (Demovsky & Niemuth, 1999). The draft survey was sent to three judges identified as knowledgeable about multicultural education and issues. They were asked to examine the questions for appropriateness to the study's goals. Items were reworded or realigned based on their ratings, comments, and suggestions.

### **Interviews**

A postcard asking participants whether they were interested in volunteering for a follow-up personal interview was included with the survey mailing. The research team developed interview questions to address the five research goals; these were further refined by the results of the survey. Figure 1 presents the interview questions.

## **Data Analysis and Results**

### **Demographics**

Of the 200 survey respondents, 164 were female and 36 were male. They were primarily Caucasian (160), with the next largest group being Hispanic (22). In regard to age, 116 participants were younger than 40 years of age and 84 were older. Additionally 105 respondents were elementary teachers and 80 were secondary teachers with the remainder working out of the classroom. The vast majority (80%) had taught for four or more years. Because we used an existing survey that was not specifically designed for our research goals, we grouped the items by the research goals that they seemed to fit best and then had three colleagues review and validate our groupings. The results were then aggregated in relation to the range of responses for each of the question groups, as described below.

### **Survey Results**

*Self-perceptions of the role of multicultural educator.* Responses to survey questions 1, 16, and 17 were aggregated to determine the gradu-

ates' perceptions of their role as a multicultural educator. The percentage of respondents who answered "agree" or "strongly agree" to the three related survey questions was 89-95%, indicating that a large majority of the respondents saw themselves as multicultural educators.

*Self-perceptions of using multicultural educational practice.* Responses to survey questions 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 20 were aggregated to determine graduates' perceptions of their use of multicultural education practices. The percentage of respondents who answered "agree" or "strongly agree" to the eight related survey questions was 53-84%, indicating that a majority used multicultural educational practices in their classrooms.

*Attribution of multicultural practices.* Responses to questions 2 and 15 were aggregated to determine whether respondents attributed the multicultural practices to their training. The percentage of respondents who answered "agree" or "strongly agree" to the two related survey questions was 50-84%, indicating that at least half, if not more, attributed their multicultural practices to their coursework.

*School support for multicultural education.* Responses to survey questions 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29 were aggregated to determine the extent to which the schools that employ these graduates

Figure 1  
*Interview Questions*

1. In your survey, you defined yourself as a multicultural educator. What does that mean to you?
2. How does this role affect your teaching practice?
3. What year did you take the course, Voice, Diversity, Equity and Social Justice?
4. What was the most memorable course activity/concept? Describe.
5. Which activity was the most useful course activity as a classroom teacher?
6. Do you believe you have the necessary knowledge and skills to function in a diverse classroom?
7. How has your multicultural approach to teaching affected your students' learning? What significant multicultural concepts do you use in your curriculum/classroom?
8. What are the barriers to the implementation of a multicultural curriculum?
9. What suggestions do you have to change the course, Voice, Diversity, Equity and Social Justice?
10. What aspect of the teacher preparation program had the most impact on your preparation to teach in classrooms with diverse student populations?
11. What aspects of the program were more or less effective than others?
12. What could be done to strengthen the teacher education program to better prepare you to teach in diverse classrooms?

are supportive of multicultural education. The percentage of respondents who answered “agree” or “strongly agree” to the ten related research questions was 30-88%, indicating that there was a wide range of perceived support for multicultural education in the respondents’ schools.

### **Interview Findings**

Interview data were sorted in two ways. First, using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we found that there were seven emergent categories: teacher candidates’ beliefs/ideology, curriculum content, culturally responsive pedagogy, school conditions, student learning, policies, and teacher preparation. We compared them to the results of the survey and found they were consistent with those findings in that there was an affirmation on their self perception as multicultural educators using multicultural practices, but there was a wide range in the perceived level of support for their work at their respective schools. We then correlated these results to Banks and Banks’ (2001) essential five dimensions of multicultural education. Because of its qualitative nature, we focused on the quality of the responses within the themes for this portion of the study, including comments from individual teachers.

*Teacher candidates’ beliefs and ideologies.* The most prevalent category under beliefs and ideologies was valuing diversity. The first was described as empathizing with and respecting children from all backgrounds. A second strong belief was on equity, i.e. that all children need to be treated with fairness, and that a multicultural educator is someone who finds equally positive contributions from all cultures. A third was the belief that all children can learn. To a lesser extent, there was endorsement of the ideology that teachers need to support all their students by making curricular changes or by challenging teachers to become more educated in diverse cultures.

*Curriculum content.* Teachers reported drawing from the cultural composition of classes to plan lessons as well as finding diverse curriculum resources to enhance instruction. The range of cultures that teachers studied mirrored, to some degree, the demographic makeup of southern California public schools. Teachers most prone to integrating cultures into the curriculum were elementary level or high school history and government and literature teachers. A strong cluster of elementary teachers used the “holiday-and-heroes” approach to multiculturalism, while three secondary teachers integrated more contemporary issues with cultural knowledge, i.e., using the newspaper, identifying teachable moments during a highly publicized immigration controversy, and using a unit on civil liberties to foster community within the classroom.

*Culturally responsive pedagogy.* Teachers in this study defined culturally responsive pedagogy as using students' diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, and social class backgrounds to inform instruction. When they spoke of "strategies," teachers referred to Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) and Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) strategies including (a) grouping configurations: small group instruction, one-to-one tutoring, cooperative learning; (b) visual aids: realia, diagrams, graphic organizers, think maps, vocabulary posters; (c) use of technology (d) experiential learning techniques: hands-on learning, community walks, real life experiences; and (f) study skills: note-taking skills, poetry frames, translations. The following comments from one teacher's interview illustrate these concepts.

Now standards tell me what to teach, but I need to figure for myself how my students might achieve them. With the narrow most essential standards, there is some agreement, but we are responsible to find the many ways to modify instruction. We need to do this because students have radically different experiences. They are from Iraq, France, Serbia . . .

One aspect of culturally responsive pedagogy is to understand that there are different forms of knowledge construction. One teacher richly articulated an understanding of different ways of knowing, as illustrated in the following:

As a multicultural educator, I'm interested in how they understand, not what they understand, e.g. my Asians are interested in book learning . . . My American students don't do well because all they want is applications . . . They do well on hands-on projects like lab work where you measure things out by hand . . . I also recognize the difference among Chinese, Korean, and Indonesian . . . My mainland Chinese students are analytical. My Korean students are verbal. Of course, it depends on the generation as well. First generations usually have different language ability than American-born.

Another important aim of culturally relevant pedagogy is prejudice reduction. Of the 25 teachers interviewed, 12 responded that they used the topic of stereotypes as a curricular means to study difference. The following groups were named in one or more of the interviews as stereotype targets: Blacks, Hispanics, homosexuals, and special needs and gifted students. Instruction on these groups occurred for one of two reasons: as a result of a school incident or teachable moment, or for a pre-determined unit of study.

*School conditions.* Positive aspects of school climate tended to focus on what teachers felt, such as that they liked working with a diverse faculty and student body, that having a multicultural focus in the class-

room helped their students to learn more and become more motivated in their lessons, and that they experienced fewer discipline problems. The extent to which school conditions were favorable tended to focus on support for children and parents with regard to communication in their native language on notices, limited on-site health services, and tutoring for struggling learners.

Negative aspects of school climate focused on the lack of time to teach what they were required to teach and frustration over not being able to teach with the depth and creativity desired and using disciplines other than math and language arts- such as music, art, and physical education. One respondent summarized these concerns:

I feel I am a multicultural educator but I don't have enough time to teach the way I want . . . There is no time to re-teach. It's no fun and there is no human interaction. I have to use Houghton Mifflin 2.5 hours a day. There is no science, social science, music, or art all year.

Concerns were also shared about the limited multicultural books in school libraries and the need for more effective in-service and professional development opportunities at their schools and districts.

*Student learning.* More than half of the respondents felt that the impact of their multicultural approach on student learning cannot always be measured by tests, so they used alternative measures. But, they felt that multicultural education had a positive impact on the areas of social interaction and attendance, as well as academic growth and cultural enrichment. In the area of social learning, teachers reported less fighting among students because lessons focused on mutual respect and community building and that students gained increased self-confidence and held higher personal expectations. In the area of attendance, one teacher credited her multicultural approach and explained, "I had one girl on contract. She ditched all her classes except [that] she would sneak back on campus just for my class."

Other indicators of student success included students' passing their classes or making it to graduation. One teacher reasoned that because multicultural education had a positive effect on attendance and motivation students experienced higher academic achievement, while another felt that it increased language development as well as academics, noting, "I see their growth in writing, oral expression, math, everything." In her statement, another agreed that her students were learning, but shared her concern about fairly assessing what they had gained, "My students could show what they know but not in the form of standardized assessment. The test is a huge obstacle. My kids are smart, but they just need to express themselves differently."

*Policy and assessment.* The major issue noted in the area of policy was that the requirement to teach a standardized curriculum limited other areas such as community building, art, and music. Teaching on a regimented timeline left no time to individualize children's different learning needs, "Our curriculum requirements are absolute barriers. There is so much information crammed into a short period of time. You lose the teachable moment. You have only one week to do a story."

A negative view of testing was also consistent throughout the responses, with comments about its perceived damaging effect on teaching, especially for students from minority groups who experienced lower achievement scores. One teacher stated, "Testing and assessment is a waste of time. I lose ten days a year ..."

*Teacher preparation.* The analysis of interview items relating to the teacher preparation program generally served to reinforce areas addressed by the course; however, recommendations for improvement also were made in specific areas. Two categories identified under teacher preparation were multicultural proficiency and a sense of preparedness.

In the category of multicultural proficiency, teachers identified themselves on the survey as multicultural educators and felt that they had a clear understanding of diverse cultures and languages as a result of the course. But, nine of the respondents wished that they had had more information on certain topics, such as religions and holy days to address increased tensions in this area. A small number (2) also noted the importance of being better prepared to work with students and parents from low-incidence languages, such as Farsi, as well as basic information on sociocultural issues that affect counseling and psychological services. On the treatment of difficult histories, while two teachers wished that they could have addressed this in more detail in the education course; eight had the opportunity to implement what they learned in their own classrooms. Some focused on topics such as the holocaust, segregation, or the internment of Japanese citizens with their students because of what they had learned in the course. One teacher stated, "You need to prepare students to change their values. The [program] made me feel uncomfortable about how inequitable things are . . . It was discomfort that prompted me to do things like my unit on the Japanese internment camp."

In the area of preparedness, all respondents emphasized they felt prepared, but less than a third saw the need for more emphasis on English language development, as well as how to better serve students with disabilities. Some graduates recommended increasing opportunities for field practice in classrooms, not only for observation, but also for working with children in various settings. They also recommended

having the opportunity to discuss pertinent issues about real classroom situations and the chance to play out scenarios that might prove difficult in classrooms. One teacher wrote,

Bring in a variety of speakers from the field, teachers who teach classes with different student backgrounds. The part-time instructors should not be Honors or AP teachers. They should be teachers of kids at risk. They should represent a variety of viewpoints.

Because the course addressed many controversial issues, one teacher alluded to the need for preparation on how to challenge the system. “Help teachers learn to speak out when they are in cookie-cutter schools.” This implies learning ways to work with adults in the school, including ways to advocate on behalf of students.

In summarizing the most memorable aspects of the course, teachers noted the *otherness* paper, social justice project, and lesson planning for multicultural emphasis as the most impressive. One comment expressed the extent to which the *otherness* assignment made a personal difference: “I remember the otherness narratives really well—one [student] was anorexic, another had brain surgery. It was a safe place for social interaction. It was a good class.” Some also noted that they really loved the course readings and still had copies of their articles and books: “The book of collected essays that had a variety of readings on current research—I still have it.”

While the course activities were fresh in their memories, most of the teachers admitted that they had not replicated them with their students. However, a small number (6), said that some of the activities had inspired them to teach using the same approaches to sensitive topics and one decidedly uses a variation of the narrative with students: “I use personal autobiographical narrative for an assignment I call, ‘My Political History,’ asking students to recall . . . the first time they became politically conscious.” However, once again, most of the teachers expressed the challenges that they have had in teaching to anything but the scripted programs or content standards due to policies and pressure from standardized tests. One stated, “I am a victim of Open Court slavery—it’s terrible . . . [but] I make a conscious effort to have stories of people who look different. I take the time to do that.” Overall, the respondents felt they had acquired the knowledge and skills to become multicultural educators as a result of the course, while still giving some minor recommendations for program improvement.

After analyzing the survey and interview data, we then correlated the survey results and the emerging categories from the interviews with Banks and Banks’ (2001) five dimensions and found that some

categories were more prevalent and consistent with the dimensions than were others. Table 1 data shows how the themes that emerged from the surveys and teacher interviews on multicultural education practices in their schools correspond to Banks and Banks' (2001) five dimensions of multicultural education. The table also shows where the responses about the teacher preparation course on multicultural education correlates with these categories.

In sum, candidates' beliefs and ideology were extracted from teacher comments on their perceptions of themselves as multicultural educators. Generally, they seemed to feel that they were competent multicultural educators, albeit with some areas that needed strengthening. Regarding curriculum, the survey and interviewees responses aligned with Banks and Banks' (2001) findings on content integration in that teacher practices primarily seem to focus on a heroes-and-holidays and approach to multicultural education in the elementary grades. Using culturally diverse perspectives and literature was prevalent in secondary history and English but, to a lesser degree, in the areas of science and math. For diverse content area instruction, most of our respondents tended to draw from the cultures represented in their classrooms.

Table 1  
*Comparison between Survey Results, Emerging Interview Themes and Banks and Bank's (2001) Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education*

Survey results and Interview Themes	Dimensions of Multicultural Education				
	Content Integration	Knowledge Construction Process	Prejudice Reduction	Equity Pedagogy	Empowering School/Social Culture
Teachers' Beliefs/Ideology	X	X		X	X
Curriculum Content	X				
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy		X	X	X	
School Conditions					X
Student Learning				X	
Policy and Assessment					X
Teacher Preparation	X	X		X	X

Issues in Teacher Education



Teachers' use of culturally responsive pedagogy is the area that tends to be most aligned with Banks and Banks' (2001), especially with regard to equity pedagogy. But, while teachers used many effective strategies to appeal to different cultural learning styles and student needs, only one teacher was clearly aware of and interested in how and why learning varied from one cultural group to another. Ultimately, most teachers were focused on giving all their students an opportunity to learn best by using varied pedagogical approaches.

School conditions were clearly identified as influencing teachers' time and ability to use multicultural education to their fullest potential. Some positive school conditions (19 entries) were noted in the interviews, such as how this pedagogical approach improved student academic and social learning, but many more teachers suggested that time constraints, a narrow curricular focus, and the negative attitudes of teachers, administration, and staff toward diverse cultural communities hindered their effectiveness as multicultural educators (29 negative entries). School learning was also associated with equity pedagogy, affecting not only academic learning but sociocultural learning as well. Generally, the theme of policy and assessment was viewed negatively. It also correlates to Banks and Banks' (2001) school conditions category, appearing to restrict and hurt the performance of both students and teachers in the study.

When comparing comments about the teacher preparation course and program, there was a range of comments that indirectly correlated to four of Banks and Banks' (2001) dimensions, namely, content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, and school conditions. Responses suggest that, while teachers believed that they are indeed sensitive to the needs of their students, and were prepared with a range of effective practices, they also were aware of areas that needed increased support, such as religious tolerance.

### Discussion of Findings

In response to our research goals, we found the following trends in the survey and interview of participants:

1. In identifying the attitudes, beliefs, and self perceptions of graduates on their role as multicultural educators, the findings suggest that interview participants generally have a strong sense of self as multicultural educators. Most shared that there was a comfort level, personally and professionally, when working with diverse student populations and their parents. For the most part, these teachers see themselves as capable multicultural

educators, and a good number have prevailed in their practice, even under conditions that appear adverse to multicultural education. This is in contrast to the findings noted in Levine's (2006) research on principals' and teachers' perceptions of how ill prepared their teachers are to work with diverse populations, including English learners. A majority of teachers participating in this research reported on feeling competent in the multiple ways they address the needs of diverse students.

2. In determining the extent to which graduates from our program are implementing multicultural principles in their practice, the findings suggest that most are implementing diverse, multicultural approaches and strategies leading to a perceived positive impact on their students' social and cultural learning, academic performance and attendance. However, they admit having to sometimes utilize multicultural educational practices behind closed doors, when school conditions are less favorable. This is important data in light of Lowenstein's (2009) concern about the limited information in the field on teachers' reflections on diversity, and leads to questions about teachers' comfort levels in divulging what that they feel has to be done to reach their students.

3. In determining whether the respondents' multicultural practices are attributed to our teacher education program, the findings show that teachers generally feel the program prepared them well in most areas related to diversity. But, they recommended some improvements to address increasingly challenging areas, such as less familiar languages, religious practices, and parenting styles. A small number of teachers admitted the need for more effective strategies to meet the wide range of abilities in challenging standards-based curricula.

4. In discovering whether school conditions supported the teachers' multicultural orientation and practices, while there was a wide range of perceived support for multicultural education in the respondents' schools; there were notable cases where the respondents felt that they needed much more support from their school administration to be more effective as multicultural educators. These teachers felt constrained by the standardization of the curriculum and they seemed to detest the emphasis on standardized assessments (standardized assessment was seen as irrelevant and a waste of time). In addition, they shared that there is not enough time to teach all the topics that they need

to teach in depth. This leads to further concern about how well teacher educators can prepare their students to work within the confines of a restrictive teaching and learning environment and what our role is in promoting change. It also challenges the role of teachers in schools as change agents.

5. In learning how we, as faculty, could improve our course and program to better prepare and support our teachers and student learning, we found that there were several areas noted. While there were very few recommendations for improvement, there were suggestions for our program to remain current by focusing more on religious diversity issues and recent arrivals with low incidence languages. While fieldwork in public schools has been an integral part of the program, we can surmise that teachers want more opportunities for early fieldwork in real classrooms with diverse populations and continued development on strategies for differentiation. This translates into a call for more and continued professional development, perhaps with a long term relationship with the institution of higher education (IHE). Also, the collective memory of participants on course activities and readings indicates that they were inspired to continue as advocates for multicultural education in their schools, but expressed frustration over the current systemic constraints that limit its implementation. This suggests a need to develop alumni support mechanisms within the IHE, as well as strategies within the education program for developing leadership skills and advocacy. This could prepare our future teachers to become more confident and active participants and change agents in their schools relative to policies that will impact their lives as teachers and consequently, the lives of their students.

In conclusion, while our graduates feel generally well prepared as multicultural educators, they don't find the schools and current policies to be helpful in facilitating multicultural education. Consequently, faculty members are called to assist our students in acquiring skills to overcome resistance in schools, and teach ways to infuse highly standardized curriculums with multicultural themes, materials and pedagogies. This implies that they would like improved and more, not less, multicultural education.

### Limitations of the Study

This study was designed only to examine our graduates' work as

multicultural educators and, as such, the findings must be understood within the context of the entire program. There are limitations in being able to ascertain the perspectives and self-analysis of those teachers who chose to not respond to either one of the data collection instruments. The study was not designed to present a comprehensive picture of the teacher education program. Therefore, the exclusion of an examination of other courses may limit the study's applicability to an entire program of teacher education. However, as a result of this effort, a follow-up study is underway to conduct a similar audit of the course on second language development and how teachers' beliefs and practices have been influenced by the course.

It is also important to note that the teachers we interviewed were self-selected as a result of the survey. Therefore, the findings may be biased by those individuals who are more likely to have had positive experiences in the teacher preparation program. It is unseen whether these same patterns would be true for the alumni as a whole.

### Implications and Future Research

There are implications of this research at both the university and school level for teacher development as well as education policies. These implications, as well as suggestions for future research, are presented below.

#### University Program Implications

While the survey and interview results showed that the teacher participants internalized the philosophical foundations of multicultural education, most respondents seemed to experience stress in attempting to implement it. Due to school impediments, they were given limited opportunities to use multicultural techniques. According to the results of this study, the primacy of focusing on the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 legislation, standardized testing, and the resulting inclination for scripted curriculum and narrow pedagogy left little room for multicultural education. Despite this, a significant number of the teachers sought innovative ways to incorporate multicultural themes and to include multicultural material. However, in those cases, there was a feeling that they were in violation of the school's curriculum and that they had to teach multiculturalism as a subversive activity. This suggests that there is disconnection between theory and practice, not because of teachers' deficit knowledge or awareness, or even their sense of need and commitment, but rather because of the restriction of class activities by the administration in the name of *No Child Left Behind* and the curricular restrictions of the California and local district standards and curriculum.

### **School District Implications**

The study suggests that some schools are still reluctant to proactively embrace diversity, as evidenced by a lack of infrastructure and support for multicultural education given Banks' definition (1995) and as envisioned by the authors of the study. Good indicators of this are the references to few books on multicultural themes in many school libraries, limited professional development in-service opportunities on multicultural issues, and little to no commitment to infuse multicultural education practices into the school community.

### **Future Research**

Several questions emerging from this study could be used to guide future research. First, how does society benefit by the education we are offering? Second, in its search for equity, fairness, and other democratic ideals, how does our work at the university serve and promote the public interest? Third, in the face of increasing accountability, whose interests are served by our work? Fourth, can university course content withstand time and currency to meet the demands of today's diverse classrooms? It would also be a clear contribution to the field to move beyond teachers' self-perceptions and also do classroom observations of these teachers in a future study. These are just a few of the many areas we must continue to address to truly determine the short and long term effects of our teacher education programs.

While we have gained some insights about the attitudes and beliefs of our graduates who identify themselves as multicultural educators and the extent to which they are implementing multicultural principles in their practice, we also identified which multicultural practices were used in the classroom that are attributed to our teacher preparation program as well as some sense of the school and political conditions that tend to impact multicultural orientation and practices. Our goal is to continue to learn how we can improve our courses and program to better prepare and support our future teachers and student learning.

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## Appendix A

*Multicultural Survey for EDUC 570 Alumni  
of Voice, Diversity, Equity & Social Justice*

Please respond freely and anonymously to these statements. Your personal perceptions will help us examine and, if appropriate, to restructure course experiences that will enhance future teachers' abilities to meet the needs of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

*General Instructions:* Read each item carefully and mark the appropriate space or write your response in the appropriate space. Please respond to all statements.

1. Gender:
  - Male
  - Female
2. Ethnic Background:
  - Black or African American
  - White or European American
  - Native American or Alaskan Native
  - Asian American or Pacific Islander (Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiian, Laotian, etc.)
  - Spanish American (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or other Latin American)
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Age:
  - 20-29 Years old
  - 30-39 Years old
  - 40-49 Years old
  - 50-59 Years old
4. Religious Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_
5. Program
  - Multiple Subjects
  - Single Subjects (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
6. Program (check all that apply):
  - Credential
  - MAT
  - MAE
7. Number of years as a teacher:
  - I am in my first year
  - I am in my second year
  - I am in my third year
  - I have been a teacher four years or longer
8. What is your teaching position?
  - Elementary School Teacher
  - Middle School Teacher
  - Secondary School Teacher
  - Subject Area \_\_\_\_\_



Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements by darkening the appropriate bubble following the statement.

1. I define myself as a multicultural educator:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
2. My professional education courses at Chapman University have presented me with techniques for bringing a variety of cultures into the classroom:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
3. My professional education courses have made me more aware of cultural diversity in the U.S.A.:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
4. My professional education courses have made me more aware of the need for cultural diversity in education:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
5. My professional education courses have presented me with techniques for effectively teaching children whose national and/or racial background differ from my own:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
6. My professional education courses have presented me with techniques for effectively teaching children whose cultural identity differs from my own:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
7. My professional education courses have presented me with techniques for effectively teaching children whose religious beliefs differ from my own:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
8. My professional education courses have helped me communicate with students from diverse linguistic backgrounds:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
9. My professional education courses have given me the knowledge to be able to locate and evaluate culturally diverse teaching or instructional materials:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
10. My professional education courses have helped me to communicate with the families of students from diverse backgrounds:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
11. My professional education courses have helped me to reduce racial incidents (e.g., hate incident) among students:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
12. My professional education courses have helped me to reduce insensitivity (indifference, apathy) and bias by staff members towards cultural differences:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
13. My professional education courses have helped me to reduce school suspensions for minority students:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
14. My professional education courses have helped me to promote a climate of respect and understanding of all races and ethnic groups:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
15. My professional education courses have helped me to introduce multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural curriculum content into the instructional materials:  
 Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

16. I am comfortable with people who have values different from me:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

17. I am comfortable with people who speak non-standard English:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

18. Teachers should make curricular adaptations to accommodate diversity:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

Part II:

19. Multicultural education is a part of my school's curriculum goals:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

20. I include Histories, perspectives, and contributions from people of ethnic diversity in my curriculum:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

21. The school library includes books written by authors of diverse backgrounds:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

22. The teachers in my school have an understanding of the cultures they see represented in their classrooms:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

23. My school's staff development programs help teachers better understand the cultures of their students:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

24. My school's staff development programs address multicultural education issues:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

25. My school has a philosophy and mission statement that refers to cultural pluralism as an educational goal:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

26. My school has official policies stating that (check those that apply) will not be tolerated:  
 racism  sexism  linguicism  ableism  classism  homophobia

27. My school calendar accommodates cultural and religious differences:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

28. The staff of my school reflect the cultural diversity of the student population:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

29. My school's parent organization works with multicultural educational goals in mind:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

30. I have taken multicultural classes/training beyond my credential courses:  
 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree