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## Diversity Issues in Literacy Teacher Education

Sue Ann Sharma  
*Madonna University, ssharma@madonna.edu*

Wendy C. Kasten  
*Kent State University, wkasten@kent.edu*

Lynn A. Smolen  
*University of Akron, lsmolen@uakron.edu*

Abha Gupta  
*Old Dominion University, agupta@odu.edu*

Julie Kidd  
*George Mason University, jkidd@gmu.edu*

*See next page for additional authors*

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## Diversity Issues in Literacy Teacher Education

### Authors

Sue Ann Sharma, Wendy C. Kasten, Lynn A. Smolen, Abha Gupta, Julie Kidd, and Tanya S. Wright

**Sue Ann Sharma, Ph.D.**  
*Madonna University*

### **Abstract**

In this study, the researchers examine how diversity and knowledge about diversity were viewed and integrated into higher education literacy programs. Using online focus groups, we collected information about diversity in literacy at the program and course levels. Literacy teacher educators reported complexities in the preparation of current and future teachers regarding working with diverse learners. The three themes of *perspectives and dispositions*, *curriculum issues and decisions*, and *outside influences* emerged. The researchers recommend that teacher educators find innovative ways to increase teacher education program effectiveness to enhance the dispositions and practices of the teachers whom they prepare where diversity is concerned.

### **Introduction**

U.S. demographics indicate that today's literacy teachers provide instruction to an increasing number of students from backgrounds that are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status (Kena et al., 2014; Reardon & Bischoff, 2011). Moreover, although student populations continue to become increasingly diverse, our teaching force remains heavily White, middle class, and female (Hollins & Torres-Guzman, 2005; Loewus, 2017; Sleeter, 2001; Snyder & Dillow, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education 2015–2016 data indicate that 7% of teaching forces are Black, and 2% are Asian (Institute of Education Science, 2017). Although this percentage is the same as it was four years ago, there has been an increase in the percentage of Latino teachers, particularly in charter schools, with 14% of teachers who are Latino, in contrast with 8.5% in traditional schools (Loewus, 2017).

Our current educational system has been criticized for not serving all

children equitably and adequately. Shannon (1991) noted that “the status quo of education has marginalized many members of racial and ethnic minorities” (p. 2). Test scores document how a student's race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status can result in inequities in academic achievement, or achievement debts, based on the accumulated failures of the education system and society (Delpit, 2006; Souto-Manning et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Nieto, 2005, 2009, 2010). Although there has been some progress, achievement debts continue to persist between Black and White students and between Latino and White students (Institute of Education Science, 2011). Further, the achievement debt between Native American and White students continues to widen (ThinkProgress, 2013).

The achievement debt that persists between diverse learners and White students presents a challenge for predominantly White teacher-led classrooms (Deruy, 2016). As such, literacy teacher educators face the challenge of preparing teachers to

educate learners who are significantly different from themselves and with whom they have had little or no contact. This divide has led experts to call attention to the need to prepare teachers to effectively implement responsive curricular and instructional strategies to minimize disparities in the educational achievement of diverse learners (Au, 1993, 2006; Authors, 2006; Freeman & Freeman, 1994; Nieto & Bode, 2011; Opitz, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Schmidt & Finkbeiner, 2006). Thus, in this study, the researchers aim to better understand the barriers, facilitators, and contextual factors that affect the attempts of literacy teacher educators to prepare culturally responsive teachers to be positioned for learners who are ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse.

For the purposes of this study, the researchers define diversity as follows: *Diversity* encompasses every aspect of the human condition. Diversity involves the rich and myriad ways in which individuals differ from each other. It is impossible to describe each and every dimension along which humans may differ. However, *diversity* certainly includes (but is not limited to) aspects such as age, culture, intellectual ability, development, language, physical ability, political affiliation, race/ethnicity, religious belief, sex/gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. Diversity exists both *across* and *within* various dimensions, such as age, gender, or political belief.

Because humans have the possibility to differ along so many dimensions, *diversity* means that each individual is unique and that no single dimension alone accurately describes that individual.

Diversity, therefore, is not simply about demographic categories. Diversity is more importantly a matter of *identity*.

As such, diversity necessarily impacts our ways of being in the world and our interactions with others. (Authors, 2016, p. 61)

### **Review of the Literature and Theoretical Perspective**

Over the past four decades, educators and literacy researchers have contributed to an evolving body of literature that emphasizes student-centered curriculum and pedagogy for teaching a diverse student population. The research was intended to address multicultural education, culturally responsive education, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and critical literacy. Two bodies of literature specifically informed the theoretical framework for this study: sociocultural theory (Bakhtin, 1986; Cobb, 1996; Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1993) and multicultural teacher education theory (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Banks, 1993; Moll, 1994; Sleeter, 2017). The *Glossary of Education Reform* (2013) defines multicultural education as “any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds” (para. 1). Multicultural

education is defined similarly: “Culturally responsive teaching uses students’ cultural knowledge and ways of being in the world to support learning” (Authors, 2017, p. 295). Culturally responsive pedagogy builds upon the cultural knowledge and skills of students to improve academic outcomes and decrease achievement debts (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Predominantly White female teachers are rarely prepared, however, to use this approach (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

The researchers support the stance that culturally responsive teaching is critical for Pre-K–12 teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2010; Kena, Campbell-Whatley, & Richards, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lenski, Crumpler, Stallworth, & Crawford, 2005; Nieto, 2005, 2009, 2010; Paris, 2012). Much has been written on diversity and multicultural issues by leading thinkers in regard to learners of African American descent (Delpit, 2006; Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn, 2017) and those of Latino cultures (Nieto, 2005, 2009, 2010) and other diverse students (Au, 1993, 2006).

Several researchers have made recommendations for the pedagogical environments in teacher education (Assaf, Garza, & Battle, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Goodwin, 2002; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Major & Brock, 2003; Seidl, 2007; Sleeter, 2001, 2017; Valentin, 2006). In this regard, four studies stand out. One study reported on the robust recruitment of teachers from diverse backgrounds

(Prater, Wilder, & Dyches, 2008); another concerned the course documents of current faculty, with the aim of determining evidence of diversity content in faculty courses (Assaf et al., 2010). The third study, initiated in response to an external program evaluation, focused on providing a better understanding of how the beliefs and attitudes of teacher educators influence the preparation of future teachers (Deveraux, Prater, Jackson, Heath, & Carter, 2010). In the fourth study, university faculty of representative programs at 142 public institutions were surveyed in regard to the program content, and the results indicated that, when diversity topics were rank ordered, racial diversity was most frequently cited and sexual orientation, the least, as present in teacher education courses (Jennings, 2007).

The study that most closely informed ours is Authors (2006), which used a survey questionnaire and focus groups with education faculty at four Midwestern universities. The researchers found a discrepancy between the faculty’s commitment to implementing diversity education and their perception of their institution’s commitment. In other words, faculty often took their cues about what matters from those in leadership positions.

The researchers recommended a multifaceted approach to diversity education: (a) recruitment and retention of education majors and faculty of color; (b) collaboration between colleges of education and local school districts to provide field experiences with diverse students to education majors; and (c)

ongoing, substantive staff development for education faculty on diversity issues. They also found a significant link between teacher educators' experiences with diversity and their commitment to diversity. That is to say, faculty who had experiences teaching in diverse settings, such as teaching abroad, or direct engagement with diverse people in their personal life, in their religious life, or in their region, had opportunities to become more aware of diversity and tended to exhibit stronger commitment to diversity.

Other researchers have conceptualized perceptions as perceived values (Kossek & Zonia, 1993) and categorized commitment as either a personal or an institutional commitment (Mayhew, Grunwald, & Dey, 2006). In other words, researchers have considered whether faculty members, as individuals, provide instruction and experiences in diversity to their students or whether their efforts are part of a systematic approach to diversity-related issues, as might be the case if an administrator encourages diversity, or an outside agency review addresses diversity needs and commitments.

### **Methodology**

To gain insight into how literacy teacher educators view diversity education, the researchers conducted a study of four online focus groups with a diverse group of literacy teacher educators, representing a wide range of institutional and regional demographics, to determine how they addressed the International Reading Association/International Literacy

Association's (ILA) diversity Standard Four. This standard states that teacher "candidates create and engage their students in literacy practices that develop awareness, understanding, respect, and valuing of differences in our society" (ILA, 2010). The researchers also sought to determine what shaped these literacy teacher educators' practices and beliefs about diversity education. Thus, the research questions that guided our study were:

- How do literacy teacher educators prepare teachers to be more inclusive of diversity?
- What influences literacy teacher educators' views, perspectives, and practices?

### **Research Context**

Based on the results of a survey of literacy teacher educators in regard to their practices and beliefs about preparing teachers to teach diverse learners (Authors, 2016), the researchers conducted focus groups to explore the complexities of diversity teacher preparation practices at a deeper level. The researchers assembled four teacher educator focus groups from urban, suburban, and rural colleges and universities of various sizes. A brief excerpt from this study was reported in a research methods anthology (Authors, 2016).

### **Participants**

To have broad geographic representation for the study, the researchers sought participants from across the United States, using contacts from various professional organizations,

in particular, the ILA. We attempted to reach out to male and female teacher educators as well as those from different ethnic backgrounds. Twelve literacy teacher educators, nine females and three males, from eight states in the New England, Midwest, Southeast Coast, Southwest, West Coast, and Pacific Islands agreed to participate, including two institutions among those known for a great amount of student diversity. The researchers grouped these ethnically diverse educators (two African Americans, nine Caucasians—two with children from diverse racial backgrounds and one Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander) into one of four different online focus groups, using University profiles. Thus, we based one group each on *all urban*, *all suburban*, and *all rural* university profiles and the last group on *mixed university profiles*. Table 1 presents the demographics of the participants.

Table 1  
*Demographics of Participants*

Focus Group No.	University Profile	Region	Gender	Ethnicity	Diverse Students
1	Suburban	Midwest	F	Caucasian	No
1	Suburban	Midwest	F	Caucasian	No
1	Urban	Southeast Coast	F	Caucasian	No
2	Urban	Southeast Coast	F	Caucasian	No
2	Urban	Midwest	F	African American	No
2	Urban	Southwest	M	Caucasian	No
2	Urban	West Coast	F	Caucasian	No
3	Suburban	Midwest	M	Caucasian	No
3	Suburban	Midwest	F	Caucasian	Yes
4	Rural	New England	F	Caucasian	Yes
4	Rural	Pacific Island	F	Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander	No
4	Urban	Midwest	M	African American	No

### Online Focus Group Procedures

The researchers used Web 2.0 technologies for data collection tools. Google Hangout, which enabled both audio and video contact, was the platform selected to conduct the online focus groups. iTalk, an iPad application, was used to capture an audio recording of each focus group session. The researchers had all files transcribed verbatim.

Three of us on the research team members with focus group research and technology expertise were selected to act as discussant, technology facilitator, and observer for each of the one-hour synchronous focus group sessions. The

observer's role was to ensure that procedures were implemented consistently in all four focus groups. The researcher most experienced in conducting focus groups was the discussant who facilitated and moderated each focus group, which included acknowledgement of each participant's response, asking clarifying questions, and pacing of the 60-minute sessions. The technology facilitator had the challenging jobs of coordinating these groups across five time zones and educating participants in advance in the use of Google Hangout, which enabled both audio and video contact for each participant. Participants were individually notified of their Google Hangout focus group time. In addition, they were informed that their focus group discussion would be recorded and were given an opportunity to withdraw before the conversation began. The research questions posed for each focus group are found in the Appendix A.

### **Focus Group Data Analysis**

The data from each of the online focus groups were analyzed in three phases: data organization, data reduction (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), and coding, through a constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The same process was used to analyze the data from each of the four focus groups. First, the focus group interview recordings were transcribed. Next, all names were replaced with random numbers generated from Excel to de-identify data from each focus group participant, thus treating the transcribed data as a single data set. Pseudonyms replaced generated

numbers for reporting purposes. Then, using the data reduction method suggested by Miles et al. (2014), each of the six-research team members read the data to generate a list of data reduction codes. Next, the researchers grouped the generated codes that emerged from the data into one list. From the list, six codes were selected based on highest frequency reported on the list. The selected six codes were defined and tested for interpretation accuracy by all six research team members before being used to code the data during the third phase of analysis. Then, using a constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), each research team member individually coded the data, using codes that emerged during the data reduction process: *demographic factors, diversity issues, program elements, teacher pedagogy, pedagogical factors, and course curriculum*. These six codes were then grouped into three themes: *perspectives and dispositions, outside influences, and curriculum issues and decisions*. Subsequently, the researchers established an inter-rater reliability of 82%.

## **Findings**

### **Emerging Themes**

The three themes of *perspectives and dispositions, outside influences, and curriculum issues and decisions* emerged from the analysis. *Perspectives and dispositions* refer to the attitudes of teacher education faculty, their students, or the program as to whether issues of diversity were important, whether they saw a role for developing positive dispositions of new teachers in their



program, and whether faculty viewed addressing diversity as part of their job. For instance, some comments indicated that other priorities, such as including more technologies, or special education adaptations took much faculty time and attention, and diversity might be an unwelcomed something else. *Outside influences* refers to a variety of factors over which faculty have less control, such as accreditation demands, university rules (e.g., the maximum number of credits allowed in a program), or factors that place demands on teachers and schools (e.g., federal mandates and standardized testing). For example, faculty preparing for an accreditation site visit may feel overwhelmed in their duties and may not be willing to have conversations about another important issue. Public institutions sometimes get new and unwelcomed demands from the state level that requires faculty focus for a period of time. *Curriculum issues and decisions* refers to issues considered and decisions made by individual faculty or by groups of faculty to include, exclude, or revise aspects of classes or field experiences to address diversity more effectively. In other words, a program area may have decided to revise an advanced degree and include something about English language learners, or a need for more research courses, more academic writing, or more accommodation for special needs students. Or a faculty member or small group may have independently made decisions to include, exclude or experiment with a new type of assignment.

Below, each theme is discussed. Summarized responses are presented that

were judged to be in that theme and category.

### Perspectives and Dispositions

In regard to *perspectives and dispositions*, literacy teacher educators discussed the narrow view of diversity that some teacher candidates express as candidates engage in coursework. The teacher educators shared the challenges that arose from their observations of teacher candidates who are developing their understandings of working with diverse learners (Table 2).

Table 2  
*Theme 1: Perspectives and Dispositions*

Category	Findings
Understanding diverse learners	<p>Candidates express discomfort with students different from themselves.</p> <p>Some universities are not very diverse, and diversity field experiences are few or non-existent.</p> <p>Candidates struggle with immigrant children who do not speak English/English language learners.</p> <p>Candidates feel challenged to differentiate instruction for differing levels of abilities.</p>
Narrow view of diversity	<p>Candidates tend to view diversity as only a racial issue.</p>

Those who discussed candidates' narrow view of diversity indicated that candidates often consider race when discussing issues of diversity but overlook other types of diversity, including, for example, religion, ability diversity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. For example, one teacher educator stated:

I think that the students might have a hard time recognizing that diversity is more than just the color of one's skin. So . . . one of our challenges is helping them to have maybe a broader definition of diversity than they have in their head. (P10, Q2)

The teacher educators also shared that some teacher candidates enter the teacher education program with deficit views of students and families who are different from themselves. One teacher educator noted:

Our students have a lot of difficulty getting over their deficit mentality about our students and their families. Oftentimes, they don't see parents as advocates; they see parents as problems and challenges to overcome rather than as people who are helpful and problem solvers in their classrooms. (P6, Q2)

The teacher educators also discussed the challenges that teacher candidates face as they develop their understandings of and dispositions toward working with diverse learners. They find that some candidates initially appear to be uncomfortable with students who are different from themselves. One teacher educator stated, "Students are often quite fearful or alarmed to go into school districts in an urban setting that they are not familiar with or not used to, that is not from their hometown" (P2, Q2). Another teacher educator, however, shared that teacher candidates from their

graduate program, who are often already working in schools, seem to have a greater awareness of students' diversities and "are a little bit more eager to learn about the varied kinds of diversities that they have" (P10, Q2).

When discussing candidates' perspectives and dispositions, teacher educators often linked the perspectives and dispositions observed with discussions of the candidates' past experiences, direct engagements and/or experiences provided in the program. In these discussions, the teacher educators noted that teacher candidates not only feel challenged by the racial and ethnic differences of their students but also other by diversities, such as socioeconomic, linguistic, and ability. One teacher educator stated:

They [teacher candidates] understand ethnic diversity, but they have a very hard time understanding economic diversity as well, and maybe even more, because they've not encountered someone who is impoverished, so poor. (P12, Q2)

There also was concern among the teacher educators that candidates seem challenged by how to teach English language learners (ELLs), including children from families who have immigrated to the United States. One teacher educator explained that candidates have expressed "the range of ELLs as one of their greatest concerns" (P1, Q2). Adding to this concern is that some teacher educators do not feel adequately prepared to teach candidates how to work with ELLs. After one

teacher educator shared her lack of knowledge of teaching ELLs, another stated, “Like [the other teacher educator] said, I personally don’t feel fully prepared to teach ELL students” (P2, Q3). She continued by explaining, “When it comes to working with English language learners, I really have to choose, myself, to reread around the topic and get as many strategies as I can possibly put in my toolbox to share with my students” (P2, Q3). Concerns also were raised about teacher candidates’ comfort with teaching students with learning disabilities. One teacher educator felt that teacher candidates are not as comfortable teaching students with learning disabilities. She explained:

They [teacher candidates] don’t really have a handle on that, even though they do take some special education courses. For children who have special needs, children who learn English as their primary language, they are very hesitant about teaching that. They don’t feel that they have quite enough experience through their coursework to meet the needs of those diverse learners. (P11, Q2)

In addition, teacher educators discussed the challenges that teacher candidates express as they consider how to differentiate instruction for children with varied abilities. In their discussions, the teacher educators talked about candidates’ need to differentiate for each student, including ELLs, students with disabilities, and students identified as gifted. For example, one teacher educator noted, “They [teacher

candidates] feel that they haven’t had enough time to develop the types of skills that they need in order to teach a wide range of students at one time in a particular subject” (P6, Q2). Another teacher educator stated, “I think also differentiating instruction can be a challenge for them [candidates], as well” (P2, Q2). She further explained:

Even though we give them lots of strategies, I think it’s a matter of them getting the confidence they need, which we do provide numerous practicum experiences to help them gain that. But we all know that experience really is the best teacher, so I think that, as they are facing their first year of teaching, I think that is a complex perspective to be in—to wonder if they are going to be able to meet the needs of all of their students. (P2, Q2)

Like this teacher educator, many of the teacher educators concluded that prior experiences and direct experiences provided by teacher education programs are critical to encouraging teacher candidates to broaden their view of diversity and to enhance their understanding of and comfort working with students with a variety of diversities.

### **Outside Influences**

Teacher educators believe that there are influences outside of the teacher preparation program and the teacher candidates who enroll in these programs that contribute to their perceptions and practices related to

preparing teacher candidates to teach diverse students. The teacher educators discussed these influences in terms of mandates placed on teacher educators and teachers and the insecurities that teacher candidate and teachers express (Table 3).

Table 3  
*Theme 2: Outside Influences*

Category	Findings
Political mandates	<p>Faculty are pressured to revise the curriculum to align with Common Core State Standards.</p> <p>Writing instructional experiences are aligned with tests rather than with sound writing practices.</p> <p>Classroom teacher evaluations are based on test outcomes and have little to do with supporting diverse learners.</p> <p>University programs eliminate course credits to be competitive in times when the curriculum review shows the need for more course time on issues of diversity.</p> <p>School districts require classroom teachers and teacher candidates to use certain curriculum materials that poorly address diversity concerns.</p>
Insecurities	<p>Classroom teacher evaluation based on tests creates job insecurity and minimizes against adding diversity issues into curriculum.</p> <p>Teacher candidates fear teaching in urban district due to safety concerns and bias issues.</p>

Political mandates included pressures to align curriculum with school-based curriculum standards, such as the Common Core State Standards and standards-based tests, use of curriculum that does not adequately address diversity, use of teacher evaluations that do not have a strong

focus on curriculum that addresses diversity within classrooms, and efforts to reduce course credits in a program to be more competitive. Teacher educators expressed that mandates such as these can affect teachers’ feelings of security and may influence teacher educators’ integration of issues of diversity into their university coursework as well as teachers’ attention to diversity in their classroom. In addition, teacher educators addressed the influence of accreditation processes and teacher certification mandates on teacher education programs.

The teacher educators also shared how political mandates compel them to prepare teacher candidates to teach in a test-driven environment. One teacher educator explained this pressure when describing the current school climate: “So, student teachers were not required or rewarded for teaching to students’ needs. It was more teaching to the test, and the whole reward systems for teachers—the evaluation system for teachers—was based upon that” (P3, Q2). Another teacher educator further explained:

And so, teachers teach to the test especially when it comes to writing because, one, they don’t know specifically necessarily how to teach writing really well and, two, because there is so much pressure in order to teach to those tests. (P2, Q2)

She also noted that there is sometimes a difference between “what is expected in the schools versus what is best practice” (P2, Q2).

Another teacher educator explained:

In many schools, there's prescribed curriculum, so that, no matter what students learn here at the university, they're not always allowed to use that information out in the schools. And, there's that, I think it's pretty prevalent here, those university colleges of education are fine, but the school district is where the real-world is for teaching. And we continue to battle, and obviously battle or influence, or try to educate, that we are both on the same side; we're not working against each other. And how can what we contribute be valued by the school district, and what the school district does be valued by us, and work as a continuum as opposed to, you know, once you get out of the school you should forget everything you learned at the university because this is the "real world" type thing. (P3, Q2)

Another issue that teacher educators raised was that mandates that can be barriers to providing curriculum and instruction that addresses diversity. Barriers included state laws that mandated English-only instruction and commercial programs adopted by school systems. One teacher educator discussed the English-only requirements in his state and other states like his. He explained:

We have to add in all the politics of second language, as well. Our students are dealing with high school requirements and

elementary requirements that require 3 hours a day of English-only instruction, even if the kids can't speak English. (P4, Q2)

He added that teacher candidates also have to deal with a mandated curriculum that does not align with the culturally responsive pedagogy that they learn in their university classrooms. He explained, "That's a big challenge . . . how do students navigate the waters of what they're learning in our classrooms and what they're seeing in their practicums and internships and student teaching?" (P4, Q2). Another teacher educator described the tension that exists when teachers feel the pressure of school mandates that are not aligned with university teachings:

One of the other teachers in there [the class] who was a practicing teacher at the time said, "Yeah, but they have to keep their jobs," and that is a valid point. I don't know that I have a valid argument for that, except for, as a parent, as a former third-grade teacher for 8 years and a literacy specialist for 3 . . . I'm doing what's best for kids. (P2, Q2)

Accreditation mandates for teacher preparation programs present another type of pressure. Teacher educators expressed a need to align their coursework with professional standards, such as the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards and certification tests required by the state for teacher licensure. One teacher educator provided insights into the types of changes that

teacher educators feel compelled to make to be in alignment with professional standards:

We have a brand-new program this year. And so, what we did is, we actually aligned a lot of our courses to the InTASC standards. And what we decided to do is integrate all the courses over the entire experience with us, so that it would. (P11, Q3)

Another teacher educator discussed the effects of state-mandated testing for certification on her teacher preparation program. When describing the process for revising the elementary reading subtest, this teacher educator shared the concerns of teacher educators in her state:

But from insider talk, the professors have been very unhappy. And we were kind of called into a focus group a year and a half ago to say, you know, “The test changed and the scores aren’t going well, and we’re here to tell you what to teach,” and that didn’t go over so well with the literacy professors. (P1, Q2)

She also explained that a new law had been passed that mandated testing for teacher candidates that ensured that “students knew the big five components from the reading panel” (P1, Q2). The teacher educators cited outside influences, such as the one described above, as influencing curricular decisions in teacher education programs as well as in the schools.

## Curriculum Issues and Decisions

Throughout the discussions, the teacher educators shared a variety of curriculum issues and decisions related to addressing diversity with teacher candidates in effective ways. The teacher educators discussed (a) building on teacher candidates’ existing experiences with their diversity, (b) enhancing candidates’ recognition of diversity as a complex and dynamic construct, and (c) designing curriculum that addresses diversity throughout teacher preparation programs. In addition, the teacher educators identified challenges to preparing teacher candidates to work with diverse learners as well as approaches that have been successful. These curriculum issues and decisions are presented in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Theme 3: Curriculum Issues and Decisions*

Category	Findings
Prior Experiences	Faculty makes good use of candidate experiences where economic, linguistic, or other kinds of diversity exist. Faculty infuses personal diversity experiences into courses.
Diversity complexity variation	Regional variation is one kind of complexity as local demographics vary. Teacher candidates need to know how to address multiple languages in classrooms.

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Curriculum design	Classroom teachers and teacher candidates encounter reverse discrimination in highly diverse schools.	field experiences.	
	Changing demographics continue to present challenges.	Faculty report gaps between what is taught in courses and what is observed in field placements.	
	Multicultural literature is used to nurture positive attitudes and cultural knowledge.	Faculty report that seminar focus varies depending on the instructor; not all seminars are as engaging or include diversity discussions.	
	Refugee stories are used to help candidates understand related issues.	Faculty with limited diversity experiences is less likely to provide students with meaningful engagements with diversity.	
	Teacher candidate experiences are inconsistent and dependent upon the instructor.	Curriculum successes	
University program content is aligned to test standards.	Faculty report differences in diversity awareness between preservice and in-service teachers; the latter are more eager to learn about teaching diverse students.		
University program is structured to include developmental experience with diversity.	Some programs report success in minority recruitments into teacher education.		
Curriculum challenges	Faculty reports negative student responses to their use of multicultural literature.		Teacher candidates in diverse field placement settings gain new perspectives and awareness.
	Faculty recognizes a need for candidates to overcome deficit thinking toward working with ELLs.		Some university programs use Vivian Taylor's work to familiarize teachers with transgendered persons and communities.
	Faculty reports tensions between published curriculum programs and progressive practices.	Particular book titles, such as Sharon Draper's <i>Out of My Mind</i> , which focuses on autism, launched rich	
	Large teacher educator programs make it difficult to ensure that all candidates are exposed to excellent classroom models during		

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discussions.

Some teacher candidates are required to write reflections about diversity experiences accessed outside of class, such as attending a religious service outside their faith or getting to know an individual who is culturally different.

Teacher candidates engage in service learning projects through local organization initiatives.

Teacher candidates are assigned conversation partners with international students.

Guest speakers from different cultures are invited into class.

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**Teacher candidates' prior experiences.** The teacher educators discussed the importance of drawing upon teacher candidates' prior experiences in order to develop their understandings of diversity. They recognized that teacher candidates have a variety of prior experiences that influence how they think about diversity and how they interact with others who are different from themselves. One teacher educator explained that, in his teacher education program, there are many ways in which the teacher candidates differ from each other and that they are "trying to keep that in mind as we move forward" (P4, Q3). They also were aware that teacher candidates enter their teacher preparation programs with a variety of assumptions and biases,

based on their prior experiences. One teacher educator stated, "Let's begin a dialogue with students and help them realize that we all carry bias" (P10, Q5). One way that she does this is by inviting candidates to share their own stories. She stated:

My own family is multiracial, and I bring them my own family stories repeatedly, about the situations where my family looks at the community and how it may be different from my family to move to another community some time. So, I do a lot of personal stories and personal experiences, when I am talking about things. (P10, Q4)

She noted, "Students love the personal stories and sometimes personal stories of faculty" (P10, Q5), and explained, "Primarily, we are creating an environment that is open for acceptance in those foundational courses and continuing that discussion throughout the advanced courses" (P10, Q5). Another teacher educator voiced a similar notion: "I think, when we talk about diversity, we need to discuss how everyone's stories are important, and their voices are important, and what matters to them is important" (P2, Q3).

**Diversity complexity variation.** The teacher educators discussed the importance of addressing the complexity of diversity and the various types of diversity that are present in schools when preparing teacher candidates. The thread that runs through this research is that diversity is a complex and dynamic construct. The teacher educators seemed



to understand that today's solutions may not be relevant in five or ten years due to changing demographics, variations by region, and the changing aspects of diversity, including racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, gender, and ability. For example, one teacher educator stated:

I also think we ought to teach the notion of diversity in its most complex and large state as possible. Our students come with a wide range of different ways of being different. And it's not just the culture; it's also an economic background, a social theoretical background. (P4, Q3)

Another teacher educator stated that, in her program, they "spend a lot of time talking to students about the complexities of diversity" (P7, Q3). She further explained:

So, in my courses, specifically, we discuss a lot of what it means to, you know, be a single teacher with that teacher's identity regardless of that teacher's race, and be in a classroom with kids from the spectrum of poverty, of languages, of race and ethnicity and culture. (P7, Q3)

**Curriculum design.** Designing curriculum to promote teacher candidates' understandings of diversity is important to the teacher educators. They view gaining deeper understandings of diversity as a developmental process, one that needs to be supported by carefully planned curriculum within courses and across the

teacher preparation program. As noted earlier, they see a need to align their coursework and program experiences with professional standards but also believe that a focus on teaching diversity is important. Although they recognize that candidate experiences can be inconsistent, depending on the instructor, they discussed a variety of ways that they and their colleagues can help candidates to understand the complexities of diversity and to work effectively with students with varied abilities and diverse backgrounds and identities.

In addition to sharing stories, as noted earlier, teacher educators shared the ways that they address diversity within their own classrooms, including the use of readings and literature focused on diversity, class assignments that require attention to diversity, and the development of dispositions that support diversity. They also discussed program experiences, such as field experiences and student teaching, as ways to promote direct engagement, understanding, and skills when working with diverse students and their families.

One way that teacher educators enhance teacher candidates' understandings of diversity is to provide a variety of readings, including children's and adolescent literature, that address diversity. The teacher educators believe that readings provide opportunities to talk about complex issues related to a variety of diversities. One teacher educator explained:

We do some readings about culturally relevant pedagogy, power, and privilege of standard

English as compared to other discourses [African American Vernacular]. So, we do talk about language and power in the ways that writing is taught and how standard English is interpreted, so, in terms of my particular course, that is how we deal with diversity. (P8, Q2)

Likewise, children's and adolescent literature is used to nurture positive attitudes and cultural knowledge. One teacher educator explained:

I teach them to use the multicultural children's books, not only for quality read-alouds, but also for using them as mentor texts in writing instruction. Also, I teach them to use the books to support content and discussion about challenging issues, whether it be segregation or racism or anything of that nature that they might have a hard time talking with students about. Books kind of lend themselves more openly to those kinds of discussions. (P2, Q3)

Literature also is used as a way to help teacher candidates understand varied abilities. For example, one teacher educator holds literature circles that use novels with characters with disabilities. She noted that she uses, for example, "Sharon Draper's *Out of my Mind*, which is told from the view of a child who is autistic" (P9, Q3). To support access to a variety of books and to encourage the use of literature in teacher candidates' teaching, one teacher

educator encourages candidates to use public libraries. She stated:

That [use of libraries] really opens up for the diversity that they are going to see. So, they might in their classrooms come across students who are English language learners or students who are of a different ethnicity. And then I have taught them how to locate books so the children in those classes, all of the children, can see themselves represented in the books that are read to them or that they read themselves. (P2, Q3)

The teacher educators also reported that they focus teacher candidates' attention on diversity when engaging them in unit and lesson planning. One teacher educator explained that teacher candidates have opportunities to learn instructional strategies that support diverse learners when they "help plan a unit with a content area teacher in adolescent literacy" (P1, Q3). Another teacher educator noted that the structure of their lesson plan format requires that teacher candidates focus on student diversity. She stated, for example, that candidates "must address how are they adapting this [the lesson plan] for ELL learners" and "they're required to address diversity in their reflections, as well" (P3, Q3).

The teacher educators also discussed the value of field experiences and student teaching in diverse settings. They viewed field work in diverse placements as a way to challenge biases and stereotypes and to enhance teacher

candidates' perspectives and dispositions. The teacher educator discussions suggested that direct engagement with diverse populations of students influence teacher candidates' perspectives and their dispositions toward working with diverse students. This is evident in this teacher educator's statement:

Many of the students, the teacher candidates, that is to say, have had very few experiences with children, or with anyone who is different from themselves ethnically. So, there is a great deal of fear on the part of the students when they are sent to the urban school. However, five days later, sometimes ten days later, that fear has gone because, they say, many of them like to say these are just children, and we realize that now, they come to us with a culture, but they are still just children. And from then on, they go on to do what we used to come to expect them to [do], a wonderful job in reaching the children where they are. (P12, Q1)

In terms of field experience and student teaching placements, the teacher educators valued diverse placements. One teacher educator noted, "They [candidates] have to go to a variety of different schools, different ethnic, socioeconomic status, diversity status, geographical status" (P8, Q2). Another stated that candidates "have multiple field placements, and some of those will be in places with rural minority representation" (P9, Q3). Diverse

placements also are considered when arranging student teaching experiences: "One of those sections is primarily in inner city and lower socioeconomic status schools" (P4, Q3). In addition to the diversity of the placements, the teacher educators shared that being in placements that align with the philosophy and the ideology of the program is important. To address this issue, one teacher educator stated:

One of our solutions has been to significantly track our own graduates and use them for our students so that the ideology of the program and the philosophy of teachers and teacher education moves forward with them into their placements. So that they are really having a chance to work with teachers who have come through the same type of program, have the same understanding about students and families, and can help our students to cultivate the types of practices that they would like to use in their classrooms. But one of our foci for our students is definitely to make sure that their placements are reflective of the types of things that we want them to see and understand about good practice. (P7, Q2)

The teacher educators noted that experiences in the field also may take place outside of school settings. One teacher educator promoted the idea of finding "two or three different kids and just doing kid watching" (P8, Q3). Another shared an assignment that will introduce them [teacher candidates] to

people who are different than they are . . . One of the ‘most popular things to do is to go to a different kind of church, or synagogue or mosque’ or ‘have dinner and talk with an Amish family’ (P9, Q3). She added, “I have received good feedback that they have appreciated . . . sort of taking a risk” (P9, Q3). This same teacher educator also discussed pairing an international student with a U.S. student and promoting an international conversation partnership that meets 10 times during the semester for 30 minutes each time. As part of this international conversation, the students are required to keep a log of their meetings, which they submit at the end of the semester, along with a reflection. She explained:

Many of them sort of push back on the whole idea at the beginning of the class, others consider it as a gift because they wanted to do something like this. At the end of the semester, the response I get from the students on the reflection paper is overwhelmingly positive and some of the assumptions that they held about the country or culture were unfounded. And they probably made lasting friendships. (P9, Q3)

Similarly, some teacher educators encourage interactions with families. One teacher educator noted that, when teacher candidates interact with families, “They realize that families are more similar [to their own families] than they realize” (P10, Q3). Other teacher educators shared that seminars were another way to provide opportunities to interact with issues of

diversity. According to one teacher educator, “Seminars can be linked to field experiences and provide opportunities to discuss issues in the field and can also be a time for guest speakers to address diversity in schools” (P12, Q3).

**Curricular challenges.** In addition to teacher educators’ describing the many ways that they addressed issues of diversity, they also discussed the challenges that they face when addressing diversity in their teacher preparation programs. They shared issues related to the lack of diversity in their university settings, teacher candidates’ deficit rather than strength-based points of view, and candidates’ responses to instruction and instructional materials (e.g., use of multicultural literature). As noted earlier, the teacher educators reported tensions between published curriculum programs and progressive practices, gaps between what is taught in courses and what is observed in field placements, and challenges in ensuring that all candidates are exposed to excellent classroom models during field experiences. They also discussed variance among instructors in their knowledge of and/or commitment to addressing issues of diversity and their abilities to provide engaging and meaningful interactions with issues of diversity.

Some teacher educators identified the lack of diversity in the university setting, especially in their courses, as a challenge. One teacher educator noted that it is challenging to address issues of diversity in her courses “because the experience here is so narrow, and stereotypes are kind of

rampant in the classrooms” (P10, Q4). They indicated that a larger candidate pool is needed “to pull in more diversity of all types of candidates for teaching” (P7, Q4). Several teacher educators, however, noted low salaries, lack of autonomy and respect, and other more enticing career opportunities as contributing to issues related to recruiting a diverse pool of teacher candidates. One stated:

We can talk about this in terms of what we as a university can do, but it’s a larger social and cultural dynamic that’s at play here that we may never at the university be able to change as much as we’d like. (P4, Q4)

Another teacher educator explained:

Because it’s not a highly regarded career. And for our students who are coming from low-income communities and families, they often move to something related, where they can do work in the community, which pays out a higher salary because they need to support, um, other family members as a part of what they do. So, I think that there is a host of issues that are set before us and, not to say that those give us any excuse for not doing the job that we have been asked to do and are paid to do, but we have to build some type of social campaign that overrides the way that education, teachers in particular in the U.S., are viewed and are discussed in social contexts. (P7, Q4)

The teacher educators noted teacher candidates’ limited exposure to a variety of diversities as an additional challenge. For example, one teacher educator stated, “I think the biggest challenge that I face was helping them [teacher candidates] understand how broad the world was and how diverse it was” (P12, Q4). Another explained further:

I think that our teacher candidates bring with them . . . some very narrow understandings of what it means to look at the world differently or maybe just look beyond the ethnic diversity. I think that some of the students come thinking that we are very accepting, but yet, you need to uncover what it means to be open, to be accepting. I think we need a bigger part of understanding. (P11, Q4)

Another teacher educator stated: The challenge of the course is that it’s very hard to help someone to do something that they can’t see. Because again, pretty narrow experience makes it very difficult for the students to relate that to what it feels like for them, for their situation. (P10, Q4)

This lack of experience with people different from themselves was raised as a concern by one teacher educator when discussing field experiences. She talked about an assessment course in which teacher candidates select a child to assess and teach. Her concern is whether

“they are in a school with a lot of diversity” and whether “they are active in planning for” diversity (P1, Q3).

Planning instruction and finding instructional materials that can help to broaden teacher candidates’ perspectives can be a challenge for some. For example, one teacher educator talked about the difficulty of finding quality children’s literature that represents a variety of diversities. She explained, “I can find children’s books that have Hispanics in them, but it was very difficult to find Hispanic books representative of Ecuador or of Argentina” (P3, Q3). Another issue raised was preparing teacher candidates for religious, sexual, and gender diversity. The teacher educators feel that resources and attention to these areas of diversity were more limited. One teacher educator noted that, although there are Muslim students in classrooms in the local area, “this conversation becomes this kind of benign neglect around the issues of religion” (P7, Q4). Another teacher educator discussed the limited attention given to sexual orientation and gender identity. She noted that schools do “nothing to help these [LBGT] students” and that, on the university level, “there’s nothing, no talk at all about that [LBGT issues]” (P5, Q4).

**Curricular successes.** Despite the challenges, the teacher educators reported a number of ways that their efforts and the efforts of their colleagues were a success in terms of preparing teacher candidates to work with diverse students and families. As discussed above, the teacher educators found that readings, including children’s and

adolescent literature, made a difference in teacher candidates’ knowledge and dispositions. They also noted that diverse field placements were instrumental in promoting understandings of diversity and developing instructional strategies when working with students with diverse backgrounds, identities, and abilities. In addition, they shared that assignments that encouraged interactions with people different from themselves were successful in promoting candidates’ understandings of diversity. The teacher educators also mentioned that the importance of opportunities to discuss and reflect on issues of diversity were key to developing candidates’ understandings of working with diverse students and families.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

Our data document that some efforts are being made to develop an awareness of diversity in teacher education programs. More needs to be done, however, to enhance teachers’ perspectives, beliefs, and practices regarding diverse learners. The issues of diversity in education are complex. In this study, the researchers identified beliefs, values, and challenges that teacher educators hold about diversity and how teachers are preparing to meet the growing demands of diverse learners in Pre-K–12 classrooms. Some in our field have called for changes in teacher education as one necessary step to meeting the changing needs of education (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Lenski et al., 2005; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC],

2010; Snyder & Dillow, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

The authors believe that the decisions and actions teacher educators take or fail to take have political consequences. Shannon (1991) has long argued, “All teachers are political, whether they are conscious of it or not. Their acts contribute to or challenge the status quo in literacy education, in schools, and in society” (p. 2). Shannon’s statement also applies to teacher educators. Culturally responsive pedagogies in our programs and courses will prepare teachers to be more skilled at addressing the needs of diverse learners in our schools. Without these efforts, the dismal statistics on the outcomes of minority students are unlikely to improve (Shannon, 1991).

For the preservation of our democracy, teacher educators must translate the demographic imperative into curriculum reforms (Authors, 2006). To accomplish this, teacher educators should be “continuing to deepen teachers’ pedagogical skills with diverse populations, their transformative knowledge base, and the ideological clarity that grounds their work” (Sleeter, 2005, p. 171). The decisions that teacher educators make are critical to the goals of a democratic nation with an educated population. As such, Shannon (1991) reminds educators that teaching and schooling can be either liberating or dominating. Educators must commit themselves to revising programs to meet the needs of all learners and to ensure that the educational system is liberating.

Teachers continue to express angst about the changing landscape of education in the United States. Every few years, new initiatives at the state, local, and national levels influence what teachers must do and often act as intrusions into the educational decision making of professionals. Our participants shared the concerns expressed by Sleeter (2005) that testing and the standardizing of knowledge are contrary to student-centered curricula. Despite such outside pressures, teacher educators often lead educational reform.

Although this is a small qualitative study, the responses were rich with information and insights about the challenges that teacher educators face when preparing teachers to meet the complexities of diversity in today’s schools. Based on our findings and the studies that informed our work, the researchers offer the following recommendations to literacy organizations, policymakers, administrators, and teacher educators.

### **Recommendations for Learned Societies**

**Revise diversity standards.** The researchers recommend that literacy organizations, such as the ILA and the National Council of Teachers of English, ensure that diversity standards go beyond practices that aim to develop diversity awareness and understanding to those that foster critical consciousness (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012) and civic equality (Gutmann, 2004). This research suggests that literacy programs should be more rigorous and implement

outcomes and measures to prepare teachers to use culturally relevant practices with diverse learners as well as incorporate specific multicultural knowledge and dispositions for teachers, administrators, and teacher educators that align with the new ILA Standard for the Preparation of Reading/Literacy Specialists, Standard 4: Diversity and Equity (ILA, 2017). This is especially important in light of our finding that teacher educators view professional standards as an outside influence that holds them accountable for providing teacher candidates with experiences that support their attainment of the standards.

Identifying the specific content for these revised standards may come about in several ways. For example, one approach would be to identify programs in the United States and elsewhere that have made significant, successful changes to support awareness of culturally responsive pedagogies and practices among teacher candidates. Descriptions of these program revisions could become case studies for diversity education for faculty.

### **Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs**

Strengthen culturally responsive pedagogy across programs. Teacher education programs need to put much stronger emphasis on diversity professional development to help prepare teacher candidates for the realities of today's classrooms where White students are becoming the minority. Our results are in keeping with those of Assaf et al. (2010), who found that, when diversity experiences occur

serendipitously in different courses and field placements with no coordination and with limited faculty commitment, teacher candidates learn little about how to teach diverse learners. Further, like Authors (2008), our findings suggest that teacher educators believe that culturally responsive pedagogy is enhanced when they provide teacher candidates with course readings focused on issues of diversity, diverse field experiences, opportunities to interact with diverse students and families, and time for discussion and critical reflection.

Teacher education program coordinators, department chairs, and faculty leaders need to establish guidelines that will ensure that teacher candidates have direct experiences with diverse learners rather than merely anecdotal knowledge of them. A multifaceted plan throughout the curriculum is more likely to result in desired outcomes (Authors, 2006, 2008). Faculty and their students need resources and experiences to meet the growing demand for teaching ELLs. One participant admitted, "I don't really feel fully prepared to teach EL students" (P2, Q3). Another participant cited working with teachers from schools that deal with at least 40 home languages, while another mentioned that urban teachers at her institution are encouraged, although not required, to have minors in English as a Second Language teaching. Yet another participant reported that, in her area, all new teachers are required to have an ELL endorsement on their teaching license. Different departments solve this challenge in different ways, but it is essential that teacher educators



know how to prepare candidates efficaciously to meet the needs of ELLs.

**Incorporate direct engagements into program field placements.** Respondents commented on the use of field experiences in settings with students from diverse backgrounds and experiences. These direct engagements can help candidates to gain a deeper understanding of diverse populations. Our literature review revealed that field experiences are the most commonly recommended diversity education experience. Candidates need supervision and guidance, however, to ensure that stereotypes and erroneous assumptions are not formed or reinforced. Further, their experiences need to be well planned and sequenced within the program.

Numerous times, participants in our study described various types of field placements as direct engagements. “We force them into these situations to support the local community . . . forcing them to get out of their comfort zones” (P2, Q2). Participants related how, sometimes, teacher candidates were disgruntled about being required to spend time in diverse settings but later, when reflecting on their experiences, expressed appreciation for their learning and the confidence that accompanied it (P2, Q2). The authors recommend that faculty prepare their candidates for a field experience in advance by providing the purpose of the assignment and information about the school or site, the student population, and the curriculum. One or even two field placements in diverse settings is an excellent aspect of any program but is not, in itself, the only

means to developing culturally responsive teachers (Banks et al., 2005; Nolen et al., 2007; Zeichner & Flessner, 2009). The researchers encourage individual faculty and program coordinators to consider some of the recommendations that follow.

Academic service learning emerged as a creative solution to obtain direct engagements for teacher candidates (P2, Q3). One participant described how the university had an office dedicated to community connections through which social service agencies and organizations register their needs for help. Professors can then mine the requests for opportunities for their students to have experiences with diverse learners, as relevant to program and course goals.

Another participant coordinated with the office for international students to pair those students on campus with U.S.-native English speakers. Partners were required to meet a minimum of ten times, cover assigned topics and vocabulary, and maintain reflective logs of their experiences. Native English speakers gained insight into their language and culture through the need to explain language and cultural differences. Learning more about another culture helped future teachers to realize the importance of asking questions rather than making assumptions about unfamiliar cultures. For some students, as based on their written reflections, this experience was transformative; they were effusive about the impact of making a real international friend, stating that it was “one of the

most meaningful experiences” (Authors, 2014, p. 48).

One of our authors learned of recent refugees from Myanmar in her region. She seized the opportunity to volunteer to learn more about these people, their culture, and their language needs. She collaborated with a faith-based organization to establish an ESL program for the adults from this community and organized a service-learning program for students from her classes to teach these people English (Authors, 2013). A number of the teacher candidates who participated in this service-learning experience were so inspired by this experience, they went on to seek other opportunities to teach refugees and other internationals. When there are opportunities of this sort in a region, making use of academic service learning as a course or program requirement can be beneficial for teacher preparation. Direct engagements may be difficult to arrange but likely provide the best outcomes in terms of diversity education.

**Utilize technology to create experiential learning for teacher candidates.** In addition to field placements, technology offers unique experiential learning opportunities. Stover, Yearata, and Harris (2016) found that digital book clubs that involve candidates and students offer communication with an authentic audience and enhance candidates’ confidence as teachers of reading. Thus, faculty are encouraged to have candidates utilize technology to conceptualize instructional material and resources in ways that are culturally

relevant to students (Authors, 2017). In this regard, college buddy book discussion blogs between candidates and students have proved beneficial (Yearata, Stover & Sease, 2015).

**Support intercultural and international experiences.** Program faculty have difficulty including perspectives that they do not yet understand themselves. Therefore, it is paramount that institutions support and encourage faculty to seek out intercultural and international experiences that will broaden their worldviews. These experiences can help them to become more aware of diversity and the need to inculcate in their teacher candidates’ positive dispositions regarding diversity (Authors, 2006). Programs that support faculty to present at international conferences and involve them in international and intercultural initiatives can help to cultivate more interest in diversity issues. One of the authors was sent by her university to a university in Mainland China to teach summer workshops to faculty from the English department. This experience led to her interest in sponsoring visiting scholars from China at her university in the US for twelve years and may visits back to China to reconnect to Chinese friends. This recommendation extends to administrators so that they become more aware of the value of supporting faculty sabbaticals to pursue research internationally and to initiate intercultural collaborative relationships with colleagues around the country and the world. Authors (2006) noted that teacher educators with global experiences were more likely to

advocate for and include diversity issues in their classes.

**Recruit minority faculty and students.** Researchers who study diversity and multicultural topics have recommended the recruitment of faculty and students who represent different racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups (Authors, 2006). Individuals who represent different groups or who have had sustained contact with diversity are inclined to have a greater commitment to being culturally responsive. As the diversity of the student population in the United States continues to grow, preparation of all teachers must focus on developing proficiency in managing language diversity, cultural diversity, policy concerns, and equity (Lapp, Flood, & Chou, 2008). As teacher educators with long histories in our field, the researchers also note that recruitment of minority teacher candidates has been far less successful than had have hoped. Efforts need to continue, but other kinds of diversity education cannot wait until our higher education faculty are more diverse than they are now. In addition, all teacher educators can benefit from meaningful and efficacious diversity education and experiences.

**Provide culturally responsive pedagogical professional development.** All human beings have conscious and unconscious biases and beliefs. Regardless of background, all teacher educators profit from culturally responsive pedagogical professional development. One metaphor for thinking about this is that fish do not know that they are in water. That is, it is easy for us to forget that what surrounds us is

normal because that is what we know. Without awareness and instruction, human beings assume that everyone everywhere views the world the same way that they do. They usually do not discover that others view the world differently until they step out of their safe, comfortable community into a very different cultural environment.

One way to get started is with faculty study groups in which teachers can share resources and ideas and search for answers to essential questions through print, digital sources, and multimedia as well as through discussions with colleagues at other institutions. Study groups may be just a few interested faculty who decide to read one of the many provocative books in our field by authors such as Maxine Greene, Sonia Nieto, Lisa Delpit, Glorinda Ladson-Billings, Kathryn Au, Yvonne and David Freeman, and others. Teacher education has become rich in diverse voices in recent years, and faculty groups who read and discuss books can inspire important questions and innovations.

**Develop program and course objectives for dispositions and competencies for preservice and inservice teachers.** Faculty can develop a list of specific knowledge and dispositions as outcomes for teacher education programs, based on the rich literature that advocates for reform in education, resulting in culturally responsive teaching and learning. The ILA standards noted earlier, or those of our other learned societies in science, social studies, and mathematics, could serve as a starting point.

Teacher education programs should aim to develop dispositions in candidates that position diversity as an asset. These programs also should help candidates to acquire the ability to integrate ELLs meaningfully into classroom experiences and to adapt lessons so that they are more comprehensible to these students. Some regions of the country have made this a part of all teacher education. One example is the state of Florida, which had the third highest ELL student enrollment in public schools according to 2012–2013 data (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). The approval of all teacher education programs within Florida includes the requirement that teaching strategies for the instruction of ELLs be used (Florida Department of Education Bureau of Educator Recruitment, Development and Retention, 2011). Colleges and universities in other states might consider how they could advocate to implement such a requirement in their region.

**Become involved in course development.** Some programs at the undergraduate level have an introductory course for education students that offers foundational knowledge and understanding of diversity issues. In graduate programs, a multicultural issues course may count for a foundation's requirement. As the researchers noted earlier, however, one course is not sufficient if there is no additional treatment of the topic in other courses and programs (Heller, 2004; Hollins & Torres-Guzman, 2005; NAEYC, 2010). Faculty who are qualified to teach complex diversity issues are best suited

to teach such a course. Where possible, the researchers believe that taking a foundational course on diversity issues is a sound recommendation.

**Strengthen culturally responsive pedagogy in courses.** The researchers recommend that faculty, whose coursework is already rich in content, discuss how they could incorporate the above dispositions and competencies into existing courses by redesigning assignments to align with recommendations by learned societies. Below are some specific suggestions for the integration of culturally responsive pedagogy into existing courses.

***Continue to use multicultural literature.*** Participants frequently mentioned multicultural literature. The researchers support the use of multicultural literature in teacher education programs; however, the researchers caution that using multicultural literature, no matter how profound the literary works, is still an indirect engagement, whereas direct engagements are crucial to the development of the knowledge and dispositions that we seek in our teachers. In other words, if their experiences with diversity are limited to reading good books, teacher candidates still will not have had any face-to-face contact with someone from another cultural or ethnic group or someone who has a different religion or sexual orientation. The beneficial impact of these face-to-face experiences on teacher candidates has been observed (Authors, 2014).

As noted, participants in the focus groups frequently mentioned

multicultural literature. One participant taught preservice teachers how to locate and evaluate books with multicultural characters and themes so that “all of the children can see themselves represented in the books that are read to them or that they read themselves” (P2, Q3). Thus, he encourages new teachers to teach to the needs of diverse learners. Another participant noted that, through multicultural literature, it is possible to expose candidates to a broader scope of diversity than may be available in any one community (P3, Q4).

***Include readings by authors of diverse backgrounds on topics of diversity.*** Participants mentioned thought-provoking texts by minority authors as a way to open students’ eyes. These can be selections by writers of color or those who hold different religious beliefs or have different sexual orientations. Introducing diversity through readings is a valuable first step for faculty who are less experienced in approaching these topics. One participant stated that she uses a reading by a transgendered individual in her classes. (P6, Q5) She has found that candidates know little about the experiences of transgendered individuals. Interviews with authors from different backgrounds also can be enlightening additions to courses.

In the same manner that the above participant included a provocative reading in her classes, there are many thought-provoking texts that could be selected to further refine teacher candidates’ knowledge base and encourage conversations that promote thinking about issues related to diversity

and equitable literacy education. The researchers recommend exploring these texts from a critical literacy stance. This adds an important dimension to the readings and offers an opportunity for self-reflection and introspection that goes beyond exposure to questioning and deconstructing text to an examination of issues of power and privilege. Using literature circles is an effective way to facilitate critical conversations during class (Authors, 2005) and to open the eyes of teacher candidates to a world and issues of which they had no experience.

For example, in a class on the “Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Reading,” the text *Creating Critical Classrooms: K-8 Reading and Writing with an Edge* (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2015) is used to prompt students to think more critically about various issues of diversity. While small groups chat, the instructor circulates, joining each group for a few minutes. This enables the instructor to know what group members are concerned or about and to address points of confusion or erroneous assumptions. In Appendix B, the researchers offer an annotated bibliography of some of our favorite texts, which can be used to instigate conversations about students from diverse backgrounds in teacher education courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

***Incorporate direct engagement experiences into course activities.*** Although indirect engagements, such as readings and studying multicultural literature, can be appropriate beginnings, these engagements are inadequate by

themselves. Facilitating experiences for teacher candidate with diverse populations of students is effective in transforming the dispositions and perspectives of candidates in regard to diverse students (Authors, 2008). Pairing education students with international students as buddies, conversation partners, or hosts are some ways to promote direct engagements. Conversation partners have been shown to be effective at raising student awareness of language needs and cultural differences (Authors, 2014) and can result in the formation of substantive friendships. When such opportunities are limited, technology can make communication more accessible. Programs can use electronic and social media tools to reach students and teachers who are racially, ethnically, culturally, or religiously different or who have different sexual orientations. For example, finding pen pals or “key pals” in other countries or regions where more diversity exists, through websites or teacher organizations, can be a starting point for education classes.

A powerful way to provide direct engagement is for teacher educators to collaborate with schools to provide field experiences for their teacher candidates. These experiences can be compelling if the teacher educator works with classroom teachers to create an experience that is beneficial for both the students and the teacher candidates. For example, teacher candidates could do paired reading with students to provide extra practice in fluency. This approach provides meaningful involvement for education majors, as they get to know diverse learners more intimately and, as

a result, build empathy. One participant shared that some students from diverse backgrounds were providing language assistance in the local K–12 schools (P2, Q5). Another participant reported that students are required to do 100 hours of observation in a variety of schools and settings, including settings with diversity (P2, Q4).

After each classroom-based participation, having teacher candidates reflect on their learning and impressions in writing, followed by classroom discussions, provides an opportunity for them to think deeply about their experiences and to share their insights and reactions with their peers. It also provides opportunities for teacher educators to encourage empathy and understanding of diverse perspectives. One teacher candidate’s written reaction after working with an African American fourth grader was, “My student wrote a beautiful piece about the book we read. I was so proud of her!” This comment was shared in a class discussion and was followed up by a meaningful discussion of the strengths that the teacher candidates had noticed in the students with whom they were working.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of the current study is the limited diversity of participants in terms of race and ethnicity. The authors sought a wide variety of participants; however, the researchers faced the challenge of finding participants who were willing and had the necessary characteristics to take part in the focus groups.

Another limitation is the size of the sample, which included only a small selection of literacy teacher educators who met only once. Nevertheless, this sample provided a representation of literacy teacher educators across varying institutional profiles (urban, suburban, and rural) and regions across the United States. In addition, the participants were limited to U.S. colleges and universities. The researchers recognize that Canadian teacher educators, as well as many other international colleagues, also face diversity challenges.

Despite the limitations above, the researchers believe that this study adequately addressed the two research questions: How do literacy teacher educators prepare teachers to be more inclusive of diversity? What influences literacy teacher educators' views, perspectives, and practices?

### Conclusion and Implications

In considering the critical and enormous task ahead of us, the researchers provide a model of our recommendations for preparing teacher candidates to be culturally responsive (Figure 1). The center of our model, *preparing culturally responsive teachers*, is the goal. The surrounding components represent examples of reform initiatives that guide program conversations and revisions. The starting point of this model may vary in different programs and circumstances. Each component is explained below, proceeding clockwise with *developing knowledge and understanding of diversity theories* and ending with *transforming dispositions and practices*.

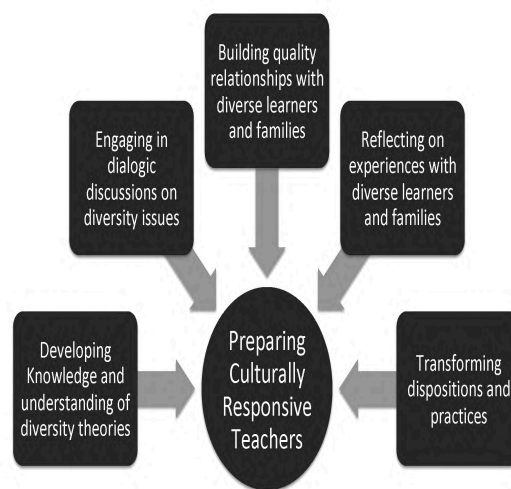


Figure 1. Model for preparing culturally responsive teachers.

*Developing knowledge and understanding of diversity theories* is a critical foundation for enhancing pedagogical skills, transformative knowledge, and ideological clarity. The researchers recommend that faculty and teacher candidates alike become familiar with the work of Banks (1993), Villegas and Lucas (2007), Nieto (2010), Moll (1994), Au (2006), Ladson-Billings (1999), and others who have contributed to the knowledge base of multicultural teacher education and culturally relevant practices. Becoming familiar with their work and theories leads to reflection on children's lives and the realization that the recommendations of these experts, for the most part, are not being implemented in most schools, whether urban, suburban, or rural.

The second component, *engaging in dialogic discussions on diversity issues*, helps to develop awareness of diverse perspectives. These dialogic discussions should include historical as well as contemporary perspectives on diversity issues, including those issues that make us uncomfortable and are often avoided, such as religion and sexual orientation. Dialogic discussions also provide teacher educators with the opportunity to uncover conscious and unconscious biases and beliefs and provide opportunities for a shift in paradigms.

The third component, *building quality relationships with diverse learners and families*, begins with direct engagement with diverse learners and their families. Both teacher educators and their teacher candidates need to do more than read, view, and discuss diversity issues. They need to become directly involved with schools that serve diverse learners. Creating meaningful, sustained interactions with diverse learners, families, and their teachers is essential to building an inclusive learning community.

The fourth component, *reflecting on experiences with diverse learners and families*, is critical to the development of a culturally responsive reflective practitioner. Reflection followed by discussion should be intentionally orchestrated, providing opportunities for teacher candidates to reflect on newly acquired, firsthand knowledge and experience with diverse learners and the realities of their lives. There is a better chance that teacher candidates will understand and value diverse

perspectives if they are supervised and guided by culturally responsive teacher educators who follow up these interactions with discussion and reflection.

When applied to program and course levels, the combinations of the first four components in this model are more likely to lead to the *transformation of dispositions and practices*. The model is more nonlinear than linear, as any one of the components of the model is essential to each other to powerfully reform teacher preparation programs and prepare culturally responsive teacher candidates.

The various competencies in this figure are in line with ILA (2017) and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2011) standards for diversity. However, there remain many challenges when it comes to the teaching of diversity in colleges of education. Valuing diverse perspectives can be achieved with teacher candidates only through knowledge, experience, discussion, and reflection.

The researchers in this study represent different states, kinds of institutions, and types of programs. The researchers know of no program that would not benefit from thoughtful conversations on the preparation of culturally responsive teachers. In fact, we believe the circumstances of our times, the demographics of our country, and our commitment to education as a liberating force require these reforms. The researchers further urge our colleagues to approach the process of reform with intentionality so that, in



implementing reforms, we set in motion the achievement of equity for the children in our schools.

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### **Appendix A Questions for Focus Groups**

The following items, based on the research questions, were posed for each focus group:

1. Briefly describe your teacher profiles and the kinds of populations whom they serve.
2. Describe the complexities that your teachers face when meeting the needs of diverse learners.
3. Describe what you do to prepare teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners both at the program level and in the courses that you teach.
4. Describe what challenges you face in preparing teachers to

- meet the needs of diverse learners.
- Specifically, can you speak to preparing teachers to meet the needs of English learners, learners of different religious backgrounds and sexual orientation, and any other areas of diversity?
  - What else would you like to add to our discussion?

The authors discuss expectations and achievement in a way that can help to scaffold readers into new ways of thinking.

Lankshear, C., & McLaren, P. L. (1993). *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis, and the postmodern*. New York, NY: State University of New York. This book contains some of the best work in critical literacy in the 1990s.

## Appendix B Supplemental Texts on Diversity Issues

### General Critical Stances

Cushner, K., McClelland, A., & Safford, P. (2014). *Human diversity in education*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

This book is popular text in social studies and diversity courses.

Darder, A., Baltodano, M. P., Torres, R. D. (2008). *The critical pedagogy reader: Second edition*. New York, NY: Routledge.

The authors present the historical emergence of critical pedagogy with articles on various diversity topics, including gender, class, language, access, race, and ethnicity.

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading and the world*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

In this classic book, the authors ask teachers to examine their shortcomings in regard to the teaching of literacy.

Grant, C. A., & Sleeter, C. E. (2011). *Doing multicultural education for achievement and equity* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Lewis, M., Leland, C., & Harste, J. C. (2014). *Creating critical classrooms: K-8 reading and writing with an edge* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum.

This book emphasizes the powerful theory of critical literacy instruction.

McIntyre, E., Roseberry, A., & Gonzalez, N. (Eds.). (2001). *Classroom diversity: Connecting curriculum to students' lives*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. This book remains a good resource for cross-cultural lessons.

Nieto, S. (2017). *Language, culture and teaching: Critical perspectives* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. The author provides teacher candidates with real-life dilemmas about diversity in classrooms.

Nieto, S. & Bode, P. (2018). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.

This book challenges readers to explore the larger contexts in which education occurs, particularly in regard to diversity.

Stouto-Manning, M. (2010). *Freire, teaching, and learning: Culture circles across contexts*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

The author makes culture circles accessible through a discussion of everyday educational practices.

Vasquez, V. M. (2004). *Negotiating critical literacies with young children*.

Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Rooted in Vasquez's own classroom teaching, the author teaches us how to shape young children into critical thinkers.

### **Diversity and Ethnic Groups**

Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*.

New York, NY: New Press.

The author examines conflicts between school culture and minority cultures, which marginalize students. It is the winner of several awards.

Delpit, L. (2013). *Multiplication is for White people: Raising expectations for other people's children*. New York, NY: The New Press.

The issue of expectations and its influence on classroom teaching are discussed in this book.

Fox, D. L., & Short, K. G. (2003). *The complexity of cultural authenticity in children's literature*. Urbana, IL:

National Council of Teachers of English. This book reinforces the need for children's stories that are based on their own and others' cultures.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers*

*of African American children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

The author challenges readers to create intellectually rigorous and culturally relevant classrooms to improve the lives of all children.

King, J. E. (2005). *Black education: A transformative research and action agenda for the new century*.

Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

This book is a collection of readings specific to Black education, including in university settings.

Reyhner, J. (2015). *Teaching indigenous students: Honoring place, community, and culture*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Drawing upon both past failures and recent successes, the author provides advice for teaching native children in positive and proactive ways.

Sarroub, L. K. (2005). *All American Yemeni girls: Being Muslim in a public school*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

The author explores the impact of intersecting roles school and religion in the lives of Yemeni students and families.

West, C. (2017). *Race matters*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

This provocative book made the New York Times Bestseller list.

### **Language, Literacy, and Literature Teaching**

Compton-Lilly, C. (2013). *Reading time: The literate lives of urban secondary students and their families*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.



Based on the author's research with first graders in urban schools, she reexamines stereotypes case studies of middle school minority students.

Lazar, A. M. (2004). *Learning to be literacy teachers in urban schools*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association/International Literacy Association.

The author examines the broader landscape of teaching literacy in high-poverty settings.

Purcell-Gates, V. (1995). *Other people's words: The cycle of low literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

In this work, the author demonstrates how access to literacy can be blocked by a confluence of factors in high-poverty settings.

### English Language Learners

Freeman, Y. S., Freeman, D. E., & Mercuri, S. (2002). *Closing the achievement gap: How to reach limited-formal-schooling and long-term English learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

This book focuses on how to teach older students.

Freeman, D. E., & Freeman, Y. S. (1994). *Between worlds: Access to second language acquisition*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

The authors explore how to put theory into practice with ELLs at a variety of ages and in a variety of contexts.

Gibbons, P. (2009). *English learners, academic literacy, and thinking: Learning in the challenge zone*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

The author provides a theoretical framework and refutes current attitudes that ELs and low-income students are incapable of inquiry-based learning.

Ponte, E., & Higgins, C. (2015). *Enriching practice in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms: A guide for teachers and teacher educators*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon.

A professional framework that targets the needs of ELLs and guidelines for implementing culturally relevant pedagogy are presented.

Uribe, M., & Nathenson-Mejia, S. (2008). *Literacy essentials for English language learners*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

This book provides research-based practices for ELL teaching in elementary grades.

### Poverty

Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., & Olson, L. (2014). *The long shadow: Family background, disadvantaged urban youth, and the transition to adulthood*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

The authors explore the lives of children who grew up in West Baltimore neighborhoods and unravel the complex connections between socioeconomic origins and socioeconomic destinations.

Gorski, P. C., & Banks, J. A. (2017). *Reaching and teaching students in poverty: Strategies for erasing the opportunity gap*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

This book is a practical guide with creative solutions for teaching students in poverty.

Shannon, P. (2014). *Reading poverty in America*. New York, NY: Routledge.

The author asserts that poverty has everything to do with public schooling and teaching and the misguided assumptions made by educators.

**Dr. Sue Ann Sharma** is Director of Early Childhood, Children & Families, and the Graduate Literacy Program in the College of Education and Human Development at Madonna University. Dr. Sharma can be contacted at