

# PEER COLLABORATION AS A WAY OF DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGY FOR INCLUDING CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, AND LEARNING DIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

Teacher educators have begun to recognize that fundamental changes are needed to support teachers in meeting the challenges of increasing diversity in public schools. Using concept analysis to study our collaboration, we developed and implemented a framework that would move a consideration of diversity from the edges to the mainstream in teacher education would do this. We use a narrative strategy to identify five situations that led to the development and implementation of the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework. In our session, we will involve participants in analysis of five critical incidents as a strategy for exploring validity and interpretation in self-study data analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

Traditional wisdom in teaching in the United States has been to teach to the middle and let the edges fend for themselves. Recently, teacher educators have begun to recognize that fundamental changes in pre-service teacher education are necessary to meet the challenges of increasing diversity among public school students. By the year 2000, 42% of the public school population will be language minority students (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1995) and by 2020 a majority of public school students will be children of color (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998). Trends toward mainstreaming have resulted in K-12 teachers serving increasing numbers of learning diverse students, such as students with disabilities or students who are gifted/talented (Colangelo & Davis, 1997; Baca & Cervantes, 1998). When we think of the diversity in schools collectively, we recognize that the total number of students who are diverse in language, culture, or learning may constitute a majority of a school's population.

There is clear evidence that K-12 teachers are not prepared to effectively support or accommodate diverse student populations in the regular classroom (Clair, 1995). Preparing teachers to respond to the needs of students

who are diverse in culture, language, or learning is paramount if public schools are to equitably serve all students (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Goodlad, 1998).

Isolation and autonomy among educators, especially among pre-service teacher educators, hinder efforts to prepare teacher candidates for the realities of the twenty-first century classroom. Literature on school reform provided evidence that cross-disciplinary collaboration for the benefit of diverse and marginalized student populations is of growing importance in K-12 schools (Lipman, 1998). Such collaboration is also important within university settings (Baca & Cervantes, 1998). From our own work in the schools, we realized that collaboration is often contrived and may fail to bring about substantive change in teachers, classroom practices, or teacher education programs.

The practice we studied in this project was our collaboration. Ultimately, this study is both about process and content. The purpose of this report is to articulate how in the process of studying our collaboration, we moved through stages of self-study which changed and guided our practice in our roles as teacher educators and secondly to articulate the content-the Inclusive Pedagogy framework which emerged.

## METHODOLOGY

This is a self-study of the practice of four teacher educators who met 20 times over the course of the first 9 months of our collaboration. At the end of each meeting, we set a topic for the next one. We made assignments to study literature from each of our areas of speciality about that topic so that we could examine the ways in which information about educating these populations were both similar and different from each other.

Our data consists of transcriptions of the audio taped segments, the documents we presented

to each other, and the documents we jointly produced for the summer institute that we planned and prepared for in these meetings. The focus of and purpose for our collaboration was to educate our fellow teacher educators who taught content area and general methods courses about the special populations that were our specialities. Our strategy was one of united advocacy.

Our analysis of the data was on going. Our conversations led to assignments. Our assignments led to conceptualizing and reconceptualizing our project. This led to new assignments. In this process, we used concept analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). This methodology allowed us to examine the literature from each of the special population fields and then to provide a cross-disciplinary synthesis of these concepts.

### **THE PROCESS OF PRACTICING COLLABORATION**

In this section, we utilize a narrative strategy for representing the way in which we moved through cycles of self-study, as we examined our understanding of how teacher educators might teach preservice teachers about educating culturally, linguistically, and learning diverse students.

#### *SITUATION ONE*

As we begin the narrative, four aspects of context seem important. First, there was a dramatic increase in the state's ESL population. In the six years between 1985 and 1991 the LEP population in the state increased more than 150 percent. By the mid 1990's, not only was almost every school district in the state affected by these demographic changes, but many schools had significant numbers of language minority students entering their programs.

Second, one of the school districts audited, in 1992, and found out of compliance with federal laws governing the education of language minority students by OCR (The Office of Civil Rights) belonged to the BYU - Public School Partnership. The issue of preparing teachers to instruct language minority students was moved to the top of the partnership agenda.

Third, the partnership received grant money to support the development of both inservice and preservice teacher education that would educate teachers to meet the needs of language diverse students.

Fourth, the linguistic faculty did not have either the resources or the educational background to meet the needs of teacher education. Their own preparation was predominately in second language education of adult learners. Their schedule of course offerings were full and any courses offered for public school or undergraduate students would have to be offered as overload course work. As a result, two new faculty members were hired. One with a joint appointment in teacher education and linguistics and the other with an appointment in teacher education in the area of bilingual education.

As part of context, Melanie was the first character on the scene. She had worked with the partnership writing grants to secure money to bring teachers and professors together to improve teaching within the partnership. She had completed her master's in teaching and learning with an endorsement in ESL. The partnership assigned her to work on getting grant monies to develop ways to bring university professors and public school teachers together to meet the need for improving the education of language minority children in the partnership schools.

Annela was the second character in the collaboration. Through a qualitative study she conducted in graduate school she interviewed a number of public school teachers. Their comments are represented by this one:

I can't . . . spend the necessary time on students who need extra help. As long as I have a class size of 40 students, and they range from ESOL, fundamental, . . . regular, honors, and even a gifted or two, how am I going to keep the gifted and the honors kids' attention without having to go to the fundamental kids and the kids who need specialized help? It needs to be addressed. (Teemant, 1995, p. 39).

This quote reflects teachers' frustration at being taught to treat each group of special

population students in unique and individual ways when the teacher was always confronted with these students as a group.

Annela realized teacher education colleagues still functioned on the idea that cultural, linguistic, and learning diversity made up a minority of teacher's concern for student learning. If she wanted to catch the attention of teacher educators about ESL students, then she needed to begin talking about the classrooms their pre-service candidates were really entering. Public school teachers need to be supported in meeting the needs of all their students and pre-service teachers needed to be better prepared to meet this diversity. In the transition of her thinking from in-service needs to pre-service needs, she realized that teacher education efforts had to address both.

Ramona, as the third character, brought a clear understanding that because the coursework about cultural diversity was offered outside of regular methods courses students marginalized it in their own thinking about teaching. Pre-service teachers kept the things they learned about being culturally sensitive in their pedagogy separate as ideals to think about in some distant time when they were no longer struggling just to teach.

Annela and Ramona decided that if they wanted to move concern for language minority students into the mainstream of teacher education, they needed to involve specialists who understood the learning and needs of other special populations. Their analysis of the issues led them to invite two other special educators, Dave (talented and gifted students) and Gordon (learning disability students).

#### *FINDING ONE*

We needed to learn more about the needs and abilities of all the special populations which teachers face in a classroom. We needed to learn and grow as professionals.

#### *SITUATION TWO*

At our first meeting, we each came prepared with evidence of the struggles faced by the special population we represented. Annela was shocked when Dave pulled out a quote about the drop out rates for talented and gifted students. While she was shocked to discover

schools did not meet the needs of learning and talented students, she was surprised because she had brought a similar quote about the drop out rates of language minority students. At this meeting we discussed the current realities of programs and practices for special population students. We discussed students' struggles in mastering content in classrooms where they were considered problematic, deficient, or out of place. We began prepared to argue about the unique needs of our individual populations. We ended up surprised at the political issues these populations shared.

#### *FINDING TWO*

From our collaboration we learned that we had to develop common understandings across special populations for there to be united advocacy on the part of the teacher educators.

#### *SITUATION THREE*

At our next three meetings, we each brought literature from our fields. This became our pattern as we considered the content of our collaboration. We began with a consideration of the Cognitive, Social/Affective, and Linguistic needs of the special populations we represented. The exploration of the development of students' development in these areas led us to consider strategies teachers used to develop these skills. Gordon had been involved in a study of inclusion in a local middle school where all learning disability students had been mainstreamed. David had been involved in a task force that helped teachers meet the needs of gifted students in regular classroom instruction across all grades. Thus, our conversations moved easily from issues of teaching strategies, to issues of assessment and legalities. We were concerned that we avoid the presentation of a deficit model for considering these students.

As we worked through problems, ideas, and reports, we realized that our first step ought to be to identify our common concerns across populations. Annela and David brought together the notes from meetings, documents produced, and reports made and developed a framework for considering the common and unique needs of the four populations.

### *FINDING THREE*

From our syntheses we developed a conceptual framework that would address the needs of special population students in the mainstream of teacher education. We called that framework Inclusive Pedagogy. We put forth five characteristics of Inclusive Pedagogy: Collaboration, Guiding Principles, Essential Policy, Critical Learning Domains, and Classroom Strategies.

### *SITUATION FOUR*

Through grant money, we now began the process of preparing for a summer institute where teacher educators would be given a framework for thinking about teaching special populations which could easily be incorporated in their regular methods courses not as an add on but as a way of thinking about teaching all students. The participants would also be asked to construct a book that could be used to teach the Content Area Literacy Course for the ESL endorsement.

As we considered the framework of Inclusive Pedagogy, we began to make it more specific. We identified critical themes in each characteristic which would define it and give the teacher educators guidance in using it in their teaching. For example, as we worked on guiding principles we found several sets of statements for ensuring that all students receive a quality education. One such set was those put forth by Goodlad. But we considered others as well. We synthesized these lists arriving at four themes to be used in teaching teachers to respond appropriately to students. We each developed a document specifying how to address those issues for our population. As a group we developed a summary outlining a common response to guiding principles for educating all students.

In preparing for the summer institute, we decided how we wanted the various groups of teacher educators, content area specialists, and public school teachers to respond to the characteristics of Inclusive Pedagogy for their book chapter. The chapter should reflect how Inclusive Pedagogy could be used as a framework to guide instruction in particular content areas and attend to the needs of special populations that teachers faced.

We also articulated more completely the Inclusive Pedagogy framework, developed guidelines for writing chapters, and designed pedagogy for teaching teacher educators, content area specialists, and public school teachers about Inclusive Pedagogy. We were concerned that the activities of the summer institute not only help participants learn the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework so that they could apply it in the chapters they would write, but also embrace it and begin to use it in their own methods courses. As a result we added Reflection for Change questions. We hoped the reflection for change questions would help participants question their own practice. In this process, Ramona and Annela brought in the fifth character Stefinee. Annela and Ramona met with Stefinee to consider the reflection for change questions, the book guidelines and the outline for the summer institute. One part of their meeting was an invitation, that Stefinee join the summer institute as a participant observer. Her role would be to watch the pedagogy. Stefinee proposed that the themes be changed to questions. Annela, Ramona, and Stefinee worked through the themes changing them to questions and making sure that they were clearly connected to the plan for the summer institute, the book guidelines, and the reflection for change questions.

### *FINDING FOUR*

We developed the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework more completely and instituted the use of questions rather than statements. In this process, we developed a pedagogic wedge into the thinking of teacher educators which would endure.

### *SITUATION FIVE*

Melanie was a participant in the summer institute. As she, Annela, and Ramona were working to plan for distance education, they realized that the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework was an excellent tool for the video-anchored endorsement course. It would link the content across courses and it would serve as a framework for teachers to display their learning.

Simultaneously, Stefinee, David, and Annela were involved in redesigning the secondary teacher education program. It became clear that Inclusive Pedagogy as a framework could

guide the main way in which generic methods for secondary teacher education would be presented. It would form a major strand for the year-long preparation of secondary teachers and would be the framework for their personal teaching texts which would display their learning.

#### *FINDING FIVE*

Inclusive Pedagogy as a framework was an important tool for moving consideration of special populations from the margins to the center of teacher education.

#### **CONCLUSION**

We realize there is a pedagogy to collaboration. Grounded in classroom realities of today's classrooms, it helps us attend to our obligations to unseen children—the students who will be educated by our pre- and in-service teachers (Arizona Group, 1997). It attends to the relationships among learners in the education of teachers—those among teacher educators (the collective teacher of teachers), those of teacher educators and their own students (pre-service and inservice teachers and the teachers they will work with), and those between teachers (taught by them) the students they will teach.

By uncovering common understandings (synthesizing the needs of students holistically, rather than as unrelated issues) we made accessible the needs of these students to the mainstream curriculum, not replacing specialization, but attending to the needs of all teachers to educate special population students. Uniting in our advocacy, we were able get broad and willing participation from others. We tied participation to professionalism: being paid for learning and growing as a professional and production of a book. We model good teaching – in our training, we let the Standards, Goals, and Reflection for Change questions guide our practice, so participants had a model they could immediately take away and use with their pre-service teachers. Finally, the pedagogy of collaboration crosses boundaries, which leads to enrichment of and challenges to current practices and new directions in teacher education.

#### **OUTLINE OF SESSION**

In our session, we will present a brief overview of the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework. Then we will engage you in data analysis. We will use records of critical incidents in each situation we present here. We will ask that you examine the relevant documents and work collaboratively to validate our interpretations of these data or to construct your own interpretations.

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