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The role of teacher education in preparing teachers for critical multicultural citizenship[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This article examines the influence of a teacher education program designed to promote aspects of critical multicultural citizenship on the views of preservice teachers' concerning citizenship education for culturally diverse contexts. The findings are based on a case study of four minority preservice teachers who attended a large research university in the Southwest and who expressed beliefs related to critical multicultural citizenship. Two questions guided this study: Where did participants acquire their views on citizenship and citizenship education? What role did their teacher education program play in fostering their views of citizenship education? Findings from this study illuminated nuances in the interaction between participants' prior beliefs about teaching for citizenship education and those ideas expressed in the teacher education program. While participants clung soundly to prior experiences, they often borrowed terminology and tools that were explicitly conveyed in the teacher education program to both express their ideas and to frame their classroom practices. Implications for teacher educators are discussed.

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Introduction

Because public schools in America have long been associated with preparing youth for citizenship (Hahn, 2008), teachers carry the burden of being the bearers of democracy for the next generation of citizens. According to Evans (2008), "schools provide fertile grounds for investigating civic learning, where the diverse dimensions of democratic citizenship can be explored, nurtured, and experienced" (p. 519). However, in the twenty-first century rapid demographic shifts in the United States (Villegas, 2008), as well as increased immigration (Zong, Wilson, & Quashiga, 2008), continue to alter the ways we define and view citizenship education. These changes affect the stances individuals take with regard to citizenship. While some argue vehemently against anything but a nationalistic view of citizenship (Schlessinger, 1992), many scholars

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acknowledge the importance of adopting multicultural identities in citizenship education and learning to transverse various cultural landscapes (Banks, 2008; Merryfield & Wilson, 2005; Ukpokodu, 1999).

Banks (2001) called on teacher educators to prepare teachers to meet the challenges of multicultural citizenship. He specifically asked teacher educators to help future teachers to “critically analyze and rethink their notions of race, culture, and ethnicity and to view themselves as cultural and racial beings” (p. 11) and “to reconstruct race, culture, and ethnicity in ways that are inclusive and that reveal the ways in which these concepts are related to the social, economic, and political structures in U.S. society” (pp. 11–12). Despite efforts among teacher education scholars to address the multicultural realities in the classroom, research studies consistently find that preservice teachers hold naïve and simplistic views about cultural diversity (Author, no date; Bartolome, 1994; Middleton, 2002; Montecinos & Rios, 1999; Mueller & O’Connor, 2007) and likewise demonstrate shallow understandings of and limited experiences with citizenship and democracy, especially with regard to cultural plurality (Avery & Walker, 1993; Gallavan, 2008; Kickbusch, 1987; Martin, 2008; Mathews & Dilworth, 2008; Rubin & Justice, 2005; Sunal, Kelley, & Sunal, 2009). Understanding how to better prepare teachers for multicultural citizenship represents an ever-pressing need for teacher education.

Indeed, Lowenstein (2009) declared “there is a need to research how learning experiences are interpreted and given meaning by teacher education program participants” (p. 164). This attention to how preservice teachers interact with, experience, and internalize new insights about cultural diversity has been addressed in only a few research studies (Author, no date). Taken as a whole, these studies suggest a variety of experiences that beginning teachers have which help them achieve deeper critical awareness of multicultural concerns. These include prior experiences interacting with culturally diverse others, especially through multicultural friends (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005; Dee & Henkin, 2002; Smith, 2000); community service and/or activism (Adams et al., 2005; Garmon, 2004; McCall, 1995); family attitudes towards race and social justice (Dee & Henkin, 2002; McCall, 1995; Smith, 2000; Smith, Moallem, & Sherrill, 1997); personal experiences of oppression and discrimination (Author, no date; McCall, 1995; Smith et al., 1997); and opportunities for critical reflection of self and society (Garmon, 2004; Smith, 2000). Furthermore, the research literature indicates that preservice teachers who have acquired this openness to multicultural issues tend to seek out greater interactions with culturally diverse others and engage in reflective activities that increase their critical awareness of issues of injustices (Castro, 2010a).

While these studies offer insights about the possible precursors for the acceptance of diversity, they fail to trace the ways in which these prior experiences inform how preservice teachers acquire new knowledge, dispositions, and skills related to teaching for diversity. In addition, these studies may lead to an assumption that preservice teachers who are open to diversity and multicultural citizenship already enter teacher education that way. Doubts about the transformative nature of teacher education certainly arise as a result of such an assumption.

To address these doubts, this paper reports on the findings of a case study of how four preservice teachers came to adopt the tenets of critical multicultural citizenship and their experiences within a social studies teacher education program designed to promote values of social justice, multicultural education, and critical citizenship. This study extends the work of social studies educators (Castro, 2010a, 2013; Castro et al., 2012; Conklin, Hawley, Powell, & Ritter, 2010; Lewis, 2001; Mathews & Dilworth, 2008; Robinson, 2007; Sevier, 2005) who attempt to increase our understanding of how best to prepare teachers for diverse communities, by tracing the influence of prior beliefs and experiences on participants’ response to their teacher education program. This study addresses two research questions: Where did participants acquire their views on citizenship and citizenship education? What role did their teacher education program play in fostering their views of citizenship education?

Critical multicultural citizenship and contexts of the teacher education program

At the time of this study, I worked alongside Dr. Eva Maria Gomez,¹ who strove to instill the ideals and teaching practices associated with critical multicultural citizenship in the social studies teacher education program. Here, I briefly define the tenets of critical multicultural citizenship and discuss how the participants’ social studies teacher education program fostered these tenets.

Critical multicultural citizenship

Critical multicultural citizenship (CMC) draws from the work of scholars who connect citizenship education with the aims of multicultural education (Banks, 2004; Banks & Nguyen, 2008; Dilworth, 2004; Marri, 2003, 2005, 2008; Mathews & Dilworth, 2008; Parker, 1996, 2003). The goal of multicultural citizenship education, according to Dilworth (2004), “is not just the students’ awareness of, and participation in, the political aspects of democracy, but also the students’ ability to create and live in an ethnically diverse and just community” (pp. 56–57). CMC finds its roots in critical multiculturalism that combines multicultural education with critical theory and criticizes superficial approaches to multicultural education that either fail to challenge the Eurocentric basis for school curriculum or have become “domesticated” or de-politicized (McCarthy, 1993; McLaren, 1995; Nieto, 1995). Its aim is to “transform those classroom structures and practices that perpetuate undemocratic life” (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003, p. 11). Therefore, like other forms of critical citizenship (transformative citizenship, social-justice oriented citizenship, cultural citizenship, critical global citizenship), CMC strives towards social justice.

¹ All names in this manuscript are pseudonyms.

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