



Teacher educators in a changing Spain: Examining beliefs about diversity in teacher preparation



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HIGHLIGHTS

- A multidimensional definition of diversity informed teacher educators' work.
- There was greater acceptance for diversity in participants' professional contexts.
- Participants associated diversity with demographic shifts and immigration.
- The study highlights tensions in sharing and enacting beliefs about diversity.

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1. Introduction

As migration continues to increase globally, cultural and linguistic diversity in schools continues to increase worldwide (UNESCO, 2004). "With increasing diversity in schools around the globe, teachers in Western societies need to be prepared to teach in culturally heterogeneous schools and to challenge their own beliefs about cultural diversity" (Hachfeld et al., 2011, p. 994). Spain, in Western Europe, has experienced radical growth in student diversity, particularly because of the increase in students with an immigrant background. The number of students with an immigrant background in Spain increased from 3% in 2003 to 10% in 2012 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2013). According to the OECD (2013), students' extreme performance differences on the *Program for International Student*

Assessment (PISA) test¹ indicated a significant achievement gap between immigrant and nonimmigrant students. Native-born students in Spain performed significantly better on the PISA than immigrant students (Zinovyeva, Felgueroso, & Vazquez, 2014). How are those working in educational contexts responding to such demographic changes and gaps in achievement? In this paper, we examine the beliefs and practices of teacher educators in Spain, those who are charged with preparing teachers for the changing student population and for the educational disparities that many linguistically and culturally diverse students currently face.

Although teachers clearly have a role in supporting culturally and linguistically diverse students, the extent to which they are adequately prepared to do so is not clear. Key educational researchers have called for teacher education that focuses specifically on preparing teachers to support the needs of culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse populations (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Lucas, 2010). However, few studies to date have investigated the ways in which *teacher educators* in Spain, those who prepare future Spanish teachers from early childhood settings to secondary settings, are responding to these significant population changes. We studied teacher educators' beliefs because we agree that in order "to bring about any attitudinal change in pre-service teachers, it is important to study *teacher educators' attitudes* toward student diversity in any culture" (Yang & Montgomery, 2013, p. 35, emphasis added).

This study is unique in that it focused on university-based teacher educators, recognizing their role in shaping the future teachers they prepare. We contend that teacher preparation programs should strive to facilitate students' understandings related to race, class, culture, and other facets of human diversity and the implications of students' dimensions of diversity on equitable

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¹ PISA assesses 15-year olds knowledge and skills in mathematics, reading, and science. It is widely used to compare students' academic performance across countries.

learning and school experiences (Cockrell, Placier, Cockrell, & Middleton, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995). We chose to focus on immigrant students as a source of diversity because of the large influx of immigrants to Spain and Europe broadly over the last two decades, and understanding the implications of immigration on the racial, cultural, and socioeconomic landscape of a region or country. This study served as a starting point, describing the recent context in Spain as part of a broader, international line of study of teacher educators' beliefs about diversity.

1.1. Research questions

The quantitative strand of this convergent parallel mixed methods study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), was motivated by the following research question: What are teacher educators' beliefs related to diversity in the context of schools? The qualitative strand focused on three key questions: (1) How do Spanish teacher educators define “diversity” in the context of schools? (2) What informs their definitions? (3) How does this definition play out in their work as teacher educators? Our overarching research question framed the analysis: In what ways do our qualitative data on teacher educators' definitions of diversity inform data from a questionnaire on Spanish teacher educators' conceptions about diversity?

1.2. Beliefs, diversity, and other key terms

Over two decades ago, Pajares (1992) addressed the “messiness” of the construct of educators' beliefs, concluding that, when conceptualized appropriately, beliefs serve as one of the most important constructs in educational research. Flores and Smith (2009), in their article on teachers' attitudinal beliefs about linguistic and cultural diversity, discuss the many terms that have been used in educational research to talk about teachers' beliefs. They also articulated the ambiguity of the many synonyms of “beliefs” used in educational research, such as views, perceptions, and perspectives, among others, yet noted that such terms are clearly connected to teacher knowledge. Throughout this paper, we use the word “beliefs” to remain consistent with the title of the questionnaire instrument that we used, Personal Beliefs About Diversity Scale and the Professional Beliefs About Diversity Scale (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001), described further below.

We recognize that, in educational contexts, the term “diversity” has historically signaled race or ethnicity and has limited “the sociocultural educational discrepancies associated with social class, gender, religion, languages (other than English), and sexual orientation” (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001, p. 161). For example, in his sample of teacher education programs across seven states in the US, Jennings (2007) found that, in elementary and secondary programs, race or ethnicity was the most emphasized form of diversity followed by special needs, language, socioeconomic status (social class), gender, and finally sexual orientation. Although we also acknowledge that the term “diversity” in itself is problematic, unpacking it is beyond the scope of this paper. Throughout this paper, we use the term diversity to convey the many ways people within and among us are different, or as Tienda (2013) explains: “to accommodate myriad dimensions—cultural, political, economic, and of course, racial” (p. 467). In the current context of Spain, we recognized that immigrant students contribute to the diversification of classrooms. Drawing on work from Aguado and Malik (2001), Zapata-Barrero (2013) explained that the “social reality” of immigration emerged in Spain in the 1990s, leading to new conceptualizations of diversity, largely based on intercultural education, along with new policies and practices in response to linguistically and culturally diversity in schools. Prior to this, “diversity” in the Spanish context focused on

gypsies and “minority nations” (p. 69). To probe these conceptualizations further, we focused part of our analysis on Spanish teacher educators' definitions of diversity.

2. Conceptual framework and literature review

To provide a foundation for our work, we explored four areas in the literature: (1) the context of Spanish schools; (2) teacher education and diversity in Spain; (3) educators' beliefs about diversity; and (4) the emerging body of research on teacher educators' beliefs and practices. Together, these areas support a conceptual framework for this paper. This study also drew on a perspective of teaching and teacher education for a globalized world that is informed by culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy emphasizes student academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness and “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). This framework seeks to “support the linguistic and cultural dexterity and plurality (Paris, 2009; 2011) necessary for success and access in our demographically changing U.S. and global schools and communities” (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

2.1. Spanish education and student diversity

Spain, which is located in southwest Europe, is made up of 17 autonomous regions. The education system in Spain is guided by the Spanish Constitution (1978) and two key national, educational policies: the *Act on the Right to Education* (LODE, 1985) and the *Act of Education* (LOE, 2006), which was modified by the *Act for the Improvement of the Educational Quality* (LOMCE, 2013), in order to improve educational quality. Although these policies provide the framework for education across Spain, each autonomous region regulates the policies' local implementation (Lasagabaster & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2010).

Spain has experienced a complex history related to the diversity of its communities. Santos and Nieto (2000) described the country as “both the site of unparalleled conflict and of coexistence among different groups (Christian–Jewish–Muslim), only later to be submergered in a secular uniformity of national beliefs and values that grew out of Spanish imperialism” (p. 418). Significant political changes in the last 40 years have had a significant impact on the country's educational system. The death of General Francisco Franco in 1975 led to a major reconstruction in the educational system in the late 1970s in connection with political and socioeconomic shifts. Cardona Moltó, Florian, Rouse, and Stough (2010) argued that these shifts along with changing educational policies helped to transform Spanish society from a dictatorial one to a democratic one. As a result, current “[e]ducational institutions in Spain are now looking at ways to support pluralism, diversity and enhance inclusive practices at all levels” (Cardona Moltó et al., 2010, p. 249). However, in their empirical work in Spanish schools, Santos and Nieto (2000) found that minority students were perceived as having cultural deficits and were integrated into Spanish schools by providing additional extra classes or through minor curricular adaptations. In addition, the authors noted that a multicultural approach was not considered necessary if there were no minority students in the school.

In the decade after Santos and Nieto findings, the immigrant population in Spain influenced the schooling context considerably. In the first decade of the 2000s, the immigration population in Spain accounted for close to half of the total immigrants received by the OECD (Cebrián, Bodega, Martín-Lou, & Guajardo, 2010). The immigrant influx had a direct impact on the school-age population in Spain, which rose from 1.5% in 2000 to 9.5% in 2011. In the second

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