

# Diversity Placements: Supporting the Development of Socially Just Teachers or Reinforcing Negative Stereotypes?<sup>1</sup>

Chloé S. Bolyard & A. Minor Baker

## ***Abstract***

*While K-12 schools become increasingly more diverse, teacher preparation programs continue graduating mostly White teacher candidates from a middle-class background. If not mitigated, this cultural mismatch can have a detrimental impact on students, as teachers' beliefs about diverse students go unchecked and impact their practice with students. One way teacher preparation programs have sought to prepare teacher candidates to meet the diverse needs of students is through requiring a diverse field experience. This paper shares findings from a mixed-methods study that examined the influence of a diversity placement on elementary teacher candidates' personal and professional beliefs about diversity at a university in the Midwest United States. As a large, public university, Midwest University draws students from a wide variety of settings, from rural locations to dense urban communities. The majority of teacher candidates at Midwest University are from suburban and rural communities. Using a pre-/post- survey design, the researchers note two significant increases in participants' scores after the diversity placement. Additionally, qualitative data analysis from interviews provides a nuanced understanding of survey score changes. Three recommendations for teacher preparation programs are provided.*

***Keywords:*** elementary teacher education; teacher candidates; multicultural education; field experiences; teacher beliefs

Given the increasing student diversity within schools (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019) and the predominantly White, middle-class, female teaching force (Hochschild, 2003; Loewus, 2017), teachers must gain competencies related to serving diverse students through inclusive, equitable, and just practices. By diverse students, we mean students belonging to “historically marginalized sociocultural groups” (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001, p. 161). Teacher beliefs and practices, specifically related to students who are different from them, have a profound impact on the teaching and learning environment (Kahn et al., 2014; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Sleeter, 2001). The demographic mismatch of teachers and students creates significant cultural and social gaps that contribute to the likelihood of marginalized students' poor performance in public education (Sandell & Tupy, 2015). Responsive teacher preparation programs (TPPs), therefore, must prepare

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teacher candidates (TCs) for the social and cultural contexts found in public schools. These contexts are defined in the diversity standards required by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) (CAEP, 2013).

Some scholars have argued that teacher education tends to perpetuate the status quo by failing to adequately prepare TCs to work with diverse students (Allen et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Current inadequate teacher education practices include a cultural homogeneity of faculty (Ladson-Billings, 2010; Warren, 2018); an additive, piecemeal approach to multicultural education (Ladson-Billings, 2010; Mills & Ballantyne, 2010); a “diverse” field experience as a hoop to jump through (Ladson-Billings, 2010) or that reinforces problematic stereotypes (Haberman & Post, 1992; Hayes & Juárez, 2012; Warren, 2018); and simplistic notions of culturally relevant pedagogy (Sleeter, 2012).

One way TPPs can disrupt the status quo is by working to enhance TCs’ equity literacy (Gorski, 2016) through meaningful and structured field experiences in schools with diverse student populations, sometimes referred to as “diversity placements” (Acquah & Commings, 2016; Siwatu et al., 2011). Community-based experiences can be more important than coursework for developing TCs’ equity literacy (Sleeter, 2001) and self-efficacy as culturally responsive teachers (Siwatu et al., 2011). The intent of this study was to explore the influence of a diversity placement (i.e., a Title I school in a Midwestern state) on elementary TCs’ personal and professional beliefs about working with diverse students. After reviewing the theoretical influences and research literature on teacher candidate beliefs about diverse students and teacher education’s approach to improving those beliefs, we describe the context and research design of the current inquiry. We share both quantitative and qualitative findings and discussion related to the study’s research question and conclude with recommendations for teacher preparation.

### **Theoretical Influence: Teacher Candidate Beliefs about Diverse Students**

Our research on TCs’ beliefs about diverse students is influenced by a number of understandings related to beliefs. In this section, we detail our conception of beliefs, how beliefs are formed and altered, TCs’ beliefs about diverse students, and a two-dimensional view of beliefs.

Because TCs’ personal and professional beliefs about diversity are the object of examination in the present study, it is necessary to clarify how we conceptualize beliefs broadly and personal and professional beliefs about diversity more specifically. Pajaras (1992), in a detailed synthesis of research on beliefs, provided several characteristics of beliefs. They are formed early and are part of a belief system acquired through cultural transmission. This belief system is made up of beliefs, attitudes, and values (Guerra & Wubbena, 2017). One’s belief system influences how one makes sense of the world, linking knowledge and beliefs. Beliefs have varying levels of centrality to an individual based on the number of connections to other beliefs. More central beliefs and those formed earlier in one’s life are resistant to change, making belief change in adulthood rare (Guerra & Wubbena, 2017). Guerra and Nelson (2009) echoed Pajaras’ (1992) contention that beliefs act as filters, influencing one’s perceptions.

Beliefs about teaching are well established by the time an individual begins a TPP (Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Pajares, 1992), largely influenced by one’s apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975; Smagorinsky & Barnes, 2014) and prior experiences (Garmon, 2005; Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014). Teacher candidates, as insiders to the profession from their experience as students, have deeply ingrained beliefs about the teaching profession that may be resistant to change during their coursework (Garmon, 2005; Kumar & Hamer, 2013; Pajaras, 1992). Researching such beliefs is

of critical importance to teacher educators since beliefs have been linked to action (Bandura, 1982; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Pajaras, 1992). More specifically, researchers have found predictive power in TCs' beliefs about diverse students and TCs' expectations and treatment of diverse students based on gender, social class, and race/ethnicity (Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Pohan & Aguilar, 2001). For example, teachers' deficit views that place blame on the individual rather than on systemic structures limit students' academic success (Guerra & Wubben, 2017).

In the present study, we adopt Pohan and Aguilar's (2001) two-dimensional view of beliefs (i.e., personal and professional beliefs) when examining TCs' beliefs about diverse students. We examine personal and professional beliefs about diversity separately because of the idea that "one's beliefs about a given issue could be in direct conflict with [their] beliefs in a professional context" (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001, p. 160). Personal beliefs are related to one's "opinions, expectations or judgements that a person considers in their daily life" (Chiner et al., 2015, p. 19). Whereas professional beliefs "refer to issues related to school (e.g., instructional practices)" (Chiner et al., 2015, p. 19).

## **Review of the Literature**

Given the deeply held nature of TCs' beliefs by the time they begin a TPP and the influence of various factors outside of teacher preparation on TCs' beliefs toward diverse students, what, then, is the role of teacher education in actually altering TCs' beliefs about diverse students? This literature review provides a synthesis of the research that has examined this question related to diversity placements and TCs' personal and professional beliefs about diversity.

### **Diversity Placements**

Scholars have agreed that experience is critical to fostering "the multicultural awareness and sensitivity" needed to support diverse students (Garmon, 2005, p. 277). Garmon (2005) contended that intercultural experiences have the potential for enhancing TCs' cultural competence. Field experiences provide TCs with an opportunity to observe and/or participate in the connection of theory to practice, providing TCs with an opportunity to apply what they have learned in their coursework to their work with students (Acquah & Commins, 2016). Diversity placements serve the same purpose, with the goal of increasing TCs' beliefs about diversity and efficacy as culturally responsive teachers. Such diversity placements have been shown to be effective at achieving this and similar goals: increases in cultural awareness, awareness of different contexts, and awareness of biases (Fry & McKinney, 1997; Gomez et al., 2009; Lastrapes & Negishi, 2012; Sleeter, 2001); perspective-taking (Lastrapes & Negishi, 2012); and the necessity of relationship building (Fry & McKinney, 1997; Martin et al., 2013; Miller & Mikulec, 2014).

Several scholars have agreed that the value of diversity placements depends upon appropriate guidance and support provided to TCs (Brown, 2004; Grant, 1994; Miller & Mikulec, 2014). Diversity placements should be well planned and closely supervised (Mason, 1999; Miller & Mikulec, 2014). Having a cooperating teacher (CT) who models culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is more beneficial for enhancing TCs' self-efficacy for teaching diverse students compared to field experiences with CTs who do not model CRT (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Siwatu et al., 2011). Additionally, a course coupled with a diversity placement enables TCs an avenue to interpret their experiences (Siwatu et al., 2011; Sleeter, 2001) and examine their existing dispositions and beliefs

through meaningful dialogue (Cochran-Smith, 1995; He & Cooper, 2009; Kirkland, 2014). TCs should have regular opportunities for reflection throughout their diversity placement (Bondy et al., 1993; Brown, 2004; Johnson, 2002; Kyles & Olafson, 2008).

As mentioned previously, not all experiences have the same impact on TCs. As far as the impact of diversity placements on TCs' confidence working with diverse students, research findings are mixed. While some scholars have noted an increased confidence among TCs after a diversity placement (Haberman & Post, 1992; Lastrapes & Negishi, 2012) and an increased willingness to teach in urban schools (Groulx, 2001; Sleeter, 2001), others have noted the adverse effect of a diversity placement on TCs' confidence to teach and interest in teaching in diverse settings (Gomez et al., 2009).

While diversity placements have the potential to make valuable contributions to TCs' cultural competence, scholars have also noted ways that such experiences have been counterproductive at developing TCs' cultural competence. Diversity placements have been linked with reinforcing TCs' biases and negative perspectives of marginalized populations and communities (Cross, 2005; Gallego, 2001; Gay, 2000; Haberman & Post, 1992; Hayes & Juárez, 2012; Jacobs, 2015; Nelson & Guerra, 2014). For example, Haberman and Post (1992) noted that TCs use "their direct experiences to selectively perceive and reinforce their initial preconceptions" (p. 30). Diversity placements have also resulted in TCs developing new problematic perspectives of marginalized students and communities (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Gallego, 2001). Kirkland (2014) reiterated that diversity placements alone do not ensure transformative outcomes.

Deficit beliefs become even more problematic when considered in light of the asymmetrical power imbalance between teachers, students, and students' caregivers. Teachers hold positional power over students through the decisions they make: which grades students earn, what groups or tracks students are placed in, which topics are covered and how, when students can go to the bathroom, which students can speak and when, and how much homework they assign (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Shim, 2016). Teachers' relationships with caregivers are also grounded in unequal power relations, evident through their expectations for parental involvement, facilitation of parent-teacher conferences, and invitations to participate in field trips (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). White, middle-class teachers make up the majority of teachers in the U.S. and hold privileged positions in society, contributing to asymmetrical power relations with students and caregivers (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Shim, 2016). When teacher educators ignore the way power operates through teacher candidates' positional status, authority, and Whiteness, diversity placements can reify racism, classism, linguisticism, and other forms of oppression (Cross, 2005).

## **Personal and Professional Beliefs about Diversity**

Research findings on educators' personal and professional beliefs about diversity have been mixed. Chiner et al. (2015), when conducting a quantitative study with 233 teacher candidates and in-service teachers in Spain, found that survey respondents showed greater sensitivity toward diverse students in the personal beliefs domain when compared to the professional beliefs domain. This contrasts with Wassell et al.'s (2018) findings when examining 142 teacher educators' conceptions of and beliefs about diversity. They found greater tolerance for diversity in the professional domain (Wassell et al., 2018).

In terms of a diversity placement's potential influence on TCs' personal and professional beliefs about diversity, Pohan et al.'s (2009) comparative study of secondary TCs' beliefs after

completing a field experience at either an urban school or a suburban school revealed that significantly altering TCs' beliefs over one semester is unlikely. As a result, Pohan et al. (2009) contended that TPPs might be content with slight shifts in a psychometric score toward more openness. Further, they found that TCs in diversity placements became more culturally responsive over the semester, specifically noting positive impacts on both personal and professional beliefs (Pohan et al., 2009, p. 48).

These mixed findings necessitate additional research into the influence of a diversity placement on TCs' personal and professional beliefs about diverse students. Further, Pohan et al.'s (2009) mixed-methods study revealed the importance of going beyond quantitative findings related to TCs' personal and professional beliefs to better understand how even one semester of a diversity placement might alter TCs' beliefs, even when statistical significance may not be achieved.

### Research Question

This case study, therefore, was framed by the following guiding question: How does a diversity placement influence elementary teacher candidates' personal and professional beliefs about working with diverse students?

### Methodology

The current mixed-methods exploratory case study (Yin, 2014) was designed to examine the influence a diversity placement (the bounded case [Creswell, 2013]) has on TCs' personal and professional beliefs about working with diverse students. The *Personal and Professional Beliefs about Diversity Scale (PBADS)* (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001) was administered before and after the diversity placement. Qualitative data in the form of open-ended survey questions and interviews (both one-on-one and focus group) provided additional insight as to the influence of the diversity placement on teacher candidates' beliefs.

### Context and Participants

Twenty-nine elementary teacher candidates from a public, comprehensive university in the Midwest United States participated in this study. Located in a midsize American city, Midwest University (pseudonym) has a total enrollment of approximately 26,000 students, including 22,000 undergraduate students. Typically, the semester before student teaching, TCs in the elementary TPP at Midwest University complete a five-week course focused on integrated unit lesson plan development followed by a 10-week diversity placement at an elementary school (1st - 6th grades) in Midwest Public Schools (see Table 1 for district demographic data). During the diversity placement, TCs spend two full days per week in the classroom working alongside a CT. As part of the diversity placement, TCs are required to teach two lessons, one short (20-30 minutes, "T1") and one long (50-60 minutes, "T2") during which they are observed by a university supervisor. State teacher certification requirements dictate that TCs complete one practicum experience in a ***diverse setting***. Midwest University, as directed by the state Department of Education, uses the following criteria to determine if a school is considered a diverse setting: Title I status, percentage of free/reduced-price lunch, percentage of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), ethnic and/or racial diversity, percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs), and a variety of grade

levels. This 10-week field experience serves as the diversity placement for Midwest University TCs who will complete traditional, semester-long student teaching the following semester. TCs who complete year-long student teaching meet the diversity placement requirement in a different route, dependent on their practicum experiences.

**Table 1: Diversity Placement Elementary Student Demographics**

Variables	Percent
Race / Ethnicity	
Two or More Races	6.5%
Black	7.7%
Hispanic	7.0%
White	74.3%
Asian	3.3%
Native American / Pacific Islander	1.2%
Free & Reduced Lunch Eligible	58.1%
Special Education	13.1%

To answer our research question, data were collected at the beginning and end of the fall 2018 semester. The *PBADS* (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001) was sent to 42 elementary TCs enrolled in the diversity placement. Of the participants who completed the diversity placement, 76% (n = 29) completed both the pre- and post-survey in their entirety (see Table 2). The demographic makeup of those participants who completed both surveys was majority White (n = 21, 73%) and female (n = 27, 93%).

**Table 2: Survey Respondents' Demographic Statistics**

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Race / Ethnicity		
Two or More Races	1	3.4%
Black	2	6.9%
Hispanic	5	17.2%
White	21	72.4%
Gender		

Male	2	6.9%
Female	27	93.1%
Grade placement		
1st	4	13.8%
2nd	5	17.2%
3rd	9	31.0%
4th	7	24.1%
5th	4	13.8%
Pre-Diversity Placement Instructional Setting		
Seated	24	82.8%
Online	5	17.2%

*Note:* Pre-Diversity Placement Instructional Setting represents the type of university classroom setting the TCs experienced before starting their diversity placement. All diversity placements were completed in a face-to-face elementary school setting.

Five TCs participated in one of two one-time focus groups. One TC participated in a one-on-one interview in December of 2018 (see Table 3). The demographic makeup of the interviewees was majority White (n = 4, 67%) and female (n = 7, 83%). The population surveyed and interviewed for this study is largely representative of the elementary teacher population in the U.S. (Loewus, 2017).

**Table 3: Interview Demographic Details**

Interview Setting/Participants	Race	Gender
One-on-one		
Natasha	Black	Female
Focus Group A		
Jessica	White	Female
Samantha	White	Female
David	Black	Male

## Focus Group B

Rebecca	White	Female
Elise	White	Female

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*Note:* All names have been replaced with pseudonyms. Each interview setting occurred once.

## Instrumentation

The 40-item *PBADS* consists of two subscales, the first is designed to show individuals' personal beliefs, those that are impacted by an individual's lived experience and worldview ( $n = 15$ ), and the second measures individuals' professional beliefs, those which are influenced by individuals' workplace or professional life experiences ( $n = 25$ ) (Dedeoglu & Lamme, 2011). The two subscales are identical in design, consisting of 5-point Likert-formatted items, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This instrument has been regularly used and validated since its development and testing, with only minor changes made to questions throughout that time (Brown, 2004). The reported Cronbach's Alpha reliability for the *Personal Beliefs About Diversity* subscale ranged from .71 to .81 and between .78 and .90 for the *Professional Beliefs About Diversity* subscale (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001).

We added demographic questions (i.e., age, ethnicity, gender, and grade level of diversity placement), an open-ended question (i.e., "Describe what you learned about working with students in your current placement"), and an invitation to participate in an interview to the *PBADS*. The pre-survey was administered via Qualtrics at the end of the 5-week course, prior to the beginning of TCs' 10-week diversity placement. The post-survey was administered following TCs' completion of the placement.

## Focus Group and Individual Interviews

In order to provide a more thorough understanding of TCs' personal and professional beliefs about diversity, both authors conducted one-hour, audio-recorded interviews. Of those TCs expressing interest in an interview when completing the *PBADS* ( $n = 10$ ), six participated in interviews (see Table 3). The researchers opted to conduct focus group interviews based on the understanding that interviewees' interactions may yield more insightful information when compared to individual interviews (Creswell, 2013). Due to a scheduling conflict, "Natasha" was unable to attend either of the two focus group interviews but instead participated in an individual interview. Interviews followed a semi-structured format (Glesne, 2011), allowing researchers to modify/add to pre-established questions during the course of the interview. Interview responses to the following questions were transcribed and analyzed:

- What does diversity mean to you?
- How did people talk about diversity at your field experience site?
- How does the field experience compare to your schooling experience at a similar grade level?
- How does this field experience compare to other field experiences during your time at [Midwest University] (in regard to a "diversity" placement)?



- Describe what you learned about working with students in your current placement.
- Prior to beginning the field experience, what did you expect the placement in a diverse setting to be like?

## Findings

### Quantitative Findings

Data were prepared (e.g., reverse coded) for analysis using SPSS statistical software. Paired-samples t-tests were used to compare the TCs' personal and professional beliefs before and after their 10-week diversity placement. The purpose was to determine the mean score difference in question responses before and after the diversity placement (see Table 4). Statistical significance was set at 0.05. Statistical significance was set at 0.05, which is the same as other studies that have used the *PBADS* (e.g., Cardona, 2005; Kahn et al., 2014; Pohan & Aguilar, 2001).

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics: Personal and Professional Beliefs Pre-/Post-Treatment Change**

Test	Pre-Treatment	Post-Treatment	Difference
Personal Beliefs about Diversity	4.26	4.30	0.04
Professional Beliefs about Diversity	4.06	4.22	0.16

*Note:* The Pre-/Post- scores account for the mean score of all questions per subscale (i.e., *Personal Beliefs about Diversity* and *Professional Beliefs about Diversity*).

For both personal and professional beliefs, the overall trend in mean score change indicated that TCs moved toward greater openness following the diversity placement. Mean scores can best be understood to indicate the relative level of acceptance, awareness, or openness to diversity-related issues (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001). A low score (1.00) indicates a low level of openness, awareness, or acceptance while a high score (5.00) indicates the opposite. In regard to the *Personal Beliefs about Diversity* subscale, the result of the paired-samples t-test did not indicate that statistical significance was achieved for any question (see Figure 1). Nine of the 15 questions indicated a small shift toward greater acceptance of diversity, and the other six questions point to a small regression away from acceptance. In regard to the *Professional Beliefs about Diversity* subscale, two survey questions (Q:16, Fig. 2; Q:21, Fig. 2) yielded statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) increases in mean scores. We present the findings in this section for the questions that reached statistical significance.

One question focused on language of instruction (Q:16, Fig. 2): *Whenever possible, second language learners should receive instruction in their first language until they are proficient enough to learn via English instruction.* Respondents showed a statistically significant increase ( $p$

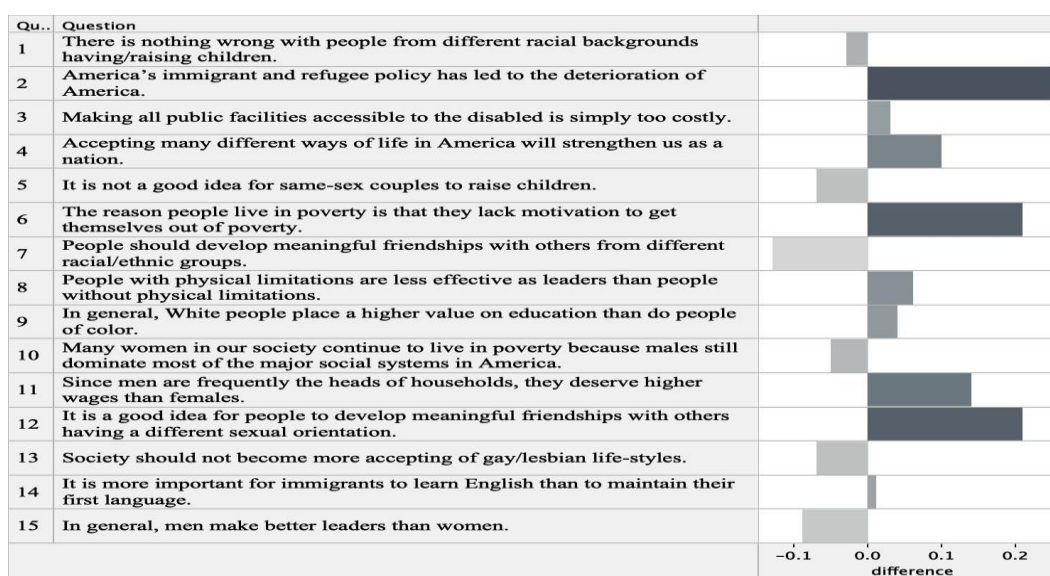
= 0.013) in their response to this question at the completion of the diversity placement ( $M = 4.414$ ) compared to their pre-placement response ( $M = 3.862$ ). The results indicate that following the diversity placement, TCs were more likely to agree that ELLs should receive instruction in their native language until they become proficient in English (see Figure 2).

The second question that yielded statistically significant responses on the post-placement survey dealt with teachers' experiences working with students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Q:21, Fig. 2): *In order to be effective with all students, teachers should have experience working with students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds*. Respondents showed a statistically significant increase ( $p = 0.032$ ) in their response to this question at the completion of the placement ( $M = 4.966$ ) compared to their pre-placement response ( $M = 3.862$ ). While pre-placement results indicated that TCs agreed with this statement, the post-placement results indicate this notion was reinforced (see Figure 2).

The shift in TC perceptions—both personal and professional—was small, ranging from -0.13 to 0.25 for personal beliefs, and -0.18 to 0.65 for professional beliefs. Although small, shifts indicate a move toward change. The length of the bars in Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the amount of change from pre-test to post-test but should not be confused with statistical significance. Overall, results suggest a move toward more openness in both personal and professional beliefs, with professional beliefs showing a more consistent shift toward openness, reiterating previous research (Wassell et al., 2018). Although larger mean score change can be seen on two statistically significant questions (Q:16; 21, Fig. 2), it is important to understand that the mean score change alone does not indicate statistical significance.

Finally, the use of paired-samples t-tests indicates there was a specific *treatment* (i.e., the diversity placement) that may have resulted in a change in post-diversity placement survey results. However, because the TCs in the study were also engaged in additional activities and classes at Midwest University, it is possible that those activities and classes had a mediating effect on the post-diversity placement scores. A paired-samples t-test is unable to account for the effect of these other mediating variables.

**Figure 1: Personal Beliefs Post-Diversity Placement Differences**



*Note.* Difference values reflect the direction of change in mean scores between pre- and post-test. Bar length does not indicate statistical significance.

**Figure 2: Professional Beliefs Post-Diversity Placement Differences**



*Note.* Difference values reflect the direction of change in mean scores between pre- and post-test. Bar length does not indicate statistical significance.

## Qualitative Findings

The open-ended survey question responses, focus group transcripts, and interview transcript were imported into NVivo 11, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. While the first author assumed the primary responsibility of coding the data, both authors engaged in frequent dialogue during analysis about analytic memos, codes (i.e., their definitions and examples), categories, and emerging themes (Saldaña, 2016).

The first author utilized three rounds of coding, following Saldaña's (2016) processes for Attribute Coding, Values Coding, and Focus Coding. During first-cycle coding, Attribute Coding (i.e., participant characteristics) was applied to facilitate easy location within the data set (Saldaña, 2016). Next, we utilized Values Coding to better understand participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs expressed through either their open-ended responses on the survey or their responses during the interviews (Saldaña, 2016). Finally, Focus Coding (Saldaña, 2016) was utilized to look for participant words and/or phrases related to our research question (i.e., How does a diversity placement influence elementary teacher candidates' personal and professional beliefs about working with diverse students?). When identifying codes for professional beliefs or personal beliefs, we relied on Pohan and Aguilar's (2001) conception of personal and professional beliefs about diversity. In terms of personal beliefs about diversity, Focus Coding generated 12 categories including but not limited to *home life/parents* and *class/socioeconomic status*. In terms of professional beliefs about diversity, Focus Coding yielded 14 categories including but not limited to *differentiated instruction*, *student-teacher relationships*, *classroom management*, *support*, and *assumptions*. Finally, 32 codes made up the articulated changes in beliefs category.

Through peer debriefing, we identified and consolidated the major categories from the list provided above (Saldaña, 2016). Within the personal beliefs theme, the two major categories we identified were deficit beliefs about families and deficit beliefs related to socioeconomic status. Within the professional beliefs theme, the two major categories we identified were differentiated instruction and student-teacher relationships. In this section, we detail our findings related to personal and professional beliefs about diversity and articulated changes in participants' beliefs.

### *Personal Beliefs*

After concluding the diversity placement, the interviewed elementary TCs articulated a number of beliefs related to the personal sphere (i.e., "opinions, expectations, or judgments, that a person considers true in [one's] daily life") (Chiner et al., 2015, p. 19). Highlighted in this section are the personal beliefs expressed related to elementary students' families and socioeconomic status.

#### *Deficit Beliefs about Families*

TCs' comments about elementary students' home lives, living conditions, parents, and/or caregivers often revealed deficit beliefs based on stereotypes. For example, Natasha reflected on the differences between her upbringing and home life (two-parent household until her parents' divorce when she was in high school) compared to her students' home lives: "I know a lot of families, especially single-parent homes and things, the mom is working like crazy. There's multiple kids, and there's so much to do." Similarly, "Jessica's" comments revealed her beliefs about students' parents' lack of care:

I worked at a daycare last year, and one of the parents left their kid. And it's like after 30 minutes, you call them. After another 15 minutes, you have to call the police. So, they had to call the police to come get this kid because their mom didn't pick them up. And their excuse was that she was napping. I'm like, "You have children that you have to take care of!" And I don't know. It's just crazy to think that parents do forget about their kids.

A potential result of these expressed deficit beliefs that surfaced during the interviews dealt with TCs viewing themselves as filling a parental void/need for students. "Samantha" shared that she felt like some of her students needed her because they did not have an active parent at home:

Especially just like one of my students, I feel like he doesn't see his mom as often. And so, I think as a person he just, he clings on to me more 'cause I think I'm like the mother figure that he kind of doesn't have right now.

While the above quotes highlight latent deficit views teacher candidates held about students' families over the course of the diversity placement, some comments, however, showed a more nuanced understanding of elementary students' home environments. "David," for example, in response to his peers' discussion of parents' lack of involvement in school-related matters, was the only TC of the six interviewed who articulated an awareness of parents' work schedules that may conflict with that of the school rather than assuming that parents/caregivers do not care about their child's education:

So, viewing the whole scope, like everybody works on different times in life, you know? Some families, like adults in the family, like they'll work at night. Some work early in the morning. And so, they aren't able to make it to certain meetings, or certain events and all that stuff because of the time that they're working with. And so, I definitely think it's so important as a teacher to be able to work with families however you need to.

Deficit beliefs that go unexamined, like those held by David's peers of their students' families, have been documented as a negative outcome of diversity placements (e.g., Kirkland, 2014). Without a means for continually interrogating biases before, during, and after a diversity placement, the placement actually works against the TPP's goals of promoting TCs' equity literacy. Further, the diversity placement can perpetuate a system of power and domination through the TCs' unidirectional gaze on students' families, granting "them the power to describe others as different or aberrant" (Cross, 2005, p. 270).

### *Deficit Beliefs Related to Socioeconomic Status*

Due to state requirements that TCs have at least one diversity placement, Midwest University determined that its TCs diversity placement would occur the semester prior to student teaching, although TCs' may be placed in a qualifying practicum earlier in their experience as well. Depending on previous field experiences, the diversity placement may be the first time a TC is placed in an elementary school with the majority of students living in poverty. The diversity placement contrasts the TPP's first required field experience that placed TCs at the university's private, tuition-

based, laboratory school. Although the university laboratory school does not have an economically diverse student body, it does have a student body that is more racially and/or ethnically diverse than surrounding school districts. It may be unsurprising, then, that during the interviews, the difference in field experiences related to poverty came up numerous times. Yet, often during these discussions, TCs' personal beliefs showed the deficit lens through which they viewed children living in poverty, reiterating previous findings (e.g., Jacobs, 2015). See Table 5 for representative statements related to students living in poverty.

**Table 5: Representative Statements Related to Students Living in Poverty**

Natasha	"Obviously if you could choose, you would be on the wealthier side where you have possibilities."
Samantha	"I had a student [ask] me if I liked Universal or Disney better, and I feel like at my school right now, none of the kids would ask me that. Just because I feel like they haven't gotten to experience that; where[as] the students where I'm going to [student teach] next semester are able to experience a lot more than my students are now."
David	"Because a lot of the time, like diverse students, it is seeing that they don't have as many supportive relationships as a student that may come from a wealthier situation."
Elise	"A lot of 'em have no idea what some of the foods even are because they've never seen fruits and vegetables before."

These comments reveal the assumptions TCs hold about students living in poverty and the types of experiences they deem as valuable. While Natasha comments that students in poverty have fewer possibilities, we are left wondering what she meant by "possibilities." Samantha's comparison of students' experiences across her field experiences hints at the value she associates with certain types of experiences. Moreover, David assumes students in poverty lack supportive relationships, and Elise assumes students in poverty have not seen healthy food, echoing similar findings in other studies where teachers have associated students in urban schools with a lack of family and community resources (Watson, 2011).

While TCs expressed numerous deficit beliefs about students in poverty, comments about students attending the university's lab school showed a different perspective. Samantha, for example, expressed feeling as though the elementary students from her first field experience at the university's private lab school were smarter than she was:

They're just really advanced. I remember going in there, and they already knew our whole entire lesson. And we were just like, "Okay, like there goes all of our hard work." ...Like I'm sitting there thinking, "Wow, this student is probably a lot smarter than me at that age." I just felt out of my element.

The university's lab school is almost entirely composed of students from homes with parents who are university faculty or who possess significant monetary resources that make paying private school tuition possible. Lab school students who are not able to keep up with the aggressively rigorous curriculum timelines often leave the lab school for other local options. This leaves a student population that is more academically homogeneous and able to move through the curriculum faster than is often considered developmentally appropriate.

One of the open-ended survey responses also showed a connection between socioeconomic status and the TCs' perception of student intelligence: "I got to see a wide range of socioeconomic classes and how that compared to their learning abilities." Again, both of these comments—Samantha's and the survey response—reveal the way TCs assign value to certain types of knowledge, experiences, and skills linked to students' socioeconomic status (Jacobs, 2015).

### *Professional Beliefs*

In addition to our findings related to TCs' personal beliefs, our analysis suggests that TCs' professional beliefs about diversity centered on differentiated instruction and student-teacher relationships. Professional beliefs "refer to issues related to schooling (e.g., instructional practices, educational resources, and inclusive education)" (Chiner et al., 2015, p. 19). A discussion of each major category is detailed below.

#### *Differentiated Instruction*

The most frequently recurring code related to TCs' professional beliefs about working with diverse students concerned ways that TCs and/or their cooperating teacher could and should differentiate instruction based on various student factors (e.g., readiness and/or first language). Differentiated instruction is when a teacher modifies curriculum, instruction, and assessments based on students' readiness, interest, and learning profile (Tomlinson, 2014).<sup>2</sup> Knowing how to effectively differentiate instruction is a critical component in supporting diverse learners. TCs expressed an increased awareness of academic diversity within a single classroom and the difficulty of responding to this type of diversity as indicated by Natasha:

When we do our lesson plans, we comment how we're going to reach the lower level learners and the higher level, but never in my lesson planning has my lower levels been so low. That was the most challenging, or my higher-level kids being so high. Again, it was just... they were just all over the place, and to try to find something to hit every kid or most of them was the most challenging because it was again nothing I ever expected.

Similarly, Jessica mentioned feeling ill-equipped to respond to students' diversity in a way that supported them, specifically when teaching ELLs in her upcoming student teaching placement:

I would say more like anxious just because I don't...it's something unknown for me. And it's like I don't like to not know things. So, it just makes me anxious because I want to

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2. Tomlinson (2014) defined readiness as the "entry point relative to particular knowledge, understanding, or skills" (p. 18). Further, one's learning profile is shaped by "intelligence preferences, gender, culture, or learning style" (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 19).

accommodate for those students, but I'm scared that I'm not gonna know how. So, I feel like that's something me and my cooperating teacher are gonna have to figure out when I first go there.

Perhaps one of the reasons TCs expressed feeling anxious about differentiating instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners can be partially attributed to the support or models [not] provided by their CT. Both “Elise” and “Rebecca” reflected on instances when their CTs provided little insight on supporting diverse students academically:

Whenever I taught my first lesson, we read a book, and I translated the entire book that I read in Spanish and gave [the Spanish-speaking student] a copy. My teacher was like, “Why did you spend so much time doing that? Like, that's insane.” But what's the purpose in her sitting here if she doesn't understand what I'm talking about? She's wasting her time. I'm wasting her time. It's just a waste of time. I wish my [cooperating] teacher would've been more helpful.

I would say that my [cooperating] teacher, she never brought up diversity herself. The only time it was brought up is when I was planning my lesson, and I said, “How can I differentiate?” And the only tip she was able to give me was to say to read the questions out loud so that all the students can hear [them], especially the ones that aren't as good at reading as other students are.

Although the diversity placement increased TCs' cultural awareness and provided them with an opportunity to apply previous learning on differentiating instruction, TCs struggled to confidently respond to student readiness, interest, and/or learning profile. Transitioning from writing lesson plans for courses to writing lessons for actual students proved difficult, exacerbated by TCs' limited experience working with diverse students and their CTs' lack of modeling. A diversity placement, then, is greatly limited in its ability to promote TCs' equity literacy when TCs are partnered with CTs who, themselves, neither model equity literacy nor provide guidance to TCs on supporting diverse students. We take up this issue in greater detail in the latter portion of the discussion section below.

### *Student-Teacher Relationships*

All six interviewed TCs discussed the importance of student-teacher relationships between a classroom teacher and their students, some identifying that relationship as the most important thing they learned about when working with diverse students. Their comments revealed specific instances when they formed connections with students, how the relationships affected their interactions and work with students, and perceived gaps in their CTs' approaches to fostering student-teacher relationships. Natasha, for example, mentioned attending specials classes (e.g., art) with her students and using music to connect with a particular student:

I went to art with them a couple of times, and I was like, “Oh, what kind of music do you listen to?” I asked [a student] if she knew who Selena was, and she's like, “Selena Gomez?” I'm like, “No, the real Selena.” She's like, “No.” I was like, “Oh, I forgot you're like seven.” Well, she's nine, but whatever. Just trying to connect with her that way...



Similarly, Rebecca commented on the impact of talking with students each morning while they ate breakfast:

My biggest takeaway from this [diversity placement] was the importance of building relationships with students. I feel like just even talking to them every morning, I would stand out in the hall, and students were allowed to eat breakfast out in the hall. I would just talk to all the students who were out there eating breakfast, even in that 15 minutes of just getting to talk to them, I built really close relationships with the students.

Some of the TCs' comments revealed ways that they were vulnerable with students, allowing TCs to form relational bonds based on shared experiences. Jessica, for instance, reflected on connecting with a student whose grandfather had died before the school year by sharing her experience having recently lost her father:

He expressed to the class that his grandpa's death was holding him back in class...he's one of the students that never wants to do his work, just wants to sit at his desk and sleep or like cry. And so, when we were done with the lesson, he was still crying and I was just observing that day. And I was just standing there like, "I could do so much for this kid and like help him." And my teacher was like we need to move on. And she was like trying to get him ready for the next thing. And I went up to my teacher, and I was like, "If you want me to take him out in the hall, like I know what to say to him. I've gone through this. Like I recently just went through this." So, I took him out in the hallway. And now he just responds so well to me in class whenever I get him to do things because he'll sit there and not do his work. And I'll look at him, and I'm like, "Get on your work." And he'll look at me and smile. And then he'll start working.

David reiterated the sentiment that building relationships with students can increase student compliance:

I really feel that is so important to build those key relationships with students. And being able to be like a supportive relationship for students. Because whenever you are building those supportive relationships with the student, it makes it easier for them to be able to listen to you whenever you need them to be able to do something. Like just lining up, casual things. But whenever they have the trust in you with that supportive relationship, it's just, I don't know. It just really makes things go a lot easier.

Although TCs identified the importance of student-teacher relationships when reflecting on their time in the diversity placement, David and Jessica's comments point to the more utilitarian purposes of those relationships. In other words, rather than building relationships with students from a place of genuine, unconditional care to better understand them as people (and hopefully disrupt TCs' deficit beliefs about them), some TCs' comments hinted at using the relationship to elicit desirable student behaviors. Genuine caring should not be dependent upon a child's behavior.

## *Articulated Change in Beliefs*

As TCs reflected on the diversity placement, they mentioned several ways their beliefs shifted, particularly related to expanding notions of diversity. Their comments highlighted an increased awareness of diversity and the assumptions they held about diverse students. Some of their comments even point to a reality shock as they detailed feeling surprised by their elementary students' experiences, especially when compared to their personal experiences as an elementary student. Natasha mentioned being surprised to learn that she had immigrant students whose parents were in Mexico; children whose parents were in jail; and children raised by single fathers, uncles, or grandparents:

The sentences they would write, I was just like, "Where are you ...?" I would laugh because it shocked me, but I'm like, "Why are you writing this?" One girl wrote, "My parents were scared ... " or afraid or whatever the word was, " ... when child services showed up at our door." I was like, "What? What's happening?" Things like that. Again, me growing up, in fourth grade if I was writing sentences it was like, "Oh, I love my mommy and daddy. My life is great. Cool. This summer we went to Texas," you know, a happy thing.

Similarly, Rebecca compared her childhood to that of the students in her diversity placement:

I would say that when I started, I didn't really see how certain situations the students are in at home would affect their school life. Meeting these students and them coming up to me and telling me the problems they're having at home, and then seeing them fall asleep in class, you kind of understand why they're feeling that way. I didn't really have that empathy before. I just didn't grow up around situations like that, so I didn't really understand.

Other comments showed that an increasing awareness of elementary students' diverse realities caused TCs to interrogate the assumptions they sometimes made about students:

**Table 6: Statements Showing an Increased Awareness of Elementary Students' Diverse Realities**

Samantha	"You never would have thought in a million years that that would have happened, but her mom had to go to a women's shelter in [another city]. Took her daughter with her. We're all just like, we'd just never known"
Elise	"I learned to not make judgments and not pass judgments so quickly...Seeing kids and just assuming, yeah, they're asleep in class, that they don't care, they're not paying attention, you know being able to not pass that judgment and be like, why? Ask that why question before I pass any judgment on anything."
Natasha	"It taught me, one, to ask questions and not to just assume and also to be more understanding that I know not every family's the same, but not every family's the same. It was my first real interaction with something so extreme"

This increasing awareness shows both the possibilities and limitations for diversity placements. As will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, one diversity placement is not enough to significantly alter TCs’ personal and professional beliefs about diverse students. We wonder how differently they might have experienced this final semester before student teaching if they had multiple diversity placements throughout their TPP that included critical reflection and ongoing dialogue about biases and opportunities to learn alongside and collaborate with elementary teachers who model equity literacy.

## Discussion

Although the sample size in this study was small ( $n = 29$ ), a number of findings are worth noting related to TCs’ personal and professional beliefs about diversity at the conclusion of a 10-week diversity placement. In this section, we summarize the significant findings from the quantitative data and extend the discussion by drawing on the qualitative findings. Together, these data enable us to answer the question guiding this study: How does a diversity placement influence elementary teacher candidates’ personal and professional beliefs about working with diverse students?

### Personal Beliefs About Diversity

Pajares (1992) contended that deeply ingrained personal beliefs or those based on early experiences are resistant to change when compared to professional beliefs. The initial findings of this study reiterate Pajares’ (1992) findings. Nine of the 15 questions on the *Personal Beliefs About Diversity* subscale revealed only a small increase in awareness, acceptance, or openness in regard to the question asked. This finding aligns with existing research that has shown that drastically altering TCs’ beliefs about diverse students over one semester is unlikely (Pohan et al., 2009). However, Pohan et al. (2009) argued that even a small increase toward more openness reflects movement in the desired direction. We discuss the small moves toward increased openness to diversity in greater detail in the implications section below.

Additionally, our qualitative findings shed light on *how* TCs’ personal beliefs were altered post-diversity placement. Corroborating previous findings on the potential of diversity placements to reinforce negative perspectives about marginalized populations (Cross, 2005; Gallego, 2001; Gay, 2000; Haberman & Post, 1992; Jacobs, 2015), our findings (see, for example, Table 5) suggest that placing TCs in a diverse school setting may reinforce deficit beliefs about students’ families and students’ socioeconomic status. While it is impossible to know how the participating TCs in this study viewed students prior to the diversity placement aside from their responses on the *PBADS* pre-diversity placement, it is possible that the diversity placement may have resulted in the development of new problematic perspectives toward marginalized communities (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Burant & Kirby, 2002). Deficit beliefs coupled with teacher candidates’ positions of power (Cross, 2005; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Shim, 2016) point to the continued need for TPPs to disrupt TCs’ deficit views before such views end up limiting TCs’ students’ academic success (Guerra & Wubbena, 2017), as will be addressed in the implications section.

## Professional Beliefs About Diversity

In terms of TCs' professional beliefs related to diversity, of the 25 questions on the *Professional Beliefs About Diversity* subscale, all but two questions—ELL language instruction (Q:16, Fig. 2) and the necessity of teachers' experience working with racially and ethnically diverse students (Q:21, Fig. 2)—saw an increased score on the post-diversity placement survey. These general findings are not altogether surprising as they have been observed in other studies using the *PBADS* (e.g., Cardona, 2005; Kahn et al., 2014). Professional beliefs, especially for TCs, are still evolving during one's time in a TPP and thus may be less resistant to change when compared to personal beliefs (Pajares, 1992). While it is perilous to draw conclusions from anything that is not statistically significant, it is worth recognizing broad trends present in the data. For both personal and, to a slightly greater degree, professional beliefs, the overall trend indicated that TCs moved toward greater openness following the diversity placement. Finally, the two questions that were statistically significant highlight the importance of diversity placements (i.e., *PBADS* scores showed more openness, awareness, and acceptance as a result of the placement). Each of these findings is discussed in detail in the following sections.

### *Working with English Language Learners*

First, the question (Q: 16, Fig. 2) regarding second language development (i.e., *Whenever possible, second language learners should receive instruction in their first language until they are proficient enough to learn via English instruction*) points to one of the important aspects of diversity placements. Nearly all of the diversity placement sites (i.e., Title I elementary schools) were attended by ELL students. For many of the TCs, this would have been their first opportunity to apply theory to practice by working with ELLs in an elementary school setting. The increase in mean scores on this question from pre- to post-diversity placement survey could be a result of this placement being the teacher candidates' first direct contact with ELLs in a school setting.

Interviews showed an increased awareness of the diversity present in elementary classrooms as a result of the diversity placement, particularly related to ELLs. While TCs acknowledged the need to differentiate and provide individualized support for ELLs, some commented on feeling ill-equipped to do so. Rather than making them feel more confident in their ability to support ELLs, the diversity placement actually had an adverse effect on TCs' confidence to teach diverse students, echoing previous research by Gomez et al. (2009). This low self-efficacy may be a result of cooperating teachers who provided little guidance to TCs in terms of specific ways to accommodate for ELLs, reiterating the necessity of partnering TCs with CTs who model culturally responsive teaching, specifically as it relates to supporting ELLs (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Siwatu et al., 2011).

### *Necessity of Diversity Placement*

Additionally, prior to the diversity placement, the majority of TCs agreed or strongly agreed ( $n = 25$ ) that teachers need to have experiences working with diverse students (i.e., *In order to be effective with all students, teachers should have experience working with students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds* [Q: 21, Fig. 2]). After the diversity placement, TCs felt even stronger about this statement. Moreover, interviews revealed specific ways the placement enhanced TCs' effectiveness with diverse students. For example, the diversity placement provided

TCs with relationship-building strategies, which TCs noted are particularly important when working with diverse students, aligning with previous research (e.g., Fry & McKinney, 1997; Martin et al., 2013; Miller & Mikulec, 2014). Additionally, interviewed TCs' articulated changes in beliefs highlighted the reality shock TCs experienced during the diversity placement. Such experiences, according to TCs, allowed them to notice ways that their personal experiences as former elementary students are not representative of all students' lived experiences. TCs' cultural consciousness increased during the diversity placement which may have enabled them to interrogate various assumptions they held about diverse students, even though their personal beliefs about diversity point to the need to continually interrogate biases before, during, and after similar diversity placements (Kirkland, 2014).

### **Limitations**

While our research extends the literature on the impact of diversity placements on teacher candidates, our study has a number of limitations. As mentioned previously, when using a paired-samples t-test, a small sample size makes it difficult to reach statistical significance. In addition, focus groups and interviews were conducted in the final semester before participants returned to locales throughout the Midwest to complete their student teaching. Multiple rounds of interviews and member checking with participants would have increased the validity of the analysis (Creswell, 2013). Future research utilizing the *PBADS*, informed by this and similar studies, will benefit from larger population samples. Also, future research design that allows for multiple rounds of interviews may lead to additional nuance around teacher candidates' personal and professional beliefs about diversity.

### **Implications for Teacher Education**

Based on the aforementioned findings, we present three recommendations to TPPs that utilize diversity placements to enhance TCs' personal and professional beliefs about diversity. Our recommendations are especially suited for TPPs like Midwest University that enroll mostly White, middle-class TCs.

#### **Require Multiple Diversity Placements**

In TPPs requiring a diversity placement as part of TCs' degree completion, that field experience should be moved as early in TCs' learning experiences as possible. This recommendation is especially important for TPPs situated within communities with majority White K-12 student populations. Midwest University TCs in this study experienced the diversity placement one semester prior to student teaching. For some, the experience was overwhelming because a majority of the previous field experiences had taken place in school settings with majority White and medium-to-high income student populations. Earlier placements in diverse settings allow TCs to contextualize their TPP coursework related to working with diverse students (Gomez et al., 2009), while also highlighting potential areas of professional development TCs may be interested in pursuing. For example, early exposure to ELL student populations allows TCs time to pursue additional certification/education in ESL/ELL or bilingual education.

## Provide a Scaffolded Approach to Diversity Placements

Midwest University's elementary TPP scaffolds TCs' field experiences by requiring an observational practicum at the beginning of their time in the program and gradually requiring TCs take on more of the classroom teacher responsibilities during subsequent field experiences. However, Midwest University does not follow this same scaffolded approach to diversity placements by only requiring one such placement which typically occurs during the final semester of coursework before student teaching. Aligning with the recommendations put forth by Siwatu et al. (2011), we recommend TPPs follow a similar progression but with an emphasis on providing TCs with "substantial contact" in diverse settings (Groulx, 2001, p. 85). Merely adding more diversity placements does not ensure meaningful change in personal and professional beliefs about diversity (Kirkland, 2014). Following previous research recommendations, we suggest that diversity placements should be embedded throughout the TPP and coupled with a course that allows TCs to interpret their experiences (Sleeter, 2001); examine their evolving dispositions, beliefs, and biases through discussion (Cochran-Smith, 1995; He & Cooper, 2009; Kirkland, 2014); and engage in critical reflection before, during, and after the diversity placement (Acquah & Commins, 2016; Dyce & Owusu-Ansah, 2016; Kyles & Olafson, 2008). Such coursework would ideally equip teacher candidates to build genuine relationships with a diverse group of students based on mutual trust rather than building relationships as a means to an end as was hinted at by some of the participants in this study. See Table 7 for an explanation of this approach to diversity placements over time in a TPP.

**Table 7: Scaffolded Approach to Diversity Placements**

Observation: School Community	In conjunction with a class on diversity and inclusion, TCs engage in an observational diversity placement, during which they seek to increase understanding of the school and its various stakeholders.
Observation: Students	In conjunction with a class on cross-cultural relations, TCs engage in an observational diversity placement, during which they observe students.
Community-Based Service Learning	In conjunction with a class on learning theories (e.g., educational psychology), TCs engage in one-on-one tutoring with diverse students.
Microteaching	In conjunction with a methods course, TCs design and carry out small-group lessons with diverse students.
Student Teaching	TCs move from co-teaching to teaching independently.

*Note: Adapted from Siwatu et al. (2011, p. 215)*

## **Place Teacher Candidates with Cooperating Teachers Who Model Equity Literacy**

Finally, the impact of one's cooperating teacher on a TC's personal and professional beliefs cannot be overstated. Scholars studying teaching self-efficacy and drawing from Bandura's (1982) social cognitive theory, have provided ample evidence as to the impact of a cooperating teacher on TCs' teaching self-efficacy development. In particular, cooperating teachers may contribute to TCs' self-efficacy development through the feedback they provide (or don't provide) on TCs' teaching and/or through the way they model various teaching practices (Christopherson et al., 2016; Martins et al., 2015; McKim & Velez, 2017). The same is true for enhancing TCs' beliefs about working with diverse students: cooperating teachers may contribute to TCs' increased or decreased sense of self-efficacy teaching diverse students (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Siwatu et al., 2011). During the interviews in this study, TCs noted several instances when their CTs expressed deficit beliefs about diverse students and families (e.g., parents don't care, poor students haven't seen fruits or vegetables). Additionally, TCs spoke of times when CTs removed "difficult" children from the classroom when TCs taught a lesson that would be observed by their university supervisor. CTs rarely acknowledged diversity in the classroom with TCs and offered little guidance on responding to student difference through differentiation. Due to the role that vicarious experiences (e.g., cooperating teacher modeling), verbal persuasion (e.g., cooperating teacher feedback), and mastery experiences (e.g., actually teaching a group of diverse students) (Bandura, 1982) play in TCs' self-efficacy to teach diverse students, it is not surprising that TCs felt ill-equipped to teach in diverse settings when their CT rarely acknowledged diversity, expressed deficit beliefs, provided little guidance for supporting diverse students, and limited TCs' opportunities to teach all students. Therefore, given the impact of CTs on TCs' beliefs and practices, TPPs should intentionally foster partnerships with cooperating teachers who model equity literacy in their work with elementary students and families. In order to enhance relationships with CTs who model equity literacy, TPPs must establish systems for supporting CTs' equity literacy while also actively avoiding placements with CTs that have little interest in supporting or modeling continual development of equity literacy. One way TPPs may accomplish this task is by providing and supporting professional development on culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017) with partner districts. TPPs often have the expertise and resources to provide meaningful training, and districts are often open to this type of development without always having the resources or expertise to provide meaningful professional development.

## **Conclusion**

Teacher preparation continues evolving in response to ever changing educational challenges combined with student population changes and needs (NCES, 2019). This study highlights the challenges and opportunities presented by diversity placements in teacher education, particularly in teacher preparation programs (TPPs) with a largely homogeneous student and community population similar to that at Midwest University. In this study, the diversity placement was the first time the majority of participating Midwest University teacher candidates (TCs) had worked closely with diverse students. For the most part, those interactions and experiences contributed to an increase in openness, acceptance, and awareness, especially when it came to TCs' professional beliefs about diversity. At the same time, TCs showed smaller gains in their personal beliefs, and as indicated during the interviews, the diversity placement actually reinforced negative stereotypes

and deficit beliefs about students and families. Simply requiring a diversity placement as a hoop to jump through (Ladson-Billings, 2010) has been shown to be ineffective at positively altering TCs' beliefs. Therefore, as TPPs work to address the cultural mismatch between TCs and their future students, TPPs may need to restructure their course sequence and field experience requirements to promote multiple opportunities for TCs to engage with diverse students over time and with adequate support from associated coursework and exemplary cooperating teachers.

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