

Teaching in the Age of Racial and Ethnic Diversity: The Implications of Perspectives, Preparation, and Pedagogy Introductory Reflection

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Abstract

Although American's Pre-K-12 classrooms are becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, the teaching force remains primarily White. We acknowledge that conversations surrounding race can be difficult, but are necessary to facilitate, establish, and maintain civil discourse surrounding race and other related topics that have implications to the field of education. Therefore, this special edition provides a space for such conversations to take place through critically engaged qualitative and quantitative research, as well as research based on philosophical perspectives that explored historical and contemporary policies or issues of diversity in education, practices, and pedagogies.

Keywords: *racial diversity, culturally relevant teaching, pedagogical excellence, racial literacy, anti-racist pedagogy, multilingual education, Voices of Baltimore*

The inspiration for this special themed edition of *Thresholds in Education* originated when the two guest editors presented at the 2018 Critical Questions in Education (CQIE) Conference in Kansas City, Missouri. It was there that we discussed proposing this themed edition with the intention of inviting conference speakers and attendees. As it turned out, we had an open invitation to others beyond the conference.

The premise of this special edition is rooted in the fact that the field of education is comprised of various areas of interest and examination that brings together an international and interdisciplinary group of scholars. Our field is located at the intersection of critical theory, curriculum and instruction, classroom management, special education, disability studies in education, and multicultural education research. Because we recognize the tremendous impact of historical legislation and current policies related to diversity in constructing a broader understanding of teaching, teachers, and diversity in the 21st century classroom, we found it essential to situate our definition of diversity; as one that is multifaceted and includes concepts related to race, gender, religion, social class, and ability/(dis)ability. However, for the purpose of this themed edition, we were intentional in our decision to focus solely on issues related to race and ethnicity.

The landscape of America's schools and classrooms continue to be permeated with issues related to race and culture (Howard, 2020). As our Pre-K-12 classrooms become increasingly diverse, the teaching force remains primarily White (Quinn & Stewart, 2019). Using nationally represented data from 1975-2016, Quinn and Stewart concluded, "that compared with racially minoritized respondents, White educators are less supportive of government equalizing efforts, hold more negative racial stereotypes of African Americans, and express more social distance from

minoritized groups” (p. 272). Therefore, we agree with Howard (2020) who asserts that in order for teachers to function in ethnically and racially diverse classrooms, they will need the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to talk, teach, and think across racial and cultural differences. Conversations surrounding race can be difficult, but are necessary to facilitate, establish, and maintain civil discourse surrounding race and other related topics. According to Kay (2018), in order for such conversations to take place in the classroom, the classroom environment must be conducive to dialogue that is rich, engaging, and meaningful.

In this regard, we consider the implications of perspectives (Murdock & Hamel, 2016), preparation (Casto, 2020; Padua & Smith, 2020), and pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b) and teaching in an age of racial and ethnic diversity. As such, we seek to provide clarity of the opportunities and challenges facing not only teacher preparation programs, but schools and the teachers in them, regarding practices and policies for more inclusive and equitable teaching and learning.

This special issue sought critically engaged qualitative and quantitative research, as well as research based on philosophical perspectives that explored historical and contemporary policies or issues of diversity in education, practices, and pedagogies. Our goal was to present research that invites audiences to engage in the following key concerns/questions: Why is a racial literacy framework productive for teacher educators working with teacher candidates due to its developmental, ongoing, non-linear nature?; How does diversity placement influence elementary teacher candidates personal and professional beliefs about working with diverse students?; In which ways can professional development help teachers and administrators come to understand and engage with students from diverse backgrounds.

The five contributions to this themed issue are highly relevant to those individuals interested in exploring how historical and current contextual forces influence the ways the education of diverse students is constructed, rationalized, problematized and/or experienced in society. Specifically, each explores not only the challenges of addressing race and ethnicity in education but ways to move our work forward for constructive and positive change.

In the first study, Denise Reid, Ayris Temidara, Sergio Merida, and Xavier Buck provide an investigation of the educational experiences of 44 individuals who attended, taught, or served as an administrator at a Black segregated school during the Jim Crow Era. Culturally relevant pedagogy was used to interpret the meaning the participants assigned to their lived experience.

Next, Rosalie Rolón-Dow, Jill Ewing Flynn, and Lynn J. Worden use racial literacy scholarship, empirical teacher education studies and the English/Language Arts as a framework for literacy. Their research project examines student response to racial literacy in teacher preparation curriculum in developing and teaching antiracist pedagogy.

Chloé S. Bolyard and A. Minor Baker explore the cultural mismatch among increasingly diverse K-12 schools and teacher preparation programs that graduate mostly middle-class, White teacher candidates. Utilizing mixed-methods they examine the influence of a diversity placement on elementary teacher candidates’ personal and professional beliefs about diversity.

In the fourth study, Jenna L. Canillas reviews orientations toward educating multilingual students with a focus on recent policies and initiatives in California, investigating the linguistic and cultural resources that English learners bring to school as funds of identity. Teachers’ perspectives are examined in light of student survey results.

In the final essay, Gary Homana shares insights on *Voices of Baltimore: Life under Segregation*, a documentary film that preserves the rich oral histories of seven African Americans who

attended segregated schools in the Mason-Dixon border area of Maryland. It asks the question “Where have we been, and where are we going”—which is so timely today.