Action in Teacher Education

Cultural Competencies: Essential Elements of Caring-Centered Multicultural Education

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Cultural Competencies: Essential Elements of Caring-Centered Multicultural Education

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Caring-centered multicultural education is a framework in the field of education with the major goal of providing all students with equitable education and to address the achievement gap between mainstream and culturally diverse students. Within this orientation, culture is seen as a core component of effective teaching. Therefore, cultural competencies must be foundational in teacher preparation and professional development. Cultural competencies for K–12 educators must include reviewing biases and cultural misconceptions, implementation of English language development strategies, teaching of high-level discipline content, and guiding students in decision making and critical thinking skills.

Cultural competencies are fundamental elements in the caring-centered framework for multicultural education (Pang, 2010). Attention to culture is one of the foundations of effective teaching especially in a nation like the United States where 45% of students in 2008 and 2009 were from culturally diverse families (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Unfortunately, many culturally diverse students do not do well in schools demonstrating a large achievement gap with mainstream learners. The Civil Rights Project (2005) at Harvard University found that culturally diverse students achieved much lower graduation rates in 2002: only 57% of African Americans, 60% of Latinos, and 52% of Native Americans graduated in comparison to 71% of all students in California. The results of this study demonstrate the need for culturally competent educators. Individuals who have cultural competencies comprehend, understand, and behave effectively when faced with culturally diverse situations, where assumptions, values, and traditions differ from those traditions with which they are accustomed (Stevens, 2009).

Cultural dissonance often occurs in schools when students come with a variety of worldviews, expectations, and motivations that differ from their classmates and teachers (Grant, 2008). However, culturally competent teachers know how to tap into the diverse cultures of their students to make learning meaningful and comprehensible. In this way, students then are able to make sense of what is being taught and to utilize the new content, abilities, and attitudes in the

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development of high levels of content area knowledge, citizenship skills, and critical thinking skills (Pang et al., 2011).

Culture is like the air; it is always there (Pang, 2010, p. 36). Culture warms children; it is a blanket from their families that embraces them when they are first born. Culture guides children. Culture affirms the identities of children. Culture provides children with filters that shape their interpretations of life experiences. Culture is all encompassing. *Culture* refers to explicit elements such as language, dress, food, artifacts, songs, symbols, and stories. It also includes interactional patters such as customs, communication patterns, conversational styles, and gender roles (Valle, 1998). However, the most essential level of culture comprises the values, beliefs, norms, philosophy, and/or expectations of a cultural group. These values and beliefs serve to direct and motivate children as they learn throughout their lives.

Educators need to develop cultural competencies because they are skills that teachers can employ in their teaching to reach all students. Educators with cross-cultural skills are more effective because they can identify and utilize cultural contexts and cultural content that can serve as cross-cultural bridges (Gallavan, 2000; King, Sims, & Osher, 2000) in their instructional interactions with students. For example, teachers can insert culturally relevant examples in classroom discussions to assist students in making connections with what they know and the content they are learning. In addition, not only does the use of cultural competencies affirm the cultural orientations that students bring to the classroom but also reinforces caring relationships between teachers and students.

Development of caring, trusting relationships is key to the creation and implementation of student-centered instruction where students are actively engaged in their learning. Culturally competent educators cultivate their abilities to combine the ethic of care and elements of culture in creating effective learning environments. However, Gallavan (2000) found in her study of teacher educators that many preservice and inservice educators were resistant to learning about cultural differences. In fact, teacher educators reported that a majority of preservice and practicing teachers were antagonistic toward working with students from culturally diverse communities or developed a superficial view of culture. Her findings are troubling and point to the need to focus on the integration of culture and caring in the development of classrooms where equality in education is at their core (Pang, 2010).

Cultural competencies are central to providing an education that is founded upon the belief of equal educational opportunities and equal outcomes. Educators must implement the same favorable opportunities to all learners that include high-quality books, up-to-date educational materials, access to technology, well-designed curriculum, and effective instruction (Grant, 2008). For many culturally diverse students, cultural competencies in teachers are vital elements in ensuring that they, children and adolescents, have equal opportunities to learn.

CULTURAL COMPETENCIES THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CARING-CENTERED MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

The prominence of culture in the caring-centered multicultural education framework is intertwined with the development of caring and socially just schools. This framework is a system of beliefs built on three theories (Pang, 2010): the first theory is the ethic of care (Noddings, 1992), the second theory is the sociocultural theory of learning (Cole, 1996), and the third

theory is education for democracy (Dewey, 1916). Culture is at the core of caring-centered multicultural education because it is seen as important in the development of effective learning, caring relationships, and the dedicated building of a strong nation dedicated to social justice.

In caring-centered education, the ethic of care identifies educational aspects such as teacher empathy, positive school climate, affirmation of students, commitment to care for others, and the development of a compassionate community that is most effectively created when teachers appreciate and have cultural knowledge of their students and families. Social justice is more than an abstract and hypothetical principle; rather social justice is a belief that is embedded in active caring. When teachers care about their students, teachers want to know about student cultural values, expectations, and behaviors because knowing this information will assist teachers in implementing effective instruction.

Culture is also a key factor in human growth and development, and the creation of effective conditions for learning (Pang, 2010). Teachers can utilize student lived experiences and knowledge as building blocks in the learning process so that students construct meaning themselves (Olgetree & Larke, 2010; Pang et al., 2011). The caring-centered framework for multicultural education is culture centered and relationship centered and focuses on mentoring students to become responsible citizens in a nation founded on social justice and compassion.

Cultural Competencies in Caring-Centered Schools

One of the key goals of education is to provide educational equity for all students, and this can be accomplished through comprehensive systemic restructuring of schooling (Gay, 2004; Grant, 2008). Gay (2004) and Grant (2008) believe that multicultural education is positioned to integrate issues of diversity and social justice into schools. Because underrepresented groups such as African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Latinos, and Native Americans were excluded from quality education prior to and after the Supreme Court Decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Gay called for a nation where its diversity, equal educational opportunities, and equal educational outcomes can be found throughout schools. As part of this call, it is imperative for educators to develop cultural competencies and construct high-quality education for the entire student population.

This chapter focuses on basic cultural competencies that educators must hold so that schools can provide educational equity. Educators can provide culturally and linguistically diverse students with exceptional education if they know how to support and access student knowledge. Grant (2008) reminded teachers that education is much more than textbooks and the lessons taught but includes the power that teachers hold in choosing the curriculum, student and teacher attitudes, who plays the lead in school musicals, which sports are included in afterschool programs, and if issues of inequality and cultural diversity are discussed in class. Therefore, we believe teachers must hold the following cultural competencies in order to most effectively teach all students.

    1. Competence in understanding one's own biases and cultural orientations: Teacher bias and misconceptions can act as serious obstacles to the implementation of high-quality and effective teaching (Gallavan, 2000).

Educators working with students must develop cultural competencies that allow them to respond in ways that support the full development of each student. It is essential for educators

to acquire a clear understanding of one's own cultural orientation and biases. This competence, often referred to in literature as cultural proficiency, requires an understanding of one's own culture, values, assumptions and beliefs, which guides her or his actions (Campbell Jones, Campbell Jones, & Lindsey, 2010).

Campbell Jones and his colleagues (2010) explained specifically what cultural proficiency refers to:

> educators are the products of our societal context, hence shaped by the education they received . . . without critical self-reflection on the values and beliefs that define our morality, teachers and school leaders are inclined to continue in unquestioning fashion the educational traditions they received. (pp. ix)

Cultural proficiency involves an "inside-out process" of personal and organizational change (Campbell Jones et al., 2010; Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; Terrell & Lindsay, 2008). This process refers to the idea of change always beginning with self. It involves taking personal responsibility for looking at one's cultural upbringing and reflecting on the values and beliefs an individual acquired through her or his upbringing. Although often a painful and difficult process, cultural proficiency calls individuals to examine how their biases may hinder their colleagues and student's growth because they impose their values and beliefs on others.

Numerous authors have called on expanded efforts to address cultural competency and proficiency in teacher preparation programs (Johnson & McIntosh, 2009; Madda & Schultz, 2009; Pang, 2010; Tidwell & Thompson, 2008; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008). To prepare educators to work with all students, teacher education programs must provide opportunities for future educators to explore the complexities of culture. Too often educators may have good intentions in the classroom, but their lack of cultural and self-awareness prohibits educators from responding in positive and affirming ways to all students.

In *The Culturally Proficient School, An Implementation Guide for School Leaders*, Lindsey, Roberts, and Campbell Jones (2005) provided a framework of the cultural proficiency continuum that equips educators to diagnose values and behaviors that can better influence their practices in the education profession. There are six elements in the continuum:

Cultural destructiveness: negating, disparaging, or purging cultures that are different from your own

Cultural incapacity: elevating the superiority of our own cultural values and beliefs and suppressing cultures that are different from your own

Cultural blindness: acting as if differences among cultures do not exist and refusing to recognize any differences

Cultural precompetence: recognizing that lack of knowledge, experience, and understanding of other cultures limits your ability to effectively interact with them

Cultural competence: interacting with other cultural groups in ways that recognize and value their differences, motivate you to assess your own skills, expand your knowledge and resources, and, ultimately cause you to adapt your relational behavior

Cultural proficiency: honoring the differences among cultures, seeing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among a variety of cultural groups.

The authors offer this continuum as a guide in gauging personal attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors. It is also recommended that individuals reflect upon their reactions to cultural

distinctiveness and expressions different from their own sense of cultural identity. These reflections can serve as insights about personal cultural proficiency. These considerations also can be useful to gauge the values and beliefs the organizations and schools that serve students.

Singleton and Linton (2006) offered a type of dialogue, courageous conversation, as a strategy for deinstitutionalizing racism (and cultural bias) to improve student achievement. Courageous conversation was initially created so that K– 12 and higher education educators could examine why students of color were not gaining access to effective schooling and, subsequently, admission to college. Through this dialogue, participants make a conscious decision to talk about race so that ignorance and racial tensions can be eliminated in schools. To effectively participate, educators must be committed to staying engaged, engaged, experiencing discomfort, speaking one's truth, and expecting and accepting nonclosure. Building trust with colleagues and inviting difficult conversations can be a positive and helpful way to look at personal and organizational cultural values and biases while supporting others to do the same.

Educators must engage in the development of cultural competencies where they review their own biases and understandings about culture:

- Assess one's prejudices about other cultural groups, values, and behaviors
- Examine ways in which prejudice can be found in school policies, practices, and curriculum
- Study the cultural world views of others and identify ways in which differences may arise in schools
- Interact with culturally diverse individuals and organizations expanding one's knowledge and conceptions of others and modify one's behaviors
- Honor the cultures of others and identify ways that diversity enriches society.

Cultural competencies are crucial in the development of competent educators. In addition, it is imperative that professionals begin with a critical awareness of the influence of culture in their own lives. Only then, can they be conscious of the dynamics of culture in others' environments. This process is essential to genuinely partake in cross-cultural work. Educators must participate in self-reflection of biases that they have never recognized, considered, or confronted before change can occur (Teel, 2008). Moving teachers and other school personnel through the cultural proficiency continuum, educators can progress from holding extremely negative views about cultural differences to respecting and appreciating the richness of diverse cultures. Although challenging, this work is a catalyst for more authentic and engaging relationships with students and colleagues, and also, a more true sense of self.

2. Competence in providing effective instruction for students who are English learners: In many schools, students come with a first language other than English. Educational equality for language diverse students rests on the abilities of teachers to utilize language acquisition skills in their teaching (Garcia, 2005).

The development of cultural competencies to specifically address the needs of linguistically diverse students is imperative for educators and the schools they attend. Culturally responsive teaching is integral to the communication process of teaching and learning (Gay, 2010). This approach to education is an ever-more pressing matter as current demographic shifts in the United States point to a dramatic increase in the number of school-age immigrant youth entering the public school system (Lucas, 1996) from countries whose national language is a language other than English. Fix and Capps (2005) reported, "between 1993 and 2003, the LEP population

rose 84 percent while the overall student population increased 12 percent" (p. 2). The growth of English Language Learners (ELLs) across the United States demonstrates the need for educators to connect with their students from a linguistic and a cultural perspective, in that each characteristic is inarguably linked within students' personal identities and the manner in which they approach the notion of learning.

As the number of immigrant youth who are concurrently ELLs surge in the nation's schools, the political climate is calling for an increasing push toward an English-only educational system, as demonstrated by the passage of restrictive language policies in states such as California, Arizona, and Massachusetts in recent years (Crawford, 1999; Garcia, 2005). These policies require ELLs to be taught "overwhelmingly" in English, often with few language supports to assist them in accessing the high-level academic vocabulary utilized in content-area classes.

Due to such policies, ELLs, though often highly motivated to learn, struggle to comprehend the school culture and the dominant language utilized. ELLs are commonly enrolled in classes that require an understanding of content specific grade-level academic vocabulary and concepts, though many are still learning to communicate basic ideas and needs. Lucas (1996) asserted that for many students "the inability to communicate ideas and feelings confidently can result in confusion, frustration, anger, and alienation" (p. 2).

In addition, the cultural value system immigrant youth bring to the new environment is not appreciated in an English-only schooling environment in the same manner as the dominant school culture, making it difficult for many to negotiate the methods in which schools operate. Lucas (1996) stated "immigrant students must balance the value systems of their native culture, ever present at home, with those of the dominant culture, which prevail at school" (p. 2). The considerable difficulties facing ELLs, such as a lack of comprehension within an English-only educational system coupled with issues understanding or connecting to the American school system, regularly causes English language learners to achieve at lower academic levels than their native English speaking counterparts, therefore maintaining the already dramatic achievement gap between English-only students and ELLs. It is crucial that educators utilize culturally responsive strategies to assist students in connecting to and accessing the concepts and curricula with which they are being educated.

One of the most important aspects in teaching ELLs is the sociocultural context; students' acquisition of academic vocabulary and content skills in English is strengthened by using students' primary or heritage language as means to facilitate students' acquisition of academic vocabulary and content skills in English (Garcia, 2005; Gay, 2010). Language is a social construct and is heavily influenced by the cultural group with whom one identifies, and therefore educators must consider students' home cultures and languages in developing and conveying class curricula and daily lessons. As Garcia (2005) asserted, "if the culture of the classroom negates a child's first language and accompanying representations of the child's world, it negates the tools the child has used to construct a basic cognitive framework" (p. 33).

In other words, students must have the opportunity to acquire academic English vocabulary and content skills utilizing the cultural and social contexts, as well as language, through which they have previously been exposed. It is essential students' home cultures and languages are valued and built upon to allow students to access the tools necessary to connect their home culture and language with that of the dominant group in this nation. In addition, teachers must connect students' prior knowledge to the concepts they are teaching by learning about students' lived

experiences, therefore helping students to connect to the curricula from which they are being instructed (Pang, 2010).

Along with understanding the significance of students' home cultures and identities and assisting students to connect with the class curricula, educators should utilize primary language instruction to help their students build strong literacy and content skills through comprehensible input (Krashen, 1996). ELLs who possess strong academic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as those who acquire skills through a strong bilingual program, often outperform their U.S.-born equivalent (Valenzuela, 1999). Students enrolled in such programs have the additional benefit of being immersed in a bicultural, bilingual environment, one that gives merit to their home language and their home cultures, in lieu of the English-only models which tend to focus on full assimilation rather than multiculturalism and multilingualism.

The following are basic competencies that teachers need to develop to work successfully with English learners:

- Affirm the primary language and ethnic identity of English learners
- Use primary languages of English learners to facilitate the teaching of academic language and content skills in English
- Connect school curriculum and pedagogy with student home cultures, experiences, and languages
- Identify and discuss value and behavioral differences in educational systems from school systems in other countries and the United States.

In teaching ELLs, teachers must take time to learn about and analyze their students' cultural backgrounds with the hope of better understanding how to competently connect their daily practices and strategies to the lives of their students. Culturally competent teachers employ specific approaches in educating their students, approaches that value students' home cultures and languages. Educators are most effective teaching ELLs when they utilize texts that explain about or connect to students' cultural backgrounds. Using culturally relevant texts help students to identify with the material and understand that their culture is valued within the classroom. Additionally, culturally congruent texts access students' prior knowledge and understandings, and help students connect their understandings to new vocabulary and content strategies.

ELLs enter our nation's classrooms from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Culturally competent teachers further give students the opportunity to dialogue about their home cultures and languages to assist them in connecting their backgrounds to that of the dominant cultural group within this country. Teachers of ELLs should introduce examples of common U.S. customs and traditions to the students and give them an opportunity to write and dialogue about the commonalities and differences between their culture practices and those of the United States. This type of dialogue serves to give voice to the students, while concurrently teaching them about the country in which they are presently members. The bridging of cultural backgrounds further teaches the entire classroom community to appreciate and value one's own background, while gleaning new understandings concerning their peers' identities and heritages.

3. Competence in interdisciplinary content and meaningful instructional practices: Teachers must be experts in academic disciplines and guide students to understand complex concepts and address intricate social issues in a democratic nation and global society (Pang & Park, 2011).

Teachers at all levels of schooling must have comprehensive subject area and instructional practice capabilities. They must provide all students access to and instruction in high-level discipline content; in this way students are able to make meaningful connections with deep subject matter knowledge and their lives. To accomplish this goal, teachers must hold credentials within their field of study, align curriculum to the necessary content standards, prepare appropriate instructional strategies, use assessments for learning, set high academic expectations for all students, and mentor students become prepared for lifelong learning (Gay, 2010; Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2006).

With the increased use of technology and the ability to communicate in a moment to countries around the globe, knowledge continues to escalate. Teachers must be aware of this explosion in interdisciplinary research. For example, in the discussion of racism, recent research in biomedical sciences, especially the burgeoning of DNA studies underscores the importance of such studies in defining and refining what the accepted should be regarding the biological bases for racial distinctions. For example, what is race and how should the construct be understood.

The concept of race is complex as it involves information from various disciplines such as history, biology, evolution, genetics, and paleontology. Teachers must make decisions about complex social issues concerning race and racism. Race is often talked about not only as a political construct, but also as if it were a proven biological concept based on physical differences (Pang & Valle, 2004). The taxonomy of racial classification was originally created by Carolus Linneaus, a Swedish naturalist (Gould, 1996). Linnaeus first developed the classification system that is in large measure still used by biologists today to categorize plants and animals. In his system, he placed humans in the order of primates, the genus given was *Homo*, or man, and the species name was *sapiens*, which means wise. In his goal to further categorize humans, Linnaeus extended his classification to include a four-race system that was primarily based on geography and three characteristics of people: physical color, disposition, and posture (Gould, 1996). Linneaeus's work was then expanded upon by J. F. Blumenbach, an 18th-century German naturalist. Blumenbach identified people who lived near Mount Caucasus as the ideal in physical beauty and named this group, Caucasians (Gould, 1996). During Blumenbach's life time many Europeans tended to believe in their own superiority over other groups (Gould, 1996). Blumenbach's work reinforced this tendency with his suggestion that people could be classified into various "categories." In the 20th century Boaz (1940), a respected anthropologist, cast doubt on the biological reality of racial differences among people. It has become clear that racial distinctions are socially constructed rather than biologically based. Asa Hilliard III (2002) reminded his audience at the 2002 American Educational Association Conference that "Racism is real; race is not."

Meaningful Connections

Meaningful connections are central to effective teaching. Culturally competent teachers must understand the context within which classroom learning takes place. This includes student experiences in terms of their previous content-level conceptions as well as the cultural context of their learning (Robins et al., 2006). Teachers cannot take on "color-blind" attitudes toward their students but must identify and acknowledge differences among students, seeing unique cultural and linguistic knowledge as assets to classroom learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This recognition of the learner is one of the most significant instructional strategies and can be accomplished

through various means including student interviews, discussions, home visits, concept maps, issues-centered education, and graphic organizers (Gay, 2010; Pang, 2010; Robins et al., 2006).

Once teachers begin to understand students' lived experiences, then they can design student-centered learning environments. Culturally competent teachers change their classroom content and behavior to implement learner-centered curriculum, effective instructional practices, and foster positive interpersonal relationships. One of the major issues of standards-based reform is that it homogenizes school curriculum (Sleeter, 2005). Teachers can overcome these issues by creatively adapting and developing curriculum to incorporate knowledge from various cultural groups, the school community, and student interests.

In terms of instruction teachers should inquire about best practices for their learners rather than simply implementing rote instruction. Students learn in various manners, which often correlate with their cultural background. Culturally competent teachers should be aware of student learning styles; especially those students who come from historically underserved communities. These students tend to flourish in environments where individual competition is replaced with a cooperative and collaborative community of learners (Gay, 2010).

Additionally, these students work well when the instruction is delivered in a manner which is variable, novel, works toward students' emotions, and involves active participation (Ming & Dukes, 2006). To accomplish this outcome, teachers can plan lessons by first identifying "big ideas" that are relevant to student lives and then planning content and skills around them (Sleeter, 2005). Additionally, students should be challenged to develop and use higher order thinking skills to keep students engaged. Some examples of classroom activities would be discussions, projects, student-driven research, and presentations.

Teachers need to develop cultural competencies which include not only deep interdisciplinary content, but also pedagogical skills that reflect the cultural diversity of schools. These competencies include:

- Hold strong comprehensive subject area expertise so that interdisciplinary connections can be made
- Understand that a color-blind orientation can limit effective instruction and force students to choose between academic success and affirmation of cultural/ethnic identities
- Integrate many examples in instruction from the lives of students
- Develop and implement student-centered learning environments where cultural contexts and content are woven into teaching processes
- Reflect upon the belief that subject area disciplines are not culture free and identify discipline assumptions
- Know how culture plays a role in the knowledge that is considered to be most valuable.

When students' cultures are valued and meaningfully grounded in a course's context, students will more often choose academic success (Gay, 2010; Grant, 2008). It can be difficult to implement this type of instruction because of the interactions between teachers, students, curriculum, instructional materials, and school climate. This is especially true in subjects such as science, which is often thought to be culture free. The fact that culture does play a role in science can be seen in the disproportionately fewer number of historically underserved groups such as Latinos, African Americans, Native Americas, Pacific Islanders, and Southeast Asians in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) careers. Science has its own unique set of norms such

as questioning, inquiry, and argumentation that teachers need to explicitly teach students (Lee & Buxton, 2010). Students' experiences with Western science may vary considerably so teachers must build bridges between sets of knowledge as well as address misconceptions. In terms of instructional techniques teachers must overcome the tensions between traditional methods and learner-centered instruction to meet the needs of their students (Young, 2010). Some examples of these methods may be role-playing to teach students the types of questioning techniques, researching and presenting sides to a controversial scientific issue, or scaffolding an inquiry laboratory activity that allows students to discover scientific principles (Lee & Buxton, 2010; Young, 2010). Another illustration of culturally relevant teaching can be demonstrated in a science lesson. A teacher may explain chemical bonding by brightening a dull copper penny using lemon juice and salt or vinegar and salt. The dull copper coin is the result of the copper reacting with oxygen which produces copper oxide. The vinegar by itself will eventually clean a penny because the acid will react with the copper. If you add salt to the mixture, the salt acts as a catalyst and speeds up the reaction. A teacher may also choose Tapatío, a condiment often used in southwest to add spice to various dishes; it is a common seasoning children have at home (Pang, 2010). This hot sauce includes acetic acid and salt. Tapatío can be an element that teachers utilize to relate science concepts to what students eat at home.

By teaching in a culturally competent manner teachers can help students to not only learn the science content, but also to have positive experiences which will in turn help them choose to continue to be involved in science and increase the number of historically underserved students who choose to pursue STEM careers.

   4. Competence in teaching students higher order thinking skills: In a democratic nation, students must be mentored to become responsible citizens who can make decisions based upon the principles of social justice, community and human dignity (Becker, 1982; Nelson, 1996).

In enhancing student success in interdisciplinary content through curriculum, instruction, and learning communities, culturally competent teachers should also mentor students to develop critical understanding of society's complex issues. A major goal as a nation is to challenge an accepted system that has subordinated and continues to treat people as inferior based on race, class, gender, culture, and other social categories (Grant, 2008). Integrating community and global issues into the curriculum can engage learners. These issues may be part of who students see themselves as being, what they see as important, and with whom they affiliate. An effective approach to teaching higher order thinking and the integration of subject-matter content is issues-centered education (Nelson, 1996). The study of issues provides students with motivation, a challenge to think about complex problems, and the integration of multiple perspectives which may differ due to cultural orientations.

Educators must continue to question the traditional focus of schooling from transmission of cultural knowledge to "informed social criticism" (Vinson, 1998). Teachers must become reflective thinkers who discuss with their students strategies that can be used to challenge social adaptation (Hahn, 1996; Nofke, 2000; Ross, 2001; Stanley & Nelson, 1994; Vang, 2005) and to commit to the struggle of moving beyond the status quo to address and take action on complex contemporary social issues surrounding race, racism, gender bias, disabilities, religion, language, culture, immigration, sexual orientation, and classism (Pang & Park, 2011).

Teachers engaged in issues-centered education understand that teaching about a topic is not the same as examining an issue. For example, a topic for discussion may be the Civil Rights

Movement of the 1960s. This approach contrasts with a unit where a teacher uses a focal question such as, "What were the most effective strategies used in the push for civil rights?" to organize the unit. To address this question, students are taught how to research, interpret, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information. In an issues-centered approach to education, questions focus student research. In addition, students identify evidence and multiple views of the issue at hand. Then they must identify their own values and beliefs in relation to the problem studied. Next, students are asked to identify possible solutions to the problems posed and consequences for each alternative. Finally, students must "take a stand" and make a decision; then this activity is followed by an explanation of their choice. The decision-making process utilizes higher order thinking skills and encourages students to engage in a thoughtful democratic process addressing social problems (Pang, 2010).

Teachers should be able to teach critical thinking and decision making skills as they relate to our culturally diverse nation and society.

- Identify culturally diverse orientations that impact diverse viewpoints about issues
- Provide students with critical thinking skills so they can research, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate crucial facts, perspectives, and knowledge about issues
- Utilize curriculum and instruction that focuses on solutions and consequences within the decision-making process
- Teach students how to make decisions about complex social issues which could include the use of a specific model.

Students and teachers critically study in depth historically marginalized knowledge and then bring it into the traditional curriculum in a critical manner (Pang & Park, 2011; Sleeter, 2005; Stanley & Nelson, 1994). Lessons can include activities such as reading articles representing counterknowledge, critiquing school textbooks, analyzing public systems, and bringing in community guest speakers. Although it can be difficult for teachers to integrate these lessons into the curriculum, they are crucial in helping students appreciate their own cultural identity, achieve personal efficacy and challenge persistent inequities (Gay, 2010; Teel & Obidah, 2008; Young, 2010). The ability to teach critical thinking and decision-making skills are crucial cultural competencies for teachers who are preparing students for their role as citizens of a democracy and global community.

Teacher Cultural Competencies Must Be Developed

Caring-centered multicultural education is a framework that integrates care, culture, and community (Pang, 2010). Because this orientation is relationship centered and culture centered, it is crucial that teachers have strong cultural competencies. These capabilities must be taught in professional development programs for administrators and teachers (Pang et al., 2011). First, educators must examine their own biases, misconceptions, and prejudices. Self-awareness is a cultural competence that must be developed to make sure that students are treated equally (Gallavan, 2000). Biases may be due to a wide-range of social characteristics such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disabilities, immigration physical appearance, religion, financial status, accent, and neighborhood. Examination of one's prejudices is an element of caring for personal teacher development; this process also can increase the creation of more authentic and trusting relationships with others (Pang, 2010).

Second, educators must understand the role of culture in the development and education of individuals (Cole, 1996). People identify with culture, utilize cultural filters in understanding their experiences, and adhere to cultural values and expectations. Next, educators must have strong instructional background in language acquisition and development skills (Garcia, 2005). For example, learning Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) pedagogy can be implemented into the teacher education programs to cultivate culturally responsive teaching.

Teacher education programs must make Cross-cultural Language Academic Development (CLAD) or Bilingual CLAD instruction, which includes SDAIE techniques, a component and an emphasis of existing programs. For monolingual teachers of English, professional development in SDAIE should be a requirement. Moreover, an effort to recruit bilingual teachers and even making learning a second language a prerequisite for preservice teachers entering a credential program may be a factor that is worth pursuing.

Teachers must also have strong interdisciplinary subject area expertise and be able to make connections among various disciplines (Pang & Park, 2011). In educational equity, all students must gain access to deep levels of discipline knowledge and critical thinking skills to develop fully for their future careers and continual life-long growth (Nelson, 1996). Finally, teachers must be able to teach critical thinking and decision-making skills within a variety of cultural contexts. Today's issues are often global and national in scope. To solve complicated social dilemmas, people and organizations must consider multiple perspectives and cultural worldviews as they collaboratively address public issues. Teaching well-defined cultural competencies can be powerful forces in mentoring effective educators who actively work towards educational equity and the creation of compassionate and just schools.

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