

Teacher Candidates' Awareness and Acceptance of Diversity

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Introduction

Like many colleges of education and the departments within them, concerns exist on the best way to provide teacher candidates with clinical (also referred to as “field” in the literature) based experiences that meet accreditation outcomes. In the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Learning* (NCATE, 2010), members of the panel stressed the importance of using a “clinically based model” for teacher preparation. The framework of this model resides with ten principles: a focus on student learning, integration of clinical preparation throughout all aspects of teacher education, data-based assessment to judge candidates and programs, preparing educators to be content and pedagogy experts, opportunities for candidates to interact in professional learning communities, rigorous selection and preparation of candidates’ supervisors from higher education and P-12 levels, designated and funded sites to support embedded experiences, application of technology to promote collaboration, research and development infrastructure, and strategic partnerships. In addition to the 2010 NCATE report, the Association of Teacher Educators developed *Standards for Field Experiences in Teacher Education* (Guyton & Bryd, 2000). The document includes twelve standards with one specifically focused on field experiences with diverse student populations and in diverse settings.

Teacher education candidates need diverse experiences much like clinicians in the medical field receive before actually practicing on their own. Unfortunately, diverse clinical experiences and preparations are poorly defined and inadequately supported. According to Franklin Torrez and Krebs (2012), the literature reveals a gap between university teacher preparation and the realities of the K-12 classroom. McIntyre et al. (as cited in Hill, Friedland, & Phelps, 2012) found research on field experiences lacking, while Keengwe (2010) found that diversity classes in higher education are not as effective as they could be due to the disparity between a college’s individual program and the aptitude of teachers providing practical and appropriate learning experiences that help develop an appreciation of different cultures and cultural experiences. Also, in the review of the literature, Hill, et al. (2012) assessed the influence of clinical or field experiences on teacher candidate perceptions of students, especially perception of students in an urban setting. Their review examined 24 qualitative, 5 quantitative, and 7 mixed studies. Results indicated that teacher candidates viewed their clinical experiences as those which brought about little change or as experiences that reinforced the negative stereotypes previously held by the teacher candidates. “The classroom environment in which the teacher candidate spends her or his field experience is an important element in that

teacher's success" (Franklin Torrez & Krebs, 2010, p. 496). The research underscores the need for clinical based experiences which allow teacher candidates to learn about diversity concepts as well as reflect on these experiences.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was twofold: 1) to determine teacher candidates' awareness and acceptance of diversity through involvement in a college level diversity course and 2) to create a baseline for future determination of teacher candidates' awareness and acceptance of diversity after implementation of a diverse clinical-based setting within the diversity course.

Method

Design

The Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale – Short Form (M-GUDS-S) was the instrument used to administer a pre- and post-survey. According to Fuentes, Miville, Mohr, Sedlacek, and Gretchen (2000), scores on the M-GUDS have been found to predict students' attitudes toward diversity of people and programs in a college setting. The survey consists of three subscales and 15 questions in which the respondents answered the questions using a five-point Likert scale. The first subscale is called Diversity of Contact. It examines students' interest in participating in social and cultural activities. Relativistic Appreciation, the second subscale, refers to the extent to which students value the impact of diversity on self-understanding and personal growth. The third subscale, Comfort with Differences, assesses students' degree of comfort with diverse individuals. Items on this subscale are reverse scored. Data were collected between May of 2011 and May of 2012 from six sections of the required course. A paired two sample t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant increase or decrease in scores from the M-GUDS-S pre-survey to the post-survey for each subcategory. The participants included teacher candidates enrolled in sections of a required course called Diverse Learners. Taking approximately 10-15 minutes to complete, the participants electronically filled out the M-GUDS-S in the first week of the course and, again, in the final week of the course. To ensure confidentiality, participants self-created a unique code following a prescribed formula.

Analysis

The total number of useable surveys is 98. A paired two sample t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant increase or decrease in scores from the M-GUDS-S pre-survey to the post-survey for each survey question. Significant increases were found for four questions. There was a significant increase for question 1 from the pre-survey (mean = 4.64, st. dev. = 0.92) to the post-survey (mean = 4.96, st. dev. = 0.67) at the 1% level of significance (p -value = .001, $n=98$); for question 4 from the pre-survey (mean = 4.19, st. dev. = 1.11) to the post-study survey (mean = 4.51, st. dev. = 1.08) at the 1% level of significance (p -value < .001, $n=98$); for question 5 from the pre-survey (mean =

4.74, st. dev. = 0.92) to the post-study survey (mean = 5.02, st. dev. = 0.92) at the 1% level of significance (p-value = .005, n=98); and for question 13 from the pre-survey (mean = 3.96, st. dev. = 1.19) to the post-study survey (mean = 4.24, st. dev. = 1.09) at the 1% level of significance (p-value = .003, n=98).

A paired two sample t-test was also conducted to determine if there was a significant increase or decrease in scores from the M-GUD-S pre-survey to the post-survey for each subscale. There was a significant increase for Diversity of Contact from the pre-survey (mean = 4.36, st. dev. = 1.25) to the post-survey (mean = 4.58, st. dev. = 1.14) at the 1% level of significance (p-value < .001, n=490). There was also a significant increase for Relativistic Appreciation from the pre-survey (mean = 4.76, st. dev. = 1.02) to the post-survey (mean = 4.93, st. dev. = 0.99) at the 1% level of significance (p-value < .001, n=490).

Findings

The results from the questions suggest that teacher candidates' attitudes changed from the beginning of the course to the end of the course. In the post-survey, more participants indicated they would like to join an organization that emphasizes getting to know people from different countries and would like to go to dances that feature music from other countries. In addition, by the end of the course, more participants indicated they can best understand someone after getting to know how that person is similar to and different from them, and they were more willing to attend events where they might get to know people from different racial backgrounds. A significant increase resulted in two of the three subscales showed - Diversity of Contact and Relativistic Appreciation. These results suggest that, by the end of the course, teacher candidates became more interested in participating in social and cultural activities and in valuing the impact of diversity on self-understanding and personal growth.

Limitations

A limitation of this study includes the number of useable surveys (n = 98). Another limitation includes the selection of the participants. All participants were either early childhood unified or elementary education majors. Students choosing these majors may have common attributes which influenced the results. Additionally, due to the participants' voluntary participation in the study, there may be self-reporting bias.

Future Implications

The study reveals that involvement in a college level diversity course can increase teacher candidates' awareness and acceptance of diversity. This result shows the importance for colleges of education to offer diversity courses for their teacher candidates. Utilizing this study's baseline data, the researchers will further investigate whether or not the addition of a diverse clinical-based experience results in the same or higher significant increases regarding teacher candidates' attitudes toward diversity.

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