EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE: PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND SELF-STUDY IN MULTICULTURAL TEACHER EDUCATION*

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Abstract

This chapter examines the development of professional knowledge in multicultural teacher education by providing examples of quality self-studies that speak to the need to prepare teachers for diverse student populations. The chapter begins with a description of the persistent challenge of White, middle-class, English-speaking females learning to teach for diversity and then describes the process of transformation, through which this challenge can be addressed. Transformation is the continuous evolution of one’s own understanding and perspectives in order to meet more effectively the needs of all students. It is generally marked by a disruption of values or cultural beliefs through critical reflection with the goal of more socially just teaching. The chapter provides analyses of self-studies that show how teacher educators studied their role in transforming preservice teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions regarding culture, race, sexuality, etc. In the process, the teacher educators also recognized their own beliefs and assumptions that impacted their ability to prepare effective teachers. The studies reveal many insights, some relevant primarily to the practitioner, but many others that speak to the improvement of the preparation of teachers in general. The chapter concludes with ideas about how these types of studies provide incentive for more careful attention to and research about the preparation of teacher educators who prepare teachers for diversity.

In this chapter, I will highlight teacher educators’ self-studies that seek to better explicate the transformation of preservice teacher beliefs about multicultural

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education by looking at one’s own transformation in beliefs and practice. In addition, I will suggest that these kinds of self-studies in teacher education can contribute to a professional knowledge base. Hiebert, Gallimore, and Stigler (2002) suggest that there are useful ways that practitioner research, in addition to traditional educational research, can build the knowledge base for teaching. While the authors focused on knowledge created in K-12 classrooms, in this chapter I will extend their ideas to suggest that teacher educator practitioners can contribute to the professional knowledge base following the same guidelines.

Hiebert et al. (2002) contend that in order for practitioner research to become professional knowledge it must meet three complementary and overlapping requirements. First, professional knowledge must be made public with the intent of not only communicating it to others but also making it open for discussion, debate, verification, and modification. Second, once this knowledge is public, there is a need to store it and make it available, over time, to other educators who may use it. Finally, professional knowledge must be verifiable and continuously improving. Knowledge that is public and easy to access is much more likely to be tried and evaluated in different contexts. The knowledge created from these trials is then able to be shared publicly, thus revising and improving on the burgeoning knowledge base.

The requirements put forth by Hiebert et al. are very relevant to thinking about how self-study of teacher education practice can contribute to better understanding how preservice teachers are prepared to teach diverse student populations. All practitioner knowledge is integrated with problems of practice. Self-study demonstrates that these problems of practice are also indelibly connected to the educator, and that recognizing these connections can serve to bridge one’s beliefs and actions in order to improve one’s knowledge about one’s practice. “Such knowledge informs future action and illuminates instructional decisions, creating praxis – informed, committed action that gives rise to knowledge” (Tidwell & Heston, 1998, p. 45). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) assert that this creation of knowledge will not only add to, but will alter the knowledge base in education.

What follows in this chapter will be a description of the challenge of cultural homogeneity in teaching and how self-study of multicultural teacher education practices can serve to better prepare teachers for diversity. A variety of teacher educator self-studies will be reviewed, measured to a standard of quality, and analyzed for contributions to the professional knowledge base in education. The chapter will conclude with suggested directions for similar research.

**Setting the Problem**

Let me begin by restating the often professed but rarely solved dilemma in teacher education today. The majority of teachers and teacher education students continue to be White, middle-class, monolingual females (Zimpher & Howey, 1992) who often come from small towns or suburbs with very limited intercultural experiences (AACTE, 1987, 1989). These characteristics make it more difficult