Preparing Teachers for the Diverse Classroom: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

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Abstract

One role of teacher educators may be to facilitate the development of greater intercultural sensitivity among preservice teachers. Teachers need to carefully examine their world view to determine whether or not unintentional and subtle biases are promoted. Therefore, it is vital that teacher educators have an awareness of these stages of personal growth related to intercultural sensitivity. This paper discusses the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which identifies issues that may be important to individuals at each developmental level. The DMIS has six stages that are used to describe the increasingly complex cognitive structures used to view the diverse world. As one's experience of cultural difference becomes more sophisticated, one's competence in intercultural relationships is strengthened. The world view of each stage may be identified by specific behaviors and attitudes. The first three DMIS stages are ethnocentric; the second three are ethnorelative. Although there has been minimal research conducted on how to alter teachers' attitudes and behaviors toward minority groups, the DMIS provides a developmental model that, along with the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)—a self-assessment tool—may be used with preservice teachers to assess the effectiveness of course content and methodology.

Today's teachers must be prepared to enter the increasingly diverse classroom. By the year 2000, children of color will constitute one-third of all students enrolled in public schools, and it is projected that by the year 2020 this figure will increase to 40% (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 1996). Acknowledgment of these changing demographics has resulted in a great deal of attention focused on how to best prepare preservice teachers for entrance into the diverse classroom. Although the expanding populations of children of color reflect a significant change, diversity is not limited to racial composition. Changing family composition, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, and the varied abilities of children also have an effect on society's expectation of what should be included in the school experience (Garibaldi, 1992). Interestingly, as the population of children is becoming more diverse, teachers entering the profession continue to reflect majority culture (Villegas, 1991). Therefore, the culture of teachers will contrast with the culture of students they teach. This realization is important because what teachers say, perceive, believe, and think can support or impair students (Nel, 1992). Beliefs influence how teachers may teach (Kagan, 1992) and how they understand multiculturalism (Sleeter, 1992).

Diversity and Teacher Preparation Programs

University early childhood teacher preparation programs should provide students with the information and experiences necessary for successful employment in the increasingly diverse public schools. Because there is a greater likelihood that teachers will be working with students whose cultural backgrounds differ greatly from their own (Dilworth, 1992; Fox & Gay, 1995), it is of great importance that teachers become aware of individual cultural perspectives and that they have an opportunity to reflect on various forms of diversity. However, some research suggests that there is reason for concern in terms of preservice early childhood teacher preparation and multicultural education (Fuller, 1999). There is a growing concern that teachers are not prepared or able to apply the National Standards of Academic Excellence in an equitable manner to all students (Bennett, 1995). A report from the National Center for Education Statistics (1999) found that only 20% of teachers expressed confidence in working with children from diverse backgrounds.

There is a range of research focusing on the preparation of teachers to work in multicultural settings (Artiles & McClafferty, 1998; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 1992). Studies suggest that most early childhood teacher education programs prepare undergraduate students for working effectively with one socioeconomic group, the middle class, and with the mainstream culture (Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Gollnick & Chinn, 1998). This form of educational preparation overlooks a number of diverse populations and fails to challenge a teacher's beliefs and attitudes that have developed as a result of membership in the mainstream culture. As a result, a number of teacher educators have proposed programs that will prepare students for working with diverse populations (Harrington & Hathaway, 1995; Noel, 1995; Shade, 1995).

The purpose of this paper is not to outline a specific curriculum or methodology for use with preservice teachers in a diversity course. Rather, this paper will describe a developmental model depicting stages of cultural sensitivity. The model will provide a framework for understanding the cognitive patterns and socioemotional reactions an individual holds based on a diverse background and previous life experiences. This perspective-taking strategy will be termed a world view to encompass each developmental domain that is integrated into the unique viewpoint. An individual's world view is based on the individual's experience of cultural difference. It is the individual's method of construing an event or experience that defines a world view. How one may construe and define a series of events provides the creation of a world view. In this regard, the model is phenomenological.

Using the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity to Assess Growth among Preservice Teachers

A teacher's world view may be understood by applying the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The DMIS is a model of six stages, created by Milton Bennett (1986), used to describe the increasingly more complex cognitive structures used to view the diverse world. Bennett's (1986) model was based on observations and interactions with individuals as they learned to become more competent intercultural communicators. The model defines culture as any group with a set of similar constructs. Therefore, the intent of the model is not limited to racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Rather, all forms of diversity and differences among individuals may be included in this definition.

The DMIS stages may be used to assess the level of cultural competency and sensitivity among preservice teachers enrolled in diversity and anti-bias courses in teacher preparation programs. Each student will enter the course with a different background and set of cultural experiences. In addition, students will also differ in their readiness to change and consider diversity issues. However, each student has the potential to develop during the course. Being aware of the developmental progression of student conceptions as a previous world view becomes obsolete and the student adopts a new viewpoint is important for teacher educators. An understanding of the struggles and questions of the student will help identify the type of activities and experiences that will be beneficial for the development of a less biased world view.

The DMIS provides a framework of increasingly more complex cognitive structures. Although each stage may be identified by specific behaviors and attitudes, the DMIS should not be viewed as a developmental framework of changes in attitude and behavior. Each stage has a world view that is distinct from all others and has a set of characteristics, including attitudes and behaviors, that is consistent with a specific world view. A world view may be compared to a lens that is used for looking at the world. How one perceives and interprets events determines the response.

The six stages of the DMIS represent an ordinal scale in which each stage is characterized by increasing sensitivity to cultural difference. As one's experience of cultural difference becomes more complex, one's competence in intercultural relationships is strengthened. The first three DMIS stages are ethnocentric (i.e., one's own culture is experienced as central to the understanding of others). The second three stages are ethnorelative (i.e., one's own culture is experienced within the context of other cultures).

Intercultural sensitivity is conceptualized as a continuum ranging from an ethnocentric perspective to a more ethnorelative world view. Although the model implies a developmental progression in an individual's awareness and understanding of cultural difference, "it does not assume that progression through the stages is one-way or permanent" (Bennett, 1993, p. 27). However, "each stage is meant to characterize a treatment of cultural difference that is fairly consistent for a particular individual at a particular point of development . . ." (Bennett, 1993, p. 27).

Ethnocentric Stages of Intercultural Development

An ethnocentric orientation involves the interpretation of events and behaviors from one's own cultural viewpoint. The ethnocentric stages, based on a predominant monocultural perspective, are viewed as a way to avoid cultural difference by denying the existence of differences, by using defenses against difference, or by minimizing the importance of difference (Bennett, 1993).

Denial. The first stage of ethnocentrism, denial, reflects beliefs that there are no real differences among people from different cultures. Individuals in the stage of denial experience their own culture as the only real one. Consideration of other cultures does not occur because proximity to differences is avoided physically or psychologically. There are two ways that an individual can maintain a sense of denial: *isolation* or *separation.* Isolation, either physical or social, from people who are different can permit the reinforcement of a selective perception in which an individual sees only those events he or she wants to see and does not see what the individual is not accustomed to observing. Another form of denial, separation, is more typical. These individuals may have "the intentional erection of physical or social barriers to create distance from cultural difference" (Bennett, 1986). Individuals who have distanced themselves from cultural differences among groups have acknowledged the existence of differences; however, they are likely to view differences with a degree of suspicion. An individual working on issues in the stage of denial is most comfortable with the familiar, as he or she may seek out others who are culturally similar, and is not motivated to encounter cultural differences (Bennett, 1993). The developmental task for a denial profile is to acknowledge cultural differences that have not been observed previously (Hammer & Bennett, 1998).

Defense. In the stage of defense, one's own culture is experienced as the one true culture. For individuals in this stage, cultural differences are not merely viewed with suspicion, rather differences are considered a threat to one's identity and self-esteem. An individual may defend against differences that may be perceived as threatening through three ways: *denigration, superiority,* and *reversal.* Denigration is a reaction by which the individual responds to differences by a negative judgment. For example, there is a value-based judgment in which an action is termed as negative solely to devalue the inherent difference. In contrast, superiority is used to have a positive evaluation of one's own culture without overtly denigrating another cultural group. Reversal, although uncommon, is a method used to devalue one's own culture as a way to demonstrate superiority of another culture (Bennett, 1993). The developmental task for a defense profile is to increase tolerance of differences and to become cognizant of the similarities among people of various cultures (Hammer & Bennett, 1998).

Minimization. The third ethnocentric stage, minimization, is characterized by attempts to overgeneralize similarities between one's self and other cultures. Differences are diminished and considered inconsequential. There are two forms of minimization: *physical universalism* and *transcendent universalism.* Physical universalism views all cultural differences as mere biological deviations. Transcendent universalism views all individuals as the product of one transcendent and universal entity. The minimization world view decreases the importance of differences that exist between individuals of various cultures. For individuals dealing with cultural difference from a minimization perspective, differences are not viewed as threatening. There is a belief that there are universal values that apply to all people; however, these values may be projected from one's own culture (Bennett, 1993). The developmental task for a minimization profile is to continue learning about one's own culture and to avoid projecting that culture onto the experience of others (Hammer & Bennett, 1998).

Ethnorelative Stages of Intercultural Development

An ethnorelative perspective is based on "the assumption that cultures can only be understood relative to one another and that particular behavior can only be understood within a cultural context" (Bennett, 1993, p. 46). The ethnorelative stages are viewed as a way to seek out cultural difference by understanding the importance of difference, by altering one's own perspective to take into account the perspective of others, or by integrating the importance of differences into one's own identity.

Acceptance. The first stage of the ethnorelative stages, acceptance, has a fundamental difference from previous stages—the acknowledgment that differences exist, are important, and should be respected. There are two forms of acceptance: (1) *respect for behavioral differences,* including an acceptance of verbal and nonverbal behavior, and (2) *respect for value difference,* including an acceptance of various world views that are underlying most variations in behavior. Acceptance is founded on a fundamental difference in world view. In other words, the individual understands that to respect differences found in another culture requires an ability to access a different world view (Bennett, 1993). The developmental task for an acceptance profile is to look at "the world through the lens of a different world view while maintaining your own commitments to values" (Hammer & Bennett, 1998, p. 39).

Adaptation. The second ethnorelative stage, adaptation, is based on a proactive effort to use one's knowledge about cultural differences to improve relationships with people who are culturally different. To accomplish this task, the individual does not merely adopt a different set of cultural beliefs and behaviors to the exclusion of one's own beliefs, values, and behaviors. Rather, this task involves the integration of other cultural beliefs and behaviors to one's own cultural perspective. Typically, adaptation is based on a form of empathy in which one is able to experience events differently from the experiences of one's own culture. Adaptation may also involve an internalization of two cultural frameworks, termed *pluralism.* In pluralism, the individual experiences events in a new way based on the integration of two cultural patterns. In addition, this individual may use skills or behaviors from either cultural framework that will be most beneficial to the current situation. Empathy differs from pluralism in that empathy involves a moment in which the individual considers an alternate cultural pattern, whereas pluralism involves a more complete and permanent world view (Bennett, 1993). The developmental task of a cognitive adaptation profile, the equivalent to the DMIS stage of adaptation, is "to link your cognitive ability to other aspects of your behavior, with the goal of generating 'natural' behavior in more than one cultural context" (Hammer & Bennett, 1998, p. 43).

Integration. The third ethnorelative stage, integration, is the weaving of "disparate aspects of one's identity into a new whole while remaining culturally marginal" (Bennett, 1986). Individuals in this stage have the ability to communicate effectively with many cultural groups. The developmental task of the behavioral adaptation profile, corresponding to the DMIS stage of integration, is to effectively manage any identity issues that may be the result of altering behavior to correspond to various cultures (Hammer & Bennett, 1998).

Using the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity to Prepare Teachers for Diverse Classrooms

As teacher educators plan curriculum to prepare preservice teachers for entrance into the diverse classroom, an awareness of developmental stages that students may encounter along the way can be helpful. As students progress from one stage to the next, a new set of questions, beliefs, attitudes, and values will become apparent. Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) created a developmental approach to teaching a racism and human development course. Goals of the course included the adoption of an anti-racist consciousness and behavior. Four phases were identified that seemed to reflect student growth and the development of anti-biased beliefs, attitudes, and values: conflict, disequilibrium, transformation, and activism. These phases outline the progressive steps one takes in order to change a previously held world view. In order to move from one stage of the DMIS to the next, individuals will likely experience each of the phases identified by Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997).

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity provides an individualized way to assess and monitor student learning. Upon enrollment in a course, students could be assessed with an instrument, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), correlating with the DMIS. Scores on the IDI would reflect the stage at which a student has issues to resolve before progressing to the next stage. Assessing an entire class would have the added benefit of discovering central issues that need to receive attention. It would not be expected that all students would have similar issues. Rather, students would benefit from exposure to a range of belief systems.

Concluding Remarks

Although there has been minimal research conducted on how to alter teachers' attitudes and behaviors toward minority groups, the DMIS provides a developmental model that may be used with preservice teachers to assess the effectiveness of course content and methodology. There are a number of curricula that have been proposed for use in diversity awareness and anti-bias education; however, little empirical data exist for evaluation of these models. The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a self-assessment instrument, was developed by Hammer and Bennett (1998) to measure the six orientations toward intercultural sensitivity outlined in Bennett's (1986, 1993) developmental model. The IDI may be used as a pre-test and post-test for assessing the effectiveness of a new curriculum.

The IDI may also increase self-awareness of level of intercultural sensitivity for each individual. For students taking a course in diversity, this information may be provided at the onset of the course in order to permit individualized feedback about a student's orientation toward cultural differences. For educators teaching a diversity course, scores on the IDI may provide a group profile of a class. This feedback may assist in the development of course curricula that are suited to students' needs and levels of development. The process of making a profile will also direct students' attention to diverse cultural orientations and will provide a starting point for students to begin the journey from not being aware of cultural differences to embracing these differences. Although cultural sensitivity transformation will not occur instantaneously, awareness of the stages along the way will assist teacher educators in better planning the journey.

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