

Teacher Education for Inclusive Education Extended Abstract

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In today's global world, the unprecedented movement of people means that the demographic profile of students in schools is more complex than ever before. Schools in many parts of the world are more diverse and multicultural in terms of ethnicity, language, religion and disability status. As the concept of identity has evolved from a simple unitary notion to one of multiplicity where people are thought to have many overlapping identities that are fundamental to their individuality, it is important to consider how teachers are prepared to deal with the changing demographic of schooling. This paper argues that the idea of *overlapping identities as fundamental to individuality* has important implications for teacher education and for the reform of teacher education.

The idea of a multiplicity of diversities in terms of overlapping identities for individuals - as individuals and within groups - means that old ideas about singular identities and the problem of integration must be replaced with new ways of thinking about human diversity as a fundamental element of teacher education for all. This view calls into question some of the traditional ways that teacher education has prepared teachers to work with groups of students who are assumed to be broadly similar - most students - with specialised responses for some who are thought to need something different from or additional to others of similar age.

This is an important element of the reform agenda for teacher education because although teachers are dealing with more diverse groups than ever before, they frequently report that they do not feel adequately prepared for the job. The view that teachers are inadequately prepared is reinforced in the media where it is common to find stories about how schools are struggling with an influx of immigrant pupils, those who do not speak the majority language and students with special needs. Critics of teacher education, such as the Washington DC based National Council on Teacher Quality blame teacher education for this inadequacy (Walsh, 2006). By linking the correlations between academic achievement, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity and disability status to the lack of robust empirical support for many of the measures that had been developed to address educational inequality, critics of teacher education have argued that inadequate teacher education is at least partially to blame for inequality in student performance outcomes.

This paper considers whether reforms of teacher education in support of inclusive education can respond to challenges of the changing demographics of schooling while also closing the achievement gap. Drawing on studies that have shown how inclusive education, properly implemented, can enhance the learning and achievement of all learners, this paper makes a case for reform in teacher education described as teacher education for inclusive education. Although this term 'inclusive education' was originally concerned with children with special education needs, the concept is increasingly seen in international circles as a strategy to achieve education for all. The term *inclusive education* is used deliberately because it embraces diversity as a central

imperative of practice rather than a secondary consideration to be dealt with separately.

A key consideration here is the idea that all children will vary and differences are to be expected as an ordinary aspect of human development. Therefore, all teachers, not just some, should be prepared in ways that support a view of difference as to be expected and responding to difference should be within the remit of classroom teaching. This is a fundamental reform in developing new approaches to diversity in teacher education. The point is illustrated by a recent EU report on the education of newly arrived migrant children (NAMS) which points out that:

Identification of NAMS as a specific target group in education is not a prerequisite for having a good and comprehensive integration policy. Often NAMS fall into a broader category of students with immigrant background or students with a different mother tongue. The analysis shows that universal and loosely targeted education mechanisms aimed at supporting all underachieving students or immigrant students are often more inclusive and beneficial for NAMS in particular. Countries focusing on the development of comprehensive educational support systems addressing all kinds of individual needs contribute to the development of more inclusive education systems for NAMS in the long-run than those focusing on the targeted measures for NAMS. (PPMI, 2013, p. 5)

The idea of comprehensive educational support systems that address many kinds of individual needs does not apply only to NAMS. This term could easily be replaced with special needs, non-native language speakers and so forth. Yet the work of preparing teachers to work with these groups often occurs within silos where teacher education programmes prepare teachers to work with different kinds of learners. Yet many of the strategies and approaches to teacher education advocated by these programmes are similar. Villegas & Lucas' (2002) "Six strands, or organising constructs, for preparing culturally responsive teachers (gaining sociocultural consciousness; developing an affirming attitude towards students from culturally diverse backgrounds; developing the commitment and skills to act as agents of change; understanding the constructivist foundations of culturally response teaching; learning about students and their communities; and cultivating culturally responsive teaching practices, p. 26) can be read in terms of any marginalised group.

It has been 25 years since Mittler (1989) compared developments in the areas of special and multicultural education and argued for a joint approach to equalizing educational opportunity because both groups of students had been 'denied equality of opportunity to some degree and have suffered varying degrees of deprivation, discrimination and marginalization'. Inclusive education, with its emphasis on the process of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion, is increasingly accepted as a unified approach to education for all. As this approach has gained currency the implications for teacher education and for the professional development of teacher educators are becoming clear but there is a great deal of work to do before Shulman's (2005) notion of a signature pedagogy of teacher education for inclusive education will emerge.

Although demographic trends differ in different parts of the world, there are common challenges in responding to special or additional needs, multicultural, intercultural, linguistic and religious diversity in schools. In Europe, demographic changes co-exist

with a policy shift in many countries as they have moved toward more inclusive education systems (European Agency, 2011). Issues of race, ethnicity, social class, language learning (bilingual and multilingual), religious diversity, gender and disability are covered to varying degrees by different national policies of social and educational inclusion, but a robust research agenda is needed to understand the effects of the different ways in which teachers are prepared to address these challenges.

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