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The Integration of Religious Pluralism into the Preparation of Future Teachers

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Abstract

Preparing future teachers for their roles in American classrooms is growing ever more challenging. Concerns involving safety, salaries, and overall respect for the profession have created an emerging shortage in licensed teachers, one that has parents concerned and politicians paying attention. Despite the barriers to recruitment, however, the quest to train and support the most effective teacher workforce continues, buffered by opportunities to serve a diverse student population and to close ever-widening opportunity and achievement gaps. Racial, ethnic, and language diversity makes the United States a rich mosaic of cultures, but it can often be the religious differences of students and parents that raise very unique challenges in providing equity and acceptance for all (Banks & Banks, 2003).

Part of what makes a 21st century educator effective is the ability to recognize and appreciate differences in culture, worldview, ethnicity, or other social markers. As such, the exploration of Religious Pluralism and the integration of such into our education curriculum, instruction and dialogue has now become a major area of focus and interest at a school of Education in the southeast United States. Through this work, the goal is to strengthen the preparation of our future classroom teachers and equip them with the outlook and the tools to engage in meaningful ways across religious and worldview differences. “Teacher preparation programs are largely responsible for teacher training and are therefore in a key position to lead the profession to ensure teachers are equipped with the best, most relevant and effective theory, practices, and strategies” (Ceglie et al., 2023, p. 1), thus, as an institution we strive to lead towards the strengthening of the next generation of K-12 educators and leaders.

Preparing future teachers for the difference in religious views that may be experienced in their very own classroom is part of how we view and approach teacher preparation. Producing teachers who are ready and excited for a diverse classroom, full of differing worldviews, perspectives, and beliefs, is an integrated part of how we approach the future teaching workforce and our place in it. By incorporating an introduction to various religions of the world, and by integrating religion-centered role play and simulations into our teaching, we are working to provide our teaching candidates with valuable tools through which to be prepared



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for diverse classrooms. As part of our study and efforts, student surveys and data are collected to analyze the impact and the work moving forward.

Keywords: Teacher preparation, religious pluralism, diversity, cultural backgrounds, teacher effectiveness