

Culturally-Competent Teachers for Multilingual Classrooms

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Abstract

The classroom demographics in US schools are rapidly changing, and culturally and linguistically diverse students are a growing part of the school population. Recent research reveals a need for education practitioners to be ready for the multicultural classroom. Therefore, culturally responsive teaching is now a central component of teacher education programs. To better prepare practitioners for classrooms with culturally and linguistically diverse students, more practical cross-cultural experiences across pre-service program areas are needed to ensure commitment to culturally responsive teaching. Moreover, teacher education course assignments and projects need to be more relevant and engage teacher candidates on a deeper level, beyond the traditional cultural holiday activities (Sandoval, Cunningham, Jacobs & Warner, 2023). The qualitative study focuses on a culture-specific assignment from an online upper-level undergraduate diversity course required of education majors in a regional university in the United States. The pre-service teachers completed readings and research, a field component, and a reflection. The author examines course participant data collected over several years to see how prospective teachers increase their knowledge base, become aware of differences and similarities, appreciate cultural and linguistic diversity, get out of their comfort zone to deal with the unfamiliar, and apply critical thinking skills to question their stereotypes, assumptions, and misconceptions about other countries and cultures. In particular, the author looks for evidence of transformation in student thinking and implications for future teaching.

Keywords: cultural diversity; English language learners; linguistic diversity; teacher education; teaching English to speakers of other languages