

Economics Education Students Learning to Teach for Diversity via a Community Engaged Project

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ABSTRACT Scholars in teacher education have suggested strategies to prepare student teachers to teach for diversity, the knowledge, and skills about culturally diverse environments. This study explored Postgraduate Certificate of Education students' views on how the Build-A-Better-Society (BABS) project prepared them to teach with concern for cultural, equity and diversity. This study also provided strategies on how to improve the BABS project for diversity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to analyse the data collected from students' responses. Findings revealed that the majority of students showed a stronger awareness of the needs of diverse learners during the project. Suggestions were formulated to empower students' with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to teach diverse learners.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century brought several challenges to the higher education arena in particular delivering quality teacher education programmes. Indeed challenges such as the increased and changing of student profiles, demanding quality assurance practices, efficient course delivery modes and reliable assessment practices directly impact on how teacher education programmes prepare students for these challenges. These challenges place high demands on institutions of higher learning sector to deliver quality teaching and learning. Moreover, scholars in teacher education have suggested strategies to prepare student teachers to teach for diversity, the knowledge, skills about culturally diverse environments. After the abolishment of a divided school community in South Africa in 1994, many of the schools were enforced by legislative requirements to integrate and adapt to changing classrooms. In the last decade these schools showed a rapid increase of culturally diverse teachers and learners, particularly in urban schools (Au and Blake 2003). To achieve culturally diverse classrooms in South Africa, teacher education programmes must [re]design to empower student teachers to teach in culturally responsive classrooms. According to Gay (2002) and vanWyk (2012) we must empower and equip student teachers with culturally responsive knowledge and skills to teach diverse learners. In the last decade, South African schools seeing the increasing population of

culturally diverse learners, particularly in urban areas, and given our failure to provide successful school experiences for those learners, there is a critical need for teacher education courses to prepare, equip and educate student teachers with knowledge, skill and positive attitudes to teach culturally diverse learners (Department of Education (DoE) 2010). Although multicultural education scholars suggest infusion of multicultural education into all areas of teacher education (Gay 2000; McAllister and Irvine 2000; Cochran-Smith 2004) for better results, many teacher education programs continue using stand-alone multicultural education courses. Most teachers see a difference between academic content knowledge and learning strategies that create classroom equity (Tellez 2007).

Literature Review

This study is underpinned by the Communities of Practice Theory (Lave and Wenger), the Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson and Johnson), the Socio-cultural Theory (Vygotsky) and the Practicing Equitable Pedagogy Theory (Baca and Cervantes 1984). These constructs is discussed and re-aligned to the purpose of the study. The notion community of practice or situated learning view was developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 2000) as the basis of a social theory of learning. A community of practice is a collection of people who engage on an ongoing basis in some common endeavour, in this case the

community engagement project for economics education student teachers. The basic argument made by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger is that communities of practice are everywhere and that we are generally involved in a number of them - whether that is at work, school, home, or in our civic and leisure interests. In this community of practice project cluster a group of student teachers who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly in a particular community. The social interdependence theory began in the early 1900s, when one of the founders of the Gestalt School of Psychology, Kurt Koffka, proposed that groups were dynamic wholes in which the interdependence among members could vary. One of his colleagues, Kurt Lewin, refined Koffka's notions while stating that (1) the essence of a group is the interdependence among members (created by common goals), which results in the group being a "dynamic whole," so that a change in the state of any member or subgroup changes the state of any other member or subgroup; and (2) an intrinsic state of tension within group members motivates movement toward the accomplishment of the desired common goals. Lewin's students and colleagues, contributed further research indicating that it is the drive for goal accomplishment that motivates cooperative and competitive behavior. Social interdependence exists when individuals share common goals and each individual's outcomes are affected by the actions of the others (Johnson and Johnson 1989). It may be differentiated from social dependence (that is, the outcomes of one person are affected by the actions of a second person but not vice versa) and social independence (that is, individuals' outcomes are unaffected by each other's actions). Lev Vygotsky (1998) designs and develop this sociocultural conceptual framework, who believed that parents, caregivers, peers and the culture at large were responsible for the development of higher order functions. Current conceptualizations of socio-cultural theory draw heavily on the work of Vygotsky (1998). Tharp and Gallimore (1988) posit that "This view [the socio-cultural perspective] has profound implications for teaching, schooling, and education." Emanating from this view, the community engagement project which was implemented for this study focus on how it influence individual learning, but also on how

cultural beliefs and attitudes impact how instruction and learning take place by other members. In preparing student teacher population for a global market but especially for an African context, culturally relevant teaching is important to advance humanity in this millennium. On the other hand, Ladson-Billings (1992) and Harding (2011) describe culturally relevant teaching as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes." Participating in culturally relevant teaching essentially means that teachers create a bridge between students' home and school lives, while still meeting the expectations of the district and state curricular requirements. BABS as culturally relevant teaching project utilizes the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the student teachers to inform the mentor teacher's lessons and methodology preparations to achieve specific outcomes. According to literature, equitable classroom practices are put in place to make sure that the classroom experience is similar for all students. Through this study the project help student teachers come together as a cohesive whole for the betterment of all of them.

Objective of this Study

This study explore Postgraduate Certificate of Education students' views on how the Build-A-Better-Society (BABS) project prepared them to teach economics education with concern for cultural, equity and diversity. To achieve purpose of this study, the following research questions are formulated:

- What are PGCE students' views on how the BABS project prepared them to teach with concern for cultural, equity and diversity?
- What strategies could be provided to improve the project outcomes for future studies?

BABS as a Community Engagement Project

This project provides a collaborative and cooperative learning environment in which student teachers jointly acquisition of group collaboration and mutual outcomes. BABS is a community engaged learning approach which

is based on the principles of individual accountability, positive interdependence, collaboration, group processing and outcome achievement. Only PGCE student teachers ($n=108$) were participated in the BABS¹ project. Sampling comprises of twenty males ($n=20$) and eighty eight females ($n=88$). These students comprised of accounting education, business studies education and economics education students who were registered for the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution in South Africa. Further they comprise of 60% Black students (39% African, 9% Coloured, 12% Asian), and 40% White students. The researcher personally invited and negotiated with schools and the purpose of the study was explained to school principals and subject teachers. The identified secondary schools ($n=19$) agreed, supported the idea that students being exposed to real classroom settings and to accommodate these students with their projects at their respective schools. The rationale behind this project was that with the increasing population of culturally diverse learners, particularly in the increasing population of culturally learners in South African schools, particularly in urban areas, and given our failure to provide successful school experiences for those student teachers, there is a critical need for initial and in-service teacher education programs to equip teachers with knowledge and skill to work with the culturally diverse in a South African context. Each team comprise of six members per subject didactics module whereby they were compelled to identify a project, plan, implement and report back on the specific project as part of their continuous assessment (CASS) marks for LADEMS or SDBCOS or SDEC00N² modules at their respective schools. This project is grounded on the assumption that student teachers must be able to make complex decisions, based on their beliefs, knowledge, and understanding of cultural diversity. The program focuses on four levels of student teacher development to facilitate appropriate decisions about teaching culturally diverse students: (a) awareness, (b) knowledge, (c) acquisition and maintenance of skills, and (d) reflection. The project was implemented during the second and third school terms (March to October 2011). Student teachers were visiting the agreed schools for their projects to be imple-

mented. Subject teachers and students agreed on set times and days per week of visitation to subject teachers, planning lessons sessions, lesson observations, reflection of lesson presentations and constructive feedback sessions of their projects. Student groups were responsible for their respective projects. Student groups met regularly to reflect on their specific projects during and after our contact class sessions at the university. Students kept a reflective teaching journal and wrote reflective notes on lesson presentations. The reflective journal was submitted to the researcher (lecturer) for research purposes.

Emanating from the findings of this study, it is further suggested strategies to educate student teachers for culturally responsive teaching and to improve the objectives of this project for further engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative method approach for conducting this study was used. This is an exploratory study was used to investigate students' views on how the project prepared them to teach with concern for cultural, equity and diversity (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009; Creswell 2009).

Sampling

Only one hundred and eight PGCE students ($n=108$) at an institution of higher learning participated in this project. A purposive sampling of participative secondary schools was selected which teach Economics education as a school subject. Sixty were male ($n=20$) and eighty eight were females ($n=88$). Twenty four participative secondary schools (grades 10) which consisted of ten public high schools (grades 8-12), four private high schools (grades 8-12) and ten combined schools (grades R-12). There were eighty eight female and twenty male student teachers, ranging in age from 20 to 32 (mean age = 21.23, $SD = 3.2$). This sample reported the following ethnicities: 40% Black, 9% Coloured, 12% Asian, and 39% White. These students were enrolled in the PGCE programme sequence, and they were participated in the community engagement project for one year.

Data Collection

Focus groups and telephonically semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data: Only sixteen economics education students (n=16) were purposefully selected for the interviews sessions because they are representing a particular social class, ethnicity, race and cultural grouping in this study. The researcher contacted the participants telephonically and sending e-mail to confirm dates for the interview sessions. Three of the interviewees were telephonically interviewed because they were unavailable (of other work commitments). Most of the interview sessions last half an hour by asking interview questions regarding diverse teaching issues. The researcher was really surprised by the stance of the some group members (heterogeneous) who did not want to be anonymised. They regarded their 'critical voices' as public testimony and stated that they were looking forward to seeing their personal discourses as part of this research paper. The researcher purposely used pseudonyms for this study.

Ethical Considerations

Before the study could begin, project was registered as community research project and permission was granted by the Quality Assurance unit of the Provincial education department. After received permission, a consent letter was written by including the official consent letter to twenty four identified secondary schools. In the letter to these schools, the purpose of the study, the confidentiality clause and consent to participants (teachers and learners) who participated in this study, was provided. After receiving permission from provincial education department and school principals and subject teachers, a meeting was convened and agreement signed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, categorized and three themes were identified.

Awareness of Needs of Diverse Learners during Project

Lenski et al. (2004) reported in their study about student awareness programme that the

majority of participants mentioned that awareness of needs of diverse learners, who they taught impact on them as well on others in the classroom. Moreover, McAllister and Irvine (2000) concurred with the latter study, student teachers must be made aware of differences and poverty which in play on all aspects of teaching learning in a diverse classroom settings. Findings of this study indicated that most student teachers believe that a deeper understanding regarding learners' cultures is important to teach in such an environment. Some members of focus groups indicated that: *We are aware of different needs of these diverse learners in our classes. We must be sensitive because we must understand other learners' cultures and the effect it brings to the classroom.* What surface throughout the interviews was an important factor which influences teaching and learning is the aspect of poor role models in the community as often mentioned by some learners. One particular Focus Group D member said: *In our placement school [this is a rural school] there are poor role models in community. Here in our community people always fighting over weekends [gangsters]. So the youth of this school doing drugs and other immoral things.* Another member referred to poverty which ... *living in our township. There are also lacks of good sporting facilities. Many of this youth are unemployed.* It seems from the interviews that at this particular community are plague by single parent households which impacted on the community at large but in particular the school. It was evident that poverty is huge challenge and problem in these schools in this study. Telephonically interviewee A mentioned: *The group started a environmental project. Save our earth was our slogan. We are now more sensitive and caring to learners in this school.* Several scholars said that there are also studies on the influences of community-based service-learning (Boven and Chapman 1996; Burant and Kirby 2002). BABS as a community engaged project can be seen as a field experience in a school and community setting where student populations were racially, linguistically, culturally diverse, or in urban settings (Howell and Arnington 2008).

Changing Teaching Methods to Accommodate Diverse Learners

Most of the focus groups and telephonically interviewees believe that teaching must be the

same for every child. They said that *how* and *why* of teaching is important to achieve your outcomes. They felt very strongly that teachers and they included the need to provide and implement various culturally diverse resources by integrating technology into the teaching and learning situations. Respondents believe that these learners are the net-generation or “digital natives”. During one particular interview session, Focus Group F alluded to diversity teaching: *When you prepare your lessons plan, you must accommodate diversity. I mean teaching the same for everyone. Treat everybody the same and be fair in the classroom.* Another group (Focus group A) replied to this question: *At our school there were a lack of resources and teaching aids to support these learners. We must incorporate culture and more diverse resources in our lesson presentations. We must change our teaching styles to achieve our objectives.*

Planning and Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching

Several studies, such as impact on prejudice reduction, have mixed results, but other studies have shown positive but short-term improvement in teacher candidates’ understanding and practice in educating diverse learners (van Wyk 2012; Greenman and Kimmel 1995; Cockrell et al. 1999; Causey et al. 2000). It seems from the focus group interviews that the respondents believe that to teach diverse learners one must be more conscious about different ways to teach them. Researchers have suggested specific pedagogical strategies to more effectively prepare teacher candidates to educate diverse learners through autobiography techniques (Clark and Medina 2000). Student teachers mentioned that planning and preparing lessons for different types of settings is very important to achieve success. After each lesson we reflect on our classroom activities which strengthening our repertoire for teaching diverse classes. The purpose of the project was to decrease prejudice reduction of our student teacher population because of our divided past (van Wyk 2012; Greenman and Kimmel 1995; McIntyre 1997; Cockrell et al. 1999; Causey et al. 2000); and develop the ability to engage in equity pedagogy (Greenleaf et al. 1994). By doing so, we also discuss topics on diversity in the classroom, planning, designing and preparing for resources on diversity,

accommodation of learners in such classes and how to assess these classes successfully. On the other hand scholars mentioned that using various approaches, faculties having to attempt by describing and examining the effectiveness in developing teacher candidates’ knowledge, attitude and skills to prepare for culturally responsive teaching. Furthermore, teacher educators hope to impact teacher candidates’ attitude toward diversities (Cicchelli and Cho 2007; Wasonga 2005). Student teachers in this project alluded to teach for social justice and integration of diverse activities into the teaching and learning situation. Emanating from this, a female student teacher [Focus Group C] alluded to social justice. She said: *I used music in one of my classes on the topic unemployment. I explain the words of the song by playing music to explain the theme of the lesson for unemployment. The learners enjoyed the topic under discussion and were very cooperative in my class.* On the other hand Focus Group interviewee B continued: *We can make a difference in the life of those learners! Yes, I felt confident to take on this challenge. By the way I reflect more on my praxis in preparing for teaching multicultural classes.* Moreover telephonically interviewee C expressed gratitude for being part of such a huge initiative. She continued: *In the beginning it was a huge challenge for me think differently regarding multicultural classroom but after completion of this project I felt empowered. Thank you so much for enlightened initiative. This project supported and equipped me to teach culturally diverse learners in my subject. I am more conscious about different ways to teach and support these diverse learners.* Schrum et al. (2007) reported that preparing future teachers for diverse schools can also being done in an online learning community. The BABS project was an excellent way of preparing student teachers for diverse students and environments would be partnerships between schools, department of education and university.

CONCLUSION

This paper describes the BABS project which focuses on both the content and process of empowering and preparing economics education student teachers to work and teach culturally diverse learners. Findings revealed that the

majority of students showed a stronger awareness of the needs of diverse learners, planning culturally diverse activities, receiving opportunities to practice and reflect on culturally diverse teaching sessions throughout the project. This community engaged initiative had a significant effect on student teachers' relationships. Furthermore the beliefs of participants about diversity and core personality traits of general open-mindedness, liberalism, sensitivity, and sympathy were enhanced. BABS also create an awareness of needs of diverse learners and find different ways to teach learners in poverty and unemployed environments. BABS also support and strengthening planning of specific culturally responsive lessons to be more conscious about different ways to teach culturally diverse learners. Emanating from this project it seems that student teachers who are dispositionally more open-minded, socio-politically liberal, and more sympathetic toward other people exhibit more positive beliefs about diversity in the school setting.

Implications for Preparing Student Teachers for Culturally Responsive Teaching

The following suggestions are formulated to prepare students for a culturally responsive teaching practice. It is suggested that be successful in teaching diverse learners, relevant teaching materials must be identified, culturally responsive instruction must be used, by creating culturally sensitive classroom environments, and incorporating various assessment tools for a culturally responsive teaching and learning classroom. The significance of preparing teacher candidates to work with diverse learners has been well recognized in many teacher education programmes. For purpose of strengthening this project, the following suggestions were formulated to empower students' with the culturally responsive knowledge, skills and dispositions to teach diverse learners:

(a) Developing a Culturally Diversity Knowledge Base

Any initial training programme must therefore empower, support and develop student teachers' understand regarding diversity and multicultural education issues. By doing so, student teachers' discipline content knowledge (DCK) and pedagogical content knowledge

(PCK) will be strengthen as a basis in enhancing their culturally diversity knowledge base. Student teachers need to understand and recognise the cultural diversities in planning and preparing classroom activities. By designing culturally responsive teaching strategies will ultimately empower and exposing student teachers with a wide variety of tools and a deeper understanding of multicultural education theory through research and scholarship.

(b) Designing Culturally Relevant Curricula

By employing BABS as empowerment strategy, student teachers will understand the importance of community engagement on how to convert cultural knowledge base into culturally responsive curriculum designs and instructional strategies for their respective classrooms. BABS can also be used as constructive alignment instrument to identify and promote other cultural groupings in the teaching and learning situation. By developing culturally relevant curricula will in a large extent avoid stereotyping, sexism, discrimination of minority groupings in the classrooms, acknowledge individuals but also embraced diversity. Culturally responsive teachers are critically conscious of power of symbolic curriculum as an instrument of teaching specific values and actions towards about ethnicity and cultural diversity.

(c) Demonstrating Culturally Caring and Building a Learning Community

Student teachers need to practice by creating classroom climates that will enhance conducive opportunities to support diverse learners. Through these actions, platforms are established in which student teachers become more culturally sensitive and building culturally responsive learning communities of practice. These specific issues will further create and support partnerships with student teachers, parents, school community, school management teams and other stakeholders.

(d) Increase Cross-cultural Communications and Create Cultural Congruity in Classroom Instruction

Student teachers must be given the opportunity to develop structures and advance cross-cultural communications to eradicate stereotypes by using cooperative learning techniques and peer coaching. Setting up class discussions regarding culture and diversity will acknowledge differences. It is very important to understand different learning styles of students and how to

design specific assessment activities in diverse classrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Emanating from the literature review and results of this study, suggested strategies are formulated. Specific pedagogical strategies to prepare student teacher candidates to educate diverse learners are autobiography, ethnography, simulations, debates, action research, integration of technology, community-based service-learning, field experience in a school and community setting, equity pedagogy and private-public partnerships. These strategies empower and give student teacher candidates an advantage edge in learning about and responding to the diverse classroom issues. Strategies if well formulated will ultimately empower student teachers' with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to teach diverse learners. The first year of the project has been completed. A major question now is, how well are these student teachers developing their expertise to make complex judgments in their culturally diverse classrooms? While the project has been implemented as planned, several concerns have arisen with respect to the time frames. Teaching practice (placements) are a fundamental component of the project and integrated within each course. A strong advantage of the project is that teaching practice can be done in student teachers' own culturally diverse urban classrooms, since most teach in this type of setting. One major question for future research has to do with the diversity beliefs and attitudes. Future studies should focus on pre- and post- measures of diversity attitudes, as a function of explicit diversity curriculum and experiences, especially in a South African context.

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NOTES

¹ This collaborative and cooperative learning approach was identifying as a community engagement project to expose Economics and Management Science education students to culturally diverse classrooms during the PGCE programme.

² It is compulsory for a student teacher to register for two subject didactics for the PGCE qualification but for this project they could chose to group in one of the subject didactics module for the project. This project consists of 15% of the weight of CASS mark per module.

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