

This article should not be reprinted for inclusion in any publication for sale without author's explicit permission. Anyone may view, reproduce or store copy of this article for personal, non-commercial use as allowed by the "Fair Use" limitations (sections 107 and 108) of the U.S. Copyright law. For any other use and for reprints, contact article's author(s) who may impose usage fee.. See also [electronic version copyright clearance](#) CURRENT VERSION  
COPYRIGHT © MMXIII AUTHOR & ACADEMIC EXCHANGE QUARTERLY

## **Diversity and Teacher Preparation: New Directions**

**Kevin Krahenbuhl, Dakota State University, SD**

Krahenbuhl, Ed.D., is Assistant Professor of Social Studies Pedagogy in the College of Education for Dakota State University

### **Abstract**

Diversity is arguably the most powerful concept embedded into higher education. Teacher preparation colleges have accepted and embedded the prevailing definition of diversity that overwhelmingly places emphasis on traits that do not directly link to intellectual capacity. That view of diversity does not adequately address the reality of the human condition. Further, it perpetuates a society where racism is prominent as teachers treat different 'diverse' groups according to how studies of those 'diverse' groups suggest they learn as a group. This article contends that this is the wrong direction for the preparation of teachers and provides a few recommendations to head in a new, and better, direction.

### **Introduction**

Diversity is, and has been, the preeminent force driving the 21<sup>st</sup> century American system of higher education. Diversity is a part of the human experience; we are by our birth, inherently unequal, unique, and diverse. We have different values, different IQs, different body structures, different genetic predispositions, and many other naturally-occurring elements that make us diverse. Hicklin & Meier (2008) noted the significant impacts of diversity being easier to comprehend when rooted in America's educational systems. Of course, the lifeblood that feeds all of these systems are colleges of education and thus they become, arguably, the most important arena for making diversity a universal precept.

Unfortunately, by all accounts, the reality for contemporary diversity advocates is that they almost entirely define diversity by skin color and cultural norms for non-white groups. This encourages a prevailing trend in diversity programs that ignores what is most important for educators – the differences in our mental, physical, and cognitive abilities – and instead place emphasis on insignificant differences such as skin pigmentation. A detailed account of this reality is spelled out in Bawer's (2012) preface to the powerful book, *The Victim's Revolution*. Among many arguments made, he also points out how that the advocates within the academy, who fuel diversity programs, and the like, are entirely ideologically motivated and their purpose is to propagandize their ideology to society through educational socialization.

Having a nearly entirely race-driven definition of *diversity* is wholly incompatible with the greatest civil rights advocate in American history, Martin Luther King, Jr. In Reverend King's most famous speech, he dreamed that one day, we "will live in a nation where [we] will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character". That seems to have been lost on the 21<sup>st</sup> century diversity crowd. As Douglas Campbell (2012) points out, in King's statement he defines both the essence of racism – defining one by his or her skin color – and its cure – defining by a person's character. Yet, in the confines of academia, the effort to cure the endemic racism in human civilization is to praise certain groups – minority ones with courses on their experiences – while bemoaning others – specifically, the majority of white Americans. This contradictory approach is underscored by many challenges; three specific ones are addressed in what follows.

### **Challenges for Diversity in Colleges of Education**

In light of the reality of the present view on diversity in higher education, let us turn our focus on colleges of education. One could argue that there is no more important place for such programs since the future teachers will undoubtedly interact with many diverse students. But within the context of diversity – as primarily a means for racial classification and praise or condemnation – several challenges exist that underscore the fact that we are headed in the wrong direction.

Within colleges of education, the prevailing vision is that teacher education programs must demonstrate an indisputable commitment to diversity (Valentin, 2006, pg. 199). This indisputable commitment can be seen nationally through the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which includes diversity as a necessary factor for earning a status as an accredited teacher preparation program. NCATE (2008) defines diversity as the "differences among groups of people and individuals based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation and geographical area". This definition presents clearly that intellectual diversity is not a significant factor in how such programs are to be evaluated seeing as only 1 out of 8 components is in any way linked to intellectual capacity. Others (Proctor, 2011) have similarly suggested that the contemporary diversity rhetoric counteracts ignorance by increasing the profile of the different – referring, specifically to those of different ethnicities.

A second challenge to the contemporary diversity movement can be seen from evidence that should be mounting – but is not – showing how much better teachers do as a result of exposure to diversity of non-white peoples. Peter Schmidt (2010) wrote of this shortcoming in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* placing emphasis on affirmative action policies and deliberate efforts to increase the campus diversity. Within his piece he affirms that although researchers have been working hard to put out evidence showing beneficial outcomes, which the lawyers need to continue to defend such policies in court challenges, they don't have a lot of solid ground on which to stand. The article also points out the work of Richard H. Sander, a law professor at UCLA, who has published research critical of race-conscious admissions. Ultimately, the evidence is severely lacking as to the benefits of diversity in practice, which would beg the question. Why then will teachers be better off simply by learning about different cultures in a race-conscious manner?

One final disturbing challenge is that in designing these programs, the goal is not improving the teaching but rather indoctrinating students to wholly accept this view of diversity. For instance, it has been argued that “diversity must be taught, encouraged, *embraced*, and *accepted* to promote the necessary social consciousness to essentially thrive as a united, well-regarded nation” (Valentin, 2006, p. 199) – my emphasis added. Garmon (2004) concluded that multicultural courses and field experiences by themselves may perhaps be insufficient to counteract students’ preexisting attitudes and beliefs again underscoring the driving motive – a well-intended form of re-education camp for future teachers. It is ironic that in the halls of academia where historically, tenure has been a key element to protect faculty members’ academic freedom (Dimaria, 2012) that has been completely corrupted.

Instead of protecting academic freedom, teacher preparation programs are required to be propagandists for the prevailing vision that this is now being mandated to earn status as an accredited teacher preparation program. That prevailing vision of diversity is well described by Berliner and Hull (2002) in describing the multiculturalist as one for whom race is the preeminent component that counts – for values, for thinking, for human identity in general. Bawer (2012) elaborated upon this further and pointed out that this is not a form of education “but of indoctrination in the name of revolutionary liberation” (pg. 18). And that is something that is downright destructive to our society and must be eliminated from colleges of education. This must take place before it increases racism in society as people see a type of person and do not look at them through colorblind lenses but instead through racial depictions created and perpetuated by our educational system.

### **Recommendations**

Having critically reviewed many of the shortcomings of diversity in teacher preparation, let’s move on to recommendations to improve this effort. First off, it is important to note that diversity is, without question, an important component to our existence. As discussed in the outset, humans are inherently different and unequal, and within education recognition of that is essential. However, the goal for diversity integration must be rooted in the vision of leaders like Reverend King and his dream. Contrary to suggestions such as those made by some that a unifying narrative of American civic-republicanism-rooted-identity is Orwellian, (Journell, 2011) the opposite is actually true. It is Orwellian to prepare future educators by forcing them to accept the idea that their future students are almost wholly identified by their race. Journell (2011) later goes on to assert that “educators have the responsibility of shaping the message learned during these formative years” (p. 18) and consistently advocates more multiculturalist revisionism. I earlier outlined the problems of educator acting as propagandists in a piece on the increasing politicization of legislation in the curriculum (Krahenbuhl, 2012), which underscores this problem.

One of the most incredible things regarding the United States – and its American identity – is that it is entirely different from most national identities around the globe because it is built on universal principles. You cannot ask a person to define an American without that person referencing universal precepts, not simply blood-relations, family heritage in the country, or racial/ethnic norms. What would most help to rectify the racist lens is to place emphasis on this reality. Americans are not defined by an ethnic background, socio-economic status, gender, or any other means; Americans are defined as individuals committed to the universal principles that

are embedded into constitutional order. Diversity, as it is presently emphasized, does the complete opposite of this and simply seeks to define people by their difference, and to place emphasis on those who have faced hardship by preferring them as victims (Bawer, 2012). Diversity should instead be built into the incredible image of the American identity that does not call for unity of a people, but unity of commitment to a set of universal principles.

A second opportunity to rectify this challenge is to place emphasis on already existing ‘diversity courses’ away from viewing different peoples as being defined by their race, ethnicity, sexual-orientation, or other category of division. Increased emphasis ought to be made regarding the reality of diversity embedded into the human situation based on experiences, values, and perceptions but within the context that a human being is a human being. There is no legitimate scientific study that would assert that somehow diverse groups, such as blacks, Hispanics, or American Indians are naturally different from white humans. The difference in one’s skin pigmentation is entirely irrelevant in the formation of one’s identity unless he or she chooses to – or is taught to – make it a preeminent component. Defining one’s self by one’s race is the essence of racism (Clegg & Rosenberg, 2012) and teacher preparation candidates should not be forced to accept and embrace – a stated goal addressed earlier – the prevailing conception of diversity. This then produces teachers who assume that if they have a certain ‘diverse’ type of student in their class it means that they need to learn a certain way. Such a policy creates a situation that perpetuates racism as teachers are trained to specifically look at people and determine teaching strategies based on their race.

The key to improving this institutional ingraining of racism into future teachers is elimination of identity studies courses – at least from college requirements, if not entirely at the university. Each of these courses perpetuates the belief that a person is defined, if not wholly, extremely largely by a person’s race or ethnicity and offers up a paradoxical position for the university to take. As Bercier (2007) explains, “the social order the university imagines and would devise impels us to divide against ourselves” (p. 116). A key part of that division is the classification of human beings into various diversity groups that see themselves as victims, or oppressors, depending on their circumstances. Either way, that is not a recipe for an effective educational environment.

## **Conclusion**

As Dewey (1956) laid out in *Schools and Society*, education and learning are social and interactive processes that make the school a driving force in constructing the society of the future. That suggestion is undoubtedly accurate but as universities we face the challenging question of what we can do regarding racial division and tensions. At least in the many colleges of education across the country one action is obvious – do that which is most likely to produce a race-blind society.

The central argument of this essay has been to present a concise, logical case against diversity as it is presently ingrained into academia and provide recommendations to rectify such instruction. In order for educators to be equipped to prepare and train the future generations of leaders, one of the most important things we can do is stop forcing teacher preparation candidates to accept and embrace the notions of defining a person by his or her ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area. Instead,

the emphasis must be placed on teaching teachers to analyze the learning styles in each class without regard to their skin color, and modifying and adapting the learning environment to best fit the cards that he or she is dealt.

## References

- Bawer, Bruce. (2012). *The Victims' Revolution: The rise of identity studies and the closing of the liberal mind*. New York: Harper Collins. Print.
- Bercier, Barry. (2007). *The Skies of Babylon: Diversity, nihilism, and the American university*. Delaware: ISI Books. Print.
- Berliner, Michael S. & Hull, Gary. (2002). Diversity and multiculturalism: The new racism. Irvine, CA: Ayn Rand Institute. Retrieved November 5, 2012 from [http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=objectivism\\_diversity](http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=objectivism_diversity)
- Campbell, Douglas. (2012). The cultivation of racism. *Academic Questions*, 25(3), 389-393.
- Clegg, Roger & Rosenberg, John S. (2012). Against "Diversity". *Academic Questions*, 25(3), 377-388. Print
- Dewey, John. (1956). *The school and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Print.
- Dimaria, Frank. (2012). Tenure and America's community colleges. *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, 22 (March 26, 2012), 16-17. Online Database.
- Garmon, M.A. (2004). Changing preservice teachers' attitudes/beliefs about diversity: What are the critical factors? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(3), 201-213. Online Database.
- Hicklin, Alisa & Meier, Kenneth J. (2008). Race, structure, and state governments: The politics of higher education diversity. *The Journal of Politics*, 70(3), 851-860. Online Database.
- Journell, Wayne. (2011). Social studies, citizenship education, and the search for an American identity: An argument against a unifying narrative. *Journal of Thought*, Fall-Winter.
- Krahenbuhl, Kevin. (2012). A legislative threat to social studies? *Perspectives on History*, 50(6), 51. Print.
- National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. (2008). NCATE 2008 Standards. Retrieved October 25, 2012 from <http://www.ncate.org/Standards/NCATEUnitStandards/NCATEGlossary/tabid/477/Default.aspx#D>
- Proctor, Gillian. (2011). Forward - Diversity: The depoliticization of inequalities. *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies*, 10(4), 231-234. Online Database.
- Schmidt, Peter. (2010). New research complicates discussions of campus diversity – in a good way. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 31, 2010. Retrieved October 20, 2012 from <http://chronicle.com/article/New-Research-Complicates/63787>
- Valentin, Sylvia. (2006). Addressing diversity in teacher education programs. *Education*: 127(2), 196-202. Online Database.