Assessing the Diversity Related Professional Development Needs of Pre-Service Teachers

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Introduction

This survey study assessed the professional development needs of students in the college of education and professional studies at a predominantly white university in the Midwest. Results indicated that students desired and faculty/staff felt more training on how to talk about issues of race, discrimination, and poverty in the classroom setting, cultural competence training and disability/mental health awareness was needed.

Conceptualizations

Students of color are expected to make up 56 percent of the student population by 2024, the educator workforce is still overwhelmingly white, 82% of K-12 teachers identify as white (Digest of Education Statistics, 2013). It’s critical that higher education institutions prepare pre-service teachers to demonstrate understanding of issues of race, class, gender, privilege, etc.

Cultural competence is having an awareness of one’s own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. It is the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each student unique, while celebrating the between-group variations that make our country a tapestry.

The mere presence of diverse communities on college campuses is not sufficient in promoting positive educational outcomes related to diversity (Museus, 2008).

Methods

Qualitative survey research was used to assess diversity related professional developments needs of pre-service teachers. Students, faculty and staff were asked an open ended question: “Please list topics of diversity training that should be offered to students in the college.” After the question a text box was provided to allow respondents to provide a unique answer. This approach, as opposed to providing a list of predetermined responses to select from gave respondents the freedom to say exactly what they felt should be offered.

Data Analysis

Through careful review of open ended questions, emerging themes were developed. A number was assigned to each theme which was used for manual coding. The coders analyzed responses independently and made notes regarding how the statements fit within the established themes and compared coding results. Using this coding method, six themes emerged.

Results

After analyzing the open ended responses provided by 829 respondents (faculty, staff and students) six themes emerged. The themes were having diversity related training in the areas of:

1) Disability/Mental Illness. Several respondents mentioned the need for more training in the areas of physical, mental and/or learning disabilities. Individuals with mental illness and those who have experienced trauma were also included in this theme.

2) Cultural Competence/Awareness. This theme emerged from statements about needing to learn about cultures other than their own and learning strategies for teaching students from different cultures.

3) LGBTQAI+/Gender. Many of these statements referred to learning about various gender differences/identities and sexual orientations.

4) Conversations of Diversity. These statements focused on training to provide the skills needed to facilitate conversations about diversity in the classroom setting or how to communicate appropriately with individuals from diverse backgrounds (e.g., not saying anything offensive or committing microaggressions).

5) Discrimination. This theme referred to knowledge about inequalities, discrimination/harassment (e.g., bias, microaggressions)

6) Race/Ethnicity. This theme emerged from statements referring to knowledge of individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Designated Solutions

- Provide numerous opportunities for skill-based training, with specific focus on effective communication skills and cultural considerations within and outside the classroom.
- Explore the intersections between ethnicity, socio-economic status, culture and race as dimensions of diversity.
- Explore managing unconscious bias and assumptions harbored by students, families, school personnel and the community.
- Provide training on communication styles and the delivery of effective feedback when responding to prejudicial or culturally inappropriate remarks within and outside the classroom.
- Explore issues of ‘unearned privilege’ in the workplace and its effect upon the strength of workplace relationships.
- Provide training on ‘cultural cues’ and issues of respect in the workplace/classroom. (Handover Research, 2017)

Teacher Preparation

Multicultural teacher education courses and field experiences play a vital role in developing students’ awareness and sensitivity to diversity. Wiggins, Follo and Eberly (2007) examined the impact of a field immersion program on preservice teachers’ attitudes towards teaching in culturally diverse classrooms. Results indicated that appropriate field placement, support from peers and teachers, and meaningful coursework facilitates the preparation of culturally responsive teachers.

Conclusion

Over 80% of the teachers coming out of teacher preparation programs are white and many are teaching in urban settings. It’s imperative they are prepared to work in an ever growing diverse society. Teacher preparation programs are tasked with this duty. Institutions have to be committed to creating structured opportunities to achieve success in student learning. Those who completed the survey agreed.

References


