

Advocacy in Academia and the Role of Teacher Preparation Programs

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Chapter 10

Managing Bias in Teacher Preparation in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Studies on teacher preparation for managing bias has established and created a domain within the global educational research enterprise. What is implicit is how researches on managing bias may be used to improve teacher development. Research on managing bias in teacher preparation has recognized a place for itself within the international educational research initiative. What is not so clear is how studies of teacher thinking may be used in improving the quality of teacher development programmes. ‘The notion of managing bias implies employing strategies that foster inclusivity and multicultural education. This chapter focuses on five areas of the importance on managing bias in teacher preparation. I endeavour to explore the following: the concept bias, bias in teacher preparation, creating an anti-bias learning environment, preparing teachers for multicultural classes, and citizenship education and anti-bias in teacher preparation.

INTRODUCTION

Studies on teacher preparation for managing bias has established and created a domain within the global educational research enterprise. What is implicit is how researches on managing bias may be used to improve teacher development. Research on managing bias in teacher preparation has recognized a place for itself within the international educational research initiative. What is not so clear is how studies of teacher thinking may be used in improving the quality of teacher development programmes. ‘The notion of managing bias implies employing strategies that foster inclusivity and multicultural education. This chapter focuses on five areas of the importance on managing bias in teacher preparation. I endeavour to explore the following:

- The concept bias
- Bias in teacher preparation

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Managing Bias in Teacher Preparation in Higher Education

- Creating an anti-bias learning environment
- Preparing teachers for multicultural classes
- Citizenship education and anti-bias in teacher preparation

Learning Outcomes

- Define the general term bias
- Discuss anti-bias teacher preparation
- Examine creation of anti-bias learning environment
- Analyse issues of teacher preparation for multicultural classes
- Analyse citizen education and anti-bias in teacher preparation
- Teaching for social justice

The Concept Bias in Teacher Preparation

In layman's language 'bias' refers to logical error: deviation from a true score, the latter referring to the valid measurement of some phenomenon or to accurate estimation of a population parameter (Levinson, 2009). In this chapter, which deals with teacher preparation, bias means perpetrating oppression cycles and marginalization which may be based on race, gender, culture or ethnicity (see figure 1) (Derman-Sparks, 2009). It depends on other concepts, such as 'truth' and 'objectivity', whose justification and role have been questioned. The aim of teacher education is to capacitate student teachers at all stages in this 21st century to be effective in the global village. Anti-bias in teacher development or preparation involves setting forth values-based principles and methodology which respect and embrace differences as well as act against unfairness (Derman-Sparks, 2009). It is important that anti-bias teacher preparation should be undertaken for teachers to operate efficiently in classrooms where there is increased diversity in race, culture, ethnicity and special needs among learners (Lin, lake and Rice, 2008). The diverse needs in contemporary classrooms require teachers who are responsive to the different needs of all learners. Teacher development should equip a student teacher with skills that enable one to implement curriculum at any level that is culturally responsive and inclusive to assist all learners meeting their needs (Lin et Al, 2008).

Figure 1. Case study

Chipo and Rudo are the only two female students in class of 20 Bachelor of Education Pre-service (Secondary) Degree programme undertaking mathematics as a major course. The two female student teachers rank top of the class in all course assessments. The mathematics course lecturer is proud of the two students. One day the lecturer walked in a lecture and remarked, "We all agree that Chipo and Rudo are the 'men' in this mathematics class because of their excellent performance. The males in this class have surely been defeated. What's left is to give them miniskirts". As you know mathematics is for the tough guys because of its difficulty and rigour.

Question: What bias does the remark show regarding preparation of secondary school mathematics teacher preparation?

Anti-Bias Teacher Preparation

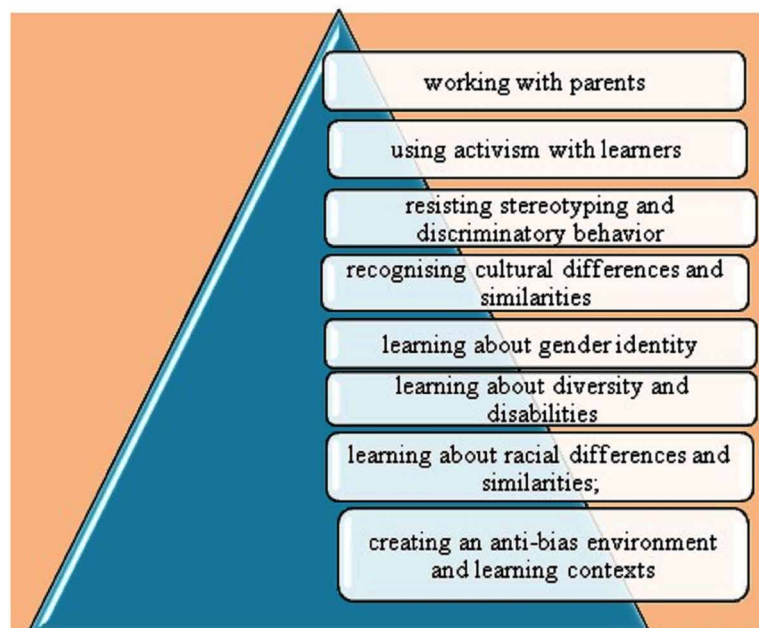
Bias is as one of several potential forms of error. More commonly, ‘bias’ refers to systematic error: deviation from a true score, the latter referring to the valid measurement of some phenomenon or to accurate estimation of a population parameter. Anti-bias teacher preparation is a way of equipping teachers with skills that enable them to teach in a manner that supports learners and their families in curriculum implementation (Kuh, Leekeenan, Given and Beneke, 2011).

Such teachers select inclusive books, teaching and learning materials. The teachers consciously avoid elaborating topics on gender, race class, ability, language differences and family structure. Anti-bias teacher preparation encourages community leaders, families, children and teachers to generate anti-bias context bound curriculum topics based on historical and contemporary events. Possessed with such skills, the teachers balance anti-bias teaching experiences, respond to learners’ questions and observations. Teachers perceive anti-bias work as an opportunity to teach rather than see it as a challenge (Kuh et al, 2011). When teachers take an anti-bias stance, they develop innovative practices in accord with the community they serve. Figure 2 below gives some strategies to anti-bias that can be emphasized during teacher preparation.

Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment

What exist or does not exist in the school classroom provides learners with significant information about whom and what is important. Every effort should be made to create a setting that is rich in possibilities for exploring cultural diversity. Such an environment assists children in developing their ideas about themselves and others, creates the conditions under which children initiate conversations about differ-

Figure 2. Approaches to anti-bias teacher preparations



Managing Bias in Teacher Preparation in Higher Education

ences and provides teachers with a setting for introducing activities about diversity (Chou, 2007). It also fosters children's positive self-concept and attitudes. Diversity is a fundamental element in all educational decision making. Environments that reflect the rich diversity of the community, nation and world assist in opening student teachers' minds and actively engaging them in their development. Research has shown that prejudice is countered when learning environments foster critical thinking, empathy development and positive self-esteem in students (Lavison, 2009). Elements such as Home-School-Community Connection, Life Experiences, Accepting Environment, Comprehensive Integration, Self-Exploration, and talking with student teachers about diversity and bias should be employed in managing bias in teacher preparation (Anti-Defamation League, 2016). Regarding Home-School-Community Connection teachers should involve parents, other family members and other community members in the learning process (Miller, 2014). Basing on the ecological theory, it should be understood that families and fellow community members provide the context in which students are motivated to learn. School and the home or school and the community should be viewed not as isolated but as interconnected with each other and with the world (Chou, 2007). Lastly, reviewing resources to make classroom displays and boards inclusive of all learners is critical. Insure that supplemental books and videos do not reinforce existing societal stereotypes. When such examples in textbooks are observed, point them out to students and encourage students to think about them critically and to challenge them.

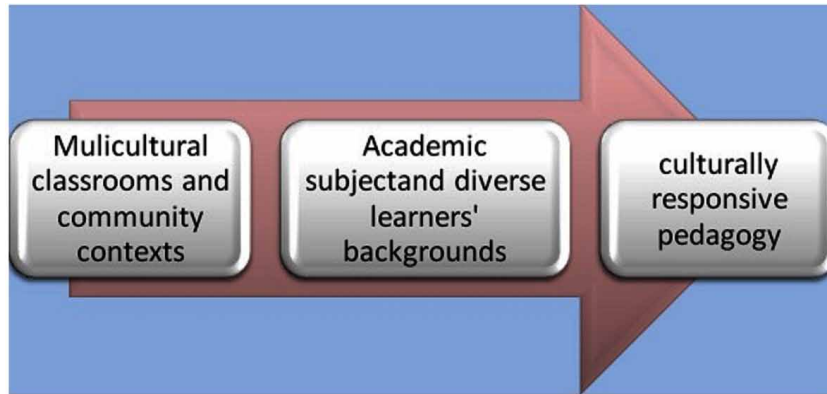
In teacher preparation emphasis should be placed on the teachers learning to create transformative learning, social justice, anti-bias education and creating learning environments where children learn freely without marginalization (Kuh et al, 2016). Student teachers can also be prepared to be able to expand learning environments. Anti-bias learning environment can also be expanded by using parents as agents for changing the classroom environment. In helping student teachers to create learning environments, student teachers should embrace parental involvement in dealing with coursework (Lin et al, 2008). By collaborating, sharing resources and generating ways of overcoming challenges with parents, the student teachers can create anti-bias learning environments. Parents should be invited in the university as guest speakers to share their own experiences and those of their children (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Preparing Teachers for Multicultural Classrooms

Anti-bias teacher education is based on Paulo Freire's idea of 'practice of freedom' (Freire, 2000). Student teachers should learn about cultural consciousness and an understanding of the transformative power of education. Hence, the preparation of teachers should enable them to implement anti-bias curriculum as a change process. Experience shows that teachers are seeing increased differences in race, ethnicity, culture and special needs in their 21 century classes. Among other things teacher preparation should focus on removing bias and implementing a curriculum that is culturally responsive and inclusive to assist children's needs (Levinson, 2009). There is need to prepare student teachers to integrate anti-bias or diversity curriculum with the regular curriculum. Quality multicultural instruction should be given to students in teacher education programmes (Grant, 2014). The approaches outlined in Figure 3 below can be adopted in developing anti-bias educators for multicultural classes.

Teacher educators need to engage in critical examination leading to curriculum reform intend to foster alternatives to hegemonic experiences and beliefs Davis, (1995). Multicultural classes foster education based on a set of strategies and materials in education that were developed to assist teachers when responding to the many issues (Levinson, 2009). The issues are created by the rapidly changing demographics of learners. Multicultural education provides students with knowledge about the histories, cultures, and

Figure 3. Teachers for multicultural classes



contributions of diverse groups. It assumes that the future society is pluralistic. Multiculturalism draws on insights from different fields, including ethnic studies and gender studies (Miller, 2014).

Citizenship Education and Anti-Bias in Teacher Preparation

All learners have different learning styles so incorporating multicultural education techniques into the classroom, may allow them to be more successful. “Multicultural education needs to enable students to succeed economically in a multicultural world by teaching them to be comfortable in a diverse workforce and skillful at integrating into a global economy (Levinson, 2009). Citizen education and anti-bias teacher preparation involves student teachers creating a classroom culture outlined in Figure 4 below.

Teaching for Social Justice

In teacher preparation that aim at reducing bias social justice involves educating students in a fair and just manner and preparing the teachers to become agents of change in the education sector in order to

Figure 4. Elements of classroom culture



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positively impact communities and society at large. The teachers should in turn be able to teach for social justice. Teaching for social justice involves taking action in the classroom to reduce the cycles of oppression (Russo, 2004). In teaching for social justice the teachers should focus on ending oppression in their classrooms.

In embracing the philosophy of social justice teaching, teachers start by recognising oppression and understand themselves as change agents. In recognising oppression, student teachers need to realise that there is injustice in the world. Some members of society are privileged. On the other hand others are always disadvantaged. Experience supported by literature shows that in most cases injustice is perpetuated around race, class, class, gender, ability or ethnicity. This is often referred to as faces of oppression. These faces of oppression do differ across time, place, and context. When teaching for social justice in a classroom context no one is left behind as illustrated by the rainbow coloured hands lifted in Figure 5 below.

Understanding how learners may be privileged, oppressed or marginalised is a teachers' business. Student teachers need to understand that being advantaged or disadvantaged is cyclical in nature. How people fail to accept that reality is occurring should also be a focus area in teacher training and development (Bigelow, Christensen, Karp, Miner and Peterson, 2010). Dealing with such focal concepts help student teachers understand what teaching for social justice for eradication of bias entails. During teacher preparation, students should develop the understanding that within their classrooms teachers can disrupt or challenge cycles of oppression and marginalisation (Bigelow, et al., 2010) Student teachers who learn about strategies to counter marginalisation across all grade levels and curriculum content areas develop into change agents. Hence, focus for developing content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge for challenging bias and injustice should be upheld in teacher development.

In that context teaching for social justice implies helping student teachers recognise marginalisation in its multiple faces or forms. When teachers are prepared to teach for (Bigelow, et al., 2010)

Student teachers should be helped to recognise and respond to societal inequality and explore possible solutions to the problems. By so doing there is hope to build a society where individuals have equal access to opportunities regardless their background. The student teachers should be developed to pose questions like:

Figure 5. Teaching for social justice



- Who benefits and who is left?
- Why are certain practices fair or unfair?
- What is needed to reduce bias and bring about change?

By answering such questions student teachers may recognise injustice existing at micro and macro levels (Eitzen and Smith, 2003). When teacher development programmes embrace social justice teaching, classrooms can be places of hope where both learners and teachers gain glimpses of our society. They also learn academic and critical skills needed to succeed in life (Bigelow, et al.). During teacher preparation, there is need to reduce bias through practicing social justice in the classroom. This is achieved by creating a community of conscience. A teacher should strive to assure those learners' voices, opinions are valued and respected. Student teachers should be cognisant of the issue that they should establish a community of conscience through creating rules that teach fairness in classroom dialogue and behaviour. Learners need to be taught to share their ideas and respond to the ideas of others in a way that value each other's perspective (Bigelow, et al., 2010). Student teachers need to avoid making learners feel bad and devalued by their classmates. The teacher should illustrate modelling good responses that enrich a classroom conversation. There is need to uphold issues of fostering a classroom community as well as help learners perceive each other as academic siblings or co-learners rather than adversaries or competitors. Ethos of social cohesion and citizenship education should be valued as these reduce bias in teacher development.

CONCLUSION

The chapter focused on managing bias in teacher preparation. Of focus were issues of developing teachers who function in diverse classes and uphold issues of inclusivity, anti-bias as well as multiculturalism. Approaches to anti-bias in teacher preparation were also discussed. It also dealt with creating classroom culture as a bias management strategy in teacher preparation. Lastly the chapter deals with teaching for social justice. This chapter is a stepping stone in managing bias during teacher development. To promote anti-bias principles, student teachers need to reflect upon how teaching strategies are relative to the teacher and learners. It is incumbent upon teacher educators to confront prejudice and celebrate diversity. Understanding how learners may be privileged, oppressed or marginalised is a teachers' business. Teacher educators should help student teachers remove the idea of discrimination and examine their beliefs and values about race, class, gender, mother tongue language and disability for social cohesion.

Learner Activities

1. In a narrative express pride, confidence and healthy self-esteem without denying the value and dignity of other people
2. Examine diversity in social, cultural and historical contexts.

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