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Are Today's Teachers Being Prepared for Diversity? An Analysis of School Catalogues

by

James Jennings and Illene Carver

The following is a summary of A Content Analysis of Racial and Ethnic Themes in Catalogues Distributed by Teacher Preparation Schools in Massachusetts, 1989 and 1990, a report issued by the Community Research and Technical Assistance Program of the William Monroe Trotter Institute in January 1991.

A recent content analysis study shows that while leading educators in Massachusetts stress the importance of preparing teachers for an increasingly diverse world, most teacher preparation schools virtually ignore the issue of racial and ethnic diversity in catalogues recruiting new students. This not only discourages people from diverse backgrounds from becoming teachers, but could also create a lack of understanding in the classroom of the black, Latino, and Asian students being taught.

Generally, there appears to be little serious attention paid to introducing future teachers in elementary and early childhood education to the growing racial and ethnic diversity in American society. While the catalogues reviewed contained hundreds of course titles and descriptions, less than 5 percent of these courses mentioned any racial, ethnic, or multicultural themes in their titles or descriptions. Few of these same courses were required for degrees.

This finding is based on a survey of 1989 and 1990 catalogues of teacher preparation programs and schools in the commonwealth of Massachusetts conducted by the Trotter Institute's Community Research and Technical Assistance (CRTA) Program and published as a report in 1991.

The study was initiated in 1990 in answer to a request by Lovell Dyett, executive curator of the Commission on the Hall of Black Achievement of Bridgewater State College, for assistance in determining the degree of prioritization given the teaching of black social and urban experiences in schools and programs preparing future teachers in the commonwealth. As Mr. Dyett requested (pers. com.

August 22, 1990), "We are interested in the amount taught, quality and depth of the material presented, methods of presentation, integration into the overall curriculum and the preparation of teachers to teach black history."

The official catalogues of these schools are a valuable resource for this kind of information, containing course listings and descriptions as well as outlining degree requirements. As important marketing devices for attracting potential students, they advise students about the philosophy and mission of the particular school or program and how certain topics will be approached in the course of their training.

Information from the Board of Regents shows a total of fifty-two schools in Massachusetts that offer various kinds of programs for the preparation of school teachers. The Trotter Institute collected catalogues from fifty of these schools. The offerings in early childhood and elementary education were carefully reviewed for the following information:¹

- Are there any courses listed in the catalogues with titles suggesting multicultural, racial, or ethnic considerations? Are any of these courses required?
- Are there any course descriptions which refer to multicultural, racial, or ethnic themes? Are any of these courses required?
- Does the catalogue include any program descriptions relating to multicultural, racial, or ethnic topics?

Code words and phrases were used as guides to determine whether or not attention was being paid to multicultural, racial, or ethnic themes and topics. These words and phrases included:

African Americans
bilingual education
blacks
busing
community studies
cross-cultural education
cultural learning styles
cultural awareness
desegregation
diversity
equal educational opportunity
equity
ethnic minorities
ethnic minorities
familiarity with urban community
Hispanic cultures
inner city
minority experiences
multiculturalism
multilingualism
poverty and cultural differences
race relations

race and ethnic relations
racial and ethnic differences
racial and cultural needs
racial heterogeneity
racism

If these terms were found in a course title or description, then it was seen as a reflection of possibly some degree of attention to preparing teachers for professional settings involving racial and ethnic diversity. A course title suggesting attention to racial and ethnic diversity does not necessarily mean the topic is adequately covered in the course. Similarly, the absence of a course title or description suggesting such attention may not be an accurate indication of course content. The former, however, may be some indication or sensitivity to the relative importance of diversity issues to a particular school.

A catalogue that suggests that a school or program reflects an appreciation of racial, linguistic, and ethnic diversity may attract a greater number of black, Latino, and Asian students.

More than two-thirds of the thirty-one schools offering degree programs in early childhood education did not suggest the importance of preparing teachers for an increasingly diverse society in any of their course titles. However, nineteen of the thirty-one catalogues—or 62 percent—did indicate some attention to racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes in their course descriptions. But, nearly half of the early childhood education courses whose titles or descriptions indicated some attention to racial, ethnic, and multicultural issues were not required.

Interestingly, large or urban teacher preparation schools and programs did not reflect any greater attention to racial, ethnic, and multicultural issues. Several of the larger schools in the greater Boston area, for example, published catalogues listing many courses, but none gave any indication in the titles or descriptions of racial, ethnic, or multicultural themes. As a matter of fact, one of the largest teacher preparation schools in Boston did not list a single course in more than one hundred graduate offerings with a title suggesting any consideration of racial, ethnic, or multicultural issues. While this particular school did have one course description that mentioned learning issues associated with racial and ethnic diversity, it was but one required course of many listed in the catalogue.

Boston University, on the other hand, listed several titles and descriptions of required courses suggesting racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes

under elementary and early childhood education for undergraduate and graduate students. The catalogue for Simmons College also reflected a serious effort to introduce students in elementary and early childhood education to racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes by requiring and strongly recommending that students in these programs take at least one course in African-American studies.

Wheelock College also listed numerous required courses with titles and descriptions suggesting attention to racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes. In fact, Wheelock College stands out among the schools in its emphasis on these themes as an integral part of its teacher preparation programs, seventeen of forty-three courses in the undergraduate curriculum having titles or descriptions strongly suggesting the importance of racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes in the preparation of future teachers.

In elementary education the situation was similar. Twenty-three of thirty-nine degree programs—57 percent—showed no indication that students would be introduced to issues touching upon race, ethnicity, or multiculturalism. Of the seventeen schools that did have listings dealing with racial and ethnic diversity, about half were not required for a degree.

To summarize, there are very few course titles or descriptions in the catalogues of teacher preparation schools suggesting an appreciation of the importance of introducing future teachers to racial, ethnic, or multicultural themes and discussions. Of the handful of courses with titles or descriptions suggesting consideration of racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes, nearly half are not required for undergraduate or graduate students to receive degrees.

In addition to recruiting and retaining a greater number of black, Latino, and Asian teachers, teacher preparation schools and programs need to prepare all teachers for the pedagogical implications of an increasingly diverse society.

As Meyer Weinberg described in *A Chance to Learn: A History of Race and Education in the United States*, there seems to be a quiet “suspension of reality” regarding the existence, impact, and history of racism in American education.² Of the hundreds of course titles and descriptions reviewed for the entire state of Massachusetts, only a very small number focused on the problem or impact of racism in American society, or within the nation’s educational institutions. Certainly future teachers and administrators, teaching and working with young peo-

ple in diverse social settings, should at least understand the historical role that race and racism has played in their profession.

The Massachusetts Board of Education recently commissioned a major report indicating the importance of recruiting, hiring, and retaining a greater number of black, Latino, and Asian teachers. The report was submitted to the board by the Statewide Committee on the Recruitment of Black, Latino, and Asian Teachers in spring 1990. The thirty-five-member statewide committee demonstrated that the presence of teachers of color in public school classrooms represented a vital resource in enabling the commonwealth to respond more effectively to its unfolding demographic, social, and economic challenges. It is clear that achieving an acceptable presence of black, Latino, and Asian teachers in the commonwealth's public schools cannot occur until more undergraduates from these racial and ethnic groups make career decisions to become teachers.

There is a gap between the kind of information and messages reported in the catalogues of teacher preparation programs and schools and the statements of leading educators — as well as the leaders of individual schools — regarding the importance of preparing new teachers for an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse state and world.

Several obstacles to greater participation and presence of black, Latino, and Asian teachers were identified by the committee. Some of these obstacles included:

- Minority undergraduate students' negative perceptions about the teaching profession;
- Inadequate outreach and marketing services to minority undergraduates who may be potential teachers; and
- Distorted curriculum messages regarding the presence of minorities in society.

These kinds of obstacles can be overcome to some degree by what potential students read in the official catalogues of these schools and programs. The messages that black, Latino, and Asian students glean from school catalogues are important in encouraging or discouraging them regarding the possibility or desirability of becoming teachers. A catalogue that suggests that a school or program reflects an appreciation of racial, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, for example, may attract a greater number of black, Latino, and Asian students. School catalogues and

bulletins are, in fact, important marketing tools for a college or university.

The analysis of school and program catalogues reveals how various schools are approaching the need to develop greater sensitivity to diversity issues in the preparation of teachers. In addition to recruiting and retaining a greater number of black, Latino, and Asian teachers, teacher preparation schools and programs need to prepare all teachers for the pedagogical implications of an increasingly diverse society. As was suggested by Dr. Peter Negroni, superintendent of the Springfield public schools, the lack of such a focus in their recruitment catalogues, while not immediate cause for criticism or condemnation, shows the need for expanded discussions regarding the messages that teacher preparation schools may be sending in their catalogues.³

School catalogues are but one yardstick for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of teacher preparation programs. But, the official catalogue of a particular school may be the first piece of information that a potential applicant obtains in order to make a decision about whether to apply or not. If, after reviewing several official catalogues, an aspiring teacher does not get any or even a minimum indication of the importance of understanding the issue of diversity in America today, then it is possible that a mistaken attitude about the importance of race and ethnicity will be imbedded in the early phases of teacher preparation. Teacher preparation schools and programs in Massachusetts need to examine more closely the messages generated by these catalogues.

Schools should review their curriculum offerings in the context of increasing racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. The Joint Task Force on Teacher Preparation, as pointed out by Dr. James Fraser of Lesley College in an interview conducted for this study, has made recommendations to the Massachusetts Board of Education regarding major changes in how future teachers should be prepared and trained. Presently, all teacher preparation schools and programs are required to respond to new state regulations for training teachers. This presents an important opportunity for the leaders of these schools to raise questions about the range and content of required and elective courses offered to future teachers and whether or not the courses address the issue of diversity.

Administrators and faculty must begin to look at these issues as a means for recruiting minority teachers and meeting the challenges facing the commonwealth's educational system. There is a gap between the kind of information and messages reported in the catalogues of teacher preparation programs and schools and the statements of leading educators — as well as the leaders of individual schools — regarding the importance of preparing new teachers for an in-

creasingly racially and ethnically diverse state and world. At this time, too few schools and programs have utilized their school catalogues to impress upon potential black, Latino, and Asian teachers the importance of their presence in these schools. Most school catalogues continue to give the impression that the experiences of people of color in the United States are not significant in the training of teachers. It appears that it would be relatively easy for future white teachers to believe that the presence of black, Latino, and Asian colleagues is not a serious topic in their educational preparation. A potential white teacher could easily be convinced from reading a school catalogue that an understanding of the black, Latino, or Asian experiences in this society is really not that important. Black, Latino, and Asian readers of these same catalogues can easily get the message that they are welcomed in many schools and programs only as a token, not on a fully institutionalized or integrated basis.

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Individual schools and programs need to evaluate themselves on this issue. Although school catalogues may not describe fully the kind of multicultural and multiracial education that is taking place—or, not taking place—at a particular school, they do represent some kind of indication. Since marketing of the teaching profession is important in the recruitment of black and Latino teachers, a review of curriculum guides and course outlines is needed to ensure that all future teachers are alerted to the importance of understanding the experiences of people of color. But, as Dr. Theresa Perry pointed out in an interview, the needed changes must move beyond “simply adding another course for minorities,” toward an “understanding and rethinking of the entire curriculum in order to ensure that it reflects all people and groups in our society.” Simply producing a better-looking catalogue in terms of

positive messages and rhetoric appealing to potential black and Latino teachers is not enough. Another educator on our panel, Dr. Luis Fuentes, noted that along with examining course content, efforts to integrate and diversify the faculty and personnel at teacher preparation schools is critically important. To offer courses that reflect an understanding and appreciation of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity without attempts to reflect this same diversity on the teaching staffs may not ultimately result in the right kind of message.

As a next step, course outlines should be thoroughly reviewed by faculty and external advisory committees composed of educational, community, and civic leaders. The selection of readings and topics must ensure that an appreciation of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity is reflected in the organization of the course. Additionally, all future teachers should be exposed to readings by and about people of color and given opportunities to analyze these readings and discuss how they are related to teaching effectiveness in public schools. Finally, textbooks used in the instruction of teachers should reflect a broad range of social experiences in the United States.

These are just a few steps that can be undertaken to make the schools a more accurate reflection of today’s rapidly changing world and to make our teachers more sensitive to the increasingly divergent needs of their students.

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Notes

1. The raw data for individual schools and programs is available upon written request to the Trotter Institute.
2. Meyer Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn: A History of Race and Education in the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 1977).
3. Dr. Negroni was among a panel of eight educators who were asked to react to a preliminary draft of this report. They included Theresa Perry, Marian Darlington-Hope, James Fraser, Lenora M. Jennings, Jean McGuire, Juanita Wade and Luis Fuentes. Some of their comments appear later in this article.