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Editorial

Gina M. Doepker* and Steven Chamberlain

White Multicultural Voices in Southern Universities: An Overview

Abstract: It is a fact that the diversity of today's student population in schools across the United States is growing. According to the Center for Public Education (2012), it is also a fact that the majority of teachers in these schools are White, middleclass females. As a result of this demographic mismatch, teacher educators have been charged with the mission to help future teachers embrace multiculturalism so as to effectively meet the needs of this diverse student population. In order for this pedagogical shift to be successful, teacher educators themselves (who are also majority White) must first embrace the tenets of multiculturalism as well. This article introduces the Special Issue of *Muticultural Learning and Teaching (MLT)* that presents the personal narratives regarding multiculturalism of several White scholars in academia who currently work in the field of teacher education in southern universities where diversity abounds throughout the schools.

Keywords: multiculturalism, teacher education, diversity, White identity, and Southern Universities

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Racial and ethnic identity affects who we are, what we do, and how we live. As we grow up, our racial identities are formed very early by our families, friends, traditions, and experiences. Unfortunately, our racial identities often include racial beliefs, biases, and prejudices that negatively influence our thoughts, words, and actions. Our racial identities are strong, and for some may even be unbreakable. This statement is especially important when we consider its impact

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in education; specifically White teachers teaching culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. As schools continue to become more diverse, White teachers must challenge their preconceived notions of their own racial identities if they are to provide culturally responsive instruction. White teachers must be exposed to new ways of thinking and being that includes explicit exposure to multicultural education. According to Obi, Obiakor, Gala, and Magee (2013), “Multicultural education is a progressive approach for transforming education that holistically critiques and addresses current shortcomings, failings, and discriminatory practices in schools, and in doing so, works toward change in the larger society” (p. 159).

In order for White teachers to truly embrace multiculturalism, teacher educators must embrace multiculturalism first. Teacher educators, specifically White teacher educators, must transform their own racial identities before they can expect their preservice teachers to take that personal journey as well. Teacher educators have a great responsibility and tremendous opportunity to change the larger society through multiculturalism and multicultural education. Obiakor (2014) stated:

....when infused properly, multicultural education has the power to change attitude and enhance quality education, especially when it (a) exposes individuals to maximum learning and new dimensions of problem-solving; (b) acquaints individuals with divergent viewpoints and multiple voices to societal discourse; (c) removes limits set on how people are defined, understood, and valued; and (d) increases how people collaborate, consult, and cooperate with each other. (p. 185)

This topical issue includes several articles from White authors in academia who all work at universities in the South. These authors take a risk by bravely disclosing their personal journeys from being racially naïve to becoming passionate advocates for multiculturalism. As Schwenn (2014) so eloquently stated, “As we go through life, we have many experiences and we need to learn from them” (p. xii). Each story is unique, powerful, and very personal; and each story positively impacts higher education in some way. The articles in this Special Issue contain information about these authors’ personal perspectives and life changing experiences with multicultural education. This issue is unique because all of the authors present their personal narratives through a White lens. It is also significant because all of the authors work in southern universities where multiculturalism is expected to lag behind because of historical struggles with civil rights in the south and assumptions that these struggles have created. In spite of all these assumptions, the reality is that there is great racial and ethnic diversity in the southern population. Through these White voices, readers may begin to understand the challenges and process that these authors experienced on their road to becoming multicultural. All articles in this Topical Issue were

originally published in the book *White Voices in Multicultural Psychology, Education, and Leadership: Inside the Walls of America's Higher Education* and have been purposefully revised for inclusion in the journal, *Multicultural Learning and Teaching*. We are very grateful that our proposal for this Special Issue was accepted by the editors of *MLT*.

There are seven articles in this Special Issue. In the first article, Rainer focuses on White privilege as well as dominant privilege, and how they impact learning environments. He describes his experiences with White privilege in classroom settings as well as discusses how to maximize experiential learning to foster diversity and multicultural education. Social identity theory is defined in relation to an individual's perceived membership with social groups as it affects learning, teaching, and social identity. The desired goal is to embrace multicultural beliefs and values and have a pedagogical shift toward multiculturalism.

The second article centers on diversity and education. Chamberlain describes how the lifelong journey from the formative years, through college, and finally professional career has supported his growth in multiculturalism. He also discusses the important personal relationships that were built along the way as well as biases that were impossible to avoid. He shares how his personal journey to becoming multicultural has helped him to challenge his students to consider their own cultural backgrounds in relation to the cultural diversity in schools today.

In the third article, Hull addresses cultural discontinuity, practicing improvisation, and valuing difference in addition to describing her encounters with White privilege. She expresses the need to help preservice teachers improvise, or "think on their feet," as they encounter diversity and cultural differences. She also discusses the role of caring in pre-service multicultural education in order to help preservice teachers sharpen their own cultural vision on the road to becoming multicultural educators themselves.

The focus of the fourth article is on uniting multicultural teacher education and literacy education, in addition to the challenges experienced by teacher educators who incorporate multiculturalism into their programs. Doecker discusses a pedagogical shift that supports the growing need for multicultural teacher education. She explains the need for diversity training to be infused throughout the teacher education curriculum which must include the implementation of meaningful, relevant, and purposeful multicultural field experiences.

In the fifth article, Rieger discusses White identity development and the implications for teacher education. She begins by purposefully discussing her realization of her own Whiteness and cultural biases which led to her multicultural awareness. This sets up her discussion of multicultural education as a framework for healthy White identity development. She then discusses the need to deconstruct preservice teachers' whiteness through cross-cultural field

experiences, self-reflective journal writing, and continuous conversations in order to embrace multicultural education.

The sixth article focuses on becoming multicultural and inclusive. Algozzine discusses his concerns with how the education system has responded to multiculturalism and inclusion during his time in the field. He discusses the largely ignored assault on the myth of learning disabilities as well as the rapid and predictable demise of response-to-intervention. He presents a strong case for improving educational opportunities for all students.

In the final article, Wilder discusses multiculturalism as a moral endeavor and how White voices can be valued. She describes being an outsider within and surviving the crisis of belonging. She also discusses her roles as a cultural broker as well as recruiter and mentor. Wilder reflects on the challenges that she has experienced throughout her life in higher education and discusses how she has made it a personal mission to help faculty and students in higher education to be moral multiculturalists.

Conclusion

According to Obiakor and Algozzine (as cited in Obiakor, 2014), “While some knowledge of multicultural education has been a good thing, it has become increasingly evident that having the knowledge is not enough anymore – knowledge must be followed by measurable commitment and action” (p. 183). The authors in this Special Issue have definitely shown their personal journey to becoming multicultural and their commitment to multicultural teacher education. Their backgrounds may be very different; but they are all White, they all teach in southern universities with a large diverse student population, and they are all dedicated to and passionate about helping their preservice teachers to fully embrace multicultural education in order to positively impact their future students. We hope that this Special Issue inspires the readers, especially teacher educators, to take their own personal journeys toward embracing multiculturalism for the betterment of the larger society.

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