Learning and Talking Diversity: 
An Early Childhood Preservice Teacher’s Experience with Case-Based Pedagogy

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Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive/interpretive qualitative case study is to understand a preservice teacher’s practical knowledge about diversity through case-based pedagogy. Data were constantly reduced using Kennedy’s categories for analyzing application of theory to cases, flexibility, connectedness, and perceived meaningfulness, together with that of Lundeberg and Fawver’s perspective-taking. Banks’ dimensions of multicultural education content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure were also used as a framework for analysis. The preservice teacher confirms or challenges her knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practice about diversity through case-based pedagogy. She enthusiastically evaluates case-based pedagogy as an interesting, vivid, and productive vehicle for in-depth reflections about diversity and multicultural education.

[Key Words] preservice teacher education, diversity, multicultural education, social constructivism, qualitative case study, case-based pedagogy

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**INTRODUCTION**

*Need for Diversity Competent Early Childhood Teachers*

More children diverse in race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family configuration, language, and culture enter P-12 early childhood education programs every year. Research has shown that many of these children feel difficulty, loss, un-safety, alienation, isolation, and depression (Congress & Lynne, 1994) when struggling to adapt to diverse languages, knowledge expectations, traditions, attitudes, values, and beliefs between their family and educational settings (NAEYC, 1996). As our schools and society become more diverse, it becomes increasingly important for teachers to be well prepared for teaching and learning in cross-racial, cross-ethnic, and cross-cultural situations. Teachers who are teaching in this multicultural era should be sensitive to the diverse sociocultural backgrounds of children and should possess socioculturally relevant knowledge, values, decision-making ability, strategies, and actions. This is essential if teachers are to help these diverse children learn more securely and meet their needs more equally in the learning setting by providing a safe, challenging, and nurturing environment. Diverse children should be part of a learning community where people acknowledge, help, and support one another. However, teachers “often lack knowledge about cultural issues and sensitivity to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds” (Miller, Miller, & Schroth, 1997, p. 223).

*Teachers’ practical knowledge about diversity and case-based pedagogy*

According to Black and Halliwell (2000), preservice teachers are not well prepared for real everyday situations in teaching and learning, finding it difficult to apply their formal knowledge from teacher education courses to complex teaching practices. Noting that teachers' knowledge is holistic with much personal meaning that cannot be taught in a linear and fragmentary fashion, many scholars emphasize the importance of teachers' meaningful learning and application to practice within a context, rather than passive acquisition of educational knowledge (Harrington, 1995; Jones & Jones, 1998).