Multicultural Teacher Preparation in Practice: A Hermeneutical Disposition

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Abstract

It is a fact that learning to teach is basically a social and practical activity that is supported and informed by theoretical reflections. Field experience and realities should be the core component of any teacher preparation program. That is why, most of the teacher education programs based on theory into practice model. The main aim of this research is not to reject this model, but to sketch out an alternative way of teacher preparation that is based upon teacher's own context and socio cultural settings or in other words teacher preparation must be organized Hermeneutically. The hermeneutical approach of Hans-Georg Gadamer, is not only of philosophical importance but contains practical implications also. The concepts of understanding, interpretation and application are the core concepts of teacher preparation. In contrast to adopting an entire theory as the guiding principle to the whole content and practice of teacher preparation courses, this research argue for the focus to be on inculcating a hermeneutic disposition in all teachers preparation programs and courses. Hermeneutics is basic to human interaction, especially in dealing with student-teachers belongs to diverse socio-cultural settings or multicultural environment. The main argument or focus of this research is that it is necessary that the teacher preparation programs must be consider the problem of multiculturalism (inter and intra cultural). Multicultural Teacher Preparation (MTP) or hermeneutical mode of teacher preparation plays an important role in the preparation of teachers. It will be helpful for teachers to develop a deep level understanding of students needs belongs to various backgrounds and perspectives, not through applying a predetermined model of classroom activities, but through helping future teachers to recognize their own prejudices and how these help to determine their understandings of diversity in their future classrooms. Developing a

hermeneutic disposition in teachers training facilitates and enrich experience of future teachers. A mixed method design was used to conduct the study.

Keywords: Teacher education, learning, hermeneutical disposition

Introduction

Learning to teach is primarily a practical activity, informed by theoretical reflection. Also, that field experience should be the core component of initial teacher education programs, and all other components should be planned and conducted in relation to that core. ' This contrasts with the priority given to learning established educational theory in the theory-into-practice model that dominated teacher education for much of the twentieth century, but which came under increasing criticism in the 1990s (Carr, 1995; Kemmis, 1995; Wilkin &Sankey, 1994). The theory-into-practice model assumes that:

1.   established educational theory is largely unproblematic;
2.   student teachers need to be well grounded in theory before they are able to teach;
3.   the main purpose of teaching is to provide student teachers with classroom experience so that can they apply established theory in tackling the problems they encounter in the classroom.

According Wong Wanchi's (1998) assessment "*idea of applying theory into practice may be a totally misplaced notion*" (p. 110). The main aim of the paper, however, is not to address these three assumptions directly, but instead to sketch out an alternative theoretical and conceptual base for understanding classroom teaching teacher education. The main argument of this paper is teaching is essentially a hermeneutical activity, and that the supervision, mentoring and assessment of the teaching component of teacher education programs should be conducted within a hermeneutical, conceptual paradigm

Hermeneutics

According to Stanford Encyclopedia of Education, "the term ***hermeneutics*** covers both the first order art and the second order theory of understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions". This is not a new theory. It is dated back to Greek Mythology and further in middle ages and the era of Renaissance. it is basically treated as a part of Biblical studies (Adopted from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/)

The Beginnings of Hermeneutics

The word Hermeneutics is originated from the Latinized version of Greek word *hermeneutice*. It become a part of language in 17th century, but its base is philosophical.. it is said that even Plato used this term in his famous and ever green "Dialogues". He treated it as a knowledge of Sophia.

An Ontological Turn

Martin Heidegger's (1927) completely transformed the discipline of hermeneutics. In Heidegger's view, "*hermeneutics is not a matter of understanding linguistic communication, nor is it about providing a methodological basis for the human sciences*". Hermeneutics is about the most fundamental conditions of man's being in the world. Yet Heidegger's turn to ontology is not completely separated from earlier hermeneutic philosophies. These philosopher saw hermeneutics as one of the base for interpretation(Schleiermacher 1938).

Hermeneutics and the Prejudice Against Prejudice

The death of Hans-Georg Gadamer in March 2002, at the age of 102, marked the end of a distinguished career that only really began when he was sixty years old. The publication, in 1960, of his book "Truth and Method" brought philosophical hermeneutics to a wide audience. It was closely in tune with the post-modern spirit of the time, in undermining objectivist notions of" knowledge" and "understanding" that had predominated since the onset of the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century and on through the Enlightenment. Hermeneutics has its origins with such intellectual giants as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and the concerns raised by the interpretation of ancient texts, particularly Biblical texts. Gadamer's account of hermeneutic theory takes it beyond the confines of textual interpretation to embrace all toms of knowing and understanding, in all areas of inquiry (Dilthy 1998).

One of his central insights was that all acts of reasoning and knowing involve prejudice and prejudgment, and, as Richard Bernstein explains, this is indeed a very radical thesis: he argued

If Gadamer is right in claiming that not only understanding but all knowing "inevitably involves some prejudice" then it is difficult to imagine a more radical critique of Cartesianism, as well as the Enlightenment conception of human knowledge. For in these traditions there are sharp dichotomies between reason and prejudice, or between knowledge and prejudice. (Bernstein, 1983, p. 128)

Three basic Concepts of Understanding, Interpretation and Application

Gadamer's notions of prejudice, tradition, and authority are directly related to a second strand of his thought, his interpretation of "interpretation". The word hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word for interpretation, *hermenia*. So, we can say that hermeneutics is the study of "interpretative theory". Arguably, Gadamer's main insight is that hermeneutics is at the heart of all inquiry --- not only within the human sciences but also the natural sciences. He therefore opposes the idea that method is the defining characteristic of human rationality. Instead, whatever methods the human and natural sciences may adopt in gathering information, and these historically have been many and varied, all forms of human rationality and inquiry are essentially hermeneutic; for all are engaged in processes of interpretation, understanding and application.(Bannick and Dam 2007)

Ricoeur (1993) places the notion of understanding at the heart of his account of hermeneutics. He refer to Gadamer and said that traditionally, within hermeneutic theory, interpretation, understanding, and application had been considered as distinct and independent entities, but he argues that they are all moments in the single process of understanding. "*Interpretation is not an occasional post facto supplement to understanding; rather understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding*" (p. 44). This is totally contrary to the Enlightenment view that there can be "objective understanding", freed from all prejudices and not contaminated by interpretation. Gadamer(1995) insists that our prejudices, pre-judgments, our relationship to authority, and our being situated within traditions, are all part of the process of interpretation and coming to understand, and cannot be bracketed out. It is only by embracing them that we will understand that which we seek to understand. This idea comes close to Thomas Kuhn's (1970) notion that science always and inevitably operates within paradigms. These paradigms, "research programs", "research traditions" (Laudan, 1976) are harbingers of prejudice, pre-judgment and authority, but they also provide the necessary theoretical framework within which the participant observer is situated in her/his quest for deeper understanding (Gollnick 1995).

Understanding is therefore not just one activity among others; rather it underlies all other human activities and is strongly implicated in the creation of meaning. "Meaning is always coming into being through the 'happening' of understanding" (Bernstein, 1983, p. 139). Understanding, Gadamer argues, constitutes the very mode of our being in the world. In that sense, we are what we understand. Moreover, language is the medium

of all understanding and all tradition. It should not be viewed simply as a tool of communication; rather it is the medium in which we live. Authentic 'understanding, therefore, cannot be detached from the interpreter for it is rooted in his or her very being, and is manifested in what he or she does, in practice. "In Gadamer's eyes, theory is... a kind of human practice. Any genuine human practice is at the same time an expression of theory" (Wong, 1998, p. 108). So, on this account, there can be no radical divide between understanding (theory) and application (practice). What we do is always and inevitably a combination of theoretical reflection and action (Dilthy 1998).

Hermeneutical Circle

The hermeneutical circle of understanding is one in which interpretation is constantly played off against alternative interpretations in the process of deepening understanding. Of course, from the point of view of those who require hard data as the touchstone of truth, this will seem like a vicious circle in which we simply trade off interpretations without any chance of reaching the truth. To assume that, however, is to assume that all interpretations carry the same weight, but this relativist conclusion should be strongly resisted. (Cochran, Smith Davis and Fries 2004)

Multicultural Teacher Education

Teacher Education is now passing through the age of changing (Ambe 2006). There is a big paradigm shift from traditional teachers training to online teachers training and developing strategies for e-learning. Beside these advances, there is another debate of addressing culture issues in teacher education(Bannick and Dam 2007). Major educational reforms are unable to address the issues of multiculturalism and multicultural needs of future teachers. . The review suggests that teacher education is problematic and that it is not possible to de contextualized multicultural teacher education from other problems of teacher education that arise in actual field (Boyle 2005).

While reviewing the work of previous multicultural teacher educators raises questions about the growth of the field and the quality of that growth. Current multicultural teacher education scholarship is beginning to balance the experimental and quasi-experimental and casual comparative research that has been prominent with a more qualitative case literature that uncovers the wisdom of practice. The increased use of autobiography, restructuring of field experiences, examination of situated and culturally specific pedagogies, and the return of the researcher to the classrooms of experts are resulting in the development of a critical multicultural teacher education. (Bruna 2007).

Conclusion: The Need for Multicultural Infusion and Teachers.

There are many studies that document Several studies document the usefulness developing and executing multicultural teacher education program (Dressman 1998, ; Cochran-Smith, 2004). A multicultural infused program enables teachers to teach students who differ in various capacities like gender, ethnicity, physical and mental ability, language, cultural heritage, religious affiliation and socioeconomic level. It is a fact that multicultural education must be an essential element of the teacher preparation program (Keiser , 2005), not only an additional component which is addressed in one or two courses by one or two instructors. Following are the reasons and ways to promote cultural diversity in teacher education programs meant for develop a Multicultural Teacher:

1.   Cultural competency and skills cannot be attained in an academic vacuum. Cultural competency develops through a the combination of different things like cultural knowledge, direct and indirect intercultural experiences, and reflection on those experiences.(Larke 1990).

2.   It is also important that educational environment promotes cultural diversity. For example university environment that appreciates and promotes cultural diversity becomes essential to the promotion of cultural competency within the university community. (Grant 1992).

3.   It is also noted that a multicultural university climate emerges when the administration and academia sincerely, properly and actively strives towards diversity in its staff, faculty, programs, and curriculum (Gollnick 1995). A university that values diversity, offers multiple opportunities for interpersonal cross-cultural communication, incorporates a diversity of opinions and ideas, and explicitly acknowledges the contributions many groups made to our nation, the sciences, the arts, and literature.

4.   It is assumed that teachers who are culturally competent   have a batter awareness of their cultural, ethnic, and gender attitudes, expectations, learning preferences, teaching style, and personal biases. So they reflect these competencies not only in their class but give critical reflection on personal experiences, classroom observations, cross-cultural encounters, research findings, documentaries, readings, demonstrations, and role playing, leads pre-service teachers to scrutinize long held beliefs, values, misconceptions, and feelings that influence how we interact with others. Therefore it is necessary to produce culturally competent teachers .

5.   The development of cultural competency is not an easy task. It requires multiple, broad based and varied opportunities, within school settings and beyond school settings, to interact with culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse communities over a prolonged period (Grant & Seeda, 1990).

6.   Novice teachers may benefit from field experiences that place them in multicultural settings and engender sharing with a diversity of people. Direct opportunities to live and teach in another culture generate multicultural competency, nurture positive cross-cultural attitudes and skills, and produce a deeper understanding of the need for cross-cultural competencies (Cooper, Beare, &Thorman, 1990).

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