

Multicultural awareness boosts teaching competency, but is an uneven resource among future teachers

December 4 2017

Student teachers with more multicultural awareness foster more positive classroom environments for their students, finds a new study by NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and published in the *Journal of Teacher Education*.

However, multicultural [awareness](#) varies considerably among future teachers based on their own race or ethnicity and prior experience working with youth of color.

Multicultural awareness - which refers to an awareness of, comfort with, and sensitivity toward issues of cultural diversity in the classroom - is crucial to teachers' abilities to promote positive outcomes for all students. Despite decades of policy reforms that emphasize the importance of multicultural awareness, few comparative studies have examined its prevalence in students preparing to be teachers (also known as preservice teachers) or the link between multicultural awareness and future teachers' measured competencies.

"In light of the persistent demographic divide between a predominantly White teaching force and evermore racially and ethnically diverse schools, current and future educators' abilities to create inclusive classroom environments are critical for fostering [student](#) success," said Hua-Yu Sebastian Cherng, assistant professor of international education at NYU Steinhardt and the study's lead author.

In this study, the researchers used unique data of preservice teachers' beliefs and student [teacher](#) performance assessments to ask whether levels of multicultural awareness vary by characteristics such as race and ethnicity, education, and prior experience working with diverse youth, as well as whether multicultural awareness shapes teaching competency.

Surveys on multicultural beliefs were collected from 2,473 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in teacher certification programs at a private U.S. university between 2010 and 2015. About 60 percent of the students surveyed (1,498) were also observed and evaluated by master teachers while student teaching.

The researchers found that multicultural beliefs are tied to student teachers' ability to create strong and nurturing classroom environments, measured during student teaching observations by master teachers.

"Our study underscores the importance of equipping all teachers with essential multicultural knowledge, skills, and dispositions," added Cherng.

The researchers also found that Black and Latino preservice teachers report greater multicultural awareness than their White counterparts. Asian American preservice teachers report having the least multicultural awareness.

"These differences are consistent with prior research that finds that Black and Latino teachers, drawing upon their own identities and experiences as racial minorities, are often more aware of and sensitive toward cultural differences," said Cherng. "What is less clear is why Asian Americans report having lower levels of multicultural awareness. It is possible that Asian American student teachers believe that multicultural education, like other discourses on race that make little mention of Asian Americans, does not include or embrace their

identities."

Preservice teachers, particularly Latinos and Asian Americans, who had prior experience working with students of color had higher levels of multicultural awareness.

"This finding suggests that educators may develop a stronger racial consciousness through working with youth of color," Cherng said.

Preservice teachers in different content area and grade-level programs reported different levels of multicultural awareness. For example, compared to future teachers in early childhood programs, those in math, science, and social studies programs had lower levels of multicultural awareness.

The researchers urge that their findings be used to inform teacher education policy and meaningfully focus both curriculum and instruction on preservice teachers that would benefit most from multicultural awareness.

The study can also inform teacher recruitment efforts. For example, since they found that prior experience working with youth of color is linked with more multicultural awareness, recruitment efforts could focus on community organizations that serve diverse youth.

"Through a deeper understanding of the relationships between preservice teachers' background characteristics, multicultural beliefs, and evolving teaching competencies, our study contributes to our understanding of preparing teachers for diverse classrooms and prompts further investigation into developing cultural competence in teaching," said Cherng.

Provided by New York University

Citation: Multicultural awareness boosts teaching competency, but is an uneven resource among future teachers (2017, December 4) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2017-12-multicultural-awareness-boosts-uneven-resource.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.