

Kimberley Daly  
EDUC 876  
JTE #2

Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002, January/February). Preparing culturally responsible teachers: rethinking the curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(1), 20-32.

#### Summary

The article by Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara Lucas, "Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers: Rethinking the Curriculum" discusses the need to prepare teacher candidates to teach children of diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Villegas and Lucas, professors at Montclair State University in New Jersey (Lucas is also Associate Dean of the College of Education and Human Services), take the position that teacher education must take an infusion approach to educating teacher candidates about diversity in the classroom, and not just add a course or two on multicultural education leaving the rest of the teacher education program intact. The writers felt that because these courses are often optional students might be able to complete teacher preparation programs without taking them and even more importantly, without constant reinforcement and experience in other courses, the ideas learned in single multicultural education courses would be less likely to be embraced by teacher candidates, making them less likely to end up in use in the classroom.

Throughout the article, Villegas and Lucas put forth their own infusion strategy for multicultural teacher education, explaining how their ideas contribute to the success of teachers and to use their language, prepare culturally responsive teachers. The strategy is based on six characteristics that Villegas and Lucas believe define a culturally responsive teacher. Those six characteristics or strands are: 1) sociocultural consciousness; 2) an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds; 3) commitment and skills to act as agents of change; 4) constructivist views of learning; 5) learning about students and; 6) culturally

responsive teaching practices. Each strand in itself could have policy implications and is outlined below.

### **Strand 1: Sociocultural Consciousness**

According to Villegas and Lucas, this strand deals with understanding people's ways of thinking and behaving as well as how these are influenced by race/ethnicity, social class and language. The strand requires that teacher candidates examine their own personal sociocultural identities, engage in self-reflection, and explore the various ethnic and social groups to which they belong. On the program level, the policy implications of this might take the form of a "Ways of Knowing"-type course that requires candidates to investigate these issues. In addition, teacher candidates could also attain this knowledge through field experiences and clinical placements. The challenges to program policies requiring a course such as the one mentioned above or field placement options is funding, faculty support/expertise, and local availability of resources. For instance, a teacher education program in a more rural or less diversely populated location might have more trouble finding placements where students can see how different social, economic, and/or language groups **interact**.

**Comment [pme1]:** Yes, geography, size, mission, and resources all are factors.

On the state level, a possible policy implication of this might be to require a course in multiculturalism or "Ways of Knowing" as a condition of **licensure**. A possible problem with this however, might be due to the reflective nature of this strand. Firm assessment for these types of courses may be difficult as well as making sure that courses at different universities are of the same caliber for state licensure and political goals.

**Comment [pme2]:** This can be touchy due to opposition by folk who oppose anything they feel supports these values.

### **Strand 2 – An Affirming Attitude Toward Students From Culturally Diverse Backgrounds**

Villegas and Lucas believe that teachers who see their students in an affirming light convey confidence and drive students to be successful. This can be done in various ways

including exposing students to challenging curriculum, building on the cultural resources students bring to school, teaching students strategies they can use to monitor their learning, setting high standards, and holding every student accountable. On the teacher education program level, there could be one possible policy implication for this. Teacher education programs can require that teacher candidates submit through portfolios work samples that demonstrate the above ideas as part of their clinical experience evaluation. This would reinforce the idea in the strand, making it more likely to be practiced when the candidate leaves the **program**.

**Comment [pme3]:** Good suggestion.

In regards to this strand on the local/district level, schools and districts can set high standards for students that go beyond the basic competency testing and reward students for performing well academically, even if in some small way (certificate, phone call home) for financially strapped districts and localities. In addition, districts and schools can set an open access policy for advanced academic offerings such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate, allowing students to self-select to take these **courses**. Teachers should also be encouraged to persuade students showing promise to sign up for these classes.

**Comment [pme4]:** Good suggestion.

### **Strand 3 – Commitment and Skills to Act as Agents of Change**

In this strand, Villegas and Lucas set forth the idea that teachers can increase access to learning and educational success by working for change. At the teacher education program level, a possible policy implication of this might be to keep a continuing dialogue with practicing teachers and local districts to assess needs and continuing challenges. The only barrier to this idea should be time and willingness (any egos need to be put aside) to have a dialogue as the university would be the one who is preparing those who are the future employees of the localities/districts. On the local/district level, teachers could be allowed to participate in policy development where appropriate, as they more often appreciate being a part of developing a new

policy or initiative that they will have to participate in rather than just being told they have to complete it. By allowing teachers to be part of the process, districts would be allowing them to share ownership which goes a long way for morale.

#### **Strand 4 – Constructivist Views of Learning**

In this strand, learners use prior knowledge along with personal and cultural experiences to make sense of learning and process new information. The policy implications of this strand for a teacher education program might be to actually teach courses in this format, modeling the method for teacher candidates. In addition, programs should teach reflection as well as model it for their students. The possible issues associated with this may concern funding and faculty if the program itself is not used to teaching in this manner or if a significant number of faculty members are not on board. In this model, all students are depicted as capable learners and this type of learning promotes critical thinking, problem solving and collaboration, all skills that students need throughout their school careers and beyond. Teacher education programs can also require candidates to provide evidence of this in clinical experience portfolios.

On the district/local level, policies can be implemented that promote constructivist learning such as requiring evidence of engaging students in questioning, critical thinking, analysis, problem solving, or collaboration in lesson plans and/or during classroom observations. This can be shown during regular teacher evaluation cycles.

**Comment [pme5]:** May clash with NCLB expectations.

#### **Strand 5 – Learning About Students**

For this strand, the policy implications could be on the district/local level. Teachers who are knowledgeable about their students' lives are better prepared to understand in-school behavior and incorporate activities that draw on student cultural backgrounds. Districts and schools could encourage collaboration between social workers, counselors, ESOL departments,

and regular education teachers to better serve students. Often, educational departments, especially those in secondary schools, are isolated and districts and schools should do more to encourage collaboration without violating student confidentiality.

### **Strand 6 – Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices**

According to Villegas and Lucas, culturally responsive teachers know how to put their understanding of how students learn and their knowledge of particular students together to make sure students are successful. On the teacher education program level, the policy implications could include methods courses where faculty model culturally responsive teaching practices, provide instruction concerning multiple intelligences, discuss inclusive classrooms, and provide strategies for differentiating learning and assessment. Potential challenges for these ideas include funding to develop new courses if they are not already in place and possible faculty recruitment.

On the local/district level, schools and districts can support teachers by keeping class sizes within the suggested limits for courses and make sure that students are properly scheduled for courses in a timely manner. Two challenges that face districts and schools in this regard is always funding and staffing but both teachers and schools need to work together in order to make sure that all students, regardless of cultural background, are successful.

Nice analysis and good suggestions. 25 points.