

Increasing Principal Preparation Candidates' Awareness of Biases in Educational Environments

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Karen D. Jones

East Carolina University

Marjorie C. Ringler

East Carolina University

The purpose of the study was to determine whether the study of diversity topics embedded in a Principal Preparation Program (PPP) internship changed candidates' self-awareness of their biases in educational environments and the biases they observed in their school community. In this study PPP candidates' perceptions of their biases and those of their schools were assessed at the beginning and end of the internship. The Anti-Defamation League's (ADL), Assessing Yourself and Your School Checklist, were utilized to obtain candidates self-perceptions. Throughout the internship monthly learning activities, PPP candidates studied various diversity topics that impact schools. Descriptive statistics were utilized to complete a pretest-posttest comparison to determine any changes toward their biases. The findings of this study demonstrated that diversity topics embedded in an PPP internship increased candidates' self-awareness of their personal biases in educational environments and the biases they observe in their school community. The study of diversity topics broadened PPP candidates' awareness of the challenges faced by groups and individuals in their school communities.

Literature Review

Next to teaching, school leadership has been recognized as the most important influence in improving student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Elmore (2003) found that when school leaders are ill prepared, student achievement suffers. Persistent gaps in student success in the areas of race, culture, gender, socioeconomic status, gender identity and sexual orientation reflect school leaders' inability to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Brown (2004) found that principal's beliefs are the basis for their perceptions, expectations and practice. According to Hawley and James (2010), many school leaders enter the principalship with few skills and strategies to address aspects of social justice. School leaders need to be culturally aware and responsible in order to be effective leaders for all stakeholders (Gao & Mager, 2011).

Schools are responsible for ensuring all students meet learning standards set by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) through desegregated data. Classrooms are made up of increasingly diverse populations of students and in order to increase achievement, school leaders must support and develop effective teachers and implement valuable organizational processes (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Schools must be environments that welcome and support all students (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). This welcoming environment must be created even though many teachers are White, middle class, and do not live in the neighborhoods where they teach (Feistritzer, 2001; Howard, 2006). Teachers and principals are responsible for educating students whose race, ethnicity, culture and socioeconomic status is very different from their own. Principals must have positive beliefs and expectations about students, families and communities in order to create a supportive school climate that supports all students in succeeding.

Literature suggests that leaders who have the ability to transform schools into environments focused on social justice are needed (Brown, 2006; Guerra, Nelson, Jacobs, & Yamamura, 2013; Theoharis, 2007). Aspiring school leaders need additional knowledge, skills and attitudes about cultural competence and bias free educational environments in addition traditional leadership, instructional, and managerial knowledge and skills. Hawley and James (2010) surveyed school leadership preparation programs at 62 universities across the US. Only 18 (30%) of the programs surveyed responded. Of those 18 programs, researchers found that diversity-related education occurred in a single course focused on broad societal conditions that affect students while failing to prepare school leaders to address these inequities in schools. This is supported by a study of 21 school leaders across the US that found diversity is talked about in principal preparation programs, but leaders were not prepared to build positive diverse community relationships (Henze, Norte, Sather, Walker, & Katz, 2002). McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) found that university principal preparation programs can develop leaders who are reflective and capable of leading school reform by helping future school leaders identify equity traps and deficit thinking. University programs can then reshape deficit thinking of principal candidates so that schools can be fair for all students.

Effective professional development is ongoing so that it can be transferred into practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Zepeda, Parylo, & Bengtson, 2014). Standards for effective professional development apply to principal preparation programs as well. According to Joyce and Showers (2002), follow up activities including coaching and study groups, after a professional development session enable adults to acquire new knowledge and apply it to their practice. An effective principal preparation program incorporates study groups and coaching into

the coursework and internship (Orr & Barber, 2005) to help candidates integrate new ideas into existing knowledge (Figueiredo-Brown, Ringler, & James, 2015). Joyce and Showers (2002) also found it is important for principal preparation programs to assess the specific needs of candidate.

Research has found that for principal preparation programs to develop school leaders that are able to meet the needs of racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students, they must shift from the current practices. One recommendation for improving principal preparation programs is to integrate social justice knowledge, skills and attitudes throughout the curriculum rather than offer one, add-on course (Brown, 2004; Hawley & James, 2010; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002). Another recommendation is to encourage reflection that identifies taken-for-granted beliefs and biases and their impact on others, to consider multiple perspectives, and to take into account historical, social and political factors that influence individual's behavior (Brown, 2006; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Whipp, 2003). A third recommendation to improve principal preparation programs is to encourage principal candidates to value and promote relationships within the school and community (Dantley, 2005; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Shields, 2004).

Conceptual Framework

Principal preparation programs have the opportunity to prepare administrators to promote bias-free educational environments. Often principal preparation programs focus on management and leadership when they should infuse learning about educating diverse student populations (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This article proposes enhancing the internship for principal preparation candidates by helping candidates identify their own biases and biases present in schools. To develop this framework, we combined Furman's (2012) theory that leadership for social justice is constructed on reflection and action, Harro's (2010) cycle of socialization, and Petersen's (2014) ideas of nonconscious biases that influence actions.

Harro's (2010) Cycle of Socialization describes how people progress through predictable stages of socialization starting first with families and close relatives that shape self-concepts, self-perceptions, and the way they see others. Through institutions such as schools, churches, and media, people are presented with messages about who should and who has power in society. These messages are reinforced through actions that are praised with public approval while actions that go against the social norms are punished or stigmatized. According to Harro the cycle can be interrupted by a new awareness or consciousness of different perspectives and biases, especially in educational environments. This may occur by listening to stories, reading books, and participating in classes that focus on different social perspectives. Harro (2010) states that, "once you know something, you can't *not* know it anymore, and knowing it eventually translates into action (p. 51)." It is fitting that the internship of a principal preparation program provide opportunities to listen to individuals and experts of various races, religion, gender, abilities, and cultural groups. These experiences help principal candidates identify their nonconscious biases.

Nonconscious biases are institutionalized in educational settings and may be unknown to an individual who means well. These non-cognitive biases can be found in everyday encounters, processes, and actions that can be disconnected from one's actual intent (Petersen, 2014). These days, discrimination is based on an individual's nonconscious biases, therefore to help candidates find their own nonconscious biases principal preparation programs need to provide opportunities

for self-reflection and conscious searching of biases in educational environments. Candidates need to be able to name the oppression present in school environments as part of their reflections (Furman, 2012). Opportunities for reflection and learning about biases should include application at both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels. Principal preparation programs should aim for personal and critical reflection on one's values, assumptions, and biases and how they affect leadership practice. Structured self-reflections and journaling are effective ways that programs may provide candidates with tools that they may practice during the program and continue using as practitioners.

To develop the capacity for principal candidates to move from understanding their biases to taking action to reducing biases, principal preparation programs should have students audit and critic their own school settings. Candidates should understand elements that promote bias-free educational environments. The Anti-Defamation League (2005) checklist provides a tool for candidates to inspect mission statements, student interactions, school symbols, parental involvement, harassment and bullying policies, instructional materials, and more factors that contribute to biases.

Study Design

Context of the Study

The principal preparation program (PPP) in this study is a two-year program that is offered in a cohort delivery model. The faculty developed the courses in the program collaboratively and therefore the syllabi used are the same for each course no matter the location. In order to maintain the integrity of the content of the courses, faculty participate in monthly curriculum meetings to discuss course content and assignments. All candidates follow the same sequence of courses regardless of the cohort meeting location. PPP candidates entering as a cohort enroll continuously for fall, spring, and summer semesters. Classes are typically offered at a local school or school district meeting room located in various counties located in the eastern North Carolina region.

The second year of the PPP includes an intensive internship for candidates. A principal candidate enrolled in the study's program completes one thousand hours of field experiences with practicing school principals and leaders. Interns engage in on-the-job learning opportunities that develop and refine their leadership skills as they contribute to the total school program. An intern must be directly involved in the many diverse activities a principal encounters on a daily basis. An intern is expected to examine the overall school vision, become immersed in the school's improvement process, and make a significant contribution to this vision and process as he/she refines his/her leadership skills.

As part of the ongoing collaboration with practicing principals that serve as site supervisors that provide meaningful administrative experiences, faculty gather feedback from these principals to use to improve the PPP internship. One source of feedback indicated that candidates needed to become culturally proficient. Through collaboration with practicing school leaders, faculty incorporated a focus on diversity into the internship experience. As result, interns meet monthly to learn about a diversity topic in schools including race, socioeconomic status, linguistics, religion, gender identity and sexual orientation. During the monthly seminars interns are provided with current data and research regarding the diversity topic as well as interact with guest speakers from the community. The community speakers describe their experiences in

school settings as a member of a diverse group. They also help interns understand what they can do to make schools a more welcoming and accepting place. Principal interns then take the information and examine their own schools through a new lens and write a reflection on how they see that diversity topic at play at their own campus. They also write about what things they could do to improve school experiences for all groups.

Study Questions

The purpose of the study was to determine whether diversity topics embedded in a PPP internship changed candidates' self-awareness of their biases in educational environments and the biases they observe in their school community. To do so, several diversity topics described in the context of the study were studied at monthly seminars using the inside-out approach (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2009). The inside-out approach focuses on the individual person, encouraging them to reflect on their own individual understandings and beliefs (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 23). The seminars provided opportunities for principal candidates to learn more about themselves and to acknowledge their current values and feelings of diverse people while encouraging change. The study questions that guided this study were: (1) To what extent did the inside-out approach to learning more about diversity topics affect principal candidates' self-awareness of their own biases in educational environments and (2) their perceptions of the institutionalized biases present in the school environments they work in?

To address these study questions principal candidates completed two Anti-Defamation League checklists, *Assessing Your Self* and *Assessing Your School*, prior to the initial diversity seminar and again at the end of the eighth seminar. The Anti-Defamation League (2005) checklists are available to the public on the Anti-Defamation Education Division, A World of Difference Institute. These checklists have been used extensively throughout the United States in school districts and other public institutions and are considered valid and reliable.

Each month PPP candidates participated in an inside-out diversity seminar where a topic was introduced with activities that helped build and deepen knowledge around each of these topics: linguistic diversity, gender and sexuality, race, religion, and poverty. During the time between seminars, approximately a month at a time, PPP candidates were encouraged to be keenly aware of that aspect of diversity at their schools, read several articles, learn from Ted talks recommended by the PPP faculty, and reflect on their learning with their internship principal.

Study Sample

A total of 53 principal candidates participated in the diversity seminars where 31 (58%) of the candidates were female and 21 (42%) of the candidates were male. There were 21 candidates that completed their internship in an elementary school, 10 candidates completed their internship in a middle school, 14 candidates at high schools, 2 candidates in k-8 schools, and 5 candidates completed their internship at private schools that offer k-12 education. Five (1%) candidates were Black, 2 (.04%) candidates were Hispanic, and 46 (98.96%) were White candidates.

Data Analysis

PPP Candidates' Self-Perceptions of Their Own Biases

PPP candidates completed an Anti-Defamation League survey, *Assessing Your Self*, self-assessment prior to the initial diversity seminar and again at the end of the internship. The instrument addresses eleven elements of effectively promoting a bias-free educational environment, asking participants to rate their implementation on a scale from (1) “I haven’t thought about this” to (2) “I need to do this better” to (3) “I do this well”. The response rate to the anonymous survey was 91% where 48 out of 53 PPP candidates completed both the pre and post surveys. As shown in Table 1, the majority principal candidates indicated that they had moved positively toward promoting a bias-free educational environment after participating in the diversity seminars.

Table 1
ADL PC Candidates Self-Assessment of Biases

ADL Question	Median Pretest	Median Post Test	Pretest Average (n=48)	Posttest Average (n=48)	Gain/Loss	SD
Have you recently read any books or articles, or watched any documentaries to increase your understanding of the particular hopes, needs and concerns of students and families from the different cultures that make up your school community and beyond?	2	3	2.28	2.67	0.39	0.28
Have you participated in professional development opportunities to enhance your understanding of the complex characteristics of racial, ethnic and cultural groups in the U.S.?	2	3	2.34	2.69	0.35	0.25
Do you try to listen with an open mind to all students and colleagues, even when you don’t understand their perspectives or agree with what they’re saying?	3	3	2.77	2.88	0.11	0.08
Have you taken specific actions to dispel misconceptions, stereotypes or prejudices that members of one group have about members of another group at your school?	3	3	2.53	2.61	0.08	0.04
Do you strive to avoid actions that	3	3	2.87	2.82	-.05	0.21

might be offensive to members of other groups?

Do you discourage patterns of informal discrimination, segregation or exclusion of members of particular groups from school clubs, committees?

3 3 2.51 2.80 0.29 0.21

Do the curricular and wall displays in your classroom reflect the experiences and perspectives of the cultural groups that make up the school and its surrounding community?

2 2 2.15 2.26 0.11 0.13

Have you evaluated classroom materials and textbooks to ensure they do not reinforce stereotypes and that they provide fair and appropriate treatment of all groups?

2 2 1.94 1.97 0.03 .065

Do you use classroom methods, such as cooperative learning, role-playing and small group discussions to meet the needs of students' different learning styles?

3 3 2.66 2.86 0.20 0.14

Do students have opportunities to engage in problem-solving groups that address real issues with immediate relevance to their lives?

2 3 2.38 2.55 0.17 0.12

Do you use a range of strategies, in addition to traditional testing methods, to assess student learning?

3 3 2.77 2.83 0.06 0.04

Note. SD = Standard Deviation.

In reviewing difference of means, one of the areas where PPP candidates showed the most positive change of 0.38 points was their indication that they have recently read any books or articles, or watched any documentaries to increase your understanding of the particular hopes, needs and concerns of students and families from the different cultures that make up their school community and beyond. This can be attributed to the assigned readings and speakers from the seminars but also many PPP candidates indicated that each topic sparked an awareness and a realization that they did not know much about the topic. In an attempt to determine if the distributions of the pre and post differed significantly and because the data had a non-parametric

distribution, we attempted to perform the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the pre and post medians (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). However, the calculations proved non-reliable because the data included many tied values and therefore the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was not appropriate.

Another area that showed a large positive change of 0.35 points in PPP candidates' self-awareness was their participation in professional development opportunities to enhance their understanding of the complex characteristics of racial, ethnic and cultural groups in the America. This indicates a shift from "needing to do better" to getting closer to "doing this well". A third area that showed a large positive change of 0.29 points toward "doing this well" in PPP candidates' self-awareness was their actions that discourage patterns of informal discrimination, segregation or exclusion of members of particular groups from school clubs, committees.

Only one question, "Do you strive to avoid actions that might be offensive to members of other groups?" had a negative difference of 0.05 points, indicating that PPP candidates at first thought they did this well but at the end of the seminars they indicated that they needed to do better at this. PPP candidates also were asked to analyze their schools to determine if a bias-free educational environment was promoted.

PPP Candidates' Perceptions Their Schools' Institutionalized Biases

PPP candidates' completed an Anti-Defamation League survey, *Assessing Your School*, prior to the initial diversity seminar and again at the end of the internship. The instrument addressed fourteen elements of how a school effectively promotes a bias-free educational environment, asking participants to rate their school's implementation on a scale from (1) "We haven't thought about this" to (2) "We need to do this better" to (3) "We do this well". The response rate to the anonymous survey was 92% where 49 out of 53 PPP candidates completed both the pre and post surveys. The pretest and posttest averages indicated that 11 of 14 questions (79%) showed a gain toward the school doing certain elements well while two elements denoted a move toward needed to do things better. Table 2 shows that the standard deviation from pre-test to post-test where principal candidates indicated that they perceived that their school showed little change (less than 0.17) in how it promoted a bias-free educational environment. Some of the elements that showed little change were those that asked whether the schools staff was representative of the diversity in the community's ethnic, racial and cultural groups. In an academic year there is not much fluctuation, however, PPP candidates became aware of the need to diversify their staff. Another element that did not show much change was any change in policy developed with the input of students, family and staff. PPP candidates commented that they were more aware of the benefits of engaging their school community in policy making. In an attempt to determine if the distributions of the pre and post differed significantly and because the data had a non-parametric distribution, we attempted to perform the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the pre and post medians (Gall et al., 2007). However, the calculations proved non-reliable because the data included many tied values and therefore the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was not appropriate.

Table 2 also shows that PPP candidates recognized the need to do better in all of the elements that promote a bias-free environment since most mean scores in the pre-test and post-test are in the closer to (2) "We need to do this better" than to (3) "We do this well". Anti-policies, respectful and equitable school vision, and participation in sports and extracurricular activities scored closest to 3. The element that scored in most need of addressing was related to ongoing evaluation of instructional materials used in teaching to ensure they reflect the histories,

contribution, and perspectives of diverse groups. This may be achieved by collaborative work among teams, families and universities and will take time and resources.

Data analysis of the ADL surveys helped identify self-biases of PPP candidates and thus initiating the inside out approach toward cultural proficient leadership. PPP candidates were able to self-analyze how they differ from others, their own biases, and see how others are affected by biases. The ADL survey also identified institutionalized educational elements that are capable of changing and promoting a more bias-free environment. PPP candidates were able to see how a school's culture facilitates learning for some students and impedes other students from learning.

Table 2
ADL PPP Candidates' Assessment of Bias-Free School Environment

ADL Question	Median Pretest	Median Posttest	Pretest Average (n=48)	Posttest Average (n=48)	Gain/Loss	SD
Does your school's mission statement indicate values of respect, equity and inclusion?	3	3	2.53	2.69	0.16	0.12
Do students typically interact with one another in positive, respectful ways?	3	3	2.55	2.53	-.02	0.01
Do the school's symbols, signs, mascots and insignias reflect a variety of cultural groups and holidays?	3	2	2.29	2.22	-.06	0.04
Do celebrations, festivals and special events reflect a variety of cultural groups and holidays?	2	2	2.12	2.27	0.14	0.10
Is the school staff (administrative, instructional, counseling and supportive) representative of the racial, ethnic and cultural groups that comprise the surrounding community?	2	2	2.37	2.39	0.02	0.01
Are staff or volunteers available who are fluent in the languages of families in the school community?	2	3	2.37	2.47	0.10	0.07
Do students, families and staff share in the decision-making process for	2	2	2.27	2.29	0.02	0.01

the school?

Has the school community collaboratively developed written policies and procedures to address harassment and bullying?	3	3	2.45	2.55	0.10	0.07
Are consequences associated with harassment and bullying policy violations enforced equitably and consistently?	3	3	2.61	2.69	0.08	0.06
Do the instructional materials used in the classroom and available in the school library, including textbooks, supplementary books and multimedia resources, reflect the experiences and perspectives of people of diverse backgrounds?	3	3	2.47	2.51	0.04	0.03
Are equitable opportunities for participation in extra- and co-curricular activities made available to students of all gender, ability, and socioeconomic groups?	3	3	2.61	2.80	0.18	0.13
Do faculty and staff have opportunities for systematic, comprehensive and continuing professional development designed to increase cultural understanding and promote student safety?	2	2	2.12	2.33	0.20	0.14
Does the school conduct ongoing evaluations of the goals, methods and instructional materials used in teaching to ensure they reflect the histories, contributions and perspectives of diverse groups?	2	2	1.94	2.18	0.24	0.17

Note. SD = Standard deviation.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrated that diversity topics embedded in a PPP internship shifted the candidates' nonconscious awareness to self-awareness of their personal biases in educational environments and the biases they observed in their school community. Two areas

indicating that work was needed were: improving student interaction with one another to make them more positive and respectful and to analyze school's symbols, mascots and insignias so they may reflect a variety of cultural groups and holidays. This may be an indication that PPP candidates realized that what they thought was positive interactions could be improved. The symbols are more of a challenge to change, however, it may be needed. For example, one PPP candidate indicated that the school's mascot was the devil and that the connotations associated with devils are not positive. Identifying and understanding what biases currently exist at a school is the beginning to understanding what should change to make the school bias-free.

The PPP achieved the first steps toward integrating social justice knowledge, skills and attitudes throughout the internship. Experts indicate that PPP candidates should strive toward integrating social justice throughout the curriculum rather than offer one, add-on course (Brown, 2004; Hawley & James, 2010; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Pounder et al., 2002). Candidates in this study were actively involved in their school and community through the internship and were able to integrate the knowledge acquired through the diversity seminars into their practice. Many PPP candidates shared that they were simply not aware of many institutionalized patterns that segregate or marginalize certain students and groups in the daily functioning of schools. One PPP candidate noticed that at their school that had 60% Hispanic students, communications were sent home in English only and that none of the staff or teachers were fluent in Spanish. Another student noticed that in a school that enrolled 90% low socio economic families, some sports such as soccer and volleyball held practices at 7 pm yet did not provide transportation to and from practices. This meant that students that had a means of transportation were part of the team.

PPP candidates engaged in ongoing reflective conversations with their university faculty supervisors. Faculty were able to support candidates in moving beyond superficial reflections to deeper understanding of the topics and implications for practice. These reflections are encouraged in research to help identify taken-for-granted beliefs and biases and their impact on others, to consider multiple perspectives, and to take into account historical, social and political factors that influence individual's behavior (Brown, 2006; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Whipp, 2003). The self-assessment post survey indicated a large change in PPP candidates' self-awareness in their participation in professional development opportunities to enhance their understanding of the complex characteristics of racial, ethnic and cultural groups in the America. Many PPP candidates shared with their faculty that they had talked with their principals about bringing professional development about diversity to their teachers and students because they saw the way they personally had been positively impacted by the diversity seminars. Many PPP candidates also shared that they experienced a shift in their thinking to asset-based approaches, those of meeting the needs of underserved students, from deficit based approaches, those of helping underachieving families.

The PPP diversity seminars involved community members as guest speakers. The candidates were able to engage in dialogue with community members who were experiencing these issues of diversity first-hand. Candidates were encouraged to go back to their schools and continue the conversations with members of their school community. This practice improved the PPP because it encouraged principal candidates to value and promote relationships within the school and community (Dantley, 2005; Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Shields, 2004).

Unconscious bias was a topic of discussion at all seminars especially because the majority of the PPP candidates (98%) were 98% White. The diversity focused made PPP candidates realize that they had power and privilege simply because they were in the majority group. White PPP candidates in these seminars realized too that they did not act on their power

because they were not aware it was inherent to them. Each time a topic was studied, PPP candidates indicated that felt compelled to do research and that they noticed more current event news surrounding these topics than in the past. At the end of the yearlong seminar series, White PPP candidates understood that it is their responsibility to be aware of institutionalized policies that oppress certain groups of individuals.

For the faculty in this program, the ideal is for PPP candidates to be self-aware of their own actions in promoting a bias-free educational environment and that they would rate themselves as doing this well. In reality, the context of schools makes every single school culture uniquely gifted with diversity. It is the goal of the faculty to instill in PPP candidates the desire to promote a bias-free educational environment in every action and interaction they are engaged in.

An area for further study would be to see how and if PPP candidates continue their study of diversity issues once they achieve roles as school leaders. A university program can prepare candidates and demonstrate best practices for understanding engaging in diversity issues, but the true test of the program is if it makes lasting change in the candidates' practice in the field.

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