

Essential and insightful narratives from teacher candidates: Challenges with an equity initiative in teacher education

Summary of article

Manu Sharma*
Brock University, Canada

This article provides insights into an equity initiative that was used in a Canadian teacher education program. The Diverse Schools initiative was a unique opportunity for associate teachers and their respective teacher candidates to learn about culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP). The intent behind this pedagogy was to provide both the teacher candidate and associate teacher an approach to addressing the needs and identities of marginalized students. According to teacher candidates, there were two substantial challenges with CRRP: (1) CRRP is not easily defined and it is interpreted differently based on the lens of the teacher who is using it (2) CRRP does not address students with special needs, students who are English Language Learners nor violence in the classroom. The first challenge helps teacher educators consider the importance of acknowledging the lived experiences of teacher candidates and provides them time to reflect on how those experiences impact their understanding of CRRP. This means CRRP is more aligned with being understood as a pedagogical approach on a highly contextual continuum that cannot be defined in one standard way. On the other hand the second challenge highlights the importance of considering the classroom's student make up and climate. It is through thinking through the identities and needs of your students while maintaining a safe and inclusive classroom space that teacher candidates can begin to grapple with different ways of implementing CRRP in the classroom. Allowing for considerations of the safety of the students and having transparent discussions on issues of power and privilege given the diversity of the student body in a classroom space is paramount. This article's findings are significant and contribute to equity based teacher education initiatives because they remind us of the pivotal role teacher candidates play in teacher education programs, and the impact such initiatives have in reaching and connecting with the increasingly diverse student populations in our classrooms today.