

Chapter 13

Supporting effective practice: the pending agenda

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This chapter focuses on key issues in teacher education for diversity: the system and its governance, strengthening the research base, and improving teaching practice. Gaps in our knowledge and areas for improvement are identified and discussed for each of these areas. Orientations for addressing and improving the current state of affairs are also provided. These orientations are necessarily general as approaches to diversity in teacher education are context-dependent; therefore, it is argued that they should be used as a starting point for further thematic and contextual analysis. Policy makers, educators and research communities are encouraged to consolidate their efforts and resources to provide sound evidence for future decision-making on this important and sensitive topic.

*From the OECD online consultation :
evaluating what works*

Most practitioners reported no formal evaluation of strategies used to address diverse student classrooms. Without evaluation, how can classrooms, schools and systems learn what works?

Introduction

This publication aims to shed light on teacher education for diverse student populations, with a particular focus on the changing role and expectations for teachers, the distinction between diversity and disparity, and the concept of multiple risks. Various options available in teacher education to address these themes have been discussed along with examples of particular country classroom practices.

One of the challenges in this field is that the available evidence base is not sufficiently robust, with an abundance of theoretical and descriptive research and a noticeable lack of empirical findings. In addition to calling for more empirical research on the general topic, this publication has identified areas in which more research is particularly needed.

The improvement of the evidence base is crucial and should in turn be used to connect research to practice and better inform policymaking. Although the need to better connect policy to research and research to practice is not unique to this topic, the sensitive – and often political – nature of diversity issues and debates makes doing so particularly complex. The difficulty in connecting research to practice and policy is also exacerbated by the complexity of the topic and a lack of connection among the various research disciplines doing work in this area, such as psycholinguistics, economics, sociology and the learning sciences, to name just a few.

This chapter focuses on areas that require further attention concerning the system and governance, the research base and teaching practice. It looks first at a number of transversal themes that have emerged across the chapters and discussions of this publication. Gaps in our knowledge and areas for improvement are then identified, followed by orientations for policy, research and practice on assessing and improving the *status quo*. These orientations

are necessarily general in nature, as approaches to diversity in teacher education and the classroom are very much context-dependent. Devising a “one size fits all” response to an inherently multifaceted issue is thus neither possible nor desirable. The general orientations presented in this chapter will be complemented by further thematic and contextual analysis in the next stage of the Teacher Education for Diversity project.

Emerging transversal themes

Crafting an agenda (from a policy, school or research perspective) to best address the issues raised in teacher education for diversity is complex and encompasses a number of different disciplines. Throughout the chapters in this volume the following transversal themes have emerged:

- diversity is a broad term with multiple meanings. Charting courses of action for systems and classrooms can only be done with careful consideration of the particular context and tradition;
- when diversity is viewed as an asset rather than a liability, it becomes easier to consider and implement the advantages that it can bring to classrooms, schools and systems;
- changing attitudes and behaviours is neither simple nor rapid. Effective teacher education for diversity is thus an ongoing process in which diversity issues are embedded within training and development options rather than being presented as one-off optional modules;
- teacher education would benefit from systematic planning and structuring such that the links between initial and in-service teacher education are better articulated and offer a holistic approach to career development; and
- suggestions for reform (of curricula, programme design, teaching practice, etc.) must be considered also in light of the incentives available to support and encourage the change desired. One key element too often overlooked is the role of parents and communities in effecting lasting change.

Knowledge gaps and policy orientations

System-wide and governance issues

It is important to better understand characteristics of increasingly diverse populations so that they may be taken into account in education systems. Without clear indications of who is included in the diverse landscape, it is difficult to target efforts addressing disparities in educational performance

to where they are most needed. To accomplish this, relevant data on diverse student populations must be collected and examined. However, overly broad data collection methods can distort the unique characteristics of diverse groups within the population as a whole. In addition, the analysis of the data may not be appropriately disaggregated, leading to inaccurate assumptions and conclusions of broad patterns that do not necessarily exist. Including and maintaining more detailed variables pertaining to diversity for all groups will benefit research, policies and practices pertaining to teacher education and student achievement.

- *Encourage timely, relevant and coherent data collection in order to provide clear indications of who is included in the diverse classroom landscape for more informed decision-making on how best to respond.*

As populations change across OECD countries, open and honest discussion about the nature and impact of these changes on society and classrooms can become embroiled in sensitive topics related to national identity and values. There is thus a tendency for these issues to become labelled as “difficult” and best avoided, particularly if political and ideological motivations become intertwined with suggested courses of action. Yet without open and active discussion, the impact of these demographic changes on schools and classrooms, and the pressure on teachers to address diversity issues, are unlikely to be adequately recognised. In order to design, develop and implement a cohesive, system-level approach to preparing teachers for diverse schools, open discussion among the relevant actors of changing realities and subsequent development needs is necessary.

- *Foster active dialogue in view of a shared vision, at different levels and with a variety of stakeholders, on the nature of increasingly diverse populations, how these are reflected in schools and classrooms, and how to accommodate the changing landscapes.*

Throughout OECD countries, demographic gaps between students and teachers are growing as student populations continue to diversify while teaching populations do not. A teaching force that more closely mirrors the student population can benefit both students and teachers. Diverse teachers can serve as powerful role models for diverse students, potentially motivating them to strive further in their achievements. Diverse teachers also bring to the classroom their unique experiences and perspectives, which can help them to better relate to their diverse students. Diverse teachers may also be more inclined to view student diversity in the classroom as a resource, and treat it as such.

- *Improve the diversity of student teachers and teachers. For this to be accomplished, there must be a holistic policy plan within countries*

and regions for attracting, retaining and inserting diverse student teachers into the teaching force.

Data on student achievement reveal that various characteristics of diverse populations, such as migration status, socio-economic status, parental levels of schooling, etc., can impact on student performance. While these data are of great importance, they must be augmented with other types of research evidence in order to provide teachers, schools and systems with timely and relevant information on what works for diverse student populations, and when. Within the classroom, the alignment of summative processes and formative assessment (or frequent interactive assessments of student progress and understanding) can assist teachers in helping their diverse students achieve their learning goals. They can also enable researchers and policy makers to better understand the links between teaching and learning, which can in turn inform and shape strategies for teaching diverse students at classroom, school and system levels.

- *Better link classroom, school and system assessment and evaluation to provide stakeholders with a more holistic view of how objectives are being achieved and to provide a more complete basis on which to make improvements.*

As is the case in other areas in education, research and evidence on teacher education for diversity are not very well linked to practice and policy. This missing element is crucial since a key benefit of research lies in its use and its implementation. Barriers to using research to inform practice can include resistance on the individual level, such as when teachers or policy makers do not believe that a suggested change is appropriate. Perhaps more importantly, it may not always be clear what research means and how it might be implemented. Even when stakeholders are clearly convinced of the utility of suggested changes, there may be practical barriers to implementation in terms of the time and resources required. On a system level, there may be resistance among policy makers on various levels, not because of mistrust of the research but due to reluctance to change existing teacher policy in an area that may not be viewed as under their own jurisdiction. As resistance to change on individual and system levels can be reduced with strategic interventions, efforts to encourage the use of research in policy and practice should be made accordingly, especially by local actors who can examine research results and determine the significance of these results within their specific context.

- *Encourage capacity-building throughout the system for using research to influence teacher education practice and policy, for example, through training for research literacy for practitioners, and/or helping to interpret and disseminate research results for a non-academic audience.*

Strengthening the knowledge base

Better teacher education for diverse student populations is a topic that requires learning from multidisciplinary evidence, but too often relevant research results are not disseminated widely enough. For example, teacher education institutions could greatly benefit from evidence from the linguistics field on how non-native speakers learn. However, research results too often remain in their original field without much further dissemination, making it difficult to create links between research findings. The dissemination of research results among relevant disciplines should be a planned and systematic process to allow for an interdisciplinary knowledge base that can better inform practice and policy. This could be fostered through the establishment of networks to stimulate dialogue and build communities among researchers themselves. This could also include creating or supporting brokerage agencies designed to provide the required links between research and practice as well as building relevant capacity both in the system and among stakeholders.

- *Create and support research networks and brokerage agencies to help foster dialogue and dissemination as well as improve the interdisciplinary nature of the knowledge base related to educating teachers for diversity.*

While the multidisciplinary domain of teacher education for diversity has inspired a great deal of research, it is predominately theoretical and descriptive in nature. Without rigorous empirical research on the key elements of teacher education for diversity, policy makers will not be able to answer crucial questions about what works and what does not. The importance of a strong evidence base on this topic is made more urgent given the political sensitivity and ideological motivations that often characterise these discussions.

- *Support relevant research, especially empirical research, on initial and ongoing teacher education as well as classroom practices for diversity in order to develop a richer knowledge base.*

In addition to calling for more empirical research overall, the analysis from the TED project reveals three major areas that require further investigation, as elaborated below.

1. Teacher educators are entrusted with the crucial task of preparing student teachers and teachers to face their classrooms. Yet there is a surprisingly sparse knowledge base on how teacher educators are themselves prepared. The limited evidence available suggests that in many countries there is minimal oversight on who can become teacher educators and that the required course of study is often ill-defined. Consequently, little is known about teacher educators and how they are prepared to teach in general, especially with respect to diversity.

- *Increase focus on the education of teacher educators, both broadly and for diversity in particular, in order to increase evidence of how they are prepared and how they in turn prepare student teachers and teachers.*
2. Diverse student teachers, who stay in the system and become diverse teachers, can bring numerous benefits to the classroom by serving as role models for diverse students, providing opportunities for all students to learn about diversity through their unique perspectives, enriching diverse students' learning through shared identities, and even serving as culture/diversity brokers in the school and broader community. Yet little is known about how best to attract diverse candidates to teaching careers, why many diverse student teachers do not continue on to become teachers, and the factors that could contribute to their retention. More targeted research would allow us to determine these factors and in turn develop strategies to address these issues.
 - *Focus more on the factors involved in improving attraction and retention of diverse student teachers and teachers, who can serve as important role models and bring valuable perspectives into the classroom.*
 3. In many OECD countries it is difficult to attract highly-qualified teachers to poorer performing schools. Even when the best teachers begin their careers at disadvantaged schools they often leave within a short period of time. Diverse student classrooms are in serious need of well-qualified teachers, but it is not always clear how to address this situation. For example, data on teacher retention both in general and in diverse schools is often lacking. So too is qualitative research that would meaningfully complement these quantitative data, such as research on contexts of hard-to-staff schools, incentives to keep the best teachers in the schools that need them most, and effective and targeted strategies for attraction and retention.
 - *Further focus on the attraction and retention of highly qualified teachers in the schools that need them most, going beyond descriptive statistics to build explanatory evidence on key variables for attracting and retaining well-qualified teachers in diverse schools.*

Improving teacher practice

Initial teacher education, the induction period when teachers are first placed in the classroom, and continuing professional development are too often considered discrete stages in the professional life of a teacher. As such, they are developed and monitored by different bodies, often with minimal

co-ordination among the various players. In order for teachers to reach their full potential and be best guided in their career progression, these “separate” stages must be linked in order to foster a more holistic process of career development and progression that more closely matches teachers’ needs. A systematic approach to career progression and development also allows for an analysis of the best timing of development opportunities so that they can be offered when they would be most useful. For example, it may be premature to provide in-depth instruction on classroom management techniques if the student has not yet started practicing in classrooms. Waiting until a practicum begins and focusing on providing ongoing support during the induction phase (*i.e.* the first year of teaching) may be a far better use of student time (and programme budget) than separating the theory from its practical application.

- *Better connect the stages of teacher education to more thoroughly develop teachers’ knowledge and skills, and plan the timing of interventions such that they are available when they are most needed.*

Improved teaching for diverse student populations is an increasingly important competency for current and future teachers. However, too often these topics are addressed through a sole course, often as an elective. As systems increasingly recognise the need to prepare teachers for a diversifying student population, there must be a systematic effort to integrate this topic and strategies into the curriculum. Moreover, a crucial component of teaching for diversity lies in examining one’s own beliefs and how they influence behaviour. Much like any other teacher competency, the requisite skills for teaching and motivating diverse classrooms and attitudinal awareness cannot be simply absorbed through a one-off course during initial education or professional development. Instead, it is important to build on this training throughout teachers’ careers, so that they gain transversal exposure to knowledge and perspectives that can have a meaningful impact on how they practice.

- *Ensure that teaching for diverse student populations is an integral component of both initial and in-service teacher education in order to foster and build on the ongoing behavioural changes necessary to respond to evolving classrooms.*

Firsthand experience in dealing with diversity issues can be a tremendous asset for teaching, curriculum design and class development. Student teachers would greatly benefit from participation in activities that expose them to practical situations of addressing diversity, especially classroom practice and placements in schools with highly diverse student populations as well as in schools that are already recognised for their use of good practices for addressing diversity. Another important way to better prepare student teachers to deal with diverse classrooms is by broadening their frame of reference with respect to diversity. Encouraging student teachers to experience another

culture firsthand through foreign language study, sustained interaction with multicultural or indigenous communities, study abroad, etc. can help them better relate to diverse students. Another good approach would be to encourage understanding of diverse groups through the use of critical reflection in learning contexts and problem-solving simulations using student evidence. In turn, after the completion of such programmes or experiences, sharing such experiences within their own education programme through formal discussion with peers and instructors would help to disseminate lessons learned more broadly. It would also serve to encourage leadership within the population of student teachers on this issue.

- *Teacher education programmes should provide student teachers the opportunity to engage in activities that expose them to practical situations of classroom diversity and allow them to broaden their frames of reference. These experiences should be formally discussed and shared in order to maximise lessons learned.*

Mentoring schemes can be extremely helpful in supporting teacher candidates and new teachers by capitalising on guidance from veteran teachers, but this mechanism is not always properly implemented. Some mandatory mentoring programmes for new teachers function better on paper than in practice, while other voluntary mentoring schemes often have few incentives for teachers to volunteer, making it difficult to attract good mentors. However, when school leaders have the tools to design and implement them properly, mentoring programmes provide opportunities for new teachers and teacher candidates to work together and discuss new situations and difficulties encountered in the classroom. These measures have been shown to increase retention of new teachers, particularly in the induction phase, that is, the first year or two of schooling when attrition is most marked. It is important to fully develop mentoring schemes so that new teachers can learn constructively from experienced teachers in their field regarding the situations encountered in the classroom.

- *Develop new, or reinforce existing, mentoring programmes, so that new and veteran teachers, preferably at the same grade and subject level, can share experiences, with the aim of supporting new teachers and encouraging them to remain in the classroom.*

Teaching requires a tremendous amount of flexibility to respond to changing classroom needs, and teachers are constantly updating their practices to respond to their students. However, without proper evaluation, teachers and school leaders do not have feedback from which to learn and, thus, lack indications of what works well, what works less well, and why. While there may be very good practices being used by teachers in the field, the lack of formal record and evaluation means that potentially good practices are being lost. Proper evaluation helps us to learn from “what works” in practice

and enables knowledge to be transferred back into schools and systems. Good evaluation practices can also serve to encourage critical self-assessment, which is an important element of improving teacher practice.

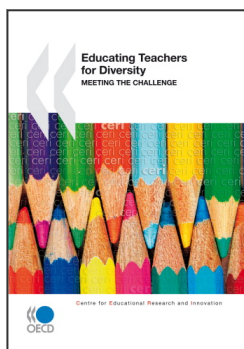
- *Better evaluate “what works” in the classroom by encouraging, and providing incentives for, the appraisal and feedback of teacher practices to feed knowledge back into classrooms, schools and systems.*

Teaching and learning take place in particular contexts. While general principles of teaching for diversity can transcend context, it is extremely important that particular classroom strategies be tailored to the learners in question. Determining universal best practices is thus neither possible nor desirable. Instead, it is important that pre-service and in-service teachers and teacher educators understand the importance of contextual specificity and be able to critically reflect on their own classroom contexts and practice. This will then allow them to apply general principles of teaching for diversity in ways that work for their classes and students. It should be noted that establishing this as a consistent practice takes time and repetition. Research has demonstrated that this process works best when it is supported in an ongoing manner throughout initial and in-service education. Furthermore, teachers report that they find this easiest to do when they have colleagues with whom they can collaborate and share experiences and reflections as well as leaders within the school body that support and champion these practices.

- *Promote awareness of contextual specificity when preparing pre-service and in-service teachers for diversity. Guide and encourage teachers and teacher candidates to adapt general principles of teaching for diversity to teaching their specific student populations.*

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