Developing a Commitment to Multicultural Education

ANGELA V. PACCIONE
Colorado State University, School of Education

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors and process involved in developing a commitment to multicultural education. The two questions that guided the study were (a) What kinds of life experiences contribute to a commitment to multicultural education? and (b) What is the process by which individuals become committed to multicultural education? The research methodology of content analysis was used to answer the first question and phenomenology was used to answer the second.

*The theoretical population for this study included all teachers in the United States who are committed to multicultural education/diversity. The tangible population included members of the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME). The criterion sample for the study was those members of NAME who (a) were affiliated with prekindergarten through higher education in 1997, and (b) attended the 1997 NAME Annual Conference (*n *= 330).*

A questionnaire consisting of one open-ended and various standard demographic questions was mailed to the sample. Content analysis of the returned questionnaires revealed 11 factors that contributed to developing a commitment to multicultural education. Telephone interviews were also conducted with 45 volunteer respondents from the sample. Phenomenological analysis of the interviews strongly suggested that a four-stage process can be used to describe the development of a commitment to multicultural education.

The results of the study have implications for multicultural education and teacher education. Foremost in the conclusions of this study are the support for (a) cultural immersion experiences and (b) course work in multicultural education that evokes a critical analysis of the sociopolitical status quo in U.S. society.

A definitive commentary on schooling for students of color was delivered by one of the foremost leaders of reform in teacher education, who said "To this day, most schools in the United States do an extraordinarily poor job of educating students of color" (Darling–Hammond, 1997, p. 1). The phrase "To this day" alludes to the long-standing history of inequitable education for students of color in the United States. Unfortunately, history

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often repeats itself. Many educators agree that the role of the teacher is paramount in the equitable delivery of education (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Joyce & Showers, 1988; Kozol, 1991). All things being equal, individual teachers make a significant difference in the learning experience of all students. Therefore, creating equitable education for students of color must begin with individual teachers.

After an exhaustive examination of the research on teaching effects and teacher evaluation, Good (1996) concluded, ". . . some of the strongest messages teachers communicate to students are expressed through *classroom behavior*. . . . Teachers may have the best intentions in the world, but if they behave inequitably, real damage occurs" (p. 632). However, individual teachers can also make a *positive* difference in the lives of students (Good & Brophy, 1994). Teachers who are able to build rapport with students have the opportunity to make a significant difference. The rapport established between teacher and student is one of the most important factors affecting student achievement (Joyce & Showers, 1988). One way teachers are able to establish rapport and make a connection with students from different races and cultures is by becoming culturally competent. Gay (1993) describes this as competence in becoming *cultural brokers*. She says:

> A cultural broker is one who thoroughly understands different cultural systems, is able to interpret cultural symbols from one frame of reference to another, can mediate cultural incompatibilities, and knows how to build bridges or establish linkages across cultures that facilitate the instructional process. (p. 287)

It takes a skillful and committed teacher to become a cultural broker for the growing population of students of color. Teachers who continue to operate as if all students are the same continue to perpetuate the inequities in the educational system. The persistent failure of the present educational system to meet the needs of students of color provides a compelling need for effective teacher preparation in multicultural education. Reed (1993) states emphatically that teachers "must be taught that they have a legal, ethical, and moral responsibility to provide the best education they possibly can to members of all racial, ethnic, and cultural groups" (p. 28).

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers who were *already* committed to issues of multicultural education and educational equity had developed their commitment (Paccione, 1998). This understanding may offer insights into developing curriculum for preservice teacher education that provides the best opportunities for assisting in the development of a commitment to multicultural education and educational equity for *all* students.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC IMPERATIVE

In 1979, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) included multicultural education among its criteria for the accreditation of teacher preparation programs. With this impetus, many colleges and universities included multicultural education in their requirements for preservice teacher preparation. Yet Gollnick (1992) found that only 56% of universities were in compliance with the NCATE mandate for multicultural education. Evans, Torrey, and Newton (1997) conducted a national survey of state departments of education to identify the requirements in multicultural preparation for certification or licensure. With a 100% return rate on the questionnaire used in the study, the researchers were able to determine that only 25 out of 50 states require course work in multicultural education for prospective teachers to be certified/licensed. Twenty years after the NCATE mandate, it appears that neither states nor teacher education programs have made substantial progress toward compliance.

The NCATE mandate addresses the racial–cultural disparity between the teaching force and the student population in the United States. In 1991, the K–12 teaching force was approximately 84% white (Bennett de Marrais & LeCompte, 1995). During 1993–94, that number rose to approximately 87%, where it remains today (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995, 1997). There is little evidence that these numbers will change significantly in the near future (Grant & Secada, 1990; Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). Meanwhile, the percentage of students of color enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools increased from 24% in 1976 to 36% in 1996 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1995, 1997). As the K–12 student population grows increasingly more racially and culturally diverse, the nation's teaching force is on track to maintain a profile that is overwhelmingly white (Bennett de Marrais & LeCompte, 1995; Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996).

A lack of cultural awareness and a lack of specific instruction in culturally relevant pedagogy may create a classroom environment that fails to facilitate the success of culturally diverse students. Research consistently indicates that teacher perceptions of students based on race, class, and gender influence their expectations for student behavior and academic performance (Gollnick & Chinn, 1998; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 1992). Teachers are often not aware of their lower expectations for students of color (Bennett, 1995; Hinchey, 1994). Gay (1997) reports:

> Because teachers' cultural backgrounds and value orientations are highly compatible with middle-class and European American culture, they can use these cultural connections to facilitate the learning of White students. This is done routinely and without conscious or deliberate intentions. It is their shared cultural orientations that make

> instruction more relevant and personally meaningful. The absence of these for students of color places them at a learning disadvantage. (p. 211)

This is not an indictment of *all* teachers. Certainly there are some, perhaps many, who possess a commitment to facilitating the success of *all* students. Neither every preservice teacher nor every inservice teacher is unaware of the cultural differences that impact student learning. Still, statistical analyses indicate that, by and large, students of color do not succeed in American schools.

Darling-Hammond, executive director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and a staunch advocate for the urgency and imperative of preparing teachers for the racial–cultural diversity of the next century, says:

> As a consequence of structural inequalities in access to knowledge and resources, students from racial and ethnic "minority" groups in the United States face persistent and profound barriers to educational opportunity. . . . We believe that . . . serious policy attention to these ongoing, systematic inequalities [is] critical for improving the quality and outcomes of education for all students. (Darling-Hammond, 1995, p. 465)

TEACHER EDUCATION FOR DIVERSITY: BECOMING A MULTICULTURAL PERSON

The experience of students of color in U.S. public schools is discouraging. There are numerous avenues that the educational community can explore to combat the inequities that exist in the present system. A focus on preservice teacher preparation is just one of the many possibilities. Knowledge of diversity, skills for effectively working with diverse populations, and transforming attitudes toward cultural diversity are all goals for the preservice teacher prepared in multicultural education (Banks, 1997; Bennett, 1995; Gay, 1994; Nieto, 2000).

Nieto (2000) asserts that one must become a multicultural *person* before one can become a multicultural *teacher*. She says, "Without this transformation of ourselves, any attempts at developing a multicultural perspective will be shallow and superficial" (p. 338). Nieto says that the process of becoming a multicultural person includes a transformational reeducation. First, she says, individuals must learn more about people and events about which they know little. This knowledge could come from literature, cultural activities, appropriate and accurate media outlets, and the like. Second, individuals need to successfully traverse the process of confronting individual racism and bias. Often racism and bias are so deeply rooted as to be unconscious.

Therefore, it may take a trained teacher/mentor to bring these issues to awareness and appropriate resolution. Third, individuals need to be able to view the world from a variety of perspectives. This shift in worldview can be difficult due to individual ethnocentrism.

By examining the life experiences that have shaped the perspectives of individuals *already* committed to multicultural education, we may begin to understand the motivation that inspires them to commit to a multicultural perspective. This increased understanding may then inform teacher preparation for multicultural education and the equitable education of students of color.

Clark (1993) reminds us that nearly everyone experiences transformational learning through those events that we report "changed our life." She states:

> In all cases, we can look back on these or similar marker experiences and identify the effects that they have had on our development, on who we are as human beings. They have changed us. Before the experience we were one sort of person, but after we were another. (pp. 47–48)

This study attempts to uncover those life experiences that inservice multicultural educators or advocates of multicultural education report have led to a commitment to multicultural education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. What kinds of life experiences contribute to developing a commitment to multicultural education?

2. What is the process by which teachers become committed to multicultural education?

Two data-collection methods were used: written survey and open-ended telephone interview. In the initial phase of the study, a survey was administered to 330 prekindergarten through university teachers. During the second phase of the study, 30–40 minute telephone interviews were conducted with volunteers who had completed the written survey.

The sample included a ready population of inservice multicultural educators and advocates of multicultural education found in the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME). From this population, a sample of individuals was selected who demonstrated a commitment to multicultural education based on their membership in NAME and their attendance at the 1997 NAME Annual Conference.

A modification of Dillman's (1978) Total Design Method (TDM) for survey research was used in an attempt to obtain the optimal response rate. Of the 327 deliverable surveys, 100 usable surveys were returned, for a 30% response rate. Due to the saliency of the topic and the use of many features of the TDM the response rate was much lower than anticipated. Factors that may have influenced the return rate include the perceived difficulty of the survey (the inclusion of a thoughtful, open-ended question), the possibility that recipients of the survey may not have viewed themselves as being sufficiently committed to multicultural education, and the possible conclusion by participants that they could choose to complete either the written survey *or* the phone interview.

The phone interviews were conducted to determine the *process* of developing a commitment to multicultural education. The sample that received the written survey was also solicited to participate in a 30–40 minute telephone interview. A postage-paid return postcard was used for respondents to indicate their willingness to participate in the interview. Fifty-eight individuals volunteered for the interviews. Twelve respondents were unable to be reached after a minimum of three attempts. Forty-five interviews were completed, audiotaped, and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were nondirective and sought to understand the *process* of developing a commitment to multicultural education. Thirty-seven of the interview respondents had also completed the written survey, which facilitated a more expedient entry to rapport building on the part of the interviewer. The ability to refer to experiences written in the survey enabled the conversation to move quickly and yet obtain depth and substance.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The complex task of uncovering the relationships between individual life experiences and a commitment to multicultural education was reduced to life themes through the analysis of survey and telephone responses.

In addition to standard demographic questions, the survey asked:

> *Think back over your career as a multicultural educator and/or as an advocate for educational equity. While many factors may be associated with this commitment, choose the events or experiences that you can point to and say, "these events, life experiences, personal influences, etc. led to my commitment to multicultural education and/or educational equity." Write a specific and detailed description of the events/experiences. Make sure to include what it was about the events/experiences that was so instrumental in the development of your commitment.*

Respondents were given a full page within the survey to answer the question and were invited to use as many pages as they wished. Content analysis

was used in analyzing the survey responses (Haggarty, 1995). The returned surveys were transcribed in a word-processing software application and each was coded using the computer-assisted coding software, HyperResearch (Researchware, 1997). Initially, every term associated with a potential factor was given its own code. Therefore, the code set began at 143 codes. These were systematically reduced by combining like terms and eliminating redundant terms, to a final code set of 11 identifiable themes. Reliability was achieved using outside researchers in an intercoder reliability check. Five surveys were initially coded by the researcher then distributed to three external researchers to code using the 11 themes. The results of the intercoder reliability check indicated a strong agreement between coders and a high reliability for the coding scheme. Agreement on survey codes ranged from 85% to 100% with an average of 92%.

The 11 themes, a brief description of the themes, and the percentage of surveys coded with the theme follows:

Theme 1. Influence of Family/Childhood Experiences. (36%)
Includes specific mention of family member as an influence, descriptions of actions of the family that encouraged an affinity toward diverse groups, role modeling of family members in actions/attitudes toward diversity, significant events experienced as a member of the family (not in school) that can be attributed to the convictions to diversity established by the family, childhood experiences with diversity made possible by family, cultural pride instilled by family, or being raised in a diverse environment.

Theme 2. Influence of Mentor, Role Model, Friendship. (22%)
Includes specific mention of a mentor, or role model, interpersonal connections formed with individuals from diverse groups, support of friends or members of the community, support from other multiculturalists, ideas about not being alone in the commitment to multicultural education, or the particular influence of a single individual.

Theme 3. Influence of Training, Educational Course, Books. (23%)
Includes specific mention of a diversity training program (not Peace Corps), specific mention of a book read or course taken, studying multicultural education topics, or the effect of using multicultural teaching strategies.

Theme 4. Interactive/Extended Cultural Immersion Experience. (27%)
Includes urban immersion experiences, experiences with another culture (including deaf population, and gay/lesbian population), experience overseas or in a country other than the United States,

or experiences with the Peace Corps or missionary groups. This category assumes an extended immersion experience, not one related to a course. Immersion experiences experienced through a course or training is coded under course work.

Theme 5. Influence of Critical Incident(s)/Significant Event(s). (20%)
Includes specific mention of events described as "life-changing" or resulting in a changed perspective, specific event(s) that precipitated commitment to issues/causes described as a reason for involvement in multicultural education.

Theme 6. Significant Temporal Environment. (21%)
Includes an environment that is limited by time or circumstance such as the Civil Rights era. Also included in this category are significant experiences in one's early educational biography, especially issues surrounding limited English proficiency and/or bilingualism.

Theme 7. Motivation from Empathy, Moral Disposition, Religious/Spiritual Convictions. (21%)
Includes specific descriptions of expressions of empathy, the development of empathic attitudes/behaviors in childhood, influence of church-related work in youth, perceived spiritual "mandates," acts of benevolent charity witnessed or performed, convictions instilled from specific spiritual community (e.g., Baha'i, Presbyterian, Catholic), or specific mention of "empathy" created from former experiences.

Theme 8. Discrimination/Racism Due to Minority Status. (36%)
Includes lived experiences as a minority (cultural, ethnic, racial, international), experiences of racism, discrimination, and/or oppression, influences/effects of segregation or living in nondiverse environments, awareness emerging from experience of being the "other," issues of esteem leading to forfeiture of culture or pathological need for cultural acceptance, or minority status of self or family members.

Theme 9. Initiative from Job Situation. (44%)
Includes specific mention of taking a job, becoming aware of inequities, and deciding to do something about it. This category is for those individuals who, due to a job situation, took their own initiative in developing a commitment to multicultural education. Also included are those individuals who developed a

commitment through a job mandate to infuse/address diversity issues.

Theme 10. Heightened Awareness of Issues Related to Diversity. (18%)
Includes specific mention of becoming aware of issues/experiences of racism, discrimination, educational inequities, social/political/economic inequities, awareness of diversity, awareness of denial about issues of inequity or racism, emergent issues of self-identity, awareness of issues of power and privilege, awareness of issues of social justice, awareness of issues relating to gender and/or sexual orientation, consciousness raising, or heightened understanding of issues of diversity.

Theme 11. Personal Power. (37%)
Includes descriptions of high self-efficacy, actions taken in response to injustices perceived, actions associated with commitment to multicultural education, perceived lifetime of commitment, anger expressed toward injustices, becoming a social activist, taking actions designed to assist others in becoming multiculturalists, role of leadership in multicultural education, or education of own children serving as impetus for sustained commitment to multicultural education.

Phenomenological research methodology was used to analyze data collected through the phone interviews. The systematic process of data analysis prescribed by Moustakes (1994) was used with a constant comparison to the data analysis completed through content analysis. Significant statements (those related to the 11 themes) made by respondents were identified and reexamined in order to capture the process and the essence of developing a commitment to multicultural education.

While no singular pattern is entirely sufficient to describe the experience for each individual, a pattern *did* emerge that clearly articulates the elements of the process as shared by all respondents in the study. The process that emerged from the analysis of the telephone interviews represents a developmental model that is inclusive of all of the respondents in the study (see Table 1).

STAGE ONE: CONTEXTUAL AWARENESS

Stage One begins with early childhood experiences that lay a foundation for the expression of a disposition favorable to issues or experiences with diversity. There is a strong contextual component to this stage in the process. That is, early exposure to diverse cultural groups appears to create

Table 1. Themes/stages in the process of developing a commitment

Stage One: Contextual Awareness	Stage Two: Emergent Awareness	Stage Three: Transformational Awareness	Stage Four: Committed Action
Influence of the Family/Childhood Experiences	Heightened Awareness of Issues Related to Diversity	Influence of Training, Educational Course, Books	Personal Power
Motivation from Empathy, Moral Disposition, Religious/Spiritual Convictions	Significant Temporal Environment	Critical Incident(s)/ Significant Event(s)	
	Initiative from Job Situation	Influence of Mentor, Role Model, Friendship	
Discrimination/ Racism Due to Minority Status	Discrimination/ Racism Due to Minority Status	Interactive/Extensive Cultural Immersion	
	Influence of Mentor, Role Model, Friendship		
	Interactive/Extensive Cultural Immersion		

a dispositional awareness that is partial to racial–cultural diversity. Individuals who report the influence of early childhood exposure to racial–cultural diversity (for example: growing up in a racially mixed, urban setting) also indicate an openness to experiences with diverse cultural groups during their adulthood. They more readily pursue training or academic course work related to issues of diversity. In addition, respondents who had a foundational disposition toward racial–cultural diversity were more likely to join the Peace Corps or spend a college semester abroad. Their willingness to put themselves in an unfamiliar environment appears to stem from these early experiences.

William provides an excellent example of an individual who grew up with a disposition that was open to racial–cultural diversity. His parents were liberal democrats who encouraged an appreciation for the global community. He says:

> My parents were liberal but I don't think they ever acknowledged or considered the fact that they might have been racist just because they grew up in a racist society. I mean, they didn't want to be. They tried to do everything possible to encourage and learn about other cultures, but the ones they selected were Japan, Europe or they took

> Italian classes. They were interested and enjoyed meeting students from South America and Africa, but in their own life they didn't seek out experiences or try to become knowledgeable about those cultures, so I think right there that indicated a bias that was invisible to them and that they never explored. They were definitely very supportive and interested in the Civil Rights Movement. . . . But again as aware as my parents were, we lived in a very White neighborhood. I never saw African Americans in my neighborhood at all. There were a few in my school, but even though we didn't talk about the ghetto or that sort of thing, there really weren't Black people or Hispanic people in my life or my parents' life.

William's contextual awareness stems from a politically active household that espoused a liberal political agenda yet remained socially insulated from minority populations. William was aware of the existence of blacks and Hispanics, but his awareness was on a contextual level at this time.

Susan's experience of stage one included exposure to diverse groups. However, her father did not espouse the kind of openness that William's father did. In contrast, Susan's father interacted with members of racially and culturally diverse groups while holding a limited bigotry toward minorities. As she tells it:

> I grew up as a white kid . . . on a farm. . . . I think probably a major factor was because we had a big farm and (my father) owned a co-op with a lot of other farmers, and they all used migrant workers. And most of the migrant workers were Puerto Rican . . . our house was right in the middle of them so we had a lot of migrant workers around us. I was an only child so I was always out playing in the field. My father wasn't real crazy about me doing that, probably the girl/male thing because most were male workers—being out there with all these guys and the stereotypes of foreigners, but it never seemed to bother me. Maybe because I was lonely as an only child, I don't know, but I would take water out to them and talk to them, and they were always so sweet and nice to me. And I think that probably had an impact.

This exposure to and interaction with a minority group gave Susan a contextual awareness that was open to diversity. The experiences described as stage one: contextual awareness serve to lay a foundation of awareness in its earliest forms. Individuals become aware that differences exist. For some individuals stage one awareness was due to negative experiences (i.e., discrimination), for others the awareness resulted from an empathetic disposition that led them to befriend those individuals who were social outcasts in their environment due to race, culture, or physical ability. The early foundation of contextual awareness prepared respondents for exposure to

issues of racism, classism, and the sociopolitical realities that confront individuals who differ from the majority. Exposure to these issues brought about a new level of awareness, stage two: emergent awareness.

STAGE TWO: EMERGENT AWARENESS

The second stage in the process of developing a commitment to multicultural education is an emergent awareness of racism, inequity, or injustice. This awareness typically emerges when individuals venture outside of their *racial–cultural comfort zones.* Cultural comfort zones can be described as environments in which an individual is surrounded by members of the same racial-cultural group.

During this stage an individual (a) becomes personally affected by acts of discrimination or racism, (b) becomes increasingly aware of intrapersonal identity issues, (c) develops a fascination with other cultures, and/or (d) begins to understand the sociopolitical realities that face minorities in U.S. society. These experiences are embedded within a critical context that permits the awareness to occur. For example, an individual grows up in a segregated childhood environment, then goes off to college where s/he has a roommate from a different cultural heritage. Through witnessing the experiences of the roommate, she becomes aware of racism and its effects. This emergent awareness is the second stage in developing a commitment to multicultural education. William experienced emergent awareness as a result of his interactions with an African American college roommate. He said:

> So when I was in college . . . I ended up with an African American roommate my sophomore year, and that was a great and a painful experience for me because at this point I was still what they would call a bleeding-heart liberal—a person who thought of myself as an ally to African Americans and felt like I should be in a sense congratulated for my liberal viewpoints. And totally unaware of the racism that I still carried around, and so when I had this roommate, invariably we would get into some discussions which would typically end up in arguments because he would see right through the shallowness of my liberalism. And he would challenge it and expose it. To me I felt like I was being attacked while all the time I thought I was being a good guy. It invariable ended up as wrestling matches and he being quite a bit bigger than me, he'd always win. That's why it was painful in a sense, but it often hurt my feelings because I thought I was a good guy compared to all these racist people I saw on TV. And yet he was telling me that I was biased. So that was I think the experience that began to open my eyes, it took a while. That was a whole year we were together

> and we were friends but it was also . . . I mean I have to thank him because really what he did was a workshop on me and I didn't realize it until later how much he'd done for me.

Another example of a stage two experience is found when a job-related situation creates an emergent awareness of issues related to racial-cultural diversity. This was frequently the case when a first-year teacher took a job in an ethnically diverse school setting. Forty-four percent of the survey respondents indicated that a job situation provided an emergent awareness of issues related to diversity.

Susan described the experience of her first job:

> But I think after I graduated and started teaching first grade in a working class, very blue collar district and there were a lot of working class White kids and Black kids and whatever, and I started seeing—that was when I started noticing social classes—when I really started seeing that.

Stage two experiences also result from significant temporal environments. When respondents could point to particular times in their life experiences as being critical *times*, these were referred to as significant temporal environments. Exposure to the issues of the Civil Rights era created an awareness for some individuals whose stage one contextual awareness was limited. Many respondents indicated that significant experiences during their childhood schooling environment provided an emergent awareness of issues of diversity. This was especially the case with issues of bilingualism or limited English proficiency. These experiences, while temporal in nature, resulted in a heightened awareness of issues related to diversity and multicultural education.

Yvonne was an undergraduate student during the 1960s and had a contextual awareness of racial–cultural diversity that was created by her grandfather's generosity and benevolence toward African American missionaries. The environment of the '60s provided a heightened awareness of the issues facing minority groups in the United States. In this context the impact of a particular book helped to move Yvonne from strictly stage one: contextual awareness into stage two: emergent awareness. She said:

> I was an English major and I read two short novels, *A Room with a View* and *Angels Fear to Tread*, and some of my background is English, and I was just horrified at the attitude of the British upper classes. Those weren't necessarily about race or anything. I just thought, such obliviousness. And then *A Passage to India* came along and that's colonial India and the way the colonials treated the native people. This was in the early '60s and I was just profoundly moved by this facet of human nature and being of an age then as an undergraduate student in the

> early '60s with the Civil Rights Movement broiling all around us. Professors I knew went down to march with Martin Luther King in Selma and so on, but I think that book alerted me somewhat to some of these issues that were happening. So I didn't become an activist as an undergraduate. I just watched and listened.

At this point Yvonne was still a spectator—albeit a concerned spectator.

Frequently, stage two: emergent awareness occurs when an individual is immersed in a different culture. Having the experience of being singularly different creates an emergent awareness of what it is like to be on the outside. Many respondents described experiences of discrimination based on nationality that served to heighten their awareness of similar experiences in the United States based on minority status. Particularly lengthy cultural immersion experiences create a similar awareness. A white family raising children in an Asian country would have early exposure to racial–cultural diversity (stage one: contextual awareness), but when the children begin to experience the "otherness" of being the minority, they would be in stage two of developing a commitment to multicultural education.

Discrimination due to minority status may also serve as an emergent awareness experience as an individual grows into an awareness of his/her sexual orientation. An emergent awareness of issues relating to diversity was reported for individuals who either experienced discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or chose to avoid revealing their sexual orientation while in high school.

STAGE THREE: TRANSFORMATIONAL AWARENESS

The third stage of developing a commitment to multicultural education occurs most frequently when theoretical understanding is achieved. There is a depth of understanding that appears at this stage that is conspicuously absent in the previous stages. Course work, training, books, or experiences pertaining to issues of diversity transform the individual at this stage. During this stage, the individual becomes personally invested in understanding the epistemology and sociopolitical consequences of racism. Racial–cultural issues shift from temporal in nature to more permanent features of one's experience.

As described in stage two, a mentoring relationship may serve as the impetus for transformational awareness. Often this relationship is formed through participation in trainings or course work taken at a college or university. Mentors have been reported to be responsible for taking one's understanding to a new level or for motivating a respondent to become more involved in issues of racial–cultural diversity and multicultural education. Susan provides an excellent example of the impact of a mentor:

> And I think the second major factor in my life was when I started to date a man . . . who was an activist and probably helped me develop more than any single person a social conscience. He was a mentor but he was a grassroots organizer so he ran the first Black ticket in an all White community—the first Black on a ticket, the first Hispanic on a ticket, the first woman on a ticket. He was always fighting the organization, the local democratic organization as a Democrat, but he was always running Independent tickets to try and move them off the center or pull them off from the right. I dated him for a long, long time and I think he single-handedly, if I would point to one person in my life, that person probably had the most impact. I think I had the attitudes and the empathy and sympathy from my childhood, but I really hadn't coalesced it into a philosophy—into a political ideology—and I think he was primarily responsible for that. He had this sense of outrage at injustice and again fighting for the underdog. But mainly he was just angry. He was angry at power that oppresses, and that anger I think really transferred to me almost 100%. So I would say that was the major catalyst in my life—is that person.

Similarly, course work/training that provokes critical analysis of contemporary sociopolitical or educational practices was frequently cited as causing transformational awareness in respondents. Course work that combined fieldwork in diverse settings was also reported to be transformational.

Yvonne was an English teacher and books had a tremendous impact on her developing a commitment to multicultural education/diversity. As stated earlier, while an undergraduate, the book *A Passage to India* provided the impetus for Yvonne to transition from stage one: contextual awareness to stage two: emergent awareness. After she was married and had two children, she made the transition to stage three. Her transition to stage three: transformational awareness was also the result of the impact of a book. She described the experience as follows:

> Then I read a book, *The Education of a Wasp*. That's a remarkable book. . . . It was a woman about my age at that time who wrote about her experience of learning what it was like to be Black. That book then prompted me to act and I picked up the phone and called a woman . . . (who) came over that afternoon and got me enrolled to volunteer at a neighborhood center.
>
> (Question: What was it about the book that prompted you to act?)
>
> I think it was reading about a woman in a neighborhood similar to mine, middle class like me, becoming a friend with a woman through a volunteer program she was with, and I could imagine that happening to myself. It was all things I could relate to. I could imagine

> becoming friends with a Black woman even though I hadn't really gotten out into the community myself. So then it was the little stories of things that she learned as she went along like, I haven't re-read that book in quite a few years, but I can still remember for instance just how horrifying it was—well the experiments they did. The family would go look at a house and "Oh, I'm sorry" and then she'd go look and it was available. Some of the cruelties involved in some of that treatment. She and her husband became such advocates for social change that . . . they moved to Philadelphia and chose to live in a very integrated neighborhood and send their children to integrated schools. But I think the key there is that I could identify.

While course work, training, and the mentoring relationship occur over a period of time, a critical incident may also provide the impetus for transformational awareness. A critical incident is an experience that typically occurs rather suddenly but that has life-changing implications. The critical incidents described by some of the respondents in this study had powerfully visceral components. Respondents described acts of racism or discrimination perpetrated on them in ways that made them rise up in anger or turn steadfastly toward a commitment to multicultural education. Typically, individuals reported these incidents after they had been coded for stage one and stage two experiences. Although the incident did not occur to *her*, Norma experienced a critical incident that can serve as an example of the intensity of an experience that would be considered "critical." She recounted an incident that occurred while she was in elementary school:

> I remember sitting in the lobby of my elementary school around a Christmas tree, and this is interesting considering that 30% of the population of the school was Jewish, and we were singing Christmas carols. And one of the boys who was an Orthodox Jew had to be taken from the room practically in hysterics. He was covering his ears and crying really hard because he was so worried that even hearing Christmas carols was going to somehow put him in bad stead with his family. And so I guess that, and even though it didn't bother me, that image has always remained with me, and what it feels like to not be in the majority and not be a part of the dominant culture.

This is the kind of experience that was coded a *critical incident* if it had been experienced by the respondent or if the respondent had indicated that witnessing this incident had a significant impact on the development of his/her awareness. Norma says, "that image has always remained with me." This attests to the impact of the incident and the awareness it created of not being in the dominant culture.

Finally, cultural immersion experiences caused transformational awareness in individuals who had already experienced stages one and two. Some of these respondents reported experiences with the Peace Corps as having had a transformational impact. Others told of urban immersion experiences that changed their lives considerably. These respondents, while already aware of issues of diversity, became transformed through the daily experience of living outside of their racial–cultural comfort zones.

STAGE FOUR: COMMITTED ACTION IN ADVOCACY FOR DIVERSITY/MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

This final stage of developing a commitment to multicultural education is distinguished by actions/activities undertaken by individuals in roles of advocacy for issues of diversity. These actions are behavioral demonstrations of a commitment to diversity and multicultural education. Consistent with its individualistic nature, commitment to diversity is expressed in a variety of ways. For some respondents assuming leadership roles in diversity issues on their campuses evidenced commitment to multicultural education. For others their commitment became evident within the confines of their job. For example, a respondent became aware of issues of educational inequities faced by racial minority individuals at a school and then developed a multicultural curriculum to make the content more relevant for the students. The sustained commitment to assuring a multicultural curriculum is ample evidence of a commitment to multicultural education. Still other respondents reported their sense of obligation to be the loyal voice of diversity in all of their associations. This included late-night talks in college dormitories and consciousness raising in the faculty lounge. Many respondents spoke of their commitment to conducting research in the areas of diversity, multicultural education, and social justice issues.

Susan, a professor at a university on the East Coast, teaches courses in which she has infused a multicultural perspective. She is a recognized advocate for diversity/multicultural education on her campus. Her experience captures the essence of stage four: committed action. She described her experiences as follows:

> And that's what I hope for in my own teaching. I'm pleased to say . . . I have students who have e-mailed me and said, "I had an epiphany in your class" or, "I will never see things the same way." If you can just get somebody noticing things that they didn't notice before. And my students are almost all white. So I do a lot with white privilege, bonding, and what's happening, which is really nice, is that I'm getting more and more students that are writing in, calling, sending me little letters and saying you know I can't stop seeing things now . . . That's

> nice because that's what he [her mentor] did for me. So I'm hoping that's what I pass on.

Like Susan, the other respondents in this study are teachers or are in some capacity affiliated with prekindergarten through higher education. Each reported either teaching courses in multicultural education/diversity or infusing a diversity perspective into the curriculum that he/she teaches.

Developing a commitment to multicultural education is a multifaceted, complex phenomenon. However, the essence of the phenomenon as described by the respondents in this study has been captured in the following description:

> The process of developing a commitment to multicultural education begins in the context of childhood experiences at home and in the community. Both negative and positive attitudes towards diversity help to develop a disposition of affinity towards diversity. Early childhood experiences help to reinforce that affinity through dogged determination to correct injustices perpetrated or through bolstering an already established interest in diversity. At this stage of developing a commitment to multicultural education, external factors become more prominent. A significant experience (or combination of experiences) causes individuals to change their perspective on issues of diversity. This significant experience can come through a variety of sources: a cultural immersion experience, a book, an individual, a critical incident, a course or training. This experience triggers a critical examination of the socio-political, economic, or educational institutions and/or practices that constitute the status quo in American society. Reflection and critical examination provide an impetus for a commitment to diversity which is subsequently expressed in a variety of practices.

MAJOR FINDINGS

One of the major findings of the study suggests that *particular* life experiences (expressed as themes in the study) are cited more frequently as factors contributing to the development of a commitment to multicultural education by those teachers who are already committed. Specifically, the five most frequently cited themes were:

1. Initiative from job situation (44%)
2. Influence of family/childhood experiences (36%)
3. Discrimination due to minority status (36%)
4. Interactive/extended cultural immersion experience (27%)

5. Influence of training, educational course, or books (23%)

[Personal power was cited by 37% of the respondents; however, in many of the cases it was not a factor leading to commitment, but rather a demonstration of having developed a commitment.] The themes most frequently cited by survey respondents should be encouraging to teacher educators. Many of the themes can be approximated in teacher education curricula and may assist preservice teachers in developing a commitment to multicultural education. This is a way to bridge the *cultural gap* that exists between the predominantly white teaching force and the increasingly racially–culturally diverse student population.

The second major finding relates to the *process* of developing a commitment to multicultural education. The results of this study strongly suggest that a four-stage process can be used to describe the development of a commitment to multicultural education. The process is developmental—each stage is dependent on the prior stage. In addition, the process reflects increases in awareness of racial–cultural diversity leading to a commitment to multicultural education. This, too, should be encouraging to teacher educators as it suggests that individuals may move through the process in response to particular curricular interventions. This finding places the onus for effective teacher preparation for student racial–cultural diversity in the hands of teacher educators.

Teacher educators have a limited window of opportunity during which to make an impact on preservice teachers' commitment to multicultural education. Preservice teachers have a wide variety of contextual awareness that has been developed through early childhood experiences. There is not much that teacher educators can do about that. However, an understanding of the stages of developing a commitment to multicultural education may assist teacher educators as they prepare preservice teachers for a racially–culturally diverse student population.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study add to the prevailing research on teacher education for student racial–cultural diversity through research-based support for:

1. Cultural immersion experiences, and

2. Specific course work in multicultural education.

These two approaches may provide the greatest potential for teacher educators to influence preservice teachers' attitudes toward racial–cultural diversity and assist in developing a commitment to multicultural education.

The most frequently cited theme in developing a commitment to multicultural education was initiative from job situation. These respondents (44%) reported being hired to teach in an urban environment that had a racially–culturally diverse student population. Not all who worked in an urban environment actually lived in that environment, but all reported the transformative effect of witnessing *firsthand* the educational inequities that existed in urban environments. For most of the 44 survey respondents this transformative experience occurred when they took their first teaching job. However, teacher education programs may be able to offer cultural immersion experiences that approximate the experiences of these first teaching jobs.

Specifically, three suggestions for cultural immersion experiences that are likely to promote a commitment to multicultural education are (a) short-term field experiences in racially–culturally diverse settings conducted in conjunction with multicultural education course work, (b) long-term student teaching placement in racially–culturally diverse settings, and (c) service learning opportunities infused throughout a teacher education program.

Short-term exposure to racially–culturally diverse communities may assist in creating emergent awareness for preservice teachers while a long–term cultural immersion experience in racially–culturally diverse settings may provide opportunities for transformational awareness through critical incidents, opportunities to develop personal relationships with individuals from diverse groups, and opportunities to examine the epistemology of racism. When these experiences are combined with specific course work in multicultural education, individuals have the opportunity to gain a cognitive foundation of emergent awareness. Short-term exposure to racially–culturally diverse environments may be more appropriate for individuals who have not yet reached the emergent awareness stage of becoming committed to diversity. Long-term field placements may be more suitable for individuals who are developmentally ready for transformative awareness.

Finally, service learning experiences provide opportunities to develop empathy and a heightened awareness of issues of diversity. In addition, service learning in a racially–culturally diverse environment may provide opportunities for individuals to develop personal relationships with those from diverse groups. Service learning activities provide individuals opportunities to become members of the community through direct participation in community projects or service.

Specific course work in multicultural education can result in transformational awareness for individuals who are already in the stage of emergent awareness. However, repeated exposure to curricular activities that are of an emergent nature may have detrimental effects. The studies reviewed prior to conducting this study suggest that many teacher preparation programs focus their content on creating an emergent awareness of issues of diversity. That is, curricular focus is often on creating cultural autobiogra-

phies, being exposed to the educational inequities facing minority students, and reviewing the history of the oppression of marginalized groups. The repeated exposure to curricular materials that focus only on stage two: emergent awareness may leave students feeling proselytized, but never converted.

The findings of this study also support the use of a single class approach to preparing teachers for racial–cultural diversity. Twenty-three percent of the respondents cited this as a factor in their developing a commitment to multicultural education. In their remarks, respondents credited the use of critical thinking strategies that motivated students to critically examine the status quo of society. Courses were described as offering much more than just information giving or consciousness raising. Due to the impact of one course, many respondents ended up pursuing multicultural education as a specialization for an advanced degree.

The results of this study suggest that further research in the domain of teacher education for a racially–culturally diverse student population is warranted. While some schools of education are committed to implementing curricular interventions in preservice teacher preparation for multicultural education, there is still a lack of research in this area. The effectiveness of these interventions needs to be more systematically examined. Commonly used interventions may be inappropriate at different stages of developing a commitment to multicultural education. One question that arises as a result of this study is, "How can teacher educators better assess the stages at which preservice teachers are in their awareness of racial–cultural diversity?" The answer to this question has implications for curriculum development of courses designed to prepare preservice teachers for a racially–culturally diverse student population.

Assessing an individual's stage of awareness of diversity is the critical next step in understanding the developmental process. A measure of expertise in diversity training and a sophisticated ability to interpret developmental cues is necessary for effective multicultural instruction. For an individual who has had emergent awareness experiences, a cultural immersion experience can be just the right experience to trigger transformation. However, for an individual who is still in the stage of contextual awareness, a cultural immersion experience may have traumatic consequences. Therefore, it is critical for the teacher educator to be able to assess the individual stages of the process of developing a commitment to multicultural education.

CONCLUSION

The changing cultural character of schools in the United States warrants better understanding of how teacher educators can best prepare teachers

to facilitate the success of *all* students. This study adds to the current literature by suggesting a process by which teachers have developed a commitment to multicultural education. A critical examination of current practices and curriculum in teacher education for racial–cultural diversity juxtaposed with this process may provide insights into the types of experiences appropriate for different levels of awareness. This may alleviate some preservice teachers' frustrations with curriculum designed to do no more than heighten awareness or curriculum that focuses on transformative awareness prior to establishing a solid foundation of cognitive, emergent awareness.

The results of this study suggest that educators develop a commitment to multicultural education through a variety of developmental life experiences. This is an encouraging finding in that it shows that a *variety* of experiences at each stage can be instrumental in the process of developing a commitment to multicultural education. Teacher educators in colleges and universities located in communities with very little racial–cultural diversity often struggle to find authentic activities to supplement courses in multicultural education. With limited exposure to racially and culturally diverse individuals, teacher educators fear that preservice teachers may not develop a commitment to multicultural education. This study suggests that at each stage of development there are at least three different types of experiences that can contribute to the process of developing a commitment to multicultural education. For instance, an individual is raised in a family that encourages a moral disposition of inclusiveness (stage one), has a mentor or friend who is a multicultural person (stage two), takes a course that inspires transformational understanding of issues of diversity (stage three), and through these life experiences develops a commitment to multicultural education.

Many models exist that describe a developmental process of developing cultural and/or intercultural identity, sensitivity, or awareness (e.g., Bennett, 1986; Helms, 1990; Kim, 1981). In a recent critique of theories of intercultural sensitivity, Chen (1997) suggests that researchers in this field examine carefully the differences in the terminology currently being used. Chen sheds light on the confusion that exists due to the interchangeable use of the terms *cultural awareness*, *cultural sensitivity*, and *cultural competence*. Chen suggests that *cultural awareness* should refer to the cognitive domain, *cultural sensitivity* to the affective domain, and *cultural competence* to the behavioral domain.

The typology offered by Chen resonates with the findings of this study. Respondents consistently referred to an awareness gained through their early childhood experiences (stage one: contextual awareness). These experiences have a general affective quality that Chen describes as intercultural sensitivity. Stage two in this study includes experiences that forced respondents to reflect on the nature of racism, oppression, or inequity (emergent

awareness). These experiences relied heavily on cognitive influences either through training, course work, books, or reflective association with a mentor. Chen describes these experiences as intercultural awareness. In this study, stage three experiences included activities that had transformative effects on the respondents (transformational awareness). These activities culminated in a commitment to diversity and multiculturalism (committed action), which Chen would describe as intercultural competence.

Developmental theories run the risk of presenting a linear, sequential model of a human process that is often much more complex. This study suggests that developing a commitment to diversity, while sequential in theory, is much more complex than can be described in a linear model. Linear, sequential models of human development beg several questions: Can a stage be skipped? Can an individual "backslide"—achieve a higher stage then regress to a lower stage? Do all individuals proceed through all stages? In this study, respondents followed similar paths in developing commitment. While the specific life experiences may be different, each serves a similar purpose, namely, to provide a context for understanding diversity, to create a heightened awareness of salient features/issues of diversity, and to provide an impetus for transformation into action. The term *process* seems to imply a strictly linear developmental sequence while the term *essence* appears to capture the dynamism of the experience.

According to this study, the progressive essence of developing a commitment to diversity makes it unlikely that an individual would be able to skip a stage in the sequence. Likewise, it would be unlikely that an individual would regress from a higher stage to a lower stage. However, it *is* likely that individuals would reach different stages of awareness with different dimensions of diversity. For example, an individual may have achieved transformative awareness on issues of racial/cultural diversity yet have only contextual awareness of issues of sexuality.

The stages of developing a commitment to multicultural education presented in this study have implications for theories of multicultural education, for theories of attitude change, and for programs that prepare preservice teachers for racially–culturally diverse student populations.

The changing demographics of today's public schools provide a potent rationale for effective teacher preparation in multicultural education, but that should not be the sole consideration. Students of color and otherwise diverse populations have been neglected by the educational system for decades. The lack of access to quality instruction and equipment have created a disadvantage for many racial–cultural minorities. One remedy that is within our reach is to ensure a quality education for *all* students. A multicultural education provides the greatest potential for students to access the curriculum and thereby affords them the best opportunity to succeed. It is unlikely that the majority of teachers will naturally be committed to a

multicultural perspective, given that over 85% of all public school teachers in the United States are white. Therefore, it is incumbent upon schools of education to provide the absolute best preparation possible for preservice teachers in working with racially and culturally diverse student populations.

Schools of education that include multicultural education in their required curriculum for teacher preparation appear to do at least an adequate job of providing opportunities for emergent awareness to occur—perhaps some even overdo the emergent awareness opportunities. This study suggests that the key to developing a sustained commitment to multicultural education lies in transformative awareness. Consequently, it is recommended that schools of education devote increased attention to activities and experiences (described in stage three of this study) that tend to promote transformational awareness.

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ANGELA V. PACCIONE is an Assistant Professor in Education at Colorado State University. She is the Associate Director of *Project Promise*, an award-winning teacher preparation program. She is currently studying issues around biracial identity development and their implications for educators.