



The Role of Intercultural Education in a Bachelor of Education Program at Nelson Mandela University in South Africa

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Abstract

People of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are now more than ever interacting with one another in work and social situations, mainly remotely during the midst of the pandemic. Intercultural education can prepare student teachers with the tools they need to interact effectively in a variety of intercultural situations with their colleagues, their principles and their students. In Bachelor of Education programs, providing student teachers with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to be able to interact with individuals of different backgrounds and bring out the best in their students is essential. The aim of this narrative study was to understand the role of intercultural education in a Bachelor of Education program and to understand how and if intercultural education principles were implemented. Five student teachers were interviewed to determine how they perceived the role of intercultural education in the Bachelor of Education Program and what their understanding of this concept was. The themes that emerged from the findings were intercultural education was perceived as: (1) Awareness of the diversity of the students' backgrounds and (2) Engaging in practical activities and (3) Principles of intercultural education were embedded in some course modules but were not practical, (4) Challenges and (5) Suggestions. Overall, it was found that principles of intercultural education were implemented in the Bachelor of Education program to an extent, but the student teachers felt there was room for more focused activities specifically related to intercultural education.

Keywords Bachelor of Education program · Curriculum · Diversity · Intercultural education · Student teaching

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Introduction

In many post-secondary institutions around the world, including South Africa, intercultural education is becoming increasingly necessary given the diversity of students within the classrooms and in work and social contexts. Intercultural education is a response to the needs of quality education which includes the acquisition of competences: knowledge, attitudes, the diversity of learning experiences and the construction of individual and collective identities (Beacco et al., 2016). Additionally, Dervin et al. (2017) described intercultural education as taking risks and making controversy in education.

In Bachelor of Education programs in South African post-secondary institutions teacher educators are preparing student teachers to work in schools which will likely be comprised of students from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Thus, not only do they have to have the technical knowledge of how to teach the subject, but they will also benefit from having the skills, knowledge and attitudes (intercultural competencies) to be able to communicate effectively with their students and ensure that they are able to effectively manage and thrive from intercultural interactions and misunderstandings and learn and grow from them. These intercultural competencies can be fostered through education.

Over the years, South African education has undergone significant education reforms to ensure that students are able to realize their full potential. However, despite these changes, the education system is subject to ongoing systemic and institutional racism and socio-economic structures of power and privilege. Given the national imperative to be socially just pre-service teachers must be guided to understand their own worldviews before they understand the worldviews of learners in a diverse environment (Roux, 2016). As university students are becoming increasingly multicultural, faculties of education will have to take this reality into account by effecting curriculum reform regarding teacher training programs as well as offering in-service training to the existing teacher staff (Roux, 2016). A response to the increased diversity is intercultural education which can help to reduce racism, prejudices and foster students' attitudes, skills, and knowledge to be able to interact effectively with people from different cultures (Cushner, 2013).

This study was conducted to understand the perspectives of student teachers in a Bachelor of Education program at Nelson Mandela University on their understanding of intercultural education and the role of intercultural education in the Bachelor of Education program. The findings from this study will help determine potential needs, improvements and successes based on the perceptions of student teachers.

The South African Context

South Africa is a complex mix of different races, cultural identities, languages, and ethnic bonds (South African History Online, 2019). Thirty-five languages indigenous to South Africa are spoken of which ten are official, including

Ndebele, Pedi, Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, Zulu, and Afrikaans. However, even though South Africa is a multi-racial democratic country which embraces its diversity, there are incidents of racism, xenophobia, and economic imbalances (South African History Online, 2019). While modern South Africa has been called naturally multicultural, people still struggle with meaningful dialogue and communities (Dames, 2012).

In South Africa, people of all races, languages and cultural identities have not always been in the same classrooms, residential areas, and workplaces due to the racially motivated segregationist legislation in 1948 in which citizens were segregated into so-called “White”, “Bantu”, “Coloured” and “Asian” suburbs. In 1994, this changed when Nelson Mandela became the first president in post-apartheid South Africa and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was adopted and guided by the following values: (a) Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms, (b) Non-racialism and non-sexism, (c) Supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law (South African History Online, 2019). Allmen (2010) described South Africa as the rainbow nation which was an inclusive human community. As of 2019, there were 89, 285 refugees in South Africa (Macrotrend, 2020). Unfortunately, attitudes of xenophobia are prevalent towards these groups (Gordon, 2016).

With the influx of refugees this means teachers will need to be prepared to interact with students from cultural and linguistic backgrounds that they may not be familiar with. South Africa already consists of numerous cultural and linguistic groups and now with cultural and linguistic groups from other countries this underscores the urgency for people of a variety of backgrounds within and outside South Africa to learn to respect one another, interact with one another and understand one another’s perspectives, so that all individuals can thrive.

Nelson Mandela’s reform in South Africa in 1994 and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa has been significant to the education field. Since apartheid ended, schools are no longer segregated and students of all races and languages are immersed in one classroom. After the new democracy was introduced in 1994, South Africa has had several national curriculum frameworks (Le Grange, 2017). The change from a content-based Interim Core Syllabus (ICS) to an outcome-based National Curriculum Statement (NCS) represented a major shift in the approach to curriculum (Le Grange, 2017).

Students of diverse cultures, languages and perspectives are now learning together, and teachers must be prepared to equip students with the skills, knowledge and attitudes that will help them navigate these multilingual and multicultural and plurilingual contexts and engage in conversations that may not always be easy (Pinar, 2013). According to Naidoo (2017), “prospective teachers need to understand the communities within which they teach and accommodate for diversity” (p. 57). Thus, it is critical that teachers acknowledge the diverse nature of South African society and teach accordingly in the classroom (Naidoo, 2017). Anthony and Walshaw (2009) underscore the importance of establishing an educational milieu which is a community of practice whose members value and acknowledge the diversity of fellow members. Intercultural education can be beneficial so that people of

diverse races, cultural identities and languages can learn to effectively communicate with one another and optimize their experiences with one another.

In South Africa there has been significant efforts by the government to evaluate the current state of the post-apartheid higher education system and work towards transforming the curriculum and social justice. Recent documents include the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET's) Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2012); and a chapter in the NPC's National Development Plan 2030 (2012) (Badat & Sayed, 2014). For instance, one excerpt from the NPC's National Development plan (2012) stated:

The education system will play a greater role in building an inclusive society, providing equal opportunities and helping all South Africans to realise their full potential, in particular those previously disadvantaged by apartheid policies, namely black people, women and people with disabilities. Lifelong learning, continuous professional development and knowledge production alongside innovation are central to building the capabilities of individuals and society as a whole (p. 294)

Thus, this can mean transforming the curriculum to include diverse perspectives and encourage all South Africans to share their perspectives and draw on their beliefs.

However, despite the government's efforts, students continued to protest for a decolonised curriculum. In 2015–2016, two significant protests in higher education in South Africa have been the Rhodes must fall protest which strives towards a decolonized curriculum and the “fees must fall” movement which strives for equal access to these spaces. As a response, academics in South Africa were challenged to re-evaluate the curriculum and integrate Indigenous African knowledge into the curriculum while at the same time retaining Western knowledge so that students were able to work and live in an international, intercultural, and global environment (Meda et al., 2019). Le Grange (2016) argued that decolonizing the curriculum is about rediscovering knowledge that have been disregarded during the colonial and apartheid era. It is not about forgetting about Western knowledge, it is about decentering it and striking a balance between including Western Knowledge and Indigenous knowledge (Le Grange, 2016). Today, students continue to argue for a decolonized curriculum. According to Pilane (2016), the student movements are to make the university a more inclusive space which include other ways of knowing. However, despite the good intentions ascribed to post-apartheid all South African universities tend to adopt Western models of academic organization and tend to disregard the knowledge of colonised peoples (Le Grange, 2016). Moreover, higher education is drifting further away from its moral mandate to train critical thinkers and socially conscious citizens who can question the rationality of Western epistemic traditions in African universities (Mayaba et al., 2018).

Overall, Badat and Sayed (2014) stated that there is still work to be done and the challenge is to respect, affirm and embrace the rich diversity of the people that inhabit historically white universities and uproot historical cultural traditions and practices. These attributes and practices can be developed through intercultural education.

Intercultural Education

The term intercultural education is often used interchangeably with multicultural education, cross cultural and international education and the boundaries are often blurred (Cushner, 2013). However, Cushner (2013) proposed that some say that intercultural education has a somewhat different orientation than multicultural education. Thus, intercultural education is more pro-active, and action orientated than multicultural education and recognizes that a genuine understanding of cultural differences and similarities is necessary to learn to live and grow together (Cushner, 2013). Although, more recent conceptualizations of multicultural education are more like intercultural education (Cushner, 2013).

According to Allmen, (2010), “intercultural includes the range of interaction within a culture as well as between cultures and is a dynamic process to invite those people and groups not to live side by side, but to cooperate, to live together equitably and harmoniously. Furthermore, the word intercultural has been recognized as a project and it has multiple dimensions, including education, social and political dimensions (Allmen, 2010). The intercultural approach has two dimensions; one is a project for education and the other is academic, calling for a scientific and objective description of reality (Allmen, 2010).

In South African education intercultural education has become a significant topic of discussion and it has become a vision of the world where human rights are respected (Neuner, 2010). Several scholars consider intercultural education as the most appropriate approach for recognizing, respecting, and coping with all forms of cultural diversity (Barrett et al., 2013) and one of the major goals of intercultural education is to help young people to understand the diversity of their perspectives and cultural practices, but also to guide development so they can become effective at living together (Cushner, 2013).

Despite the good intentions of intercultural education, several scholars have critiqued it for neglecting power imbalances which often occur within intercultural interactions, ignoring racism and homogenizing cultural differences (Allmen, 2010; Langmann, 2016).

In the Bachelor of Education program at Nelson Mandela University principles of intercultural education are incorporated into some of the modules but they are referred to as, “curriculum development to cater for diversity,” developing a multicultural approach to teaching, and discussing the use of culturally appropriate instructional material” (Nelson Mandela University, Faculty of Education, 2019). Developing intercultural competencies is also listed in the module, *Issues and Challenges in Education* and principles of intercultural education are listed in the *Educational Thought-Teaching and Learning* module.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of integrating intercultural perspectives and education into Bachelor of Education program and preparing teachers to teach in classrooms with students of a variety of backgrounds (Amery, 2020; Guo et al., 2009; Magogwe & Ketsitlile, 2017; Morrow, 2012; Pareja & Lopez, 2018). However, while there is little disagreement that providing pre-service and in-service professional development for educators to develop

their cultural and linguistic awareness is a critical and urgent task (Bower-Phillips et al., 2013; Lucas & Villegas, 2013), the reality is there is a gap between policy and practice (Guilherme, 2009). Moreover, there appears to be little evidence that teacher training programs, go beyond telling pre-service teachers what they should be doing to implementing intercultural education (Clandinin & Husu, 2017).

These studies have also highlighted challenges that teacher education programs and their educators experience in integrating intercultural education approaches (Amery, 2020; Guo et al., 2009; Morrow, 2012). For instance, the challenge to teacher education programs is helping students to translate intercultural awareness into practical strategies to build inclusive educational environments for all students (Guo et al, 2009).

In a study conducted on pre-service educators' views and perspectives on intercultural competence and how it is taken up in teacher education programs, pre-service teachers stated that it was sometimes taken up, but only at a surface level, while others said that the classes focused mostly on learning styles and abilities (Guo et al, 2009). Moreover, according to an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2020) report, pre-service teachers felt ill prepared for diversity in their initial teacher education program or in their professional development. Furthermore, in a study conducted with in-service adult English as a Second Language (ESL), instructors indicated that there were few professional development sessions on implementing intercultural approaches to their curriculum and many teachers did not feel prepared to incorporate intercultural education into the program (Amery, 2020).

South African teachers face added challenges which often stem from unequal social conditions and historical constructed perspectives of differences in people and their relationships which have implications for education including intercultural education (Morrow, 2012). For instance, despite the cultural mosaic of South Africa, the social conditions of the significant gap between the rich and the poor schools are prevalent. Some students do not have equal access to education and the schools that many students attend do not have established routines. The challenge for teachers is to work towards cultivating a stance of equal expectations among all learners and overcome disempowering students (Morrow, 2012). Students recent calls for decolonising the curriculum is an indication that they are not satisfied with the current curriculum, arguing that the curriculum still focuses on promoting Western knowledge as the dominant knowledge, suppressing varieties of Indigenous knowledge, the knowledge of the working poor or the knowledge of black female dwellers (Fataar, 2018). Essentially, students continue to advocate for knowledge pluralism which refers to the incorporating of all ways of knowing and those who have been previously excluded (Fataar, 2018). A more inclusive curriculum can promote student teachers continuously reflecting on their own biases and assumptions, expose them to non-Western perspectives and encourage them to not only become aware of other perspectives, but consider how these can be incorporated into the curriculum. Bignaut (2014) stated that students should become part of the conversation of curriculum and that no form of knowledge should be elevated above other ways of knowing. Hence, intercultural education principles include other forms of knowledge and

recognize diverse perspectives and determine how they can contribute to alternative understandings.

Implementing intercultural education principles and strategies is not an easy task. It takes effort, time, skills and attitudes of openness and curiosity to be able to implement strategies that encourage students to consider other perspectives, challenge dominant viewpoints and reflect on their own assumptions and biases. Not everyone has the skills, time, and attitudes to reflect on themselves and teach others to do the same.

According to several scholars, having attitudes of curiosity, openness, and a willingness to suspend judgements towards others are extremely important when interacting with others (Byram, 1997; Dearsdorff, 2006; Sorrells, 2016). Byram (1997) argued that educators should remember how one acts towards others in relation to their beliefs, that these attitudes implicitly impact interactions with others. Essentially, one's attitudes can affect one's teaching practices (Gay, 2010). However, most prospective teachers do not think deeply about their attitudes and beliefs about ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity (Gay, 2010). Education programs should teach prospective students to become cognizant of their habits of using examples and modify them to be more culturally diverse (Gay, 2010). This can include providing students with opportunities to critically reflect on their self as well as their assumptions and biases.

The problem that this study addresses is that even though within the context of South African schools there are a multitude of domestic cultural and linguistic groups and those who have immigrated or came as refugees or asylum seekers, people are not living peacefully together. Mandela's vision of the rainbow nation of inclusiveness and bringing people together has not come to fruition. Instead, racism, xenophobia and stereotyping still exist within groups and students continue to protest for a decolonised curriculum. In Bachelor of Education programs, teacher educators are preparing student teachers to work in classrooms which will reflect the diverse community. Hence, teacher educators must be equipped to work with students of diverse backgrounds in the teacher education courses and also be prepared to equip their students with the knowledge, attitudes and skills to interact effectively, manage intercultural conflicts and recognize the value their students bring to the classroom. Intercultural education is one such response. However, studies focusing on the role of intercultural education in Bachelor of Education programs, particularly in South Africa are limited and more perspectives of what intercultural education is and what the role of intercultural education is are needed from student teachers so current practices can be examined and suggestions can be made. Recent studies indicate that there is a correlation between perceptions, beliefs and attitudes and teaching practices in the classroom and the consideration between perception, beliefs and attitudes is a key factor in teacher training, especially in relation to cultural diversity (Pareja & Lopez, 2018). However, there is little known about teacher educators and their attitudes and ideologies about teaching to a diverse group of students (Gay, 2010; Gorski et al., 2012), but it is important to recognize how one's attitudes can affect their teaching practices (Gay, 2010).

Gay (2010) argued that it is essential to raise consciousness and awareness of prospective and practicing teachers about cultural diversity and that examining

beliefs and attitudes about cultural diversity, along with developing cognitive knowledge and pedagogical skills should be critical elements in teacher education. Cushner (2011) further posited that facilitating intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and development of novice classroom teachers may be the precursor that is necessary for other changes related to social justice which is a facet of intercultural education.

As several researchers have argued, intercultural education goes beyond knowing other cultures or participating in their folkloric expressions, it involves positioning oneself in the socio-political context, considering power imbalances, orientating teaching towards social justice and critical thinking. In South Africa, given its complex history, it is critical to consider one's attitudes towards cultural diversity and how the past history of segregation, inequality and racism can impact their teaching practices and create a curriculum that allows teacher educators to reflect on their positions and guide their students to critically think, consider how they position themselves in a variety of contexts.

Moreover, research on student voice (Gambrell, 2016; Smyth, 2006; Urban & Kujinga, 2017) is not new, but it has not been given much attention in higher education for the purposes of transforming the curriculum. Additionally, there have been few studies that focus on the use of culturally relevant approaches (Han et al., 2014). In South Africa, students have been protesting over decolonising the curriculum and in favour of considering other perspectives than the dominant Western perspective that continues to be taught. One could say that intercultural education is a way to supplement the effort of decolonising and transforming the curriculum.

This study seeks to fill the gaps in the literature on students' perspectives on intercultural education and understanding the role of intercultural education in the Bachelor of Education program from the perspectives of student teachers. The two primary research questions were:

- (1) What are student teachers' understanding of intercultural education?
- (2) What role is given to intercultural education in the Bachelor of Education program?

Methodology

This study is a narrative study, exploring narratives of student teachers' perspectives of intercultural education in the Bachelor of Education program at Nelson Mandela University. The most suitable approach to answer the research questions was a qualitative interpretive narrative research method. Narrative research is commonly used in studies of educational practice and experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and narrative research has contributed in different ways to the educational field. By exploring diverse educational matters, narrative research has mostly focused on teacher education and school change by looking at the ways in which teachers' narratives shape and inform their practice (Bell, 2002). Hence, it was considered that everyone has a story to share as the stories of our past, help shape our future and our practices. By inviting student teachers of the Bachelor of Education program to share their stories, on the topic of intercultural education, may help us better

understand how their stories shape their practices and learn about the role of intercultural education in the Bachelor of Education program, from their perspectives. To look for patterns and themes, we employed the constant comparison method of analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

Once approval was granted by Nelson Mandela University and the University of Calgary, we began recruiting the participants. The aim was to interview student teachers of the 4th year Further Education and Training (FET). The intention of interviewing students who were in their 4th year was because of the length of time they spent in their program. It was assumed that they would be able to reflect on their three years in the program and the role of intercultural education. However, the criteria had to be changed as it was challenging getting participants for the study. Subsequently the invitation was extended to 3rd and 4th year students in all three phases: the foundation phase and intermediate phase who had applied to a study abroad program in Germany. My rationale was that they would have an interest in intercultural education and diversity.

The unexpected COVID-19 pandemic affected recruitment significantly as the university closed, and students were no longer attending classes which made recruitment even more difficult. Hence, recruitment was opened up to students who were recent graduates of the Bachelor of Education program of no more than two years ago and students in their 2nd or 3rd years of the Bachelor of Education program. Interviews had to be changed from face to face to online. During the 8-week period of the national lockdown due to the COVID-19, two student teachers were interviewed via WhatsApp. These participants were recruited from snowball sampling. A member of the research team recommended one participant and a retired professor who had taught in the Bachelor of Education program recommended another participant.

The participants include a mix of the racial categories constitutive of the South African society. The student participants consisted of three students who were registered in their fourth year of the FET stream of the Bachelor of Education program, one student who was a recent graduate of the intermediate phase of the Bachelor of Education program and one student who was in her second year of the foundation phase, altogether five participants.

The site where the study took place was a Bachelor of Education program situated within Nelson Mandela University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. The Bachelor of Education program is comprised of three streams that students can choose from, (1) the senior phase in which they are preparing to teach grades 7–9 and the further education and training (FET) stream in which they are preparing to teach students from grades 10–12, (2) the intermediate phase in which they are preparing to teach students from grades 4–6 and (3) the foundation phase (Grades R-3).

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, using NVivo to categorize and code the data. A member of the research team went through each interview transcription through line by line and the data was coded. Then the coded data for each

interview's transcript was analyzed. Then the coding was grouped into similar categories and the cross-comparison approach was employed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to look for patterns amongst the interviews from the five student teacher participants. Additionally, the course modules were used to look for principles of intercultural education and similarities and differences among the interview data. After the analysis of the data, the data was checked by the other two members of the research team and the following themes were identified: (1) Awareness of the diversity of the students' backgrounds, (2) Engaging in practical activities, (3) Principles of intercultural education were embedded in some course modules but were not practical. (4) Challenges and (5) Suggestions.

Findings

Perspectives of Intercultural Education

One theme that emerged from the student participant findings is that teachers should be aware that there are students from diverse cultures, languages, and religions in the classrooms. All the student participants mentioned that the South African classrooms were comprised of students from diverse cultural, linguistic, race and religious backgrounds. South Africa is comprised of people of diverse languages and cultural groups (e.g. Zulu, Xhosa, Coloured, Asian, Black and White (Afrikaans and English) and the student participants mentioned that the classroom reflected the South African communities. They were all aware that the classroom was diverse and intercultural education required being aware of the multiple diversities that they were likely to encounter in the classroom. Mathew asserted that intercultural education included at least two differences, such as language and racial differences. Mathew said:

I would say my understanding of intercultural education is when teaching and learning occurs between people from different races, different language, different cultures so when I learn that the teachers are different from the learners or between...learners are different from each other. The first thing that you think about is the teacher when you hear intercultural education, you are most probably thinking a white teacher, black students or black teacher and white students. I think it's easy to forget that if you have different races between your learners as well and that also plays a big role so I would say intercultural education is when there are a couple of differences, language differences, racial differences between teachers and learners as well as learners from each other.

Alyssa highlighted the complexity of intercultural education due to the history of South Africa. She referred to the diverse mix of students because of culture, race and different belief systems and highlighted the importance of considering the cultural dynamics in the classroom. She said:

That's a very difficult thing to define. Intercultural education is a diverse classroom that has more than one culture or race, people have different belief sys-

tems. With the curriculum we have in South Africa it is very difficult to teach without taking into account the cultural dynamics of a human being because we have a certain culture that has been exposed to a certain lifestyle, economically and that's because of apartheid and the racial system that we faced back then. It is still very very visible presently.

Another student educator, Rose also emphasized the importance of teachers to be aware of students' diverse backgrounds and recognize what they were bringing to the classroom. Rose stated:

For me I think it [intercultural education] is a very strong tool, our learners learn so much outside and they come to school and then you want to teach them a whole lot. We don't expect of them to tap into that cultural knowledge that they already have, at home, their families and family functions and rituals. We don't tap into that and as an education system we fail the kids because obviously they've learned quite a bit and then when they get to school and then the teachers do not take that into account.

Another theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that intercultural education meant being accepting and open to people who were from different races, socio-economic backgrounds. Carla explained:

That I have a classroom with 30 children but each of them have a different background, each of them has different religions, each of them has different beliefs and intercultural... more than 50% of them wouldn't be raised the same way and as a teacher I have to stand there and be able to all accept all those children whether you are part of the LGBT, whether you just are a normal boy sitting there that's an atheist, everyone's different and as a teacher, I will have to be able to work around that and accept it and treat everyone equally. Get to know them and accept their choices and then to promote equality in our classrooms, not just between me and the learners but between the learners and their peers because it won't help if you respect everyone, but the learners don't respect and understand each other

Another student participant also highlighted the diverse nature of the classroom and the importance of being open to everyone's beliefs which meant not imposing one's views on the students. Cait stated:

Intercultural education as a way of...I see it as teaching in a classroom where children are from different cultures. You don't only teach towards one specific culture or teach based on own culture. I feel that you need to be open to everyone's beliefs in the classroom and not kind of indoctrinate the children into your beliefs. Does that make sense?

Another theme that emerged from data analysis was that teacher educators should engage in practical activities to ensure that students' perspectives were being acknowledged and respected.

For instance, Rose said that not only do students need to be aware, but they also need to actively bridge students' home knowledge with school. She defined

intercultural education as a “very strong tool”, and she spoke about valuing the students’ perspectives and cultural backgrounds and incorporating their perspectives into the classroom. According to Rose, it should be an amalgamation of students’ home lives and school experiences and should not be separate. Rose noted that teachers were missing invaluable opportunities by not tapping into their students’ cultural knowledge. She explained:

For me I think it [intercultural education] is a very strong tool, our learners learn so much outside and they come to school and then you want to teach them a whole lot. I feel like we...We don’t expect of them to tap into that cultural knowledge that they already have, at home, their families and family functions and rituals. We don’t tap into that and as an education system we fail the kids because obviously they’ve learned quite a bit and then when they get to school and then the teachers do not take that into account, we keep English education and they...and I think it needs to be an amalgamation of the two for me. Yes, we discuss, and we speak about different cultures and different beliefs but like actually incorporating learners’ unique cultures and their belief systems and what they are taught into the nitty gritty of content.

Another participant, Mathew highlighted the diversity in the classroom and referred to intercultural education as the teaching and learning between students of different cultural backgrounds, languages, and races, emphasizing that it meant a couple of differences, not just one. He implied that while they are taught to be aware of the beliefs and conversations learners have within their own cultures, there should be more practical exercises related to intercultural education. Being aware is good, but to put it into practice is another. He said:

I do not think it [intercultural education] is incorporated into the official program, into the CAPS [Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements] curriculum that is currently in place. I think that technically they are attempting it but not to an extent that it is significant. I think that the practically there of is that it isn’t happening. I feel that we are supposed to be very aware of teaching... For instance, I am a mathematics and physical sciences major and especially in physical sciences where we are urged within the department or at least the education department within the university to be aware of the beliefs and conversations that learners may have within their own culture regarding natural phenomena such as lightening. That’s why...That’s an aspect of their belief of lightening and when you start speaking of lightning and electricity the whole concept in physical sciences, you need to keep that in mind. You can’t just walk into a classroom, start teaching and... but whether that happens or not is a different question

Overall, the students had diverse perspectives of intercultural education, but being aware of the students diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds was a theme that was common among most of the participants. Some students said that education meant being open and accepting of their students unique cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. The third theme that emerged from the analysis of the

data was that intercultural education meant teachers need to go beyond being aware of other cultures and embrace diversity in the classroom by encouraging learners to share their perspectives and incorporate their perspectives into the classroom.

In regards to the second research question, what is the role of intercultural education, most of the students said that their teacher educators attempted to incorporate principles of intercultural education into the modules but it was highly dependent on the individual teacher educator on how and what they taught. They used terms such as, “it was sort of there and to an extent.”

When asked to describe intercultural education in the classroom, most of the participants shared that while principles of intercultural education were embedded into some of the course modules, such as increasing students’ awareness of the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their peers, they tended to stop at awareness and practical activities related to intercultural education were limited. The participants described intercultural education in the classroom as “sort of”, “to an extent” and “they dipped into it.”

Alyssa a fourth year FET student explained that intercultural education was sort of there, but it was not practiced as much as it could be. While they were asked to conduct a lesson, which accounted for different cultures and mental abilities, they did not actually put it into practice. She said:

[intercultural education activities] they were generally just research; you formulate your assignment, and you hand it in for your lesson plan. Although in inclusive education you always had to add activities to your lesson plan on how you would implement a... let me think of how to word this. Say your lesson plan is there and you want to teach to a classroom that has different cultures, different mental disabilities and all those previous things I mentioned and then your activity needs to reflect that the different levels of understanding as well. So, it would also just be paperwork. We wouldn’t present a lesson, but you would have that thinking process happening at least and you would try to imagine a setting and how you would teach to that. It’s sort of covered but you weren’t assessed on how you would implement that lesson. I think it is still fruitful, it was last year in our third year and it’s right before we go into schools so it should still be fresh in the mind.

Likewise, Rose shared that intercultural education was sort of there and practiced to an extent. Rose implied that intercultural education was more of an add on and was not embedded into the actual lesson and stopped, “when the real learning start.” Rose commented:

So, in that sense, they would dip into it and sort of engage with it but then it would stop when the real learning actually started. So, am I making sense you know? So, the actual content from textbooks and modules, teachers’ guide, and study guides and stuff so now let’s put that approach and now we have to deal with what we have to learn.

While all student participants were aware of the diverse make up of South Africa, some had more interactions with people from diverse cultural and

linguistic backgrounds than others which may have been influenced by their upbringing and attitudes of curiosity and openness. Alyssa implied that simply being in the context of multicultural South Africa did not automatically lead to exposure and that her prior experiences of being in a diverse school helped her feel more prepared to introduce principles of intercultural education into the classroom. She explained that her classmates did not have the same exposure as her which may indicate the need for formal intercultural education. Alyssa explained:

It [school] was very diverse. It's not something I find very challenging to bring into the classroom because I am very used to it by now, I was speaking to a white girl that I study with and she actually mentioned that our mutual friend that's Muslim is her first Muslim friend. She was the first Muslim friend she's ever had and this was at the age of 20. She is from PE and she went to an Afrikaans school here in PE and it was predominantly white and Afrikaans.

The student teacher participants shared why they thought that intercultural education was not implemented as much as it could have been in the program. Some student teachers spoke about the attitudes of the instructors as a reason why going beyond the surface and implementing intercultural education activities that encouraged students to think critically and question norms was not common practice.

Mathew suggested that fear was one reason why more discussions about cultural differences were not incorporated into the program. He articulated:

I think it becomes an issue so in the education department where there is significantly more black students than colored or white or other racial groups and because of that becomes I think is a natural tendency to have it focused on that culture, how the work is dealt with but I think that people easily or are very scared to approach the topic of cultural differences.

Alyssa explained how xenophobia was common in South Africa due to lack of exposure. She commented:

... they [other students] are not exposed to the different cultures and that lack of exposure maybe they don't develop a sense of trust for another culture and maybe they believe that their culture is superior and that is why they look down on another person's culture.

When asked if they had any suggestions of incorporating more intercultural education opportunities into the program, the main theme was offering more opportunities to talk to one another and to talk to people in the community. For example, Mathew shared how he believed that building relationships was critical. He commented:

Yes, I think how we cultivate young minds to not be at least be aware of other cultures is to integrate...sorry not integrate to have the cultures communicate and form relationships between the cultures. I think that if you have young kids at a young age interacting with other young kids from other cultures

Alyssa also shared how more contact is needed between people and suggested that one task could be an interview with two people from different cultures. Personal contact was key which she felt was not touched on enough in the program.

Yes, in the class what the take home task and then you would have to have at least 2 interviews where you would have had to interview at least 2 different people from a different culture just to grow your awareness and not to rely on the internet or your understanding but to also rely on personal contact from another culture because that intercultural education would then be practiced because then you are interacting with someone from a different culture.

Rose also spoke about the importance of uniting people and recognizing the rich cultural knowledge they bring to the classroom. She explained:

I think combining two, knowledge and cultural resources and cultural knowledge is sort of a way of uniting people, a big way of uniting people and making people feel welcome and people feel that they have a place instead of feelings of discontent and...

I think maybe if lecturers could use students as a tool to kind of gather information in their home environment specifically related to cultural views. Let's say we are given a task on finding educational games. Educational games that could occupy learners during a time where they are not in school. I think students should be encouraged to tap into that resource as well, not chucking articles and chucking books away, but just adding the cultural knowledge as another source I think is very important and I think that's something all lecturers could do whatever module they are offering.

Carla suggested having student teachers who are working in classrooms to share their experiences. She recommended:

It would be nice to have a couple of workshops to be with students who are actually working within intercultural classrooms or have experienced positives or negatives that they could pass onto us and we could learn from their experiences.

Discussion

The findings in this study indicated that while teacher educators implemented principles of intercultural education into the classes and they were included in some of the course modules, they did not translate into practice as much as they could have been. There could have been several reasons why this was the case. The perspectives of the student teachers and the role intercultural education plays in the Bachelor of Education program are likely influenced by several factors such as the students' upbringing and life experiences, their attitudes towards diversity and South Africa's complex history.

Within the Bachelor of Education program at Nelson Mandela University, the student teacher participants were aware of the diverse cultural and linguistic

backgrounds of their peers and the students in the classrooms that they would be teaching in and they were open to learning about and incorporating their peers and students' perspectives in the curriculum. As one student educator participant Alyssa emphasized, it is difficult to work in South Africa without encountering people from different cultures in schools. The student teachers' perspectives in this study are like other studies on pre-service teachers' perspectives on intercultural education and the role it played in the classroom (Guo et al, 2009; Magogwe & Ketsitlile, 2017). For instance, similar to the current study, Magogwe and Ketsitlile (2017) found that while their pre-service teachers' level of awareness of the different ethnicities, cultures and linguistic backgrounds were high and the professional program had increased students cultural awareness it did not prepare them with specific techniques to address diversity in the classroom. Similarly, pre-service teachers in Guo et al.'s (2009) study stated that intercultural education was sometimes taken up, but only at a surface level, while others said that the classes focused mostly on learning styles and abilities.

Consistent with these previous studies, in the current study, while teacher educators did try to encourage the student teachers to share their cultural and linguistic backgrounds by asking students to present on their cultural backgrounds, write language glossaries and increased students' awareness about cultural differences, they only appeared to skim the surface and there was more room for more in-depth intercultural learning with practical activities. As Rose, a student teacher participant said there were not enough practical activities in the class to acknowledge students' diverse backgrounds and to learn from them.

While increasing student teachers' cultural awareness is necessary, it is important to go beyond awareness and gain an understanding of the diversity in the classroom and encourage students to tap into their cultural knowledge and incorporate this knowledge into the classroom activities. Teacher education has an obligation to prepare teachers to work with diverse populations (Ben-Peretz & Flores, 2018). Programs need to go beyond simplistic notions of cultural otherness and include more challenging content for students and encourage students to develop social and academic identities and use "difference" as a resource (Alexiadou & Essex, 2015). Most of the student teacher participants' perspectives support Alexiadou and Essex's (2015) argument that there was not enough challenging content and while their teacher educators increased their awareness of other cultures they did not go deeper. Rose's comments on tapping into students' cultural knowledge and integrating it into the curriculum are consistent with Alexiadou and Essex's (2015) recommendation of using students as resources. Most of the student teacher participants in our study suggested there could be more opportunities for learning about their peers by interviewing people from diverse cultures and listening to student teachers who had taught in diverse classrooms. These suggestions support Dei's (2000) recommendation that bodies of knowledge should influence one another and are dynamic. The starting point of the Africanisation of the curriculum is the importance of affirming and validating, as opposed to marginalising knowledge that is based on African views of the world and systems of thought. This, however, does not mean making them the exclusive

focus of the curriculum in the ethnocentric-particularist manner of Eurocentric approaches (Higgs, 2016). It should be a combination of the two approaches.

The student teacher participants were open to learning about others and sharing information with one another. The student educator participants did not want to abandon their own way of knowing but saw the benefits of learning about other ways of knowing while engaging in practical ways to encourage their prospective students to share their own perspectives, effectively deal with misunderstandings and incorporate their students' perspectives into the classroom.

However, even though the sample student teacher participants had been exposed to other children from diverse backgrounds and were comfortable and open to learning about other cultural perspectives, this was not necessarily representative of all South Africans, including their peers and teacher educators in the Bachelor of Education program. Some of the student teacher participants mentioned attitudes of fear and xenophobia which were still prevalent amongst some South African people, including some student teachers and teacher educators. This may have been a reason that teacher educators only touched on diversity and did not go beyond the surface.

Despite the multicultural nature of classrooms, teachers often find themselves ill prepared or in a dilemma in addressing cultural diversity and social justice in the classroom (Ben-Peretz & Fores, 2018; Fine-Davis & Faas, 2014). According to Szelei et al. (2020), teachers might not feel prepared for, or comfortable to address complex and often controversial philosophies around cultural diversity or know how to translate them into practice. Furthermore, some students do not want to discuss past histories as one student teacher participant indicated in the current study. First, one must recognize that their racial, ethnic, and cultural beliefs are always present, often problematic, and significant in shaping teaching conceptions and actions (Gay, 2010).

According to Gay (2010), pre-service teachers do not think deeply about their attitudes and beliefs towards ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity. While the student participants in our study all seemed open and accepting towards their peers and recognized that they would likely be teaching in diverse schools, they did not appear to be asked to think deeply about their beliefs and question them. A deeper analysis of their beliefs towards racial, cultural, and linguistic differences may have better prepared them to work with diverse populations. Furthermore, while these participants had been exposed to diverse cultures growing up, this was not necessarily representative of all students in the Bachelor of Education program. Most of the student participants referred to examples of their peers who were not as open to learning about others and had grown up with peers that were the same cultural background. Hence, as Cushner (2014) suggested, it is important to develop intercultural sensitivity and competence before expecting students to acquire the skills to solve problems and advocate for social justice. Teacher educators must consider their own experiences as well as their students' prior experiences in relation to interacting with people from diverse cultures and reflecting on oneself (Cushner, 2014). They then can develop strategies through intercultural education that can help student teachers develop intercultural competencies.

The majority of the student teachers suggested that teacher educators could facilitate more interaction and dialogue between the students in their classes and provide

practical exercises that encouraged student teachers to deal with real life examples of misunderstandings due to cultural and linguistic differences and see diversity as an asset to the classroom. These activities may help student teachers to reflect deeper about their attitudes, beliefs, and biases and how they influence their practices and interactions towards their students and incorporating intercultural education principles. First, we concur with Cushner (2014) that teacher educators must begin with facilitating cultural sensitivity to help open student teachers' minds to understanding that other diverse perspectives, experiences, and histories do exist. However, we believe this needs to be more than just providing students with the information and they should provide more experiential learning opportunities.

The findings are consistent with the literature that teacher education has not done an adequate job in preparing teachers to teach diverse populations and there is more work to be done (Gay, 2010; Lee & Herner-Patnode, 2010). Despite the high expectations of the post-apartheid education system, there is still evidently a lot more to be done by student teachers, teacher educators, program administrators and policy makers. The protests to decolonise education and include non-Western perspectives is a good indication that many students are not satisfied and could benefit from a curriculum that acknowledges all ways of knowing.

Conclusion

Overall, it is evident that while there are principles of intercultural education imbedded into some modules in the Bachelor of Education classes at Nelson Mandela University, there is still room for improvement and more practical activities to prepare student teachers to work with students from diverse cultures in their classrooms and with their colleagues. The findings support the arguments that there is more work to be done in educating and preparing pre-service teachers to teach in diverse classrooms. Given South African's complex history it is important to consider how student teachers' attitudes may influence their practices in the classroom and willingness or abilities to develop and execute a curriculum that encourages students to value non-dominant perspectives and incorporate these perspectives into the curriculum to broaden their ways of knowing.

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