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Abstract
Via this case study, I explored the social justice of two Somali educators regarding Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) perceptions and their related effectiveness with white third graders. In the interpretive study, I follow the two Somali teachers, Iqro, and Ayan, to explore any challenges they experienced in teaching mostly white students. I had a particular interest in the strategies Iqro and Ayan employed in instructing a group made up of mostly white students (Iqro = 92%, Ayan = 87%). I conducted six interviews and eight observations and analyzed them via critical education research methods (Young et al., 2024). I also analyzed students' reactions to working with Somali teachers, mostly addressing their sense of racial diversity. Education researchers in the U.S.A. tend to address the experiences and challenges impacting white teachers dealing with cultural diversity. This investigation turns the issue around looking (as it does) at the experiences of diverse teachers. However, the fact showed 97% of teachers in rural area of state of Minnesota are white people and 87% of their students also represent majority white families. Results showed that Iqro and Ayan traced their success to 1) building the sense of belonging in their educational spaces, 2) creating positive interactions, and 3) setting up clear learning goals to maintain students' success. Qualitative meta-analysis concluded a de-colonizing perspective and use psychological cognition to discuss DEI and social justice.

Keywords: Diverse Teachers, DEI, Social Justices, Elementary Education Program, Critical Race Theory, Decolonized Education

Introduction

The purpose of the study is to explore how diverse teachers transform their pedagogical content knowledge to teach students in their classroom where majority of students are white students. It may involve how diverse teachers revise their mindset, upgrade their DEI perspectives, and explore the meaning of social justice directly. Furthermore, the study used qualitative meta-analysis process to rethink the current teacher preparation programs and critique the decolonized education in the U.S.A. The method of the study used qualitative case study. Two in-service teachers participated in the study. Both graduated from elementary education three years ago and I was their instructors to teach them elementary curriculum and instruction course and elementary math methods.

Ayan and Iqro (Ayan and Iqro are fake name in this study) were not born in the U.S. but raised in the U.S., even though no information can share how long they are here in the U.S. and when they began to go to the school in the U.S. The only thing I know is both were graduated from a high school in the U.S. Ayan seems has more memories from her middle-high school than Iqro; and both felt they are outsiders from their classmates in their whole entire high school experience. Iqro mentioned to me in one of interview, saying, one day, someone whispered each other and called her "Blackie" in the hallway. Similar experiences also happened to Ayan. This kind of racist slur happened sometimes and made them feel "uncomfortable" and for cure in that moment, they don't feel belonging anymore. Then, where do they belong to? They begin to have identity problems. Who are they? What do they need to do in their future life? How can they live a meaningful life? Eventually, Ayan and Iqro are representing most of the diverse high school students' essential question: How they can identify themselves to live a meaningful life in the current U.S. society. Different kinds of identities, including self-identity, personal identity, and social identity (Carr, 2021; Drummond, 2021) represent a positive relationship with diversity (Rummens, 2003). Based on the interview in the research, it showed the K-12 diverse students' mental health may be an important issue to explore.

Ayan in her 10th grade would like to identify themselves to be a teacher because she loved young kids and elementary students. She thought they can provide positive attitude to K-6 Somali students and develop social justice in this job. She does not even think about in the future, she will have any chances to teach white students. Iqro, in her 11th grade decided to study in the university and some humanity-related majors are what she would like to choose. She considered either nurse or elementary education in the beginning. Finally, she decided to study in K-6 education because she assumed her experience to raise 8 children may benefit her to help Somali students in K-6 education. Both agree that in the beginning, they would like to help diverse students, not even think about how to take care of white students or students from white family. This is the initial thought to major in education, helping diverse students in the future.

During the teacher preparation program, however, in the diversity-related courses or topics, they found the knowledge have a presumption. Eventually, there are two worlds in the knowledge. One is "we" world (refer to white Caucasian, rich people, or people living in the colonizing side) and the other one is "them" world (refer to diverse people, people living in poverty, or people living in the de-colonized side). Being a diverse future teacher, they confuse again to learn how white future teachers can take care of diverse students in their future. Seldom instructors teach them how to teach white students in their future. None of any

specific pedagogies or theories teach Ayan and Iqro how take care of their future white students.

The research question of this current study is to explore how the two Somali teachers transformed their teacher preparation programs to teach their students in their classroom where 82% or above of students are white.

Conclusions: Findings, Implication and Limitations

Findings

Three themes emerged as primary findings, related to the research question proposed on an a priori basis. The essential components for the teachers of colors are proved to be, (1) building a sense of belonging, (2) seeking and emphasizing positive interactions with students, and (3) setting clear learning goals that maintain students' success. Each of components is further developed in separative subsections.

Theme One: Building a Sense of Belonging

After a math lesson, Ayan invoked what I coded as belongingness (Osterman, 2023). The following the data:

> Before you come to see my teaching this semester, I have spent most of time building the belonging in my classroom. This is what I really learn and want to share with you that that the sense of belonging from white teachers are different from those of diverse teachers. The white teachers' belonging is more like you [students] and I [white teachers] know the culture and live in the culture without any awareness of difference.... It is more like you-know-what-I-mean feeling. My sense of belonging for students is we [Ayan and her students] belong to the classroom. Certainly, the awareness of the difference is obviously in our mind, and we accept the difference in order to build the belonging culture in my classroom.

Ayan seemingly perceived belongingness in the following terms. To her, a sense of belonging consisted of authenticity of communication across cultures. Differences exist in the world and both teachers and students are well aware of them. Through Ayan's performance, students transform their awareness to acceptance of the difference. So, feelings of belongingness do not automatically evolve from students' experiences but result from the educator's systematic efforts to support a sense of belonging and inclusion in the educational space. "What can I do? What can I do?" Ayan related that she worked hard and plan-fully to achieve acceptance from her pupils. In addition, she argued that her efforts were more demanding than those white teachers.

Two significant questions arise for future research.

1. Do African American teachers **also** see requirements for differential effort on their part to provide white students a sense of belonging?
2. What is the level of efforts required of white teachers to build belongingness into classrooms? Ayan's perception of expending greater effort might be phenomenological and not, strictly speaking, objective.

Iqro also tried hard to build the belongingness into her classroom. She provided clarification as to why a sense of belonging is important to minority educators.

> I do follow your teaching to build a belonging culture in my classroom. It is hard and time consuming, but I know all classroom management and strategies need to base on the belonging culture. I think the mindset is so important for me and my students. Once they can accept me as their teacher, all classroom management turns out to be easy. They begin to share their daily life experience to me like Xbox game. I don't know what Xbox is in the past, but I take the chance to use some characteristic persons in the Xbox as example, in my math lessons and they love it. I really learn from my students about different lifestyle, and I also try to live my life through their mindset, which make my classroom management turns to be much easy and enjoy having them in my classroom.

Iqro's interview reminded me of represented Drummond's (2021) study that successful classroom management eventually depends on the switch of personal identity. Such identity-switching remains a significant challenge for diverse teachers who may insist on the status and thus do not wish to change anything—especially as related to their personal and cultural identity.

Theme Two: Create Positive Interaction

The second generalization, dealing with the nature of interactions, is obviously very closely related to principle number one, that is "belongingness." In fact, the two principles may ultimately prove in separable. However, I saw the interviews as distinguishing between overall classroom climate (belongingness) and the nature of individual interaction. This distinction is worth the attention of researchers in the future. Perhaps, individual positive interactions collectively produce or result in greater levels of belonging.

According to both interviewees, the establish of effective classroom management procedures, requires growing a sense of belonging among their students—a process that respondents views as differentially effortful for them (compared to that exerted by white educator). The following data is categorized by how both educators perceived effective teaching. It demonstrated that positive interaction in the teaching process is a key feature of producing a reasonable valence of positive interactions.

The following data, mostly generated via interviews and via my observation notes, reveal how Ayan and Iqro shaped positive classroom interactions.

> In the beginning of teaching white students, I feel I am not doing everything perfect. I think I can create more lessons and projects, which connect with students based on individual student's needs. It might be related to understand white students' daily lives. After using my student's daily life experience (what movie they like, what online-games they play the most and so on) in my teaching; it is not enough. I need to use their experience to the positive interaction in my teaching. It is so difficult for me. The meaning of positive is not just a term but a real action and I don't know. (from Ayan)

In exploring this topic with the educators, I concluded that management of classrooms initially proves so difficult that all new educators, but particularly these two Somali teachers,

find the challenge daunting (Castro, et al., 2010). The data show that the creation of a positive "working" community proved difficult for these diverse teachers. Ayan struggled to understand the nature of positive interactions so that she could build on this factor. She clearly expressed a sense that the social identity (Evans & Stanovich, 2013) differed in meaning between her, as a teacher, and her students. She concluded that she ultimately accepted accountability for the tone of classroom interactions.

The following evidence clarifies the cultural issues Ayan faced and how she dealt with it. Obviously, these cultural factors remain phenomenal subjective in this study, not necessarily reflecting objective reality.

> I know it is rough for my students to have a Somali teacher wearing "the traditional hijab." …. They might have different perspectives about Somali people, wearing hijab; but they do not say anything about that in front of me. The **myth silence** [model] obviously exists, and we [appear to] respect each other. From some points of you, I feel my white students are mature at this point. They really learn, at least for me, what is called "respect of each other" in my class. This is the reason I like them because of the myth silent, like you know, I know, more listen and less talk.

A positive interaction may build on a magical "myth silence" between Ayan and her white students. The so-called myth silence was not that teachers and students didn't talk with one another, but that they "held fire" when it came to potentially sensitive cultural signals. In addition, one must ponder whether or not, or to what degree white students self-consciously avoided bringing attention to signifiers of cultural or gender differences. In my class observation notes, some white students did mention her dressing; [Somali woman will wear hijab or head coverings, which can be Hijab, Chador, Niqab, or Burka] and held a conversation to talk about the culture differences. The myth silence model presented an intentionality that teachers and students arrive at a common intention stance (Dennett, 2008) as Ayan mentioned "…like you know, I know" in [a] silent situation. It seemed to me that Ayan acted wised in using the silent moment to build positive interactions with her students. The myth silence moment produced a moment to let students understand each other. Here is the myth silence model (see Figure 1) in Ayan's mindset:

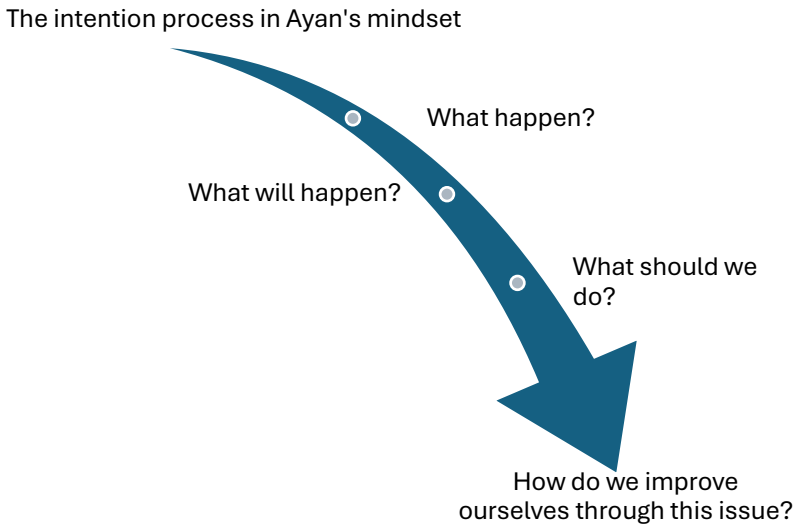

Figure 1: The Myth Silence Model in Ayan's Mindset

In my interview with her, Iqro shared a thought-provoking comment about construction new perspectives via which to engage students learning in order to create positive student-teacher interactions. She argued that teacher preparation faculty members did not prepare her for developing and maintaining positive interactions with white students.

> I am kind of surprised that many of my students are not homeless. It is different from my personal elementary school experience when I was an elementary student. I still remember my classmates are unable to be a part of class too long because of lack of transportation or family issue so they cannot come to school every day. Right now, my students have different kinds of family, cultural background. They don't need to get free lunch and come to the class everyone. It turns out that I need some new perspectives to engage their learning. I found how I can bring a positive interaction with them turns to be the most challenge and needed knowledge and unfortunately, I have to say, your teacher preparation program does not teach me how to.

Igro pointed out that her teacher preparation program seemed aimed at primary white candidates. This means that the DEI-related programming primarily for Caucasian candidates. The following is Iqro's response to a question that I posed related to this issue:

> I don't need to teach my students how to sit in my class and hold their heads high and bring positive interaction by praising their physical behavior. Instead, I found it is so important for me to "elaborate" the language I use, and "articulate" my explanation. For sure, my students like to play math games or do some projects. It is the most time I spend that how to design meaningful math games for different students' needs rather than monitor students' behaviors.
>
> Lo: Do you mean you do not have any DEI issue in your class?
>
> Iqro: Yes, we do. We still have DEI-related problems but different kinds.

Iqro faced diversity issues other than race. For example, some students represent low-income families, most of these individuals manifested limited linguistic ability. When low-income individuals attend classes with other students whose parents are from higher-income groups, they might work together smoothly on a project (Duke, 2000). For another example, one or both of a student's parents may experience drug problems, and the youngster might reside with a foster family. While all the students in Iqro' class were white, they manifested DEI-related issues.

Diversity issues were not only related to racial diversity. The very popular critical race theory material used in our program (Sleeter, 2017) did not really address this "teacher-diversity" situation. DEI perceptions need broadening to account for students' cognitive development, dealing with such topics as self-consciousness, as well as personal and social differences. Thus, positive interaction may result from how students understand and accept classroom differences. In addition, resolution of diversity issues will likely depend upon helping teachers of color interpret and deal with within-race divergence.

Theme Three: Setting Up Clear Learning Goals to Maintain Students' Success

Ayan valued several aspects teaching methods from her preparation program. She expressed particularly she like inquiry-based methods. In addition, she voiced positive remarks about

students' attitudes—their positive viewpoints, she felt, allowed her to place more energy on pedagogy.

> One thing I think I am so proud of myself in teaching my students is I always tell them what they are going to do after my 5-minute teaching. I always set up my teaching time only 5 minutes the most. After that, they need to show me their understanding by doing something. I do appreciate the play-based, project-based, and problem-based inquiry model because my students clearly know what my expectation in my 5-minute teaching. I think it is the key to engage students and the play-based teaching can motivate students' learning attitude strongly.

Ayan primarily allocated short periods for directly instructing skills and orienting her pupils to tasks, subsequently allocated longer periods for student work. She articulated that her students kept learning goals and instructions in mind; they ownership during their learning process. I did not follow up this time on her definition of ownership but from what she said, I infer that it means that the young people independently followed through on her directions and requests.

Language is a sensitive topic for Ayan and Iqro because of their accented English—as both educators came from Somali-speaking backgrounds. They both dealt with language by developing the habit of writing learning goals and similarly recording other important information via an electronic system (Smart board). Eventually, their students came to depend on reading information on the smart board to complete learning activities—especially in situations wherein their accents proved difficult. I will note here that I found that both interviewees spoke English very clearly—though I must admit that my English is also accented—or so I am told (Mandarin background) and that I thus might have missed elements of their speech. Ayan and Iqro played the role of explainers and facilitators in their teaching process:

> No matter how good I feel my English is clear to my students, I still write down and show in the smart board. I always print a hard copy of rubrics for my students, so they firmly know what learning tasks are, how to complete the learning tasks. I will say my teaching is mainly on tasks, not my lecture.

Ayan and Iqro both shared their anxiety about whether the students' parents might question her teaching abilities. This phenomenon has been identified in the literature as qualitative meta-analysis—the notion that members of groups may hold formulaic views about how persons representing other groups view them (Fayyaz, et al., 2023). This is a topic worth exploring for enhancing teacher preparation programs. Even though they did not cite direct statements (from parents), both educators expressed directly that the best way to keep their jobs was to maintain high academic standards. So, both set a high bar for learning.

> To make sure I can keep my teaching job here, honestly speaking, I set my expectations for my students' academic performance higher than those in other classrooms. I mean I don't have the same culture as my students, which make me feel I lose something [some potential tools with which I can connect with my students]. Instead, I really set the academic performance [expectations] high as well as my hopes that they reach team goals. So, academic performance is not just for individuals but also for the whole class performance. (From Iqro)

Obviously diverse teachers can perform excellently in the profession—working primarily with white students. The proved true of Somali candidates who performed extremely well, despite the challenges they experienced. Even though Ayan and Iqro found ways to deal with their cultural differences, I conclude that they did not receive the optimal level of support from their teacher preparation program about how *their* diversity would likely affect them.

Implications

Based on my observations and interviews, I did qualitative meta-analysis of my results on a post-hoc basis. In the future, I would like to determine whether their perception of challenges from white students' families where somehow objective, and finally why both articulated that they failed to learn enough in their preservice education about diversity-based challenges. These perceptions of challenge might well emanate from U.S.A education system's maintenance of an unfortunate colonized perspective in preparing teachers, failing to prepare teachers of color for dealing with the challenges they will likely face. Both were looking for the de-colonializing perspective whereby divers teachers' voices are heard and acknowledged.

Here is the list of the study's primary implications:

1. The myth silence model represents that the intentional theories related to theory of consciousness (Dennett, D. C., 2008) or a theory-sketch in the field of education, where we can rebuild our DEI and social justice perspective from dual-theories in both cognitive and social psychological point of view (Evans & Stanovich, 2013) in redesigning the DEI and social justice aspects of teacher preparation.
2. It remains imperative to avoid of a reductionistic bias. Reductionism in psychology centers on reducing complex phenomena to the most basic, putatively measurable parts. The bias perceived by candidates likely trace from the prejudice that Somali teachers experience on the part of society and thus their students. It should be emphasized here, that while I endorse the precept that the stressors voiced by participants constitute reality—at least for them—that I encountered little objective evidence that parents, for example, or other educators, discriminated against the cultural markers of these individuals. This is well worth the attention of researchers.
3. In our current teacher preparation system, much "we" vs. "they" colonialized thinking still exists. It is obviously that to build a positive interaction process, the de-colonized education may need to be enhanced in the real teaching situation.

Limitations

The first limitation of the study is the sample size. The study is initiated by two participants and all data (6 interviews and 8 classroom observations) are based on two diverse teachers. The further study may enlarge the sample size and design meaningful survey to bring in a quantitative approach.

The second limitation of this study is the two participants were graduated from the same teacher preparation program and I used to be one of their instructors. One positive perspective is we all know what DEI perceptions are taught in the program; the negative perspective, however, is the limitation of the study's generalizability.

Overall, the study provided a detail description of the two cases about how diverse teachers face in vivo challenges in their professional lives. The analysis of DEI and social justice

perceptions may suggest that we come to include cognitive developmental perspectives. Teachers' mental health, not just students' mental health, may be included in our teacher preparation programs.

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