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The Relationship Between Teachers' Attitudes Towards Multiculturalism and Assigned
Grade Level

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Word Count= 2777

Abstract

This study investigated the differences between different grade level teachers' attitudes towards multicultural awareness. Ninety-three teachers from one Long Island school district responded to the Multicultural Awareness to School Environment survey. The responses were compared using an analysis of variance. No differences were found between middle school and teachers of other grade levels; however, there were differences between elementary and high school teachers.

Introduction

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The racial/ethnic diversity of the students in today's public schools is increasing, while the teaching force remains mainly White females. According to the United States Department of education, in 2005, 57.6 percent of the public school students in grades kindergarten to twelve were White, while 42.4 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander, African-American, Hispanic, or Native American (2005). In 2004, the percent of White teachers working in public school was 83 percent (US Department of Education, 2005). However, Long Island is the third most racially segregated suburban community in the United States (Erase Racism, 2009). Due to this segregation, teachers who attended Long Island Schools as students, then work in the schools as adults, may have little to no life experience with multiculturalism. Many of these teachers are working in public schools that serve racially diverse student bodies and for the first time having social interactions with people of different races, ethnicities, and cultures.

Using the Multicultural Awareness to School Environment (MASE) survey developed by Tatum and Morote (2005), this study explored the relationship between teachers' grade level assignment and their multicultural awareness. For the purpose of this study, multicultural awareness is defined as appreciation, sensitivity, and understanding about the experiences, history, institutions, lifestyles, symbols, and values of several cultures (Banks 2006; University of Notre Dame, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

The importance of multicultural awareness has been discussed extensively in the research literature. For example, McAllister and Irvine (2002) conducted a qualitative study where they found that teachers believed their most valuable trait in the teaching of a diverse group of students was their multicultural awareness. This awareness was developed through their own experiences as members of the various cultural, ethnic, language and racial groups represented in

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the nation. Two professional development activities designed to increase multicultural awareness were also identified by the teachers as valuable experiences (McAllister and Irvine, 2002). These teachers participated in a simulation designed to assist them in “experiencing the emotions associated with being in a different culture” (McAllister & Irvine, 2002, p. 437) and in discussions with parents and community leaders while visiting the homes or businesses of their students’ parents. Milner, Flowers, Moore, Moore, and Flowers (2003) found pre-service teachers’ knowledge of diverse cultures had increased in past 13 years. This increased awareness of multiculturalism however did not transfer to a willingness to utilize multicultural assessments, curricula, and programs. Garmon’s (2004) case study of one pre-service teacher found that the educational experiences of the participant was one of six factors that increase the effectiveness of multicultural coursework. Garmon found that this teacher’s multicultural awareness increased her openness to his instruction on multicultural education. However, Wasonga (2005) stated that multicultural awareness has negligible influence on the attitudes of pre-service teachers and these same teachers’ attitudes’ towards children with diverse backgrounds. Wasonga’s findings demonstrates that multicultural awareness is not enough to change teacher practice (2005) but it is a necessary pre-requisite to teacher professional development (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schofield, and Stephan, 2005). Banks et. al (2005) agreed that teachers must have the awareness about the culture and history of multiple cultural, ethnic, language, and racial groups within a school and nation. Teachers must be aware of the diverse perspectives found among the members of these groups. Teachers must be aware of the negative stereotypes perpetuated by popular culture and institutionalized knowledge (Banks et. al, 2005).

There are differences among elementary and secondary teachers. Book and Freeman (1986) noted that “Consistent with conventional wisdom, elementary candidates’ reasons for

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choosing teaching as a career tended to be child-centered. Secondary candidates were more likely to be attracted to teaching by their desire to teach subject matter. Secondary candidates were also more likely to look upon teaching as providing a stepping stone to other careers” (p.48)

As a result of their study of pre-service teachers in Minnesota, Avery and Walker (1993) found statistically significant differences between elementary and secondary pre-service teachers' explanations of the ethnic and gender differences in academic achievement. Educators who are interested in the child may be more interested in learning about the child's and parent's culture, perspectives, and the negative stereotypes that may affect that child's academic performance. Educators who are interested in teaching the subject matter may not share that interest and therefore not be open to increasing their multicultural awareness through pre-service education or in-service professional development. Currently, there are no published studies of differences in multicultural awareness between teachers assigned to different levels of schools in the K-12 system.

Research Design

The data for this study was obtained from an administration of the Multicultural Awareness School Environment (MASE) survey to the staff of one Long Island school district. The district has a larger than average student enrollment for Long Island. Its racial diversity is similar to national population statistics. Less than half of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch and the district is in good standing academically. Only two subgroups did not meet the state's annual yearly progress standards. Of the one 132 respondents, 93 were teachers. To

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compare the grade level attitudes, the teachers were placed in groups based on their teaching assignments. 42 teachers were placed in the elementary group (pre-school to grade 5). 16 teachers were placed in the middle school group (grades 6 to 8) and 22 teachers in the high school group (grades 9 to 12). 13 respondents classified themselves as pre-school to grade 12 teachers so we eliminated their responses for the purposes of this study.

The MASE was mailed to the participants with instructions. The MASE is a 30 item questionnaire where respondents answered the questions using the Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The variables used in this study were the teachers' school level assignment, either elementary school (grades Pre-K-5), middle school (grades 6-8), or high school (grades 9-12). The MASE survey is an instrument developed by Dr. Tatum and Dr. Morote (2005) to measure multicultural awareness in educators in a K-12 school settings. The instrument has three dimensions that are referred to as factors. Curriculum and instruction items measure attitudes about what topics and skills are taught, how these topics and skills are taught, how the instruction is assessed and demonstrated, as well as the resources the teaching staff uses. Professional development items measure the attitudes of the respondents on their need for and beliefs about diversity and cultural competence training. School climate items measure the respondents' perceptions about their school or school district's diversity and multicultural practices.

The three dimensions of the MASE were divided into 9 questions relating to curriculum development, 11 questions relating to professional development, and 8 questions relating to school climate. Tatum and Morote (2005) stated, "Internal consistency estimates of reliability for the MASE were computed for the three factors. Values of the alpha coefficient ranged from 85.8% to 88 %, indicating satisfactory reliability" (p. 4).

Data Analysis

Curriculum and Instruction

An ANOVA test was conducted to show that there is a difference among grade level and teacher's attitude in multicultural curriculum instruction. The ANOVA test was significant; $F(3,78)=2.74$, $p=.049$. The null hypothesis which states that there is no difference among the groups for curriculum and instruction is rejected. The n^2 of .095 indicates a moderately large effect size of school level had on the attitudes toward multicultural aspects of curriculum and instruction.

Professional Development.

An ANOVA test was conducted to show that there is no significant difference among the groups for Professional Development. The ANOVA test was not significant; $F(3,84)=.498$, $p=.685$. The null hypothesis which states that there is no difference among the groups for professional development is not rejected. The n^2 of .017 indicates the small effect size that school level had on the attitudes toward multicultural area of professional development.

School Climate.

An ANOVA test was conducted to show that there is no significant difference among the groups for school climate. The ANOVA test was significant; $F(3,73)=3.65$, $p=.016$. The null hypothesis that there is no difference among the groups for school climate is rejected. The n^2 of .13 indicates a large effect size that school level had on the attitudes toward multicultural aspects of school climate.

The mean scores for the three levels on the three factors of the MASE are as follows:

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Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

		N	Mean	SD	F	P
Curriculum Instruction	Elementary	39	25.21	6.07	2.74	.049
	Middle	14	23.00	3.98		
	High School	19	21.63	4.06		
Professional Development	Elementary	40	38.90	5.02	.50	0.498
	Middle	16	39.44	4.18		
	High School	21	38.14	4.86		
School Climate	Elementary	37	24.68	6.63	3.65	0.016
	Middle	12	21.58	5.57		
	High School	18	19.06	4.82		

Table one shows elementary school teachers (M=25.2, SD=6.07) have higher mean scores on multiculturalism within curriculum and instruction more than high school teachers (M=21.6, SD=4.06). Elementary school teachers (M=24.7, SD=6.63) have higher mean scores on multiculturalism and it is reflected in their school climate more than it is reflected in the high school teachers' school climate (M=19.1, SD=4.82).

Table 2 : Results of Post-Hoc Tests

Dependent Variable	(I) Grade Level	(J) Grade Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.(a)
Curriculum Instruction	Elementary	Middle	2.13	1.92	0.27
		High School	3.55	1.58	0.03
	Middle	Elementary	-2.13	1.92	0.27
		High School	1.42	2.13	0.51
School Climate	Elementary	Middle	2.49	2.16	0.25

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		High School	6.38(*)	1.78	0.00
	Middle	Elementary	-2.49	2.16	0.25
		High School	3.89	2.40	0.11

Based on estimated marginal means

* The mean difference is significant at the .02 level.

a Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).

Table 2 shows the post-hoc results of the two significant relationships found in the ANOVA, Curriculum and Instruction and School Climate. Table 2 also confirms that there are significant differences between teacher's attitudes in Elementary school and High School in Curriculum and Instruction ($p=0.03$) and School Climate ($p=0.00$).

In a previous study that used the MASE survey, there was a slight influence of gender on teacher attitudes toward multiculturalism (Bowens-MacCarthy, Murtha, Morote, Tatum, 2006). It is a generally accepted that the percentage of female teachers in the elementary school level is much higher than the percentage teaching at the high school level. Bowens-MacCarthy et al. (2006) found that female teachers' attitudes were more open to multicultural awareness. To ensure that the results of this analysis were not a result of more female teachers assigned to the elementary school level, an ANOVA test was run without the male teachers. The results remained the same.

Fuchs, Gallagher, Morote and Tatum (2006) found a relationship between the years in the teaching position and the attitudes of teachers toward multicultural awareness. Teachers with less years of experience were found to be more open to multicultural awareness (Fuchs, et al., 2005). For this study, the elementary teachers had less experience than the high school teachers; however there was no correlation between the years in the teaching position and the attitudes of

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teachers in this school district toward multicultural awareness. With this testing, we conclude that our results are not affected by age and gender between Elementary School and High School.

Discussion

As stated by Bowens-MacCarthy et al.(2006), “As the degree of diversity increases in the student population of schools across the nation, it becomes increasingly important for teachers to have, and be willing to use instructional strategies that result in high levels of academic achievement for all students” (p. 4).

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were differences between the attitudes toward multiculturalism of teachers' assigned to elementary, middle, and high school. The findings of this study show that elementary school teachers demonstrate the greatest willingness to engage in multicultural training for curriculum and instructional activities and a greater need for multiculturalism in their school climate, followed by middle school then high school teachers. There was no significant difference in the responses between elementary, middle, and high school teachers in the area of professional development. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Avery and Walker (1993) and suggest that multicultural training should be differentiated for elementary school and high school teachers to match their curriculum and instruction needs and their differences in multicultural awareness..

For the all three levels, the mean scores for the two MASE dimensions of Curriculum and Instruction and School Climate are lower than the mean scores of Professional Development. The teachers in this study need additional experiences with multiculturalism and interactions with diverse people to improve their attitudes toward making the necessary changes to curriculum and to value diversity, which is consistent to the findings of Garmon (2004). Multicultural awareness is not enough to change teacher practice (Wasonga, 2005) so the higher

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scores on professional development are encouraging. The results of this study suggest that elementary teachers will be least resistant to the effort it requires to make their classrooms more inclusive to multiple perspectives and more supportive of diverse needs than high school teachers.

We recommend further studies with a larger sample for the purpose of predicting to the larger population of public school teachers. We recommend special attention be paid to the attitudes and concerns of high school teachers in further studies of multicultural awareness.

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