Early Childhood Inclusive Education: Pre-Service Teacher Beliefs and Influential Diversity Course Content

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Introduction

It is important to consider coursework and practical experiences that can begin to respond to the call for improving preparation of early childhood teachers as they grapple with meeting the needs of their varied student population.

The goal of preparing pre-service teachers to value diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice is not simply to prepare teachers to acknowledge the presence of diverse groups of children in their classrooms; rather, the goal is to provide them with the competencies to actively involve and include each and every child, family, and culture in the learning process.

This poster describes pre-service teachers' reactions to and reflections on content provided in a course focused on diversity and inclusion for undergraduate pre-service early childhood

Study Methods

- Data analysis was completed in Fall 2015.
- Consisted of analyzing course content from a co-taught, interdisciplinary early childhood diversity course
- A subset of students enrolled in the course in spring 2014 provided permission
- **Goals** of analysis include determining and describing course content that elicited reactions from students and therefore, met the course objectives.

Course Content

- Consideration of the variability in human condition as related to early childhood
  - race/ethnicity,
  - socioeconomic status,
  - family configuration (two-parents, single parents, and same sex couples),
  - disability,
  - sexual orientation, and
  - men in early childhood.

- Each of the six units included two to three lessons focused on various aspects of **diversity, equity, young children, and families**.

- Within weekly and unit reflection papers, students shared their reactions to content

- Based on all course content provided, students most often mentioned learning area content, then media (videos and documentaries) in their weekly journals.

- The most common reactions included **individual growth** or **change** statements followed by positive feedback on content.

- Individual student excerpts often included a reference to course content and a reaction statement.

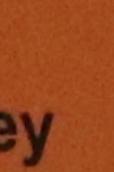| Unit	Session	Topic Covered
Unit 1	Lesson 1	- Course overview - Defining culture and recognizing diversity in inclusive ECE settings
	Lesson 2	- Culture, development, and identity formation - Self-awareness and the impact of culture on teaching
	Lesson 3	- Culturally-based views of early development, care and education - Culturally responsive pedagogy and practice in ECE settings
Unit 2	Lesson 4	- Sources and consequences of bias and exclusion - Media effects on adult and child perceptions of diversity
	Lesson 5	- Rights and responsibilities related to serving young children and their families in the context of diversity
	Lesson 6	- Strategies for understanding and incorporating diverse perspectives
Unit 3	Lesson 7	- Development of gender roles and identity - Reducing gender bias and promoting equity in ECE settings
	Lesson 8	- Diversity in family structure and organization - Supporting young children in LGBT families
Unit 4	Lesson 9	- Socioeconomic diversity - Supporting young children in low-income families
	Lesson 10	- Young children in immigrant and refugee families
Unit 5	Lesson 11	- Supporting young dual language learners
	Lesson 12	- Cultural perspectives on exceptional needs and inclusive ECE - Intersections of cultural, language, & ability diversity
Unit 6	Lesson 13	- Practices that promote inclusive learning environments - Promoting classroom community and fostering social justice
	Lesson 14	- Issues of diversity in K-12 system, school readiness & transition

Examples of Students' Reflections

Before completing Lesson 1, I thought...that diversity was relating to more of a person's race. After looking at the pictures of the different kids, I picked the pictures of the kids that were together and of different race as diversity. But after reading the lesson, I see diversity as it is. Knowing that age, gender, etc. makes a person different. I did not include it in thinking of diversity. It is true that there are many types of diversity that exist and should always be considered. (Student 101)
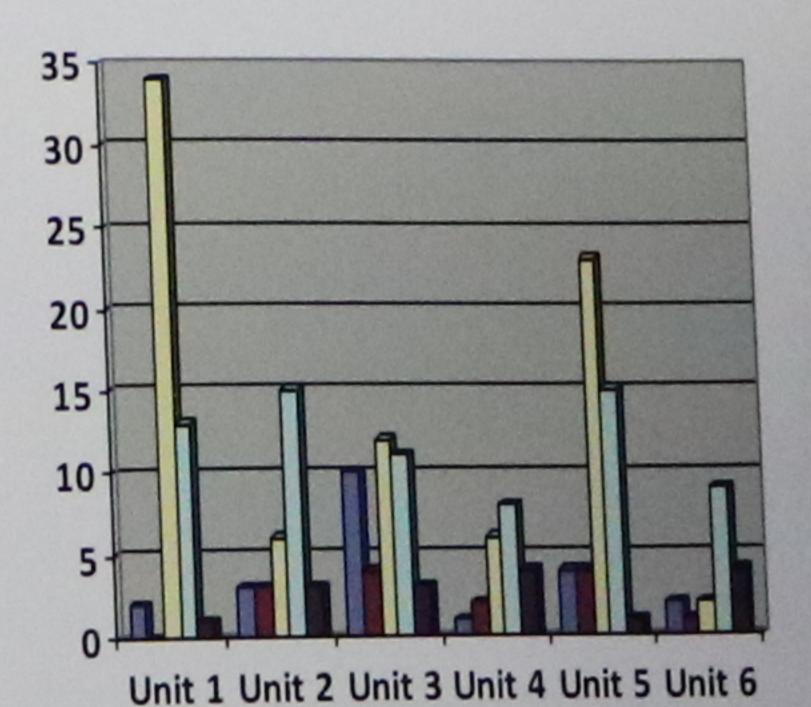
This lesson (lesson 1) brought to my attention that I am not aware to [sic] culture as I thought I was. When I was describing my emotions and actions to the scenarios, I found I was not as responsive as I should have been. When answering them, I didn't even think about how someone's culture could affect the situation. Those scenarios also showed me that culture is present in everything that we do and I need to become more aware of that (Student 101)

One of the first key points of this unit that I noticed was how stereotypes show up in our daily lives despite how much we try to avoid them. The scenarios in lesson four are the perfect example. Sadly one of the examples fits into my life. I realize I mention racial and ethnic words when I am referring to someone who I don't know a name for. I never realized I was doing it but it is so easy to do in our lives. (Student 102)

Chart highlights the course content students' referenced, and their reactions by unit

Legend:
- Areas of Tension
- Ques/wondering
- Indiv growth/chg
- Positive/liked
- Critique/disagree

(x-axis: Unit 1 Unit 2 Unit 3 Unit 4 Unit 5 Unit 6)

Implications

The most important implication of this study is the need to have these courses offered within teacher preparation programs, and this type of content integrated throughout the teacher preparation program curricula.
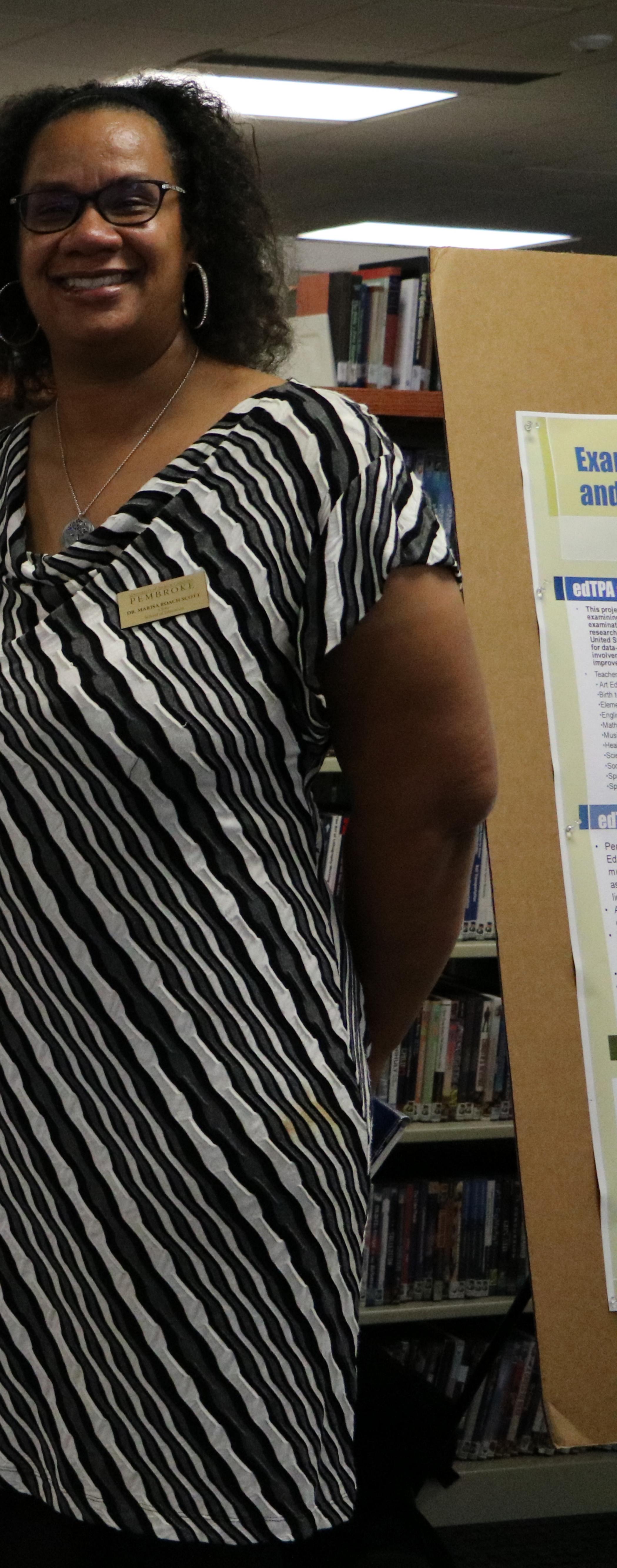
These ideas must be integrated into every course about early childhood, and programs should provide great depth on these topics.
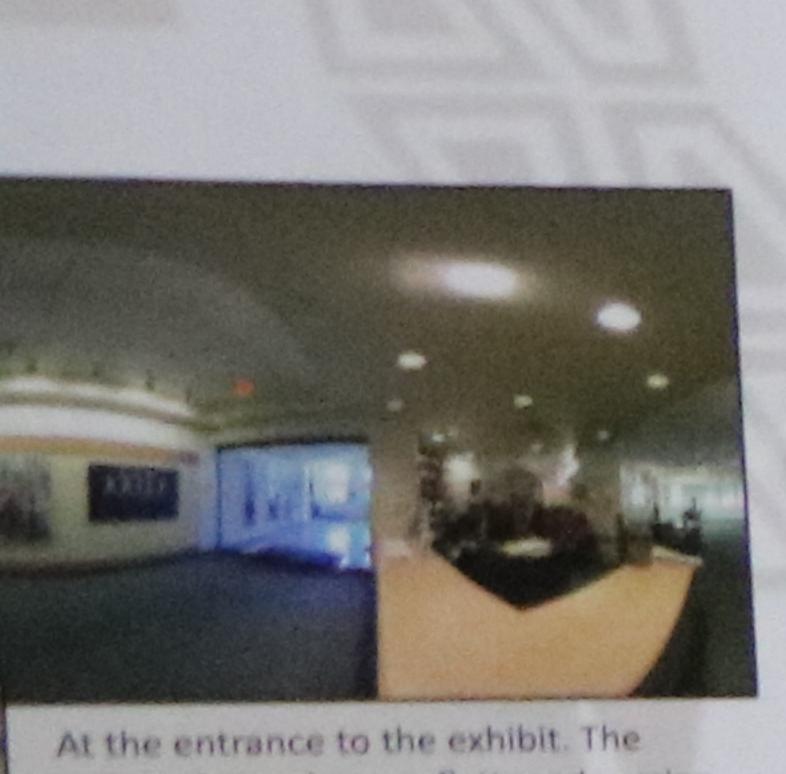
Across the findings of this study, it is clear that self-reflection is a key component to students' understanding of complex issues, a result that is consistent with similar research (Bentley-Williams & Morgan, 2013; Brown, 1998; Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Mills and Ballantyne, 2010). Therefore, inclusion of such assignments into online course delivery is imperative.

Furthermore, specific delineation of course goals is necessary so that course material can be intentionally selected to elicit empathy and growth.

References

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