

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: An Exploration of Identity Development and Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices Among African American Elementary Pre-Service Teachers in Urban Communities

Researcher: Juanita Ashby Bey, Doctor of Philosophy, 2007

Dissertation directed by: Dr. Susan M. Blunck, Associate Clinical Professor, Education

African Americans living in urban communities are subjected to many disparities including racial discrimination and cultural discontinuities that manifest in public school classrooms. African American students continue to struggle academically and are less likely to attend college, which maintains their impoverished status. This study was designed to investigate how teacher education programs could help improve the academic status of urban African American students.

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the results of integrating theoretical and pedagogical knowledge related to identity development and culturally relevant teaching into a teacher education program as an intervention method to more effectively prepare pre-service teachers to teach urban African American students.

This study utilized a mixed method concurrent nested approach. Case study methodology and ethnographic components were used to collect data for this project. Quantitative data collection methods included the use of CRIS to collect identity data and the CRTI to collect data on culturally relevant teaching practices. Qualitative data were

collected using reflective journals, field notes, observations, interviews, and debriefing sessions.

Results of the study indicated that pre-service teachers believed that the intervention activities were beneficial inclusions in their academic program. The sessions helped the African American pre-service teachers understand the relationship between their oppressive experiences and their identity. All pre-service teachers experienced some change in their identity and all pre-service teachers applied some culturally relevant teaching strategies; however, they require additional preparation to apply notions of political expression, sociopolitical critique, and community responsibility. Data also indicated that the pre-service teachers realized that their role as teachers included helping African American students transform their lives. Additionally, there was consistent evidence that suggested that pre-service teachers began to develop a critical consciousness and began to engage in critical action. A very important finding of this research was the discovery of the lack of knowledge that pre-service teachers have about the history of the Diaspora, including African American history.