Title: Increasing Intercultural Awareness: Utilizing Cultural Plunges in Teacher Preparation Programs

Purpose: To introduce a set of evidence-based teaching strategies to improve pre-service teachers’ levels of intercultural awareness and sensitivity.

Overview of the Project: Professional preparation programs have an obligation to provide diverse experiences, both in and out of the classroom, to foster professional dispositions and skills among pre-service teachers. Activities such as cultural plunges allow pre-service teachers to gain exposure to persons or groups from a different social identity from that of the “plunger.” Sample plunges include: exposure to diverse literature and media, domestic field trips, cultural celebrations and parades, and service learning projects. Moreover, reflection - written and/or oral - is a critical component to any cultural plunge activity as it provides pre-service teachers time to digest and evaluate how the experience will shape their current and future instructional practices. Without reflection, pre-service teachers marginalize their ability to relate the plunge activity, personal biases, and experiences to classroom instruction and learning. By integrating these strategies, professional preparation programs can yield more culturally aware teachers who become successful in working with underserved students in diverse settings.

Conclusions and Implications: The combination of intercultural awareness, inclusive teaching practices, and professional preparation help teachers’ bridge the achievement gap and potentially reduce educational disparities. Furthermore, teachers’ job performance, satisfaction, and retention can be enhanced as they enter diverse environments with improved intercultural awareness and skills.

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