



Meeting the Needs of All Students: How Student Teachers Identify Individualization

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The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine how 64 student teachers at one mid-sized rural Midwestern university identified their students' needs and perceived the ways in which they met their students' individual needs. The authors used constant comparison methods and focused coding to examine, verify, and draw inferences from 4,668 student teacher journal entries. The student teachers met their students' needs in 27 different ways across four themes: cultural, behavioral, social, and curricular. Though student teachers described a variety of methods for addressing classroom management and learning differentiation, they exhibited deficiency in meeting students' cultural needs.

Introduction

Despite the many criticisms of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, including the unrealistic goal that all students would be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014, it is hard to argue with the notion that NCLB has led to increased attention on learner variance. Any teacher will attest that the range of students' cognitive, social, and emotional skills is vast and growing. Increased accountability on the learning of all students, including traditionally underserved groups such as low-income students,

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students with disabilities, and major ethnic and racial subgroups, necessitates attention to students as individuals, each with unique needs. If teachers are to take seriously the improvement of their classes collectively they must attend to each student individually.

Unequivocally, we are not advocating for NCLB or an emphasis on teaching reform based on high-stakes standardized testing; however, the goal of narrowing the wide gaps that exist in our classrooms is worthwhile. Though academic gaps receive the most attention, particularly among the media and policy makers, causes of those performance gaps are varied and complex. Anderson (2004) redefined what has been commonly and now historically known as the “achievement gap.” The importance of shifting paradigms to understand that the differences in achievement are not ones of inherent attitudes or cultural norms on the behalf of any particular family structure and/or communities; rather the issue is one in which American education has failed to address the concerns of students of every race, creed, and nationality. In order to enhance the academic success of our schools, classrooms, and students, it is imperative that teachers identify and address each student’s individual needs, in their many forms.

If tomorrow’s teachers are to be effective at teaching their classes collectively as well as each student individually, teacher education programs must reassess the task of teacher preparation to identify and meet students’ needs. The purpose of this study was to examine how student teachers at one mid-sized rural Midwestern university identify their students’ needs and perceive the ways in which they meet their students’ individual needs.

Theoretical Framework

Though classrooms have always exhibited variation in students’ abilities and needs, arguably, today’s classrooms present history’s greatest variety in students’ cultural, social, and academic needs (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2006). Today’s classrooms contain diversity across numerous domains including, but not limited to: learning aptitudes and preferences, achievement, social skills,

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culture, and economic background (Tomlinson, et al. 2003; Zion & Kozelski, 2005). Each student is a unique blend of each of these domains and more. No checklist exists to describe or identify each student (Zion & Kozelski, 2005). Whereas in the past it might have been advised to teach to the norm, current school reform efforts must address each student's needs (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kea & Utley, 1998).

The burden to address learner variance falls on the classroom teacher (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Tomlinson, 2004b). In their recently released Model Core Teaching Standards, the Council of Chief State School Officers (2010) stated, "Today's context presents a complex combination of factors impacting learning" (p. 4). They noted the gaps in opportunity and achievement facing our students and that since "today's students are more diverse – racially, linguistically, with special needs," teacher attention to individual student needs must be a key component of effective instructional practice (p. 4). Individual learning must be customized. It is worth including in full their first two standards preceded by their categorical description (p. 9):

Teaching begins with the learner. To ensure that each student learns new knowledge and skills, teachers must understand that learning and developmental patterns vary individually, that students bring unique individual differences to the learning process, and that students need supportive and safe learning environments to thrive. Effective teachers have high expectations for each and every student and implement developmentally appropriate, challenging learning experiences within a variety of learning environments that help each and every student reach his or her full potential. They do this by combining a base of professional knowledge, including an understanding of how cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional and physical development occurs, with the recognition that students are individuals who bring differing personal and family backgrounds, skills, abilities, perspectives, talents and interests. Teachers collaborate with students, colleagues, school leaders, families, members of the students' communities, and community organizations to understand better their students and maximize their learning. They promote students' acceptance of responsibility for their own learning and collaborate with them to ensure the effective

design and implementation of both self-directed and collaborative learning.

Standard #1: Learner Development. The teacher understands how children learn and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and designs and implements developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences.

Standard #2: Learning Differences. The teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that allow each learner to reach his/her full potential.

The imperative that teachers possess the skills to meet their students' needs necessitates that teacher education programs provide teacher candidates with instruction in and opportunities to reflect on how to accomplish these goals. Research suggests many teachers are unprepared to meet unique cultural, linguistic, social, behavioral, and academic readiness needs of their students (Tomlinson et al., 2003). If teachers are unprepared to meet the needs of students, there is the potential for a deficit attitude towards students and their capability to learn and develop. Nieto (2000) defined the cultural deficit model as the one that makes assumptions that some students, because of genetics, cultural, or experiential differences, are operating at a deficit and are, in fact, inferior to other students. The deficit models assert that "disadvantaged people have underlying deficiencies, attributable to genetic and/or social pathology, which limit the probability of their achievement and social adjustment" (Bennett, 1979, p. 90). Further, proponents of the deficit model believe that students representing diverse cultures fail academically due to inadequate parenting, poverty or a combination of these (King, 2004; Nieto, 2000).

Conversely, when teachers are carefully prepared to address the individual needs of students, they can become culturally responsive educators who value and celebrate the uniqueness in

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each student. By definition, “culturally responsive teaching is using the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive teaching bridges the cultures between a pupil’s home and school. Culturally responsive teaching is best shown through the following characteristics: Acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, building bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experience, using a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to diverse learning styles, teaching students to know and praise their own and each others’ cultural heritage, and incorporating multicultural information in all subjects and skills commonly taught in schools (Carter, 2003). With a culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning, the needs of students will inevitably be met.

It is important to note that teacher preparedness to meet individual student needs consists of teachers’ awareness of the issue, as well as, their desire and ability to act. Often, teachers are simply unaware of students’ unique needs (Perry, et al. Schumm & Vaughn, 1995; Tomlinson, 2004a). Likewise, many teachers choose not to address students’ needs (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Richards, 2006; Schumm & Vaughn, 1995; Zins, et al., 2004). Most commonly, however, teachers lack the skills to differentiate their actions to meet individual student needs (Callahan et al., 2003; Morocco, 2001; Morocco, Riley, & Gordon, 1995; Tomlinson, 2004a, 2004b; Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008).

The challenge of helping teachers to become more responsive to student variance is pervasive and complicated. Tomlinson et al. (2003) warned that the task is complex and that the gap between current practice and the ideal is vast: “Currently, few teachers make significant changes to teaching and learning routines in response to learner variance” (p. 135). Though efforts to improve teachers’ pedagogical skills for teaching ethnically and

linguistically diverse students have been met with some success (Irvine, 2003; Pang & Sablan, 1998), teacher education programs largely have failed to include content and experiences that address learner diversity (Kea et al., 2006). According to Vaughn, Bos, and Schumm (1987), many preservice teachers feel that their undergraduate programs do not adequately prepare them to teach in a society that has an increased number of ELL students, students with disabilities, students with no family support, and students who are not motivated to learn, and are often part of minority cultures. Given the changing demographics in today's classrooms, Brown (2004) suggested that teacher educators must assist preservice teachers in moving from a limited cross-cultural understanding of diversity to an acceptance of multicultural tenets. Additionally, Wang, Spalding, Odell, Klecka, and Lin (2010) noted that teacher educators must also help preservice teachers "develop a deeper understanding of the prior knowledge of students from diverse backgrounds as well as how they learn" (p. 9). The responsibility to prepare novice teachers to interact with all students appropriately looms large and is a vital component of any successful teacher education program.

Methods

We based this qualitative study on phenomenological principles. The phenomenon of study stemmed from our inquiry about how our student teachers identified the ways they met their students' individual needs. To gain understanding about the phenomenon, we asked student teachers to describe their lived experiences (Creswell, 1998).

Data Sources

Specifically, we asked 64 student teachers (40 female, 24 male; 27 elementary, 37 secondary) to record at three points (after 6 weeks, 11 weeks, and 16 weeks) during their student teaching practicum how they were meeting the needs of each of their students. Student teachers in a secondary setting focused on one class or period of students. The mean number of students per class for elementary teachers was 22, and 26 students for secondary student

teachers. Thus, the elementary student teachers produced 1,782 pieces of data, and the secondary student teachers produced 2,886 pieces of data, for a total of 4,668 entries. In our directions for the assignment, we suggested they write two to five sentences per entry. As a result, the amount of data we analyzed was substantial.

Data Analysis

We used content analysis to examine, verify, and draw inferences from the data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Krippendorp, 2004; Mayring, 2004). We began coding the data using constant comparison methods (Glaser, 1992). Collectively, the three of us examined several students' entries and inductively created initial codes. We then coded several students' charts separately and reconvened to compare and refine our initial codes. Next, we used focused coding (Charmaz, 2006) to array the first cycle codes into broader conceptual categories under which we placed each subcode. Once we agreed on our set of categories and subcodes, we coded new charts separately to determine interrater agreement. With a Fleiss' Multirater Kappa of .74, we felt comfortable dividing the remaining coding amongst the three of us. After each of us coded the assigned data, we used frequency counts and other descriptive statistics (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) to examine the data and draw inferences. Additionally, we categorized each of the 27 themes into six key headings.

Results

From the 4,668 statements the students teachers recorded, 4,154 (89%) clearly identified actions they took to meet their students' individual needs. In other words, 514 statements either contained further description of the students, but not teacher actions, or suggested that the student teacher purposefully took no action to accommodate the student. For example, one student teacher wrote, "He has no special needs," while another wrote, "She never shows any issues in class." Such statements would imply that only students with special needs or challenging behavior problems warrant individual attention while those students who are "good, well-behaved" students do not. It is interesting to note that even

though the assignment asked the student teachers to describe each student and how they meet his or her individual needs, many student teachers either had difficulty articulating the way in which to meet the students' needs or simply did not do so.

The vast majority of their written statements, however, contained explicit examples of how student teachers purported to have met their students' needs; and, we were able to identify 27 different ways from their claims (see Appendix). The number of incidents of each type of student teacher action (theme) ranged from 29 to 638 ($M = 154$, $SD = 135$). The least-common action was used by 22% of the student teachers and the most common action was used by 94% ($M = 58$, $SD = 20$). We attempted to coalesce the 27 themes into key categories (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Categories of Student Teachers' Actions to Meet Their Students' Needs*

Category	Incidents
Cultural	319 (7.7%)
Behavioral	1,338 (32.2%)
Social	978 (23.5%)
Curriculum	1,519 (36.5%)
Learning Content	350 (8.4%)
Learning Process	874 (21%)
Learning Product	295 (7.1%)

The most common category centered on curriculum-related elements (36.5%), which includes three sub-themes: content, process, and product (Tomlinson, 2004a, 2004b; Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Content relates to the knowledge and skills students should learn; process relates to how students learn the content; and, product relates to how students demonstrate what they have learned (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Though one might expect curriculum-related actions to dominate student teachers' attempts to accommodate their students' unique needs, themes related to student teachers taking actions on their students' behavior needs

(32.2%) were almost as common. Nearly a quarter of the student teacher actions addressed students' social needs; whereas, only 7.7% of the student teacher actions addressed students' cultural needs.

Curriculum-Related Actions

The most common set of actions used by the student teachers involved providing ongoing support during class. This category included actions such as helping students get started on their seatwork, providing additional directions, and re-explaining or re-teaching concepts. The student teachers' journal entries contained 638 instances of this theme, with 94% of the student teachers applying these actions. For example, one student teacher wrote, "After I explain the assignment to the class, I sit next to him and re-explain what he should be doing, and then I help him get started." Another student teacher noted, "With her, I just have to make sure I walk by her desk a lot to give her little help periodically." It is interesting that although these actions appear reactive, the student teachers typically anticipated they would have to provide ongoing support to certain students. It was as if they would give whole-class instructions and directions repeating the process for some students.

Commonly, the student teachers made conscious efforts to make sure their students were challenged appropriately; however, they were more likely to challenge high-achieving students. For example, 84% of the student teachers noted that they differentiated the learning content and product (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010) to accommodate higher-achieving students; whereas, only 50% of the student teachers differentiated tasks and materials for struggling students. Even though the majority of the student teachers expressed their actions to meet their students' curricular needs, they tended to use unmitigated policies for differentiation. Throughout the 4,668 entries, we found only 37 instances of formative assessment. A number of student teachers (27%) noted that they gave reduced homework to students, and they did so consistently. For example, one student teacher recorded, "I always

have him do only the odd problems on his homework.” Often, student teachers noted how they accommodated students who struggled academically by having a standing policy that allowed students to reduce their work load to avoid being overwhelmed; however, few mentioned that they assessed students’ competency on a particular objective and reduced the homework accordingly. Conversely, most of the instances of formative assessment involved student teachers determining that high-achieving students already mastered an objective, and then consequently giving the students more challenging tasks. For example, one student teacher wrote, “He seems bored a lot of the time with what we are doing, so each day I check if he already knows the material, and if he does, I give him something harder to work on.” In this study, it appeared that the student teachers were more comfortable differentiating their teaching with high-achieving students than with low-achieving students.

Nearly all the student teachers wrote about working with students with special needs, and they often revealed these students “labels;” however, we were surprised by the lack of mention of their students’ Individualized Education Plans (IEP). For example, one student teacher wrote about a student who “has been diagnosed with ADHD and has some trouble with auditory processing,” yet the student teacher makes no mention of the student’s IEP goals or accommodations. Often, the student teachers mentioned how they provided accommodations to students with special needs, but without mentioning the IEP. For example, one student teacher wrote,

Patrick is a student with a learning disability in math, written expression, and reading comprehension. He struggles with this challenge daily and at times feels like he cannot figure out any of the problems we do in class. Patrick gets bored with lessons that involve very little student movement so I meet his needs by incorporating group work into my lessons that require students to be actively involved.

It wasn’t clear why the student teachers seldom mentioned IEPs. Perhaps their cooperating teachers simply didn’t show them. But then, this raises another question: Why not?

Behavior-Related Actions

Ultimately, teachers must maintain an orderly and compliant classroom to create an atmosphere for learning. Often, however, teachers prioritize order over learning (Brophy, 2006). In this category we included actions such as redirection of off-task behaviors, positive and negative consequences, seating arrangements, private conference with students, home contact about behavior, and behavior plans. These themes presented an interesting juxtaposition. When asked to describe how they met their students' individual needs, reflections revealed the concern for maintaining order in the class collectively.

Redirection of off-task behavior using actions such as proximity control and verbal reminders was the second-most common theme (342 instances; 89% of student teachers). Common occurrences also included praise (311 instances, 77% of student teachers) and attention to seating arrangements (305 instances, 73% of student teachers). As the literature supports, the student teachers were quite concerned about the role of individual students in maintaining whole-class order. Ironically, a number of student teachers identified actions they took with individual students not because those actions were what the individual student needed but because those actions helped to maintain classroom order. For example, one student teacher wrote, "He is a major distraction to others (always talking) so I moved him to the back corner." In this example, the student teacher failed to address the more pressing issue of why the student was distracting others and, thus, immediately chose whole classroom order over individual needs. It can be said, then, that the student teacher acknowledged the student's characteristics and accommodated the other students in the class.

Social-Related Actions

As expected, curriculum- and behavior-related actions were most common, yet nearly a quarter of the student teacher actions related to students' social skills and behaviors. The third-most common theme in the study (329 instances; 83% of student teachers) included the student teachers' use of students as role models or helpers. Student teachers frequently noted how they used students as peer tutors to help other students or as a teacher's assistant to help with organizational and procedural tasks. It is important to note that the student teachers didn't limit these tasks to high-achieving students. Frequently, they mentioned how they used struggling students as a means of building their self-esteem. For example, one student teacher wrote:

He has a very low self-concept and really struggles academically, so I try to give him tasks to do that he can be successful at and feel good about himself. For example, I assigned him to be the class mailman, and he loves his "job" and takes it very seriously.

Another emergent theme involved how the student teachers tended to encourage introverted and extroverted students alike. For example, 73% of the student teachers noted that they focused extroverts, particularly by trying to prevent students from dominating class discussions or asking too many questions. These student teachers applied a number of behavior modification strategies such as limiting the number of questions a student could ask and requiring students to write out questions and comments rather than participating in class through oral response. In a similar manner, most student teachers (72%) indicated that they challenged introverts also. For example one student teacher wrote, "I try to get him out of his shell by asking him questions when I am pretty sure he knows the correct answer." The student teachers demonstrated a strong sense of obligation to teach social skills. Fewer than half of the student teachers revealed that they did not challenge introverts (42%) or extroverts (22%). Nonetheless, there were 45 instances of students teachers writing reflections such as: "She is very shy, so I make sure not to call on her in class;" or: "She likes to work alone, so when we do group work, I just let her

work by herself instead.” Least common (29 instances) was the student teachers’ mention of how they purposely did not challenge or focus extroverted students. For example, one student teacher wrote, “Sandra likes to talk to others, but she still works on the task at hand. So if we are having work time I verify that she is not bothering anyone else, I let her continue to talk and work.”

Cultural-Related Actions

It is important to acknowledge that the university used in this study is located in a rural, mostly Caucasian region of the upper Midwest. Yet, 14 (22%) of the student teachers completed their 16 weeks of student teaching in urban areas and two (3%) taught overseas. Though 75% student-taught in the local area, at schools with little racial diversity, they faced other types of diversity, particularly socioeconomic diversity. A number of the placement schools had more than 50% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. As such, we used a rather broad definition of “cultural” when coding student teacher actions, perhaps one that is more in line with a definition of multicultural education. Banks and Banks (1995) defined *multicultural education* as: “... a field of study and an emerging discipline whose major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups. One of its important goals is to help all students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate, and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and moral community that works for the common good.” (p. xi) With this definition in mind, we created the category of cultural, within which we included student teacher actions related to students’ race, sexual orientation, religion, SES, and heritage

Despite the wide net for this category, student teacher actions for these themes were sparse. Most noteworthy was a common phenomenon in which the student teachers demonstrated an awareness of students’ cultural characteristics, but did not identify how they took actions to meet those cultural needs. Often the

student teachers provided a detailed description of the students' interests and home life but stopped there. For example, one student teacher wrote, "Angie is one of two African American students I have all semester. She is very talkative and boisterous. Angie socializes with the A students; however, her grades are usually more in the B range." Another student teacher wrote:

Jonathan is one of the youngest of a very large family. His parents are Hmong immigrants and he is the only Asian American student in his class. Jonathan is very respectful, very attentive and participates in classroom discussions and activities. He is not very talkative, but it could be because I'm a teacher and I only see him in school. Jonathon participates in class, but because of his quiet nature he is harder to read, like if he's happy or upset about anything.

These student teachers seemed to be aware that the students they described had different culturally backgrounds but failed to consider how to best meet their individual needs given said cultural difference.

It was also common for student teachers to provide descriptions of their students' cultural and curriculum-related needs and then to explain how they met their students' curriculum needs but not their cultural needs. For example one student teacher wrote:

Camarie is an African American male in the 5th grade. He never met his dad and is being raised by his mother and grandmother. His primary disability on his IEP is CD. He has a secondary disability of Emotional Behavioral Disability. Camarie can be easily frustrated during longer writing tasks. I often either shorten these tasks or write them out in hi-lighter for him to trace.

Though the student teacher differentiated the learning content and process for Camarie, she did not mention any attempts to address his cultural needs.

The student teachers often reacted to other forms of cultural diversity in the same manner. For example another student teacher wrote, "Nathan's family is Jehovah Witness, therefore he is unable to participate in holidays, celebrations, and birthdays. He also is

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very intelligent and needs to be challenged.” At no point in his journal did the student teacher mention actions he took to make Nathan or the other students feel more comfortable about his religious differences. Likewise, a number of student teachers noted students who were poor, often with detailed descriptions of their family situations, but few student teachers explained how they were able to help these students. For example, one student teacher wrote:

[She] comes from a bad home. She lives in a trailer. Her mom is a user and often brings home different guys. She frequently wears the same clothes two or three days in a row and often stinks. It is very sad. Thankfully, she does well in class. She’s a smart girl.

Despite the infrequency of student teachers addressing their students’ cultural needs, there were a handful of student teachers who did. One student teacher wrote:

This student is the only African American girl in the classroom. She is outgoing, but stays on task. She is organized and motivated. This student plays basketball. She is from a family with 8 kids. Her mom and uncle are suspected of selling drugs. Mom is gone a lot and her aunt watches her. I talk with this student a lot about how her good choices are helping her in school. I incorporate basketball examples into my math lessons. I also make sure I have materials with pictures of African Americans in the classroom.

Another wrote:

I sing to this student a lot in the morning while she is at her locker. She likes the warm welcome at the beginning of the day. This student still comes to school smelling like urine and has unbrushed hair. The counselors have been letting her brush her hair and use their baby wipes as needed. I am continuing to check her homework at the end of each day, as well as check her homework throughout the day. In addition, I have been more attentive in redirecting her. During free time she wants to go on the computer, but I will ask her if her homework is done and have her show it to me. Also, during student work time she wants to work on other writing projects. I direct her to work on the given assignment, and then work on her own projects.

Such responses indicate the student teachers' understanding not only of the pupil's individual cultural needs, but sensitivity to how culture can impact performance in school academically and socially.

Limitations

Despite the large data set and our high degree of inter-rater reliability during the first phase of coding, there were a number of limitations in this study. First, we do not know if the student teachers actually applied the actions they wrote in their journals or if they merely wrote what they thought we wanted to read. Though each of us observed student teachers, we did not formally examine their classroom actions to see if they were consistent with their journals.

The second limitation of this study involved our attempt to categorize their actions, and the 27 themes, into the four categories: curriculum, behavioral, social, and cultural. It isn't clear, for example, whether a student teacher's decision to use less group work should be considered a behavior-related action or a curriculum-related action involving the learning process. We attempted to discern these differences by reading their journal entries contextually, as well as by discussing entries that baffled us individually. Nonetheless, the lines between teacher actions that could be categorized are often blurry.

Third, there was variation in the amount of coursework students took on multicultural education and classroom management. Most student teachers were enrolled in a one-credit course on multicultural education and a one-credit course on classroom management concurrently with their student teaching seminar course. Prior to student teaching, the secondary education majors took a three-credit course entitled, *Teaching for Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice*; whereas, the elementary majors had similar course concepts dispersed throughout their methods courses. Classroom management was integrated into each of their methods

courses ,as well, at both the elementary and secondary levels. In this study, we were unable to determine the impact that the student teachers' previous and concurrent coursework had on their sensitivity to cultural issues or their ability to manage the classroom during student teaching.

Discussion and Implications

Obiakor (2007) stated that educators, “must be well-prepared to address issues related to demographic shifts in paradigms and power and also be well prepared to value all learners” (p. v.); and, Pai and Adler (1997) asserted that effective democracy depends on the “acceptance of the intrinsic worth of all human beings and their unique individuality” (p. 104). Though teachers often refer to their class as a collective, a class of students is ultimately a collection of individuals, each with unique characteristics and needs. Darling-Hammond (2002) suggested that when teachers acknowledge and then leverage students' unique characteristics, they can build a more inclusive and powerful community for learning. Because our schools continue to become more diverse – racially, economically, linguistically, and in achievement – it is imperative that tomorrow's teachers be prepared to meet each of their students' needs; and, teacher education programs must bear the responsibility of making sure they are prepared.

Though our school of education expresses our desire to prepare future teachers for the realities of tomorrow's classroom, we were largely unaware of the extent to which our student teachers were willingly able to identify and take action based on their students' unique needs. This study provided our program with much-needed feedback. In some areas, our student teachers did better than we had expected. Their use of curriculum-related differentiation was impressive, and we felt a sense of pride, assuming that their actions were the result of what they had learned in various methods courses. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) stated, “[V]ery few teachers proactively plan instruction to consistently address student differences” (p.13); however, the student teachers in this study revealed an awareness of their students' learning needs and

an assortment of actions to meet those needs. The student teachers demonstrated that differentiation according to “learner variance in readiness, interest, and learning profile” is pedagogical rather than organizational (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 120).

Inextricably tied to curriculum-based actions are measures aimed at managing students’ behavior. Classroom management is consistently identified as novice teachers’ primary concern, and student teachers regularly report feeling unprepared (Anderson, 2009; Clement, 2000, 2002; Tulle, 1995). It is no surprise that the student teachers in this study exhibited actions intended to control students’ behavior and to maintain classroom order, seemingly above their desire to accommodate students’ learning needs. In a review of decades’ worth of research on the subject, Brophy (2006) asserted that effective classroom managers employ a variety of strategies and are able to accommodate the unique needs of individual students as well as the unique characteristics of each class as a collective. Wright, Horn, and Sanders (1997) discovered that the most effective teachers are effective with all students, regardless of achievement level or other differences. The goal of classroom management is to establish an environment that maximizes student learning and development. Tomorrow’s teachers must be able to meet the needs of each individual student, regardless of factors such as ability, race and/or ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, if they are to maintain an atmosphere for learning.

Certainly, students’ cultural needs are vital to creating such a learning atmosphere. In this study, one area of concern involved the student teachers’ lack of action to accommodate students’ cultural needs. It appears that the student teachers had an emerging level of cultural knowledge, which is vital for culturally competent teaching (Banks, 2004); however, only a few student teachers demonstrated praxis, which is the “application of skills, strategies, and pedagogical practices” (Yang & Montgomery, 2011, p. 2). It wasn’t clear from the data in this study why the student teachers did not act to meet students’ cultural needs. We presume student teachers simply lack the necessary knowledge and skills to do so,

which indicates a need to shift the ways in which issues of diversity are addressed in methods courses in our education program. Though cultural awareness is an important first step in developing cultural competence, effective teaching requires commitment to developing specific skills that grow over time. Fortunately, culturally responsive teaching can be taught (Delpit, 2006).

As Common Core State Standards movement gains momentum, there is mounting concern that individual students' needs will be deemphasized. Sleeter (2011) warned, "many school have adopted scripted curriculum packages that treat students as empty vessels that have no interests, life experiences, or home knowledge of value" (p.2). It is ironic that as our classrooms are becoming more diverse, our curricula are becoming more uniform. More than ever before, our schools need teachers who have the awareness of students' unique needs and the skills to maximize the learning of each student.

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Appendix

Student Teachers' Actions to Meet Their Students' Needs

Action	Student Teachers (n = 64)	Total Incidents
Redirection of Off-Task Behavior	57 (89%)	342
Assigning Responsibilities	53 (83%)	329
Providing More Challenging Material/Tasks	53 (83%)	211
Praise/Verbal Encouragement	49 (77%)	311
Seating Arrangement	47 (73%)	305
Focusing Extroverts	47 (73%)	107
Challenging/ Pushing Introverts	46 (72%)	165
Creating a Safe Space	45 (70%)	140
Acknowledgment of Student's Interests	44 (69%)	197
Use of Another Student as Role Model	43 (67%)	163
Clarifying Expectations for Assignments	43 (67%)	145
Private Conversation with Student	42 (66%)	140
Alternate Learning Product	36 (56%)	118
Behavior Contract	34 (53%)	122
Academic Support Outside of Class time	37 (58%)	136
Providing Less Challenging Material/Tasks	32 (50%)	67
Providing Assistive Tools/Technology	31 (48%)	72
Giving Extra Time	31 (48%)	63
Negative Consequences	29 (45%)	85
Not Challenging/Pushing Introverts	27 (42%)	45
Selection of Reading Material	26 (41%)	62
Acknowledgment of Student's Home Life	25 (39%)	60
Contact with Student's Parents	21 (33%)	33
Formative Assessment	18 (28%)	37
Reduced Homework	17 (27%)	32
Not Challenging/Focusing Extroverts	14 (22%)	29