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Perceptions of teacher education students at a South African university on the relationship between culture and education: implications for social justice

Abstract

The Constitution of South Africa envisions a socially just society. However, realising this requires an education context that, amongst other things, celebrates and promotes cultural diversity. Widely known as the rainbow nation, South Africa is home to diverse cultures, both from within and from all over Africa and the rest of the world. This fact poses particular challenges to education, which is not only required to provide a multi-cultural educational context conducive to effective teaching and learning, but also to promote social justice. However, indications are that SA education fails dismally to achieve both ends. We argue that part of the reason for this failure is the inability of (pre-service) education students to understand, acknowledge and validate the intrinsic relationship that exists between culture and education. As such, they hamper efforts to realise social justice through education. In this paper we report on the perceptions regarding the relationship between culture and education of third- and fourth-year education students at a university in South Africa. We conducted quantitative research amongst a culturally diverse group of students; 266 in total. Findings suggest that students have a limited understanding of this relationship, in spite of the efforts both this university, as well as the education authorities' attempts. The paper concludes with recommendations for enhancing sensitivity amongst education students about the relationship between culture and education, and the possible implications for social justice as a result of ignorance of this issue.

Key words: Culture, South Africa, education, cultural integration, social justice.

Abstrak

Die Suid-Afrikaanse Grondwet is gerig op 'n sosiaal regverdige samelewing. Om hierdie ideaal te verwesenlik vereis 'n onderwyskonteks wat onder andere kulturele diversiteit vier en dit bevorder. Suid-Afrika, alombekend as die reënboognasie, is die tuiste van diverse plaaslike kulture, maar ook ander kulture uit Afrika en van die res van die wêreld. Hierdie stand van sake hou bepaalde uitdagings in vir die onderwys wat nie net 'n multikulturele onderwyskonteks moet daarstel nie, maar ook sosiale geregtigheid moet bevorder. Daar is egter aanduidings dat die Suid-Afrikaanse onderwys jammerlik misluk om hierdie uitkomst te verwesenlik. Ons argumenteer dat hierdie probleem deels geleë is in die onvermoë van onderwysstudente om die intrinsieke verhouding wat daar tussen kultuur en onderwys bestaan te verstaan, dit te erken en dit te bekragtig. Gevolglik word pogings om sosiale geregtigheid deur onderwys te verwesenlik, belemmer. In hierdie artikel doen ons verslag oor die persepsies van derde- en vierdejaaronderwysstudente aan 'n Suid-Afrikaanse universiteit. Ons het 'n kwantitatiewe ondersoek onder 'n kultureel-diverse groep studente gedoen: 266 in totaal. Bevindings dui daarop dat studente 'n beperkte begrip van die verhouding tussen kultuur en onderwys het, ten spyte van pogings van beide hierdie universiteit sowel as die onderwysowerheid. Die artikel sluit af met aanbevelings oor hoe om 'n sensitiwiteit oor die verhouding tussen kultuur en onderwys onder onderwysstudente te bevorder, en die moontlike implikasies vir sosiale geregtigheid as gevolg van 'n gebrek aan kennis hieroor.

Sleutelwoorde: Kultuur, Suid-Afrika, onderwys, kulturele integrasie, sosiale geregtigheid

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is globally regarded as significant in addressing social ills, and in promoting social justice. Within the South African (SA) context this is particularly dominant as education aims to not only “redress past injustices ...” and “contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society”, but also to “advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance ...” (DoE, 1996a). This aim is derived from the SA Constitution (RSA, 1996: Preamble) which proposes to “[heal] the divisions of the past and to establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights”. As such, South African education has a responsibility to transform South Africa into a socially just and equitable society, which can secure an improved quality of life for *all* its citizens. Therefore, in the wake of previous, exclusionary policies, structures and practices prior to the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, social justice directives have aptly been characterised by constitutional imperatives of redress, access, equity and the widening participation of marginalised societal groups. Teacher education students should therefore be prepared in such a way that they will be able to teach for social justice.

To accomplish this, the *National Education Policy Act* (DoE, 1996b: Section 7) expect teachers to understand the impact of class and other identity-forming forces, such as a culture of learning. Education systems in unequal societies often assume the possession of particular social and cultural capital which makes it difficult for working- class students to succeed in the education system. In this way, we contend that social injustices are overtly reinforced and sustained through ideology and hegemony in education policies and practice (Sullivan, 2003).

This article aims to explore the relationship between culture and education, and the implications thereof for social justice. In doing so, we briefly explore the concept of culture and social justice. We further ascertain teacher education students’ perceptions, then report on students’ understanding of the link between culture and education, and finally comment on the implications for social justice.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our conceptual framework is formed by the concepts of culture and social justice. What follows is a brief exposition of these concepts.

2.1 Culture

The concept of culture is socially constructed, complex and highly mediated (Banks & Banks, 2010). Traditional and commonly accepted definitions of culture focus on its materialistic components, and patterns of behaviour (Goduka, 1998a), as well as on culture as shared knowledge and belief systems, or symbols and meanings (Bennett, 2007). These definitions appear to be generally embraced by and liberally used in education. Such definitions inevitably inform and shape our understanding (or lack thereof) of the concept of culture and its relationship with education. However, whilst it has relevance for human development and understanding, such conceptualisations of culture are of limited value for education (Entwistle, 1978). These conceptualisations fail to make explicit the manner in which culture is manifested in educational settings in general, and in the learning process of individuals from culturally different backgrounds in particular (Howard, 2012). As such, the articulated conceptualisations fall short of centring culture in education as an aspect of social justice.

Conceptualisations of culture do not originate in a vacuum. Rather, they are created and shaped by people, who are historically situated in particular positions dictated by, amongst other things, class, race and gender (Dallavis, 2008). As such, power becomes an important determinant of how culture is defined and how it operates. Culture is therefore used to differentiate and to classify. Freire (1985) holds the view that culture is a “form of production

whose processes are intimately linked to the structuring of different social formations ... related to gender/age/race/class". Similarly, McLaren (2003) postulates that culture is intimately linked to the structure of social relations within class, gender and age formations that produce forms of oppression and dependency. Thus, *culture* not only has a potentially hegemonic nature (McLaren, 2003), but it is also linked to social inequality (Bourdieu in Lareau & Weininger, 2003), and to issues of politics and power (Banks & Banks, 2010:37). In this way, culture could potentially be used to produce and reproduce power relations (Apple, 2013) effectively holding the potential to create social injustices by discriminating against and excluding others. This is confirmed by Goduka (1998a) who asserts that culture has resulted in a number of African students suffering injustice, marginalisation, powerlessness and being submerged in the culture of silence of the dispossessed. Power and related issues of inequality, inequity and social injustice should therefore be central to any understanding of culture in education.

It is therefore imperative for teacher education students to understand that culture could potentially be used to reproduce social injustices and that, as agents of change, they have to develop a critical orientation towards it. In other words teachers, and more specifically pre-service teachers should understand that culture can do more than merely inform behaviour or serve as an 'innocent and neutral' frame of reference for a particular group of people. Rather, culture is a significant tool in inequality, oppression and the reproduction of the status quo of unequal power relations and social injustices. Furthermore, culture is also closely related to politics, and therefore it is important that teachers in general and student teachers in particular become sensitive to covert applications of *culture*, in order for them to attempt to counter the hegemonic nature of education and the role culture plays in the system.

2.2 Social justice

The concept of social justice is variously defined and definitions thereof are informed by various perspectives and theories, resulting in definitional vagueness (cf. Rizvi, 1998). This vagueness is captured by Novak (2000) who claims that "whole books and treaties have been written about social justice without offering a definition of it". For Bell (1997), social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable, while Heybach (2009) distinguishes between social justice as a means of exposing and altering institutions which perpetuate systemic oppression, and function as a means of perceiving oppressive patterns that affect students as individuals and as others in society. Zajda, Majhanovich and Rust (2006) also contend that social justice refers to equality, human rights, and human dignity. In addition, Murrell (2006) views social justice as a disposition toward recognising and eradicating all forms of oppression and differential treatment extant in the practices and policies of educational institutions.

According to Fraser (1996) and Capeheart and Milovanovic (2007) constructions of social justice, especially within the realm of higher education, should move past their distributive form (fairness and equality in the distribution of basic resources, benefits and burdens to society) and possibly, their redistributive form (the manner in which education systems cater for and respond to the social and economic needs/outcomes of various societal groups). In essence, we assert that curricula developed for pre- service teachers should also centre on promoting a recognition of social justice. This implies that an awareness should exist that social systems, such as the education system tend to produce unequal outcomes, (advantages and disadvantages), thus perpetuating new forms of social and economic discriminations and social injustices. Therefore, both forms of redistributive and recognitive social justice should be taken in account in teacher education programmes. Based on the above, we understand social justice to be concerned with the elimination of cultural, social and economic disparities and inequalities, with a focus on the promotion of fairness, equality and non-discrimination.

Social justice concerns are intrinsic to education. This is because schools "serve as effective

sorting devices, allocating individuals to particular locations in the socio-economic hierarchy ...” (Parsons in Villegas, 2007:371), and because social, political and economic conditions are often replicated in schools (Zembylas in Berkovich, 2014). As such, social justice in education needs to prepare teachers who can teach *all* students well, and not just those traditionally well-served schools, so that *all* are able to participate equitably in the economic and political life of the country (Villegas, 2007). In addition, social justice education should transform schools into sites infused with the principles and values of social justice. This is particularly relevant to the SA context which is characterised by gross inequalities in education and severe social injustices. In addition, social justice is not only an ideal in the Constitution, but also an imperative for all South Africans who, based on their humanity, are morally entitled to.

2.3 Culture in education

Education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture (Apple, 2013). Whilst Banks and Banks (2010) maintain that everything in education relates to culture, Phutsong (1999) asserts that one can no longer ignore the powerful influence of culture on education. Various scholars refer to the centrality of culture in students’ academic success in the realms of teaching and learning. Bazron, Osher and Fleischman (2005) assert that the disconnection between education and culture leads to a poor self-concept, disciplinary problems, and poor academic outcomes for students from subordinate cultures. Evidence also suggests that cultural practices shape thinking processes, which serve as tools for learning (cf. Hollins, 1996).

For education to be effective and to respond to the needs of *all* students, meaningful connections between the students’ culture, the curriculum and education practices therefore has to be made. This not only supposes an awareness of the student as someone with a cultural background which could add value to teaching and learning practices, but also a validation of the students’ cultures in what they are taught and how they are taught (Avery, Sullivan & Ou, 2012). Moreover, it also requires teacher education students to critically reflect on the relationship between culture and education, especially within the SA educational context.

2.4 Culture in the SA educational domain

For SA, insights into the hegemonic nature of culture and the potential role it can play in social injustice in education, is particularly important since *culture* has previously been misused as a qualifier in education provisioning. During the pre-1994 period it was propagated by the state that education at all levels is predetermined by the cultural background of students (Schoeman, 1998). This not only resulted in various socially unjust and unequal education systems for the various cultural groups in SA, but also in concerted efforts to misuse education to maintain subordinate cultures in oppressive conditions (Goduka, 1998a). With culture as a defining criterion, quality education was limited to only those cultural groups who were regarded as culturally superior, whilst students from marginalised groups were prevented access. The origin of this reasoning is to be found in the *Manifesto on Christian National Education* (1948) and the accession to power of the National Party in 1948. Where the former document explicitly framed education for South Africans along cultural and racial lines, the National Party, through the *Bantoe Education Act, Act 47 of 1953* legalised inequality in education on this basis. This situation resulted in deep and irreversible social injustices in South Africa.

It is against this background that today in SA, the cultural rights of all SA citizens are firstly protected by the Constitution (RSA, 1996: Section 9, 30 and 31) and secondly, promoted through education (RSA, 1996: Section 29). In line with these directives schools in SA were desegregated and a clear educational vision was developed which aimed to advance social justice and equality through education by promoting cultural diversity and integration in schools and in the broader SA society (DoE, 1996c).

SA adopted multicultural education (ME) as a principle of education (DoE, 1996c), thus acknowledging the relevance of culture for education. It therefore becomes imperative that we explore the perceptions of education students concerning the relationship between culture and education.

3. SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants consisted of students in the Faculty of Education enrolled for the module EFA112. This is a compulsory module offered to all B.Ed. and PGCE students. Entitled "Culture and Education", this module aims at sensitising education students to the close and intrinsic link between culture and education. Five-hundred-and-forty-nine (549) students are registered for this module. A sample of 266 teacher education students was selected using convenience purposive sampling. Out of this sample 69.9% were White participants and the rest were Black participants.

4. DATA GATHERING TOOL

We used a structured questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale to investigate the perceptions of teacher education students. The questionnaire comprised various Sections. Section A dealt with the biographical information of the educators, whilst Section B, ascertained the perceptions of students regarding various aspects of culture and education. The data were analysed using the LP SERVE -PROGRAMME from the Unit for Mathematical and Statistical Services at the University of the Free State.

5. FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

Table 1: Perceptions on culture and education

ITEMS		Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Mean
1	There is a strong link between culture and education.	2.6	1.9	50	43.2	3.37
2	I have the skills and knowledge to effectively teach culturally diverse groups.	1.1	3.8	45.1	45.9	3.09
3	In SA, gaps in the success rates amongst learners from different cultural groups cannot be attributed to their incompatibility with the school's dominant culture.	6	37.6	44	7.1	2.55
4	I am sufficiently equipped with knowledge, skills and the right values to deal with cultural diversity in my class.	1.5	15	57.9	22.2	3.04
5	Educational equality and equity has nothing to do with culture in education.	22.9	45.1	22.9	6.8	2.14
6	Cultural issues in schools just cause problems.	14.7	35.3	35.3	12	2.46
7	Learners who do not fit into the existing culture of a school should enrol at a school where their cultural needs can be met.	23.3	27.1	34.6	10.9	2.35
8	Learners from culturally different backgrounds to my own have an educational deficit which needs to be eradicated.	24.4	44	23.7	3.4	2.06
9	Culture is political.	1.6	39.1	13.5	11.7	2.05
10	Equal educational opportunities for all is still elusive in most integrated schools.	49	25.2	50.8	15	2.79
11	I think it is culturally biased to ignore the cultural needs of all the learners in my class.	15.4	9	25.4	44.4	3.04
12	I think it is safe for schools to focus and emphasise only the visible culture.	25.9	23.7	33.2	15.2	2.37
13	Learners from culturally diverse backgrounds must adapt their culture to that of the dominant culture of the school.	23.3	33.1	27.8	10.9	2.28
14	Learners should be allowed to use their personal culture to enhance their educational success.	4.1	8.3	54.1	28.9	3.13
15	All teaching and learning strategies are suitable for all learners, irrespective of their cultural orientation.	12	28.9	33	20.7	2.66
16	It is important to provide scaffolding between what learners already know and what they need to learn.	2.6	6.8	48.9	36.5	3.26
17	I am convinced that a colour-blind approach in schools is detrimental to the academic success of learners of minority groups.	12.8	30.1	32.3	18.8	2.61
18	I am convinced that being culturally responsive will advance the academic success of minority cultural groups in a particular school.	3.8	15	53.4	21.1	2.98
19	I am convinced that schools reproduce social inequalities.	9.8	21.1	42.1	19.9	2.78
20	I am sincerely aware of the impact of race, ethnicity and social class on teaching and learning.	0.8	6.4	42.1	43.2	3.38

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

What follows are the analysis and the discussion of the data. The data are grouped and discussed in two separate categories: positive findings and concerning findings.

6.1 Positive findings from the data

From the analysis of the data some positive perceptions about the relationship between education and culture were discerned. It is encouraging that an overwhelming 93.2% of the participants acknowledged that a strong link indeed exists between culture and education. The expectation is that teacher education students will not only demonstrate an awareness of, and a sensitivity towards particular factors, dispositions and/or social constructs that might impact on the academic success of *all* students, but also align their teaching practice to respond to the social justice needs of the students. In relation to this, a vast number of education students (92%) felt very positive about their ability to effectively teach culturally diverse groups. These education students subsequently felt that they were sufficiently equipped with relevant knowledge, skills and the right values and attitudes to deal with cultural diversity in their classes. This could be because of their exposure to multicultural education practices and how to deal with multicultural classes. Students who attend multicultural education programmes are more inclined to be responsive to social justice issues and therefore appear to be better prepared for the teaching profession (Alexander, 2016). Similarly, Irvine (in Kea, 2003) avers that teachers exposed to multicultural education are less likely to embrace culturally deficit views. Education students also need to know themselves as cultural and ethnic beings. It is knowledge of the self that might assist practicing teachers in understanding their students and to effectively engage with the complexities of teaching culturally diverse students (Santoro, 2009). Since values influence attitudes and behaviour, education students who are not knowledgeable about themselves might enter the profession with certain prejudices and preconceived ideas about certain students.

Furthermore, when asked whether it is culturally biased to ignore the cultural needs of *all* the students in a class, 69 % of participants responded positively. The majority of the education students seemed to concur that if a teacher's classroom practice reflects the cultural and linguistic practices of only one cultural group, students from other cultural groups are disadvantaged. Richards, Brown and Forde (2007) contend that teachers have a responsibility to *all* their students to ensure they *all* have an equal opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability. Education students who demonstrate cultural bias and prejudice are not impartial and can therefore impede social justice. By endorsing the cultural needs of *all* students, pre-service teachers provide students with equitable opportunities to be successful.

When asked about the relationship between cultural responsiveness and academic success, most participants (75%) indicated that being culturally responsive would enhance the academic success of marginalised cultural groups. Culturally responsive education is a pedagogy that empowers students by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes, thus acting in a socially just manner (Ladson-Billing, 1994). Intrinsically, it draws on and from cultural markers to ensure student success; cultural responsiveness not only acknowledges culture as significant in student success, but it also builds on students' cultural identities in the quest for academic success.

Furthermore, almost 85% of the participants indicated that students should be allowed to use their cultures to enhance their educational success. Participants therefore believe that students cannot be expected to leave their cultural identities at the school gate upon entering. Hayes and Juarez (n.d. 4) assert that as a variable, culture is often overlooked as a function of student success. Gay (2001) also postulates that the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters. Similarly, Sleeter (2011) blames the poor academic performance of

marginalised students on the fact that their home cultures are not sufficiently utilised as a resource for their own learning. A responsibility therefore rests with education students to accept the different cultural experiences and knowledges students bring to the education setting.

A significant number of participants (85.3%) also indicated that they were sincerely aware of the impact of race, ethnicity and social class on teaching and learning. This means that most pre-service students are sensitive to particular social justice constructions which might impact on effective teaching and learning. For Grant and Sleeter (in Banks & Banks, 2010) the dynamics of race and class also influence our knowledge and understanding of our students, impacting on students' experience of schooling. Furthermore, the absence of race consciousness and the desire or ability not to see race also inhibits the implementation of social justice initiatives (Schmeichel, 2012).

Furthermore, 68% of the participants indicated that they did not view students from culturally different backgrounds to their own as having deficits which need to be eradicated. Deficit theories see poor students and students of colour as lacking culture, coming from impoverished backgrounds which are not suited to academic success, possessing an oppositional culture, having a disdain for academic achievement, and having parents who lack concern for their children's academic aspirations (Howard, 2012). In addition, issues of power and longstanding racialized and institutional policies and practices consistently disadvantage marginalised students and could also contribute towards their failure and the continued cycle of social injustice (Schmeichel, 2012).

Most of the participants (84%) subsequently also indicated that it is important in multi-cultural schools to provide scaffolding to ensure student success. Scaffolding entails determining what students can accomplish independently and what they can accomplish with instructional support. Then design instruction that can be implemented to provide just enough scaffolding for them to be able to participate in tasks that are currently beyond their reach (Montgomery, 2001); scaffolding supposes a bridging between students' existing knowledge and new knowledge. Students from marginalised cultures often experience a disconnection between prior knowledge and experiences, and what is offered and happening in schools to an extent that they feel alienated. This requires that teacher education students should be trained in such a way that they find connections between existing knowledge, new content and the experiences students bring to school in order to facilitate socially just learning opportunities.

What is further encouraging is that most students (66%) disagreed with the statement that educational equality and equity has nothing to do with culture in education. From these responses it appears that the majority of students feel that there is a link between culture and educational equity and equality. Equity in education supposes that there are equal opportunities for all students to develop to their fullest potential (Bennett, 2007). For Banks and Banks (2010), inequalities in education inevitably help to create economic and social inequalities. Amidst inequalities and injustices in education, students from marginalised groups might therefore be robbed of the opportunity to excel in education.

In line with above finding, most of the participants (62%) appear to be convinced that schools reproduce social inequalities. Calhoun (2003) states that "all the institutions of modernity ... share in a tendency to ... present themselves as working for the common good, but in fact reproduce social inequalities". In this sense, education institutions typically contribute to reproducing and maintaining social injustices.

These positive responses suggest that students have some awareness of the relationship between culture and education and of particular cultural aspects that might impact on social justice in education. As such, teacher education students might consider during their teaching practice tenure the cultural backgrounds of their students, and implement

strategies to ensure that education provides, in a socially just manner the educational and cultural needs of *all* students.

However, on close scrutiny we discovered some alarming perceptions about culture and education amongst the teacher education participants. What follows is a presentation and discussion of these aspects.

7. CONCERNING FINDINGS

Although these responses do not *per se* present a negative perception about the link between culture and education, they are neither optimistically positive and could potentially threaten the advancement of social justice imperatives in educational settings. They also demonstrate a particular disjuncture (and in some cases a paradox) in participants' perceptions, knowledge and more importantly, their understanding of culture and its impact on education.

When asked whether culture is political, most of the teacher education students (70%) responded negatively, suggesting that they do not regard culture as a political concept. Pettman (in Grant & Sachs, 1995:90) regards culture as "highly political in its representation and reinforcement of structures of power". The value of treating culture as a political concept lies therefore in the space created to give voice to culturally marginalised and silenced students, and thus not only affirm their identities, but also respond to their social justice needs.

More than half the teacher education participants (53.7%) felt that all teaching and learning strategies are suitable for all students, irrespective of cultural orientation. Learning styles are related to culture and are influenced by cultural orientation. Goduka (1998b) posits that learning styles are a component of cultural behavioural styles, the habits, the values, predispositions, and preferences that develop during a child's cultural socialisation. Misunderstanding (or not considering) students' cultural behavioural styles, is problematic and may advance social injustices as teachers may underestimate the students intellectual potential and unknowingly misplace, mislabel and mistreat them as slow individuals who are not motivated or interested in learning (Bennett, 2007).

Correspondingly, only 51% of teacher education participants felt that in SA gaps in the success rates amongst students from different cultural groups cannot be attributed to their incompatibility with the dominant culture of the educational setting. Accordingly, teacher education participants felt that other factors, rather than the relationship between school and culture and the compatibility with a student's culture should be blamed for the inequality in student success rates. Goduka (1998b) also asserts that the possibility that some students do not learn because their culture, language, and learning styles are not validated and affirmed in the classroom is often ignored.

Less than half of the participants (48%) regarded it as safe for schools to focus on and emphasise only the visible cultures of students. These responses suggest that respondents favour an educational approach to culture that focuses on and celebrates only the external aspects of culture. McVee (2014) opines that externalised, objectified versions of culture (visible and invisible) are the norm in educational settings. Therefore, overemphasising the visible culture by celebrating particular cultural aspects such as food, clothes, crafts, and the literature of dominant groups in the curriculum could potentially create perceptions that education settings are sufficiently transformed, whilst in actuality promoting inequity and inequality.

The majority of participants (56%) felt that students from culturally diverse backgrounds should adapt their culture to that of the culture of the educational institution. From this response, it can be deduced that teacher education students seem to be in favour of

assimilation. Assimilation, according to Chisholm and Sujee (2006), denotes a process in which power relations determine that a subordinate group accommodates to and is accommodated by a more powerful group. In other words, assimilation assumes that students from marginalised cultures, adapt to the existing culture of the institution. Hall (2002) views assimilation as racist and argues that assimilationist practices imply that the dominant or majority culture is superior to the marginalised culture. In this way, educational institutions keep marginalised cultures and students in subordinate positions and do very little to accommodate and respond to social justice imperatives.

A worrying 52.1% of participants appeared to be convinced that a colour-blind approach in education is detrimental to the academic success of students of marginalised cultures. Colour-blindness assumes that teachers do not see 'colour' only 'children', and that they are able to teach any student irrespective of colour, gender or social status. Meier and Hartell (2009) criticise this approach accusing teachers of glossing over their prejudice against students from racial groups other than their own. Dallavis (2008:43) also asserts that colour-blindness ignores the realities of social inequality.

A further 47% of teacher education participants indicated that cultural issues in education just cause problems, as opposed to only 50% who responded to this positively. From these responses one may detect, although not convincingly, an aversion towards culture in education. According to Avery, Sullivan and Ou (2012) some teachers do not engage students with questions on culture in education because they see the acknowledgement of cultural differences as counterproductive; thus, a teacher would appear as unsympathetic towards issues of equity and equality in education. Since neither culture nor education is apolitical, and since culture impacts on education, culture and related issues are intrinsically linked to education.

In line with this, 50.4% of the teacher education participants indicated that students who do not fit into the existing culture of an institution should enrol at institutions where their cultural needs could be met. In essence, this response suggests that teacher education students support culturally segregated educational settings for diverse cultures. Segregation refers to a deliberate policy of separate development (Hall, 2002), with the aim of excluding marginalised cultures.

8. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to explore teacher education students' understanding of the relationship between culture and education and the implication thereof for social justice.

To achieve this purpose we briefly explored the concept culture, social justice and the relationship between education and culture. We further attempted to analyse the data in order to come to an understanding of how teacher education students understand the relationship between culture and education. From the responses it appears that education students might not be exposed to critical considerations of culture and its effect on education. It further appears from the findings that teacher education students have a superficial understanding of this relationship. In order to facilitate a deeper understanding of the relationship between education and culture, we argue that higher education institutions give strong consideration to the inclusion of critical pedagogy as a social justice imperative when conceptualising their training initiatives, policies and teaching and learning programmes for pre-service teachers. In addition, such institutions should also reflect on the possible effect of hegemonic structures on the realisation of social justice. Critical pedagogy tends to challenge liberalist claims, arguing that public education offers equal opportunities to all citizens, social mobility, and political and economic powers to the marginalised and dispossessed. In contrast, critical pedagogy views learning institutions as producers of the dominant ideology, the forms of knowledge and the distribution of

skills needed to reproduce the social division of labour. Critical pedagogy champions the development of counter hegemony construction that positions itself in opposition to the dominant ideological values of capitalist elites and various social justice concerns, such as the marginalisation of groups and forms of inequality and social exclusion (Apple, 1993; Giroux, 2007). Therefore, we argue that social justice should promote a critical consciousness of the socio-political and historical origin of individual and institutional prejudices and notable and prevalent forms of oppression and social injustices.

In realising social justice, we subscribe to critical multicultural education. Critical multicultural education creates a platform for the introduction of democratic initiatives in the curriculum, pedagogy, social relations in educational settings and an understanding of participation in diverse communities (Alexander, 2016).

It is our view that institutions of higher learning should channel their policy mandates and resources to enhance educational opportunities for teacher education students. Consequently, these students might be enabled to create multiple learning experiences for learners in diverse educational environments. In this way teachers and learners may acquire the knowledge and skills to converse about difference, human rights issues and social justice concerns.

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