Diversity & Cultural Competence On Early Childhood Education

Abstract  
Young children and their families reflect a great and rapidly increasing diversity of language and culture. The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) recommendations emphasize that early childhood programs are responsible for creating a welcoming environment that respects diversity, supports children’s ties to their families and community, and promotes both second language acquisition and preservation of children’s home languages and cultural identities. Linguistic and cultural diversity is an asset, not a deficit, for young children. Modern pre-school education together with the whole educational system face the period of constant changes, in which new needs of novices, universities and educational institutions arise. It is extremely important to train such pre-school teachers who can successfully get involved into children educational system and to contribute to faster changes of pre-school educational practice. *Purpose of Study* - to construct and empirically ground the competences of educative mentor, fostering change in the early childhood education. This Research paper emphasis and describes the concept of traditional mentoring based on behaviouristic theories, educative mentoring based on constructivist theories and reform-based change fostering mentoring. Having done the factorial analysis of mentor competence structural factors in the mentor competence model consisting of 8 competences, the following essential mentor competences have arisen: personal, communicative; expert assessment and reflection, student practice and reflection.

Introduction  
Modern pre-school education together with the whole educational system face the period of constant changes: from traditional didactic paradigm towards experience-based authentic education (Blandford, & Knowles, 2009), from teaching towards new learning paradigm oriented towards learning for all (Kalantzis, Cope, 2012), from teacher-oriented education towards education from a student’s perspective (Sommer, Samuelsson, Hundeide, 2010), from the concept of narrow content containing only formal curriculum, towards a wide concept consisting of the processes of curriculum creation and implementation, learning input and outcomes, communicative meetings of all participants of educational process. (Male, 2012; Niculescu, 2010).Constant reflection upon personal experience and educational process is emphasized together with deinstitutionalization, deformalization (Pollard with Anderson, Swaffield, Swann, Warin, & Warwick, 2008). On the other hand, all the changes mentioned above are clearly conceptionalized, however, its practical realization is not sufficient yet.

Under the conditions of such great changes universities face the challenge to train pre-school teachers qualified effectively to get involved into children educational system and to contribute to faster changes in school educational practice, implementing valuable theoretical ideas into practice. Mentoring is one of the most effective strategies of training teachers. Students from universities and other educational institutions bring new theoretical approaches so the mentor not only teaches the student but also learns from him/her. In this case the mentor and the novice learn together and look for new ideas to develop teaching practice. The mentor becomes a mediator of change in teaching practice and helps the novice to involve into the process of change and manage it.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY  
It is the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services, thereby producing better outcomes In the school setting, it involves the ability to acquire knowledge of education-related beliefs, attitudes and practices to improve student achievement. It is a developmental process occurring along a continuum from cultural destructiveness to cultural incapacity to cultural blindness to cultural pre-competence to cultural competence to cultural proficiency.  
Cultural Proficiency

Knowing how to learn and teach about different groups in ways that acknowledge and honor all people and the groups they represent. • Ethnicity – groups in which members share a cultural heritage from one generation to another; one’s geographical origin, group image and a sense of identity derived from contemporary cultural patterns and a sense of history. Many people are of multiple ethnicities. • Race - a classification system based on physical characteristics and generalized conceptions of skin color. A political and social construct that is most often important in societies with a history of oppressing specific groups. • Racial Identity – one’s sense of group identity or affiliation and association with others who possess the same racial heritage.

Ethnicity - You identify with

RACE – You are classified as

**Diversity in Education**

**Diversity** among students in **education** directly impacts their performance. Studies show that students work better in a diverse environment, enabling them to concentrate and push themselves further when there are people of other backgrounds working alongside them. Special Needs Students = All Students!  Because all students have special needs, they must be acknowledged and taught appropriately. Teachers understand student diversity and know how to plan and teach learning experiences and design assessments that are responsive to differences among students that promote all students’ learning .Appreciate the uniqueness of each person and mutual respect for all. To form positive self-concepts, children must honor and respect their own families and **cultures** and have others honor and respect these key facets of their identities too.At the same time, color and **culture** help children learn about each other and the world. Research suggests adults who engage children in culturally responsive educational experiences help to: Build young children's self-confidence and skills. Increase children's awareness, appreciation, and inclusion of **diverse** beliefs and cultures. Maximize children's academic achievement and educational success. When working and learning with people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures present in the **classroom**, students gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. It also teaches students how to use their own strengths and points of view to contribute in a **diverse** working environment.

Embracing Cultural Awarness  
To increase kindergarten participation for children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds Purpose:

Professional development training for educators • Resource development and information dissemination • Policy development to remove barriers to kindergarten participation • Supporting strong linkages between community and the early childhood sector http://embracekindy.com.au EMBRACE has promoted cultural diversity in ECEC through.Help develop essential concepts in the children’s first language and within cultural contexts that they understand**.** Although some children can seem superficially fluent in their second language, most children find it easier to learn new, complex concepts in a familiar language and cultural framework. Once established, these concepts readily transfer into a second language and contribute to later academic mastery. **Convince families that their home’s cultural values and norms are honored.** Continuity between home and the early childhood setting supports children’s social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. Though not always identical, practices at home and in school should be complementary. Knowledge – accumulation of factual information about different cultural groups • Skills – integration of awareness competencies to positively impact children from culturally distinct groups • Attitude – belief that differences are valuable and change is necessary and positive. Each domain builds successively on the previous one such that mastery of an earlier domain is necessary before proceeding to subsequent domains.

**On responding to linguistic and cultural diversity**

**Actively involve families in the early learning program.** Links between school, home, and community are important for all young children, but forging them can be challenging when families and program staff differ in culture and language. Ties to the community, respectful relationships with families, and encouragement of active, culturally meaningful family involvement are essential.

Today, 44 percent of all children are members of “minority groups.” By 2050, the proportion will be 62 percent.

**Encourage home language and literacy development, knowing that this contributes to children’s ability to acquire English language proficiency.** Research confirms that bilingualism is an asset and an educational achievement. When children become proficient and literate in their home language, they transfer those skills to a second language.Almost three out of ten Head Start children come from families who speak a primary language other than English.**Support and preserve home language usage.** Whether or not staff are proficient in a child’s home language, programs should make every effort to use children’s home languages and create classroom environments that reflect children’s languages and cultures. Within that context, teachers can model appropriate use of English and provide many opportunities for children to learn and practice a new language.Creativity and collaboration are needed to ensure that all children, whatever their current language proficiency or culture, have the opportunity to participate fully in the program’s learning opportunities. Collaborative work groups, including teachers and families, can develop flexible approaches that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate.

Conclusion

In the context of implementation of constant pre-school education reforms and innovations, new needs of novices, universities and educational institutions occur, which conditions the appearance of new mentor models. Apart from traditional mentoring grounded on behaviouristic theories which helps the novice to integrate into the work market, new mentoring models grounded on other theories and aims are being developed. Educative mentoring grounded on constructivism theories is being developed, which aims to develop the novice’s personality and his/her professional development thanks to mentor and novice’s bi-directional cooperation. Constant implementation on innovations emphasizes the need for change enhancing mentoring model. This aims at maturing the novice, able to learn together with the mentor in professional network and not only develop but also seek pre-school education quality, new theoretical concepts and implementation of reform ideas in practice.

In the structure of mentor competences the personal factor has emerged as the most important (well developed personal competence is relevant to the mentor). The factor of professional development relate the range of competences (communicative, social; leadership, life-long learning, expert assessment and reflection). Management factor has emerged as a separate one covering the competence of student practice organization and reflection. The factor of pre-school education reform and change has not emerged, though mentors with practical experience highly evaluated the attitudes and abilities of pre-school education competences referable to change fostering mentoring.

In further researches competences of educative mentor, fostering change in the early childhood education should be revised and the effectiveness of mentors having these competences should be assessed.

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