

# **Making it Real: ALANA Teacher Education Preparation, Communication and Diversity Suppositions**

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## Abstract

This article clarifies brisk salient education and communication perspectives on the need for and role of ALANA (African, Latino, Asian and Native American) teachers and teacher education students in the nation. From the co-authors' perspectives as African American professors of prospective ALANA K-12 teachers, the notion of "Making it Real: ALANA Teacher Education Preparation, Communication and Diversity Suppositions" is an aerial design that continues to be drafted. This design must be multicultural, multiethnic, multimedia and multi-disciplined in order to be fecund. The creation of a video by ALANA university teacher education students also demonstrated that diversity is invaluable and central to the teacher education process. The experiences and cultural lenses of ALANA teachers in training are seen as being equally valuable in measuring teaching and learning. Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (social learning theory) provides the theoretical underpinning for this article.

## Introduction

A skilled look at the education arena communicates that our homeland continues to skirmish with the challenge of becoming an accepting, multicultural society. The populace of minority students, or AHANA (African, Hispanic, Asian and Native American) students, continues to greaten while the number of AHANA teachers has not equated this expansion. It is a designation that is growing in reference within the news media and the academy.

According to the Office of AHANA Student Programs at Boston College, AHANA is a term that was first proposed by students at Boston College in 1979, who felt that "minority" was not a positive term for these groups (2003). A similar term, used in this paper, is ALANA, which stands for African, Latino, Asian and Native American. The terms, AHANA and ALANA, are now used by educators and students on diverse campuses such as Ithaca College, Boston College and Syracuse University.

Journalism professors Shirley Biagi of California State University at Sacramento and Marilyn Kern-Foxworth of Texas A&M University also noted the term ALANA in their 1997 book, "Facing Difference: Race, Gender, and Mass Media," when they stated that, "Although the term minority appears in some of the articles we have included, we believe that the terms 'people of color' or ALANA will be used in the future" (p. XXI).

The nation's challenges to the successful selection, retention, and development of ALANA faculty at the K-12 level include weighty barriers within academia itself that

may chill many people of color from becoming prolific and fulfilled members of the profession. Racism is certainly not the only factor, but it remains a major part.

There remains a belief in some quarters of the academy that ALANA students as prospective teachers and journalists are not intellectually capable of succeeding. If we, however, apply the 1996 definition of intelligence that William Banks of the University of California at Berkeley offers (along with a student's academic performance), "...individuals who are reflective and critical, who act self-consciously to transmit, modify, and create ideas and culture," (p. XVI) we promptly reduce the effect of this argument.

By deliberating ALANA teacher issues with the seriousness and complexity that they deserve, this discussion begins to weave narrations that will prove to be a critical interlude to business as usual. A major purpose of this article, therefore, is to investigate the status and hear the voices of students and faculty who, despite some barriers, are currently working in predominantly white education institutions. In this case, the students are four enthusiastic University of the Pacific students, in Stockton, California, majoring in teacher education, and doing their teacher training at a local elementary School in Stockton. University of the Pacific faculty highlighted in this interdisciplinary collaboration are a professor of teacher education in the School of Education and a media studies professor in the Department of Communication.

### Theoretical Underpinnings

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (social learning theory) provides the theoretical support for this article. Social Cognitive Theory envelopes imitation, identification and modeling to explain how people learn through observation of others in their environments (Baran & Davis, 2003). Bandura distinguishes between the procurement of knowledge (learning) and the observable performance based on that knowledge (behavior). One major factor is the powerful effect that imitation, identification and modeling have on learning.

Humans learn from observation. There has been some question, however, about how much and what kinds of behaviors people learn from the media. No one questions whether people can imitate what they see in the media. Imitation is the direct, mechanical reproduction of behavior. Baran and Davis (2003) cite the example of how a television viewer sees a movie called *Fuzz* in which a gang of teenagers beats and sets a hobo afire. The next day that viewer beats a homeless man sleeping on a bench and sets him on fire. Or two teenagers set fire to a New York subway tollbooth, killing its attendant, after seeing the movie *Money Train*. Both are true stories. Both demonstrate imitation.

Identification, on the other hand, is "a specific form of imitation in which copying a model, generalized beyond specific acts, springs from wanting to be and trying to be like the model with respect to some broader quality" (White, 1972, p. 252). Although only one or a very few people might have imitated the behaviors seen in the films mentioned above, how many others identified with the movies' characters? How many

others might choose a different form of violence against someone they might encounter? Imitation from media is clearly more dramatic and observable than is identification. But identification with media models might be the more lasting and significant of the media's effects.

Baran and Davis (2003) further note that the first serious look at learning through observation was offered by psychologists Neal Miller and John Dollard in 1941. Where Miller and Dollard saw social learning as an efficient form of stimulus-response learning, contemporary social cognitive theory argues that observers can acquire symbolic representations of the behavior, and these "pictures" provide them with information on which to base their own subsequent behavior. Media characters (models) can influence behavior simply by being depicted on the screen. The audience member need not be reinforced or rewarded for exhibiting the modeled behavior.

Modeling, the acquisition of behaviors through observation, is an efficient way to learn a wide range of behaviors and solutions to problems that we would otherwise learn slowly or not at all, or pay too high a price to learn in the actual environment. This learning from observation of the environment, or social cognition, is the basis of social cognitive theory. According to Bandura (1994), social cognitive theory explains psychosocial functioning in terms of triadic reciprocal causation; behavior, personal factors and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bi-directionally.

The students in University of the Pacific's Benerd School of Education learn to teach by observation and reflection. They are taught new behaviors, theory, philosophy and a body of information relative to becoming a professional in the field. Essential knowledge, skills and dispositions are important to becoming a teacher. Knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy of teaching, knowledge of practice, reflective practices and several skills areas such as leadership, classroom management, assessment, evaluation, lesson planning and organization are integral to establishing a successful teaching practice in this country. On the other hand, communication majors at the University are taught social learning theory with a focus on how much and what kinds of behaviors people learn from the media. For communication majors, scholars and practitioners, social learning encompasses imitation, modeling and identification to also explain how people learn through observation of others in their environments.

Both the education and communication majors, therefore, view imitation, modeling and identification as important to both professions and scholarship. Imitation is the direct reproduction of observed behavior. Modeling is defined as the acquisition of behaviors through observation. Identification is a special form of imitation that springs from wanting to be and trying to be like an observed model relative to some broader characteristics or qualities. In addition, the notion of diversity is also interwoven into these students' learning process.

Diversity is not simply a matter of the changing demographics in students or faculty. Attending to it has also altered the very knowledge base upon which the

intellectual integrity of the academy rests. Many institutions across the country are taking advantage of the explosion of new scholarship about the diversity of cultural traditions and histories in America and around the world. Diversity has also provided additional interpretive lenses through which to analyze ideas and society.

Many education strategies will be suggested for teacher training and some may actually be implemented as the nation becomes even more diverse. By deliberating ALANA teacher issues with the seriousness and complexity that they deserve, this discussion begins to weave narrations that will prove to be a critical interlude to business as usual.

### Cultural Lenses of Prospective Teachers: An Elementary School Visit and Video

Quality curriculum, a necessary component of improved teaching and learning, is strengthened by infusions of books, libraries, computers, software, and other curriculum materials and equipment (Anyon, 1997). However it is equally important that ALANA teachers in training be allowed to infuse their cultural strengths within the educational framework of K-12. At the end of the four teacher education students' supervised training period, they produced a reflective-oriented videotape that showed their experiences at Victory Elementary School in Stockton, California. The videotape clearly showed the importance of cultural and ethnic diversity at the school through the lenses of the four students in training. This diversity is reflected at both the student and teacher training levels. This is significant because their supervisors, master teachers and principal, were white and according to Maher and Thompson Tetreault (1997), whiteness and the effects of whiteness "shape the construction of knowledge as it is produced and resisted in the classroom" (p. 321). The video produced by the four students was not intended to be a professional film documentary, yet it captures a deep understanding of the importance of communication across ethnic and school cultures, as well as the importance of diversity in teacher education.

Within the video, there were also experiential activities and cooperating teachers and trainers. The video, as an artifact, was also filled with examples of experiential activities, cooperating teachers and trainers, children learning and student reflections. Artifacts, according to Hindley (1996) provide a vision of how extraordinary classrooms can be. There was enthusiasm from the participants, a vision for being a teacher, and discussions of being a teacher from a cultural perspective. And equally important, from the teacher education professor's perspective there was also a "spiritual" feel to the students' voices as filmmakers and teachers in training. The four ALANA students were able to bond as peers during their training and studies at the university and according to Gurin, Dey, Hurtado and Gurin, (2002), there is a correlation between the relationship between students' experiences with diverse peers in the college or university setting and their educational outcomes.

From the media specialist's perspective, although the visual quality, shots and some of the dialogue in the tape were amateurish, the students scored high marks for this short docu-story of their experiences at the elementary school for several reasons. The

film quickly grabbed the viewers' attention, the beginning also established the mood, and there was a short beginning, a lengthy middle and a short strong ending. The "what and why" element (in this case, diversity in teacher education) flowed out of the relationship between the main characters. In addition, "new habits of work habits that are collegial and public in nature, not solo and private as has been the custom" were documented in their reflection piece (Meier, 1995, p. 22).

### Mass Media and Education

The significance of the mass media is conspicuous with regards to the education enterprise. General and specialized media continue to be instrumental in telling education's story to millions of educated consumers -- from the 1998 movie, "The Faculty," to *U.S. News & World Reports'* annual "America's Best Colleges" and "America's Best Graduate Schools" guides to ongoing coverage in award winning daily and weekly newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Times of London* and the *Miami Times*.

The media - print, video, film and broadcast - are also crucial in gaining an awareness of perceptions and patterns evolving during university preparation in teacher training, as well as other disciplines, such as communications. Critical glimpses of the aspirations of these four ALANA students - and research foci of two African American university professors - were distinctly chronicled in this collaboration that also utilized film as a medium for discourse.

### Further Communications and Interdisciplinary Research Points

What people feel, think and act upon concerning teacher education can often be attributed to the media. Traditionally, there have been various accepted forms of media research carried out by academic investigators. Among the more popular areas of media research, are 1) Agenda Setting by the Media, which proposes that the public agenda - or what kinds of things people discuss, think and worry about - is powerfully shaped by what the news media choose to publicize, 2) Antisocial and Prosocial Effects of Media Content, which studies the effects of viewing television and motion pictures, 3) Uses and Gratifications, which examines how people use the media and the gratifications they seek and receive from their media behaviors, 4) Cultivation of Perceptions of Social Reality, which examines how the media affect audience perceptions of the real world, 5) Advertising and the Socialization of Children, which is based on the concern over the impact of advertising on children, and 6) Cultural Studies, which focus use of media to create forms of culture that structure everyday life. In addition, because of the ALANA subject area, the popular press might also be a fine complement to this more scholarly approach as also noted by Stanfield (1993, p. 11), who wrote:

Writing in the discourse style of the racially oppressed is viewed as unprofessional, as popular literature. This is tragic, because the conservative character of professional jargon, particularly about racial issues, often stifles if not outright destroys the passion that is an important

element for understanding the complex depths of race, racism, ethnicity, and ethnocentrism.

This latter research form is crucial because of the cultural approach of this interdisciplinary effort. The idea of using the popular press as a teaching tool has also been suggested by researchers, including Hilton (1998). In the case of joint research efforts around the teacher education theme, there are intriguing “teachable moments” and occasions to share the findings in scholarly journals, as well as via public intellectualism channels such as in education trade publications and through the popular press. These are certainly not exclusive.

### Summary

Many education strategies will be suggested for teacher training and some may actually be implemented as the nation become even more diverse. Two professors worked collaboratively to identify key communication and education concurrences and variances on the need for and role of ALANA k-12 teachers and teacher education students. Four teacher education students used several media technologies and video techniques to get the attention of experts in their field, much in the same way that professionals at *The (S.C.) State* or the *New York Times* (news organizations) use printing presses and the newspaper (technology and medium) to reach their readers (a large audience).

In the students’ youthful diplomacy they seemed to understand that the nation respects and believes in its teachers, and that teachers and teacher education students have voices. As ALANA teachers in training now in the pipeline, they can help make a teaching difference in the nation’s future.

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