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Research Article

# Improving the Cultural Responsiveness of Prospective Social Studies Teachers: An Action Research

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## Abstract

In recent years, studies on teacher training have focused on the development of a culturally responsive understanding in prospective teachers and its use to allow students benefit from learning–teaching environments in the best way possible. Considering diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students as wealth is a prerequisite for teachers to create a happy and motivated learning environment for students. Social studies teachers in particular need to become culturally responsive individuals during higher education. The research problem of the present study is “How can we ensure prospective teachers become culturally responsive individuals?” This study, conducted within the scope of the course Communication and Human Relations with third-year prospective social studies teachers, was planned as an action research. The resulting data were subjected to content analysis. Creating action plans allowed prospective teachers get to know their own culture, learn about the cultural backgrounds of their students, gain a better understanding of social, economic, and political contexts, and improve their skills and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies and their commitment to create inclusive classrooms, which are among the elements of culturally responsive teaching.

## Keywords

Teacher training • Social studies teacher • Cultural sensitivity • Culture-sensitive teacher • Action research

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Various definitions have been given for the concept of culture, which was initially used to refer to agricultural activities. In the process of history, three main uses of the concept of culture stand out. The first one is the concept of culture referring to “a general process related to mental, spiritual and aesthetic development beginning from the 18th century,” the second is the concept of culture referring to “the lifestyle of an individual, a community or a society,” and the third is the concept of culture as “products of intellectual and artistic activities” (Williams, 2005, p. 110). Culture is defined as follows in UNESCO (1982): “In its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, and beliefs.” Although today’s definition of “multiculturalism” includes multiple meanings for the concept of culture, this study uses the concepts of culture, cultural diversity, and cultural responsiveness as defined by UNESCO.

At the 33rd session of the General Conference of UNESCO in Paris, October 3–21, 2005, cultural diversity was affirmed as a defining characteristic of humanity and a convention was made stating that cultural diversity forms a common heritage of humanity and should be cherished and preserved for the benefit of all. As specified in this convention, it is necessary to provide the necessary conditions and create a culture of peace for cultures to develop and interact in a mutually beneficial manner. The most important institutions that fulfill this obligation are those of education and thus teachers. Today, many countries exhibit culturally diverse views for various reasons. For this reason, studies on teacher training, especially in Europe and the USA (Middleton, 2001; National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education [NCATE], 2008; Valentiin, 2006; etc.), highlight the importance of teachers’ developing a culturally responsive quality prior to service, facilitating, and encouraging students’ learning in educational environments. Teachers using culturally responsive teaching practices value the cultural and linguistic diversity of students and perceive this diversity as a gain in constructing knowledge rather than an obstacle to learning. These teachers use this gain (personal experience, interests, etc.) as a basis for educational links to facilitate students’ learning and development (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). Researchers confirm that teachers need to learn more about children’s worlds to present them better opportunities for learning success (Graybill, 1997; Pransky & Bailey, 2002/2003). One way to accomplish this is culturally responsive education (Gay, 2000). Indeed, culturally responsive education will enhance success levels and facilitate learning for all students. Being culturally responsive is a necessary quality for teachers to create a learning environment which provides students with the best learning opportunities regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds and where students are satisfied and supported. This becomes possible when teachers use the three dimensions of culturally responsive education efficiently. These dimensions are academic achievement, cultural elements, and sociopolitical awareness. The

interaction between these three dimensions makes significant contributions to teachers' meeting needs of different student populations (Barnes, 2006). Not only do teachers learn to be responsive to the needs, interests, and skills of students, parents, and society, but they also find the opportunity to support these for all individuals by putting the three dimensions into practice (Nieto, 1996). However, most preservice and inservice teachers believe that culturally responsive education is an abstract and theoretical process. This gap between theory and practice makes it necessary to revise most teacher training programs (Acar Çiftçi & Aydın, 2014; Açıkalın, 2010; Arslan, 2009; Cırık, 2008; Gökalp, Şahenk, & Türkmen, 2010).

To encourage them, it is necessary to see students with cultural differences as skillful learners. Effective teaching of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds requires more than special teaching methods. It requires a new perspective that understands the role of language and culture in learning. Six features stand out as necessary to create a consistent framework for professional development initiatives in schools which seek an effective solution for the increasingly diversifying student population. These features are as follows: understanding how learners construct knowledge, learning about lives of students, having sociocultural awareness, refusing stereotypes related to differences, using appropriate teaching strategies, and being fair to all students (Villagas & Lucas, 2007). These features of culturally responsive education may be collected under three dimensions as cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005, p. 53). The cognitive dimension provides information about different cultures, the affective dimension teaches about responses to problems encountered during the process of adaptation to different cultures and what needs to be done to overcome these problems, and the behavioral dimension improves the potential of the individual for effective communication with different cultures. The training in cultural differences to be given to prospective teachers to allow them become culturally responsive individuals (Eğimli, 2011, p. 220) may be summarized as follows:

Table 1  
*Dimensions of Cultural Differences Training*

Dimensions	Learning Outcomes
Cognitive dimension	To know people in the locality where the school is located
	To minimize negative thoughts about the culture encountered
	To learn about different cultures and the global culture
	To be aware of one's world view and culture as a teacher
Affective dimension	To minimize concerns about the culture encountered and to increase positive feelings
	To establish good relations with individuals from the culture encountered
Behavioral dimension	To ensure prospective teachers gain the ability to work with different cultures
	To prevent the stress caused by everyday problems experienced with different cultures from reducing the quality of education
	To communicate effectively with individuals in the area where school is located
	To provide individuals from different cultural backgrounds with opportunities to reach their goals

While it is important that teachers adapt to the culture of the area where the school is located when they start their service, it is equally important that students are in agreement and harmony with their teachers. In a culturally diverse classroom, the teacher must consider intra-classroom differences in the educational process.

For them to become culturally responsive teachers, prospective teachers must be trained in cultural differences, so that their probability of finding themselves in culturally uncertain situations is reduced and they acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to solve problems related to culture. Using this knowledge, teachers are able to quickly adapt to new communities and gain confidence, since they have been trained in the necessary approaches (Eğinli, 2011, p. 219).

A review of the relevant literature shows a number of studies on raising culturally responsive teachers. Walker (2013) investigates how prospective teachers can learn about culturally responsive teaching and, stating that culturally responsive teaching is a central component of teacher training programs and requires serious effort in the preparation process. Vavrus (2008) concludes that culturally responsive education, which challenges the dominant modes of schooling, will have a lasting effect on the development of active democratic citizens. Gay (2002) notes that culturally responsive teaching requires increased understanding of certain characteristics of different ethnic groups, since culture strongly influences attitudes, values, and behaviors. Gay (2002) states that this is possible through teachers' becoming culturally responsive to ethnically different students in their own teaching processes. Ebersole, Kanahale-Mossman, and Kawakami (2016) go beyond theoretical study, examining themes such as conducting culturally responsive activities, moving toward culturally responsive teaching as a perspective, and being a culturally responsive teacher and conclude that it is necessary to reconceptualize culture-based courses to deepen teacher perspectives rather than merely enhancing teaching activities which support culturally responsive teaching and learning.

In our review of the relevant literature in Turkey, studies such as Başbay and Bektaş (2009), Polat and Kılıç (2013), Çoban, Karaman, and Doğan (2010), Işıklar (2015), Eğinli (2011), and Polat (2009) were found. However, these studies mostly focus on discovering the perceptions and opinions of teachers and prospective teachers. Thus, considering that we were not able to find a study on culturally responsive teaching within the scope of teacher training, except for a study conducted by Ebersole et al. (2016), we believe that this study will contribute to filling a significant gap in the literature. Indeed, there are certain questions which teachers must ask themselves in face of differences in the teaching–learning environment. Questions such as “Can I ignore their differences and treat all my students the same? Will I regard students who are closer to my cultural identity as more valuable? Will I marginalize students with a certain cultural identity?” (Işıklar, 2015, p. 31) seem to be problems that can only be solved by teachers if they have competence in cultural responsiveness.

Cultural responsiveness is a quality which social studies teachers in particular need to acquire during higher education. Indeed, considering that teachers are assigned to serve in various provinces and districts according to the Public Personnel Selection Examination, the majority of teachers have the opportunity to come into contact with different cultures as soon as they start their service. For this reason, it is necessary to train teachers to be culturally responsive individuals before they start their service. On the other hand, cultural differences within student populations in schools have been increasing gradually, but instruction remains homogeneous. Interviews held with prospective teachers in the course of their applications show that they do not find themselves to be adequate in cultural responsiveness. Thus, the research problem of the present study is “How can we ensure prospective teachers become culturally responsive individuals?” The purpose of this study is allow prospective teachers to engage in self-criticism and to raise their awareness regarding cultural responsiveness.

### **Method**

This section describes the research model, study group, validity and reliability, data collection tools, and data analysis techniques.

#### **Research Model**

The research model is based on emancipatory/developmental/critical action research, a qualitative research model. According to Özpınar and Yenmez (2015, pp. 441–467), emancipatory/developmental/critical action research requires its implementers to identify daily problems that they encounter in an environment and acquire the skill to combine theory and practice to solve these problems. In action research, the researcher assumes the role of designing and implementing the action plan as the implementer. As noted by Kuzu (2009), educators who plan and implement the action research find the opportunity to better understand, interpret, change, and improve their own educational practices in the process. For this reason, the researcher assumed the role of implementer in this study and ensured that the action plan served the purposes of the study by directly observing developments throughout the process.

Thus, during interviews held for the purposes of needs analysis, the researcher/implementer asked prospective teachers whether they were ready to work in different cultural environments and whether they found themselves competent in this regard; the deficiencies in the training of culturally responsive teachers were determined to be the research problem based on the answers received. To resolve this problem, the researcher came to the conclusion that such a study was required to provide prospective teachers with the skill of combining theory and practice related to culturally responsive education. Although there can be various approaches to the action research process (Berg & Lune, 2015; Creswell, 2005; Hendrics, 2009; Johnson, 2002; etc.), it seems that the commonality of these approaches is the steps

of the process, which are as follows: selecting the research area, data collection and analysis, action plan, implementing the action plan, data collection, and analysis and assessment. This study was designed in accordance with these common steps, as shown in Figure 1.

Action research steps.

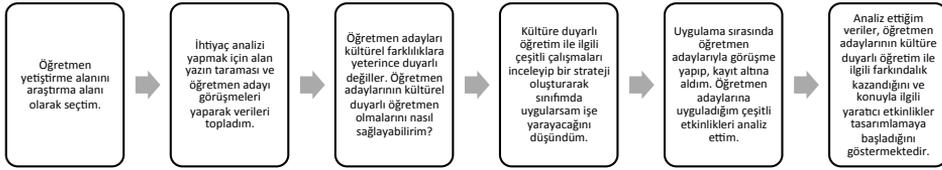


Figure 1. Action research steps.

**Action plan.** Each step of the action research process given in the figure above was adapted to the action plan by the researcher/implementer. Table 2 shows the action plan together with the time chart and application goals.

Table 2  
Time Chart

Time	Activity	Goal
Week 1	Applying the 2N (What did I know?) form	To determine preliminary knowledge, skills and perceptions of prospective teachers related to being a culturally responsive teacher prior to the start of the action plan.
Week 2	Leading prospective teachers think by asking questions related to the subject	To ask prospective teachers questions about the subject to help them prepare cognitively.
Week 3	Class discussion	To allow prospective teachers to become aware of their and others' differences and create an opinion regarding the concept of difference.
Week 4	Research and class discussion	To help prospective teachers acquire knowledge on different cultures and become aware of their and others' differences.
Week 5	Story review and sharing	To guide prospective teachers to find creative ways to sustain differences within the same environment.
Week 6	Film screening and analysis	To identify problems encountered during the process of adaptation to different cultures and find solutions to overcome these problems.
Week 7	Film screening and analysis	To have prospective teachers consider the importance of linguistic differences in communication in the educational process within the context of multiculturalism and come up with creative solutions for the problem of linguistic differences in the educational environment within the context of multiculturalism.
Week 8	Activity planning	To encourage prospective teachers to get to know themselves and their culture and come up with creative ideas to gather under the same roof by respecting differences.
Week 9	Activity sharing	To have prospective teachers share the activities they have planned and learn about each other's perspectives.
Week 10	Applying the 2N (What did I learn?) form	To determine the new knowledge, skills, and perceptions of prospective teachers related to being a culturally responsive teacher after the action plan.
Week 11	Interviewing prospective teachers	To determine the new knowledge, skills, and perceptions of prospective teachers related to being a culturally responsive teacher with their own words.

Activities performed in the action plan given in Table 2 also include data collection tools of the study. Therefore, these will not be described in detail under the *Data Collection Tools* heading.

Action research:

- Begins with the application of the “What did I know?” section of the 2N form to prospective teachers in the first week of the Communication and Human Relations course.
- Then the students are encouraged to think about the following questions.

In face of diversity in your classroom/school:

- Do you ignore differences and treat all students the same?
- Do you regard students who are closer to your cultural identity as more valuable?
- Do you marginalize students with a certain cultural identity?
- Prospective teachers perform various activities to find answers for the questions given above and come up with possible solutions.
- Class Discussion: A class discussion is held using themes and questions given in the table below and the discussion is voice recorded. The implementer listens to what prospective teachers have to say without making a judgment and ensure prospective teachers listen to each other. Then prospective teachers are handed the open-ended question form consisting of class discussion questions and asked to write down their opinions.

Table 3  
*Themes and Questions for Class Discussion*

Themes	Questions
Realizing differences	What makes you different from others?
	Does this difference makes you more or less valuable than others?
Respect for differences	Is every human being valuable? Why?
	Is there anything that makes an individual more valuable than others? Why?
Tolerance for differences	Do you feel uncomfortable when you are in the same environment as someone who is different from you? Why?
	Can you work in the same group with someone who have different traits than you? Why?
Creating common values	As individuals, we all may have different values. However, do you think that there are certain values which everyone must have as a human being? What are these values?
	Does having these common values indicate that we are all similar despite our differences? Why?

- Research and class discussion: Prospective teachers are asked to research different cultural characteristics so that they can learn about different cultures in the country where they live and research results are shared in the classroom.

A printed version of Keil et al. (2007, p. 3) was distributed to students and they were asked to read it. After reading the story, prospective teachers were asked, “How can we build a classroom/school where all differences are respected, all differences can find space to live and all differences are used effectively?” Prospective teachers were asked to write down their opinions. Once the writing process was finished, the implementer had prospective teachers share their opinions with each other. The purpose of this step was to allow students develop ideas about how differences can live in the same environment in harmony by interacting with each other.

- Film analysis: The implementer and prospective teachers watched the film *Two Languages, One Suitcase* (Eskiköy & Doğan, 2008) and analyzed it within the context of cultural diversity’s reflection on education. Prospective teachers were asked to write down their analyses and discuss them with the class. The purpose of this activity was to identify problems and responses encountered during the process of adaptation to different cultures and find solutions to overcome these problems.
- Activity planning:

In this step, prospective teachers were asked the question, “What kind of activities would you perform with your students to manage differences in your class successfully?” Opinions of prospective teachers are obtained and they are then asked to record the activities which they planned. The purpose of this activity was to allow prospective teachers improve their own potential to communicate with other cultures effectively and contribute to each other’s idea-generation process.

- Finally, the “What did I learn?” section of the 2N form was applied to prospective teachers and it was determined whether prospective teachers had acquired new knowledge, skills, and perceptions as a result of the action plan.
- Five prospective teachers were selected from the study group based on academic achievement. The selected prospective teachers were interviewed to locate in their own words new formations in the study group related to culturally responsive teaching.

### **Study Group**

Within the tradition of qualitative research, purposive sampling requires researchers to use their own judgments about whom to select for the study group and the most appropriate subjects for purposes of the study are included in the sample. Since the purpose of this study was train prospective Social Studies teachers as culturally responsive teachers, convenience sampling was used in the study, a purposive sampling method. Thus, 40 prospective teachers were enrolled in this study from among 70 students taking the Communication and Human Relations course

in the second semester of Social Studies Teaching Department, Atatürk Faculty of Education, Marmara University. Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. While the implementation was carried out together with all students, participation was considered voluntary for the parts of the study wherein prospective teachers were asked to actively do something. The study group was 19 female and 21 male students.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The social constructivist approach has developed a new language and new concepts to improve the quality of qualitative research. These new concepts include credibility instead of internal validity, transferability instead of external validity, reliability instead of consistency, and confirmability instead of objectivity. The combination of these concepts is considered reliability (Patton, 2014, p. 544). Data triangulation was employed in the study to improve reliability by using different data sources, such as individual interviews, open-ended questions, activity documents, and discussion recordings. Detailed transcripts were created from activity and interview recordings to improve the quality of the study.

Lincoln and Guba (1986, p. 76) state that constructivist theory supports different perspectives and communication and interaction between them rather than aiming to achieve a single truth and a linear estimation. In parallel with social constructivism, the prospective teachers in this study were guided by the communication and the interaction between their own experiences and backgrounds, their own worldviews, and how their behaviors are influenced by these. In other words, the focus of this study was not the direct influence of the steps of the action plan but rather the effectiveness of the communication and the interaction between prospective teachers when performing activities contained by the action plan's steps.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The 2N form, class discussion recordings, story review documents, film analysis papers, and activity planning papers were used as data collection tools. Since the action plan section of the study describes the data collection tools, they are not included in this section.

### **Data Analysis**

Class discussion recordings, story review documents, film analysis papers, and interview recordings were subjected to content analysis. The literature was reviewed when preparing the action plan and common themes were established to design the activities of the study: realizing differences, respect for differences, tolerance for differences, and creating common values. The 2N form and class discussion activities

were structured based on these themes and the resulting data were categorized around the same main themes and subthemes were created. The data obtained from story review documents, film analysis papers, and activity planning papers were abstracted to identify analysis themes inductively. The data obtained from interviews were subjected to descriptive analysis, and direct quotes from prospective teachers were presented. Additionally, the sections of the 2N form were scored on a scale of 1 to 5 to assess the significance of the differences between the sections.

### Findings and Comments

The findings obtained in this action research, in which the researcher assumed the role of implementer as well, were classified as findings obtained from the 2N form, findings obtained from class discussion, findings obtained from story review documents, findings obtained from film analysis papers, findings obtained from activity planning papers, and findings obtained from interview recordings.

#### Findings Obtained from the 2N Form

The 2N form was applied to identify preliminary knowledge of prospective teachers prior to the action plan and improvements in their knowledge after the action plan. The literature review carried out when preparing the action plan, which was used to create research activities and served as a basis to establish themes for the content analysis, was also used to identify criteria to convert the data obtained from the 2N form into scores. The criteria can be found in the table below.

Table 4

*Assessment Criteria of the 2N form*

Question	Expected answer theme	Score
What makes you different from others?	To be aware of differences	1
Is every human being valuable?	To be valuable solely for being human	1
Is there anything that makes an individual more valuable than others?	To be valuable solely for being human	1
Can you work in the same group with someone who has different traits than you?	To work together	1
Are there common values which all humans must have?	Universal values	1

To claim that prospective teachers are culturally responsive, it must first be established that they are aware of differences and diversity. It is also desirable that they value individuals just for being human and do not feel uncomfortable when working with others, since they believe everyone is equally valuable. Beyond the differences in values arising from personal differences, prospective teachers are also expected to be aware of the existence of universal values which everyone must have. Answers given by prospective teachers to relevant questions were assessed in accordance with the scoring shown in Table 4, and irrelevant answers were not

included in the assessment. The table below shows the scores obtained by prospective teachers from the 2N form, which was assessed on a scale of 1 to 5.

Table 5  
*Scores Obtained from the 2N form*

	What did I know?					What did I learn?				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
F	14	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	17
M	16	3	2	-	-	-	-	1	2	18
Total	30	7	3	-	-	-	-	1	4	35

As can be seen in the table, none of the prospective teachers obtained a score of 4 or 5 in the “What did I know?” section, whereas 35 prospective teachers obtained a full score from the “What did I learn?” section. This corresponds to 85% of the study group included in the research. Therefore, a comparison between scores obtained by prospective teachers in the “What did I know?” section and the “What did I learn?” section of the 2N form shows that prospective teachers had increased awareness of differences and diversity after taking part in activities designed to improve their cultural responsiveness.

### Findings Obtained from Class Discussion

The findings obtained from class discussion were categorized around main themes in the 2N form and subjected to content analysis. Each main theme is presented in a separate table so that relevant subcategories and subthemes obtained by inductive abstraction of student statements can be seen clearly.

Table 6  
*Analysis of the “Realizing Differences” Theme*

Main theme	Categories	Subthemes	f
Realizing differences	Innate traits	• Physical appearance	5
		• Cultural characteristics	24
		• Ethnic origin	18
		• Gender	9
		• Language	12
	Acquired traits	• Religion	2
		• Strong character	3
		• Authenticity	5
		• Open mindedness	8
		• Empathy	2
		• Tolerance	9
		• Skill	9

As shown in the table above, what prospective teachers understand by “difference” was mostly traits acquired by individuals at birth. These innate traits include the language and culture of the family into which the individual is born and his or her physical appearance, ethnic origin, and gender. Prospective teachers mostly emphasized cultural characteristics, followed by ethnic origin and linguistic differences. The most frequently mentioned acquired traits were tolerance, skill,

and open mindedness (In this theme, the total number of students exceeds 40, since students answered questions related to more than one subtheme).

Table 7  
*Analysis of the “Respect for Differences” Theme*

Main theme	Categories	Positive	F	Negative	F
Respect for differences	Every human being is valuable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For being human</li> <li>• Without discrimination</li> <li>• The reason for being</li> </ul>	24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terrorists are not valuable.</li> <li>• Those who are fools are not valuable.</li> </ul>	1
	Some people are more valuable than others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No, they are equals.</li> <li>• No, everyone is human after all.</li> <li>• No, everybody has the same value; achievement in science or art or other traits are like clothes people wear. Clothes do not make a person more valuable.</li> </ul>	11 22 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, those who resemble us are more valuable.</li> <li>• Scientific or artistic ideas can make a person more valuable than others.</li> </ul>	2 2 2

In the “respect for differences” theme, the majority of prospective teachers stated that everybody was valuable solely for being human. One of the prospective teachers suggested that those who commit acts of terrorism were not valuable and another prospective teacher suggested those who are fools were not valuable (when asked, this prospective teacher defined “fools” as those who waste their time with foolish things); 90% of prospective teachers held that everyone was equal, as each individual was human after all and individual differences did not make individuals any less valuable; 10% of prospective teachers stated that there were certain privileges that make individuals more valuable, and these privileges included resembling the person who makes judgment sand engaging in scientific or artistic activities.

Table 8  
*Analysis of the Tolerance for Differences Theme*

Main theme	Categories	Positive	F	Negative	F
Tolerance for differences	Being together with different individuals	I would certainly not feel uncomfortable	35	I would feel uncomfortable	5
	Working with different individuals	Of course, I would work with them	37	I cannot work with them	3

The vast majority of prospective teachers responded that they would not feel uncomfortable being in the same environment together with individuals who are different than them, whereas five prospective teachers stated that they would feel uncomfortable. However, two of these prospective teachers stated that they could work with people who are different even if they felt uncomfortable, and only three prospective teachers stated that they could not work with them. Therefore, the vast majority of prospective teachers expressed that they could work with individuals who were different.

Table 9  
*Analysis of the Creating Common Values Theme*

Main theme	Categories	Subthemes	F
Creating common values	Common values	• Honor, virtue, honesty, etc.	2
		• Respect	13
		• Kindness	1
		• Moral principles	1
		• Human rights	1
		• Spiritual values	5
		• Freedom	1
		• Tolerance, love	15
		• Peace	1
		Similarities among differences	• Having common values
	• Being happy or sad over the same thing		3
	• Being alive		3
	• We are all human		14
			• Diversity is wealth

Under the creating common values theme, the majority of prospective teachers stated that being human was the most basic similarity, and it was a common desire for humans to have common values; thus, having common values constituted a similarity among differences. A considerable portion of the prospective teachers believed that respect, love, and tolerance were values which everybody must have. As a result, prospective teachers questioned the meaning of the concept of difference in the class discussion activity and gained awareness of the concepts that they and others attribute to differences. Prospective teachers expressed their opinions during the class discussion and they were influenced by each other from time to time and thus acquired different ideas. This shows that discussion is an important activity that reveals one's current status and raises awareness of individuals. A sample selection from the discussion recordings is presented below to enhance the credibility of this improvement.

Table 10  
*A Section of the Class Discussion*

Teacher: Is every human being valuable? Is there anything that makes an individual more valuable than others?

A: My musical talent makes me valuable. I believe I am more valuable than those who have no talent.

B: Well, my friend. D has athletic talent against your musical talent. So, which one of you is more valuable?

A: Hmm.

C: I hesitated to answer when B said that. I consider myself to be religious. Is it something valuable?

E: Can you scale these traits?

D: Every person in this classroom has a trait which makes him or her valuable. But is one of these traits more valuable than others?

A: Of course, some traits provide an advantage. For example, I might be a famous musician and become rich. I already have many fans.

E: What you are saying is traits that provide an advantage are valuable and other traits are not. So, are we supposed to calculate advantages of talent, ethnic origin, belief, or lifestyle to determine their value?

G: I think nobody is entitled to make such valuations. First of all, we are valuable solely for being human. We are not an economic commodity. Each society determines good or bad values based on its own judgment. I do not think we can say "This society is not valuable or that person's life style is not valuable."

A: I guess you may be right...

### **Findings Obtained from the Research and the Class Discussion Activity**

In the first step, prospective teachers were asked, “What do you know about different cultures living in our country?” In the second step, prospective teachers were asked to do research on the culture that they want to learn the most about. Then prospective teachers shared the results of their research in the classroom. They focused on similarities and differences between cultures. Prospective teachers from different cultural backgrounds were asked various questions and the parallelisms between the research results and real life experiences were compared. Since this activity focused on interactions between prospective teachers during the class discussion process, no analysis was performed. A sample section from the activity is presented below.

Table 11

*A Section of the Research and Class Discussion*

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A: I used to perceive Alevism to be different from Islam, because they do not go to the mosque and have a separate place of worship. As a result of my research, I found that Alevism is not so different from other Islamic sects. My friend F, you said you are an Alevi. How can you enlighten us on this issue?

F: I go to the mosque. My family does too. Essentially, as you said, we are an Islamic sect. I mean, after all, we are Muslims and the Quran is our holy book. However, different events occurred in the past due to political or similar reasons and different life styles emerged. For example, Anatolian Alevis and Persian Alevis may have different lifestyles. As I said, practices became distinct in the course of time due to a number of different reasons. But of course, each life style should be evaluated in its own cause and effect relationship. For this reason, we cannot say “This is more valuable and that is not.”

N: I am an Alevi as well, but neither I nor my family go to the mosque, because Ali was killed there. But we perform the salaah.

K: The information provided by our friends is very valuable. I see that we are very similar regardless of religion or ethnic origin. Different reasons give direction to our lives and different traditions are formed. This is what we have in common.

Z: I realize as I learn about different cultures here that we are both similar and different. Human beings always feel the need to hold onto something and try to do what their ancestors used to do to maintain their existence. So being human is our most basic common value, and I do not think there is a more important value.

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As can be seen, the class discussion held by prospective teachers as a result of their research improved the interaction between them and led to a process of improvement in terms of cultural responsiveness.

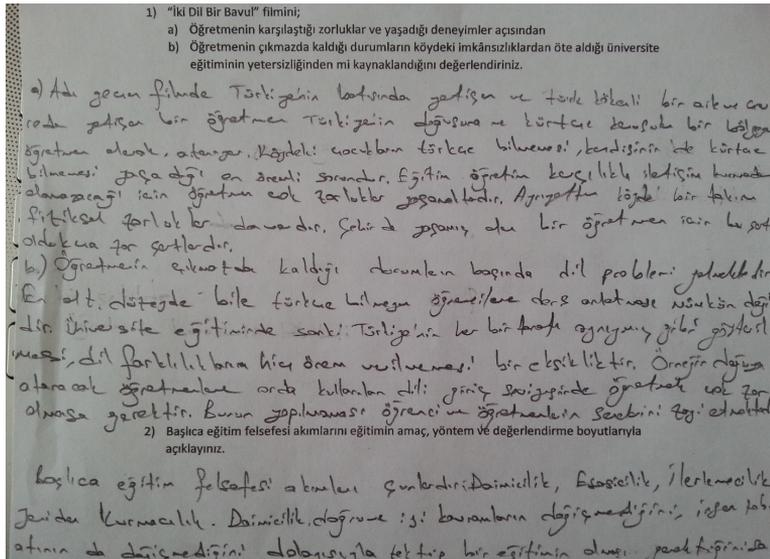
### **Findings Obtained from Film Analysis Papers**

In this step, the researcher and prospective teachers watched the film titled “*Two Languages, One Suitcase*” together and the prospective teachers were asked to analyze how cultural differences are reflected in education and then share their analyses, so that they would find the opportunity to see each other’s perspectives. The following shows the results of the content analysis applied to the film analysis papers of prospective teachers. The themes and categories of the content analysis were obtained from the statements of prospective teachers using inductive abstraction.

Table 12  
Film Analysis

Themes	Categories	Sample statements	F
Educational environment	Quality of the physical space	The teacher is baffled by the filthiness and age of the school, there is not even water.	39
	Combined classes	There is only one class and students from 1st grade to 5th grade receive education in the same place.	28
Student quality	Lack of prior knowledge	It seems students never went to school before, besides none of them is in the classroom when the teacher arrives at the school.	35
	Inability to express oneself	The students do not speak Turkish, so they are not able to express themselves.	40
Communication	Common reference area	The teacher and students have different cultures and languages.	40
Multicultural personality	Being open to different cultures	The teacher wants to achieve something, but I do not think that he is open to different cultures, because he did not care to learn about the place before he went there.	34
	Empathy	The teacher cannot empathize with the students, he gets angry and yells at them when they fail to express themselves, but it is not their fault that they do not speak Turkish.	35

As shown in Table 10, the analyses made by prospective teachers about the film were assessed within the framework of the educational environment, student quality, communication, and multicultural personality themes. All prospective teachers realized that a problem was encountered in the film in relation to communication and questioned the actions of the teacher in the film against the ideal multicultural personality. The film analysis written by one of the prospective teachers, F<sub>2</sub>, can be seen below in her handwriting.

Figure 2. F<sub>2</sub>'s sample film analysis.

F<sub>2</sub> stated that linguistic differences were not foregrounded as much as necessary in the film, given their importance. However, the film clearly showed that difficulties experienced by teachers in different regions of assignment were due to cultural differences. In the film analysis activity, prospective teachers became aware of the fact that linguistic difference is an important problem in communication and stated at the end of the activity that linguistic differences must be given importance after examining events in the film within the context of multiculturalism. The purpose of this activity was to identify problems encountered during the process of adaptation to different cultures, which constitutes the affective dimension of culturally responsive education, and find solutions to overcome these problems, and we believe that the activity achieved its purpose.

### **Findings Obtained from Story Review Documents**

In this activity, prospective teachers were asked to read the story "*The Giraffe and the Elephant*," and after reading the story, prospective teachers were asked, "How can we build a classroom or school where all differences are respected, all differences can find space to live and are used effectively?" The opinions of prospective teachers were analyzed and categorized around various themes, as shown in the table below, which also includes sample statements from prospective teachers.

In examining the findings from the story review documents, it can be seen that prospective teachers usually came together on similar themes. Prospective teachers used statements emphasizing the various interests and needs of students, looking for ways to allow different cultures live together and the management of differences. The emphasis on the interests and needs of students includes an interesting motif: "Establishing a connection with school." For example, F<sub>1</sub> expressed her opinion as follows: "There must be a connection between the school and the student, the school must embrace the student like a loving mother. The student should be able to come to the school outside of classes as well, for example to read a book in a corner of the schoolyard or to work in different settings within the school on his interests." A sample statement of M<sub>6</sub> regarding the synergy between different cultures theme can be seen below with his own handwriting.

Table 13  
 Story Review Analysis

Theme	Categories	Student Number	Sample Statements
Interests and needs	Establishing a connection with school	5	Students should not come to school only for information. They should have a connection with the school, and the school must be designed in a way that allows students to come sit under a tree and read.
	Types of disability	25	Schools must have special sound systems for the visually impaired and accessibility for the physically impaired.
	Interesting libraries	1	We have to create interesting libraries so that individuals with Turkish culture, Kurdish culture, and other cultures can find any book they are looking for.
	Common language-mother tongue classrooms	3	I would establish classrooms where students can receive education in their mother tongue and where there was a common language classroom so that everyone can understand each other.
	Sense of equality	16	We need to ensure that students learn that differences in physical appearance do not come to mean that people are not equals, and respect for physical differences must be acquired by students as a behavior.
Synergy between different cultures	Cultural exchange	35	We must provide students with opportunities to share their own culture with their peers.
	Mediating teachers	31	Teachers must assume the role of the mediator in education.
	Enhancing common points	29	We must enhance points of commonality without emphasizing differences.
	Parts of the whole	22	There is an order in functioning of any machine, think of a car engine or gears in a clock. Each one is different and fulfills a different task. But the result is the same: the car runs, the clock runs. We might organize children in accordance with this system.
	Common purpose	37	I believe we can achieve this by directing them, I mean those who are different, to the same purpose.
	Empathy	29	First, we need to ensure that teachers empathize and then, we need to encourage students to empathize and better understand each other, show tolerance and respect.

Onları, yani farklı olanları, ortak bir amaca yönelterek bunu başarabiliriz diye düşünüyorum.

Mesela bir araba motoru yada bir saatin içindeki çarklar herhangi bir makinenin işleyişinde bir düzen vardır. Her biri farklıdır, farklı görevi yerine getirir. Ama sonuç aynıdır araba çalışır, saat çalışır.

Çocukları da sonucu anlatarak birliğe başarabileceğimizi bir sistem kurularak onları öğretebiliriz. Birbirlerine saygılı olmalarını sağlayabiliriz.

Figure 3. M<sub>6</sub>'s sample statement.

M<sub>6</sub> saw differences as parts of a whole, mentioned that all parts were necessary for the whole to function and stated that differences could be routed to a common purpose to ensure they maintain their existence. During this activity, prospective teachers

looked for creative ways to allow different cultures live together and emphasized the importance of being culturally responsive teachers with statements regarding the management of differences.

### Findings Obtained from Activity Planning Papers

In this step of the action plan, prospective teachers were asked to design a range of activities they could use in the classroom as culturally responsive teachers. Activities planned by prospective teachers were grouped according to themes, as shown in the table below.

Table 14  
*Activities Grouped According to Themes*

Activity name	Activity theme	Activity type
I am both similar and different	Similarities among differences	Card game
Tolerance	Tolerance for differences	Tolerance board
We are Turkey all together	Common values	Drama
Cultural diversity is wealth	Diversity is wealth	Role play
Gathered under a single roof	Breaking stereotypes/biases	Project-based learning
If I were you	Tolerance	Empathy
The sense of “we”	Tolerance for differences	Parent cooperation
Language learning	Communication	Subtitled film screening
Familiarizing with differences	Common ground	Artist biography
Finding a common ground between differences	Similarities among differences	Culture day
Let’s get to know each other	Breaking stereotypes	Learning about cultures
Feelings	Understanding each other’s feelings	Charades
Communication	Being aware of differences	Empathy
Respect for differences	Diversity is wealth	Six hats thinking
Filled with feelings	Understanding different perspectives	Story completion
Understanding feelings	Listening	Empathy
Do not categorize me	Preventing discrimination	Creating heterogeneous groups
Familiarization	Creating a common action	Culture day
Let’s get to know each other	Common values	Culture introduction day
The route of the colors	Learning about differences	Group work
Let’s get to know cultures	Learning about differences	Card games
I am learning about my homeland	Learning about cultures	Ball passing game
Let’s enrich our society	Respect for differences	Drama
Our differences	Common roof	Empathy
We are all the same	Common roof	Jigsaw puzzle

It can be seen that the activities designed by prospective teachers were mostly related to getting to know oneself and one’s country, respecting differences, and gathering differences under a common roof.

An activity written by F<sub>4</sub> is presented below in her own handwriting as a sample activity designed by prospective teachers.

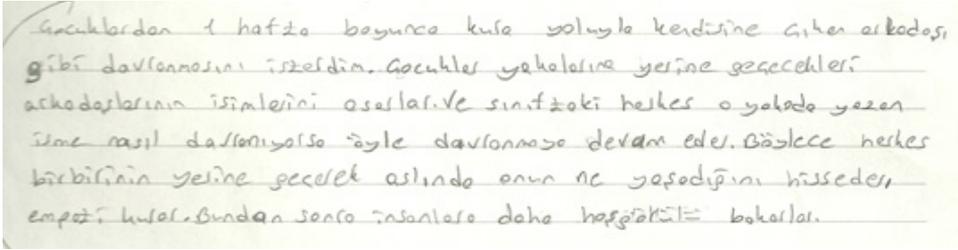


Figure 4. F<sub>4</sub>'s sample activity.

F<sub>4</sub>'s statements show that she thought organizing a “substitution” activity would encourage students to empathize with others and better understand each other’s opinions and behaviors. An expected outcome of this activity was to improve the tolerance of students for each other.

The activity designed by a prospective teachers, M<sub>3</sub>, can be seen below as a sample.

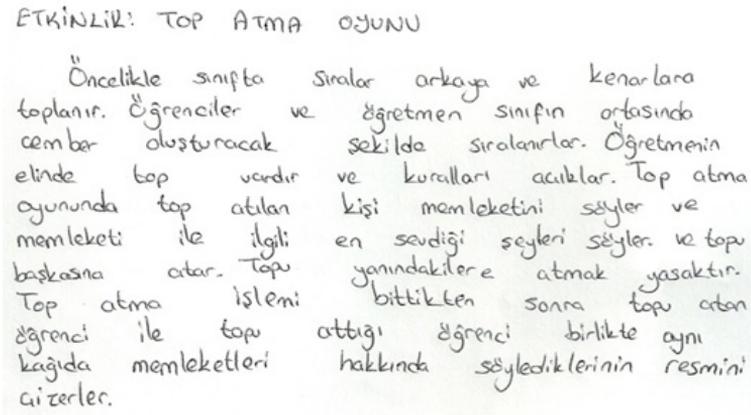


Figure 5. M<sub>3</sub>'s sample activity.

In this activity, M<sub>3</sub> designed a game intended to allow students get to know each other’s cultures. The game is not difficult to play, does not require much material, and leads students to learn different things about their peers’ cultures.

The results obtained from the analysis of activities designed by prospective teachers can be summarized as follows:

- It must be remembered that all students in the class are equals and the teacher must maintain an attitude that will not upset the equality.
- Tasks and responsibilities given to students, such as project assignments, must be designed to embrace all cultures.

- Students from different cultural backgrounds should be given the opportunity to introduce literature, folklore, art, and cuisine specific to their culture by associating them with the course.
- It should be ensured that students understand diversity means wealth.
- The idea that “diversity is wealth” must be reflected within the context of multiculturalism by creating heterogeneous groups.

### **Findings Obtained from Interviews**

Five participants, about 10% of the prospective teachers who participated in the study, chosen by academic achievement, were interviewed about the process. Prospective teachers were asked, “What effects has this study on the management of diversity had on you? Have there been any changes in your opinions or behaviors?” and the answers given by prospective teachers were recorded. Selections from the interviews are given below.

F<sub>5</sub> expressed her opinion about effects of the study as follows:

I started to think that I need to reconsider my prejudices. This process showed me that culture is a space where prejudices collide. Of course, we all love our own culture. We believe that we are the best and we are always right. I realized that this is ethnocentrism. I mean, if everyone believes they are right, who is right? It means that there is no such thing as right when it comes to culture. We all have two eyes, two ears, a nose, and a mouth, yet our faces are so different. Culture is just like that. I mean, after all, we will be teachers and I would say we need to reconsider our prejudices. I believe this is how we can manage differences well.

F<sub>5</sub>'s statements show that she realized ethnocentrism and became aware of the fact that she had certain prejudices. It seems that she underwent both cognitive and affective changes.

Another participant in the study, M<sub>1</sub>, expressed his opinion as follows:

I learned that I need to keep examining and changing myself so that I can manage diversity effectively. I had never thought about it before. I saw differences in the classroom only as differences in learning styles. On the other hand, I believe that if I can understand my students' cultures, they will trust me more. This is very important to me.

E<sub>1</sub>'s statements show that he came to realize the importance of openness and flexibility, which are among the most important traits of a culturally responsive teacher.

Another prospective teacher, F<sub>12</sub>, gave the following answer:

Not knowing about different cultures would cause me to overlook the potential of my students, which would shatter their self-confidence. Not knowing behavior codes of their culture, I

might interpret their behavior incorrectly. We learned in the communication course that there must be a common reference area for healthy message exchange between the source and the receiver. Now I understand what this means. I have realized that one of our most important mistakes is to fail to think in a guided manner. I mean, we do not think systematically and in-depth about certain topics. In this study, activities allowed us to think in a guided manner about management of differences. It allowed us to find solutions in our own way.

F<sub>12</sub> pointed to the importance of learning about different cultures for effective communication and also mentioned the importance of thinking systematically and in depth about certain topics.

M<sub>18</sub> expressed the following opinions:

Sometimes we think so much about the Public Personnel Selection Examination that we forget to think about what we will do once we start our service as teachers. This study allowed me to start to think about that. I have never lived anywhere other than Istanbul. I have met with individuals from different ethnic or cultural groups only in my university life. But in university, you do not have to talk with anyone if you do not want to. This will not be the case when we start our service. If you want to be a good teacher, you have to communicate with all your students. For example, I might be assigned to the Black Sea region or to the Eastern Anatolian region. To communicate with someone, first you have to get to know them. It turns out communication is not only speaking the same language. Thanks to this study, I have realized the high level of diversity in our country. But of course, I have seen how we fight for human values in spite of our differences. If I get assigned to a region with a different culture than mine, I plan to learn everything about the cultural characteristics of that region before I start my service. Of course, this study would be merely preliminary. I will do my best to get to know my students and their families once I get there. Of course, getting to know them is not enough, I need to break the stereotypes in my mind.

As can be understood from his statements, M<sub>18</sub> tried to develop the behavior of “trying to understand behaviors and opinions of individuals without being critical,” which can be listed among the traits of a culturally responsive teacher. It is obvious that M<sub>18</sub>, similar to F<sub>12</sub>, valuing exchanging messages with correct communication codes of each culture.

Another prospective teacher who participated in the study, F<sub>8</sub>, made the following statement about the effects of the study:

When we start our service as teachers, we will probably be in an environment that we are not used to. This does not have to be in another city or region exactly. Some schools in Istanbul are like a mosaic of cultures. For this reason, I can say that my eyes have been opened to differences. I believe this is the most important effect of this study on me. There is also flexibility. I used to perceive flexibility was like changing colors like a chameleon, but the flexibility of a teacher is different. It actually means to be able to break the stereotypes in your mind to adapt to new situations. We do not allow ourselves to break these stereotypes. However, I have realized that flexibility means allowing yourself to do so. In other words, it means understanding behaviors of the person you are dealing with and acting accordingly.

What can we teach our students if we cannot understand them?

It seems that F<sub>8</sub> understood the importance of trying to understand the characteristics of the culture one deals with.

Once we consider the findings in terms of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of culturally responsive education (Table 13), we can see that the activities allowed prospective teachers to engage in communication and interaction, which are among the most basic elements of culturally responsive education, and these activities not only showed the current status of prospective teachers regarding cultural responsiveness but also provided them with opportunities to improve their potential in communicating effectively with other cultures. Naturally, developing a formative education on a certain subject is not a short process. However, we believe that this study has made a certain progress along the steps of this long-term process.

Table 15  
*Comparative Presentation of the Data Obtained*

Dimensions of culturally responsive education			
Data	Cognitive dimension	Affective dimension	Behavioral dimension
Class discussion	Prospective teachers questioned the meaning of the concept of difference with the class discussion activity.	They gained awareness of concepts that they and others attribute as differences.	Prospective teachers expressed their opinions during the class discussion and they were influenced by each other from time to time and thus acquired different ideas.
Research and class discussion	Prospective teachers learned about different cultures in the country where they live.	They also gained perceptions of the characteristics of different cultures.	The results of research were discussed in the classroom.
Story review	Prospective teachers learned about the conditions necessary for different cultures to coexist.	They shared their opinions about creative ways to allow different cultures to coexist.	They found solutions for problems related to the management of differences.
Film analysis	Prospective teachers became aware of the fact that linguistic differences are an important problem.	They empathized with those who are unable to communicate.	They learned about problems encountered during the process of adaptation to different cultures and what to do to overcome these problems.
Activity planning	They realized students are equals in every aspect.	They understood that diversity is a kind of wealth.	They reduced the number of prejudices as much as possible by learning about each other's cultural characteristics in the classroom environment.
2N form	Prospective teachers realized cultural differences between their classmates.	They developed the understanding that everyone is valuable solely for being human.	They concluded that everyone has common value as humans.
Interview	Prospective teachers stated that they learned the traits of a culturally responsive teacher.	They stated that this study allowed them to reduce their prejudices and ethnocentric feelings.	They decided to improve their effective communication and interaction skills.

## Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

In conclusion, various activities were performed within the framework of the action plan developed to train prospective Social Studies teachers to be culturally responsive teachers. These activities encouraged prospective teachers to examine the concept of difference and gain awareness of traits that others consider to be differences. Prospective teachers also became aware of the fact that linguistic differences are an important problem in communication, and after examining the situation within the context of multiculturalism, they concluded that they must be given importance. During another activity, prospective teachers looked for creative ways to allow different cultures live together and emphasized the importance of being culturally responsive teachers with statements regarding management of differences. Prospective teachers developed creative ideas about getting to know oneself and one's culture, respecting differences and gathering differences under a common roof. In accordance with these results, it is believed that being able to see differences between individuals from different cultural backgrounds and assessing events accordingly is an important quality for teachers. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2008) emphasizes the importance of cultural responsiveness in teacher training. Among studies conducted in this context, Assaf and Lopez (2015) was performed in an elementary school which Spanish speaking Hispanic-Americans attend for a semester. In this study, the researchers established writing clubs to positively affect students' learning and designed these clubs as warm environments where students can write about what excites them, share their feelings and opinions, and interact with prospective teachers. At the end of the study, prospective teachers had had the opportunity to work with students from different cultural backgrounds and were also able to contribute to the students' learning. Although this study and that of Assaf and Lopez, which obtained successful results and dealt directly with the field of education, present similar results in terms of training prospective teachers as culturally responsive individuals, in our study prospective social studies teachers implemented action plans in the classroom environment. Thus, similar contributions were made in this study to those of Assaf and Lopez through the creation of interactive environments through activities performed by prospective teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Brown (2007) noted that there had been an increase in the number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and education in the U.S. and suggested that the problem lies in the way educators responded to this change. Brown a positive or negative response could affect the self-esteem and academic success of students from varied cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Brown suggested therefore, that it is necessary to challenge schools and educators to find creative ways to work with these students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

and develop a closer fit between students' home cultures and the culture of the school and advocates that this is only possible through culturally responsive teaching. The importance of raising culturally responsive teachers was shown in the needs analysis performed in this study, and an action plan was prepared to find creative ways to work together. The activities performed within the scope of the action plan allowed prospective teachers to take their first steps toward eliminating their prejudices and concerns related to cultural diversity.

Weinstein (2004) note the effects of culturally responsive teaching: "Given the increasing diversity of our classrooms, a lack of multicultural competence can exacerbate the difficulties that novice teachers have with classroom management. Definitions and expectations of appropriate behavior are culturally influenced, and conflicts are likely to occur when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds. However, culturally responsive classroom management can solve this problem." In conclusion, Weinstein found five essential components for culturally responsive classroom management. These components include recognition of one's own ethnocentrism; knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds; understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context; ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies; and commitment to building caring classrooms. Prospective social studies teachers presented a considerable portion of these five essential components within the scope of the action plan implemented in the present study. Prospective teachers engaged in research to learn about their own culture, identified cultural differences which may exist in their classroom, tried to find ways to manage these differences, and found love and respect to be important factors in management of diversity.

Banks et al. (2001) note that academic achievement is not sufficient to educate teachers, and being culturally responsive is a necessary element in teacher training. In parallel, the results of the present study show that academic achievement alone is not a sufficient element in teacher training. Indeed, it can be seen that some of the students who received the lowest scores on the "What did I know?" section of the 2N form were among the students with highest academic achievement.

Barnes (2006) sought to answer the question, "How do we prepare preservice teachers to teach in a culturally responsive manner?" Barnes intended to have prospective teachers work with a culturally and linguistically diverse student population and gain a more integrative, connected learning experiences, planning situations where prospective teachers create rich learning environment through activities such as autobiographical poems and cultural artifacts, cultural diversity awareness inventories, book discussion groups, inquiry projects, and structured field experiences. A strategy containing various activities to train culturally responsive

teachers was determined in [Barnes](#), and the author noted that constructing teacher training programs such that they support students from diverse cultural backgrounds would result in positive developments. In parallel with [Barnes](#), an action plan was prepared to produce culturally responsive teachers in our study as well. We provided prospective teachers with awareness and allowed them reconstruct their reality through communication and interaction with processes such as class discussions, film analysis, story review, and activity planning.

As in the studies mentioned above, it was attempted in this study as well to improve the awareness of prospective teachers regarding diversity, and then various activities were performed to educate them to be culturally responsive teachers. It was found that the level of awareness of prospective teachers improved throughout the research process, and thus they took their first steps toward being culturally responsive teachers. At the end of the study, we believe that the prospective teachers had reached the level of developing activities to manage diversity as culturally responsive teachers. The following recommendations may be presented in accordance with the study process and results.

- It is recommended that different implementation studies be conducted to improve the diversity management and cultural responsiveness skills of prospective teachers. Indeed, studies in this field mostly focus on determining perceptions, opinions, and perspectives. It is also possible to include activity-based trainings to these determination studies to identify whether positive changes occurred.
- For example, the purpose of [Marx and Moss \(2011\)](#) is to explore improvements in intercultural competencies of prospective teachers after a semester of experience in a teacher training program abroad. This program provides prospective teachers with opportunities to face their ethnocentric world views through study abroad and start to think about cultural effects in learning and teaching. Findings obtained in the study show that this program positively affects intercultural improvement. As in [Marx and Moss](#), it is recommended that future studies on producing culturally responsive teachers allow students encounter with different cultures via experiences abroad. It is believed that these experiences will positively affect the ethnocentric perspectives of prospective teachers.
- It is recommended that observations be made during school practicums of trainee teachers, their competencies and incompetencies be identified, and trainings be organized to address their shortcomings.

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