

Intercultural Inquiry with Pre-Service Teachers: Executive Summary July 11, 2007

Researchers: Dr. Nancy Arthur, Dr. Darren Lund, Dr. Yan Guo, University of Calgary

Educational institutions are a primary vehicle for transmitting attitudes and behaviours that either enhance or pose barriers for social inclusion. Codes of ethics for professionals who work in educational institutions provide standards of practice directed at respect, dignity, and rights for all persons. However, professionals who work in public institutions such as schools need to be adequately trained with curriculum focused on cultural diversity and inclusive practices. Teachers have roles and responsibilities as agents of the integration of immigrant children and youth, particularly visible minorities. The purpose of this study was to examine how intercultural competence is experienced by pre-service teachers through reflective practice and intercultural inquiry. Three research questions guided the study, 1) What methods are effective for engaging pre-service teacher preparation in intercultural inquiry?; 2) What values conflicts and dilemmas about intercultural teaching emerge for pre-service teachers?; and, 3) What teaching and learning practices enhance the development of intercultural competencies? Thirty-three students in their first year of the Master of Teacher preparation program at the University of Calgary provided their perspectives through critical incident questionnaires, focus groups and one individual interview. Data was synthesized using interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Major Findings:

1. There are multiple understandings of diversity among pre-service teachers.
2. Pre-service teachers did not always feel equipped to respond effectively to diversity.
3. Pre-service teachers felt a disconnection between theory and practice.
4. Self-examination and reflection are important in the process of intercultural inquiry.

Key Implications and Recommendations:

1. Fostering self-awareness as a foundation competency

Intercultural competence needs to be understood as a dynamic process driven primarily through the process of critical self-examination of the cultural contexts that influence one's behaviour, attitudes and beliefs.

2. Supporting teachers as learners

A climate of inclusiveness of all new Canadians needs to be enhanced through assisting policy makers in government, school boards, schools, and universities and by expanding teachers' professional codes of ethics from principles to practices when working with students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

3. Teaching content about diversity versus a learning process

Building stronger linkage between professional education curriculum in post-secondary programs and practice realities in schools should be given priority; there is a need for a closer connection between theory and practice in responding to diversity. This requires the infusion of intercultural competencies into the professional education curriculum.

4. Addressing student group needs while addressing individual student needs

The inclusion of more intercultural and multilingual expertise and opportunities in our pre-service programs needs to be adopted. Experiential learning can be enhanced through

pedagogy that is informed by critical incidents based on actual scenarios of teaching and learning.

Intercultural Inquiry with Pre-Service Teachers: Final Report July 11, 2007

Dr. Nancy Arthur, Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Calgary.

Dr. Darren Lund, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Calgary

Dr. Yan Guo, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Calgary

Tara Musk, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education, University of Calgary

Background Context

Educational institutions are a primary vehicle for transmitting attitudes and behaviors that either enhance or pose barriers for social inclusion. Professionals who work in public institutions such as schools need to be adequately trained with curriculum focused on cultural diversity and inclusive practices (Dei & James, 2002; Hesch, 1999). Teachers have roles and responsibilities as agents of the integration of children and youth of immigrant origin, particularly visible minorities. Research shows that many teachers are uninformed about how to work effectively with students from different cultural backgrounds (Alberta Beginning Teachers' Survey, 2002; Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004; O'Byrne, 2001). As we consider ways to support new Canadian children with the settlement and integration process, attention must also be paid to the process through which professionals such as teachers view intercultural competence and acquire competencies to support their interactions with diverse student populations. This includes helping pre-service teachers identify, confront, and resolve conflicts of values that occur when working across cultures (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003; St. Denis & Schick, 2003). This research project focused on the cultural competence of pre-service teachers and ways to prepare them for responding to the needs of diverse student populations.

Goals and Research Questions

The overarching goal of this research project was to examine the meanings of intercultural competence for pre-service teachers in the Master of Teacher Preparation (MT) program at the University of Calgary through three research questions:

- 1) What methods are effective for engaging pre-service teacher preparation in intercultural inquiry?
- 2) What values conflicts and dilemmas about intercultural teaching emerge for pre-service teachers?
- 3) What teaching and learning practices enhance the development of intercultural competencies?

Methodology

The critical incident technique was selected as the methodology for investigating pre-service teachers' understandings about intercultural competence. The critical incident technique is associated with the case study method. In essence, critical incidents are brief descriptions of vivid events that people remember as being meaningful in their experience (Brookfield, 1995; Pedersen, 1995). In the current study, critical incidents were collected from student teachers' experiences of meaningful events in their on-campus and field-placement learning related to cultural competence. Critical incidents were collected through two methods. First, questionnaires contained five open-ended questions focusing on, a) learning experiences with on-campus curriculum pertaining to cultural diversity, b) learning experiences with field-

experiences pertaining to cultural diversity, c) emerging values conflicts, d) use of cultural competencies, and e) identification of competencies for future development. Questionnaires were collected monthly during the 2005/06 academic year. Second, three focus groups were conducted at the end of semester one to discuss the questions noted above in a group format. Thirty-three students in their first year of the Master of Teacher preparation program participated. *Critical incidents* were collected through a total of 67 questionnaires and 3 focus groups and 1 individual interview. Data was synthesized using interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

Results

Several key themes are apparent from the data in light of the three main objectives of the study.

Objective A: Better understand how teachers view emerging issues related to intercultural competence

The pre-service teachers indicated that intercultural competence is pressing, relevant and requires significant attention. They define diversity broadly extending from ESL students to cultural and religious backgrounds to individual learning styles and physical disabilities. They value multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion though some identify some of its problems and limitations. Finally, the pre-service teachers are grappling with how to bridge what they are learning in their university classes with what they are experiencing in their field placements. They find intercultural competence to be a complex dynamic that cannot easily be practiced. However, pre-service teachers felt that there was a disconnection between theory and practice in responding to the diversity of the students they are teaching. Many participants did not feel equipped to deal with diversity in practice. In contrast, some pre-service teachers developed an awareness of racism and discrimination faced by students from minority cultures and they acted in advocate roles.

Objective B: Record the values conflicts and dilemmas they face in their teaching roles pertaining to cultural diversity

The pre-service teachers find the task of meeting multicultural needs overwhelming. Concerns arose around dealing with language and social barriers, using culturally sensitive resources, cultivating cultural understanding and awareness, and respecting religious differences. These concerns forced students to be more self-reflective, examining first principles and the place that culture has in understanding oneself. Through reflective practice, some pre-service teachers developed an ability of understanding the influence of their own sociocultural contexts on their thinking; such self-awareness helped them to challenge ethnocentrism.

Objective C: Document the professional education and learning practices that enhance their intercultural competencies

The pre-service teachers are primarily addressing intercultural competence through their practical experiences/placements. It was commonly noted that some placements provided excellent opportunity for learning how to navigate questions of cultural diversity, whereas other placements provided little opportunity for exploration. They received some training from their classes but it is short and disconnected from the rest of the program. Others noted that their learning was directly related to their professors' expertise. There was still an emphasis on learning about "other groups". There was a need to move beyond learning about

other groups to critical self-examination of the cultural contexts that have influenced their own behavior, attitudes, and beliefs

Conclusions

1. There are multiple understandings of diversity among pre-service teachers.
2. Pre-service teachers did not always feel equipped to respond effectively to diversity.
3. Pre-service teachers felt a disconnection between theory and practice.
4. Self-examination and reflection are important in the process of intercultural inquiry.

Key Implications and Recommendations

1. Fostering self-awareness as a foundation competency
Intercultural competence needs to be understood as a dynamic process driven primarily through the process of critical self-examination of the cultural contexts that influence one's behaviour, attitudes and beliefs.
2. Supporting teachers as learners
A climate of inclusiveness of all new Canadians needs to be enhanced through assisting policy makers in government, school boards, schools, and universities and by expanding teachers' professional codes of ethics from principles to practices when working with students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.
3. Teaching content about diversity versus a learning process
Building stronger linkage between professional education curriculum in post-secondary programs and practice realities in schools should be made; there is a need for a closer connection between theory and practice in responding to diversity. This requires the infusion of intercultural competencies into the professional education curriculum.
4. Addressing student group needs while addressing individual student needs
The inclusion of more intercultural and multilingual expertise and opportunities in our pre-service programs needs to be adopted. Experiential learning would be enhanced through pedagogy that is informed by critical incidents based on actual scenarios of teaching and learning.

Dissemination of Results

- Three conference presentations have been given on this research with one forthcoming:
Arthur, N., Lund, D., & Guo. (2007, September). *Critical incidents in views of diversity*.
Poster presentation accepted for the 8th Advances in Qualitative Methods Conference, Banff, AB.
- Arthur, N., Guo, Y., & Lund, D. (2006). *Facing diversity: Reflections from pre-service teachers*. Paper presentation at the international Teacher Education Conference 2006, Calgary, AB.
- Arthur, N., Guo, Y., Lund, D., & Musk, T. (2007). *Teaching and learning for intercultural inquiry*. Poster presented at the 9th Metropolis Conference, Toronto, ON.
- Arthur, N., Lund, D., Arthur, N., Lund, D., Guo, Y., & Musk, T. (2006). *Intercultural Inquiry with Pre-Service Teachers*. Paper presented at the 8th National Metropolis Conference, Montreal, QC.

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