

FINAL REPORT

Promoting the pursuit of intercultural competence among pre-service teachers

the University of Alberta component of an Education Domain Project entitled
Development of Intercultural Competence through Teacher Education Programs

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Abstract

This study investigates the experiences of a group of teacher educators working to promote the pursuit of intercultural awareness among pre-service teachers enrolled in their subject-area curriculum courses. Specific goals of the project were: 1) to understand what pedagogical discourses and processes teacher educators can use to assist pre-service teachers in attaining, maintaining, adapting, or creating ideologies for increased commitment towards diversity, and 2) to understand how these processes can be infused into existing subject-area courses in the teacher education program. The significance of the study is tied to the expectation that promoting the development of pre-service teachers' awareness of and commitments to ethnic and linguistic diversity can foster greater equity and social inclusion.

In the study we used an action research design that involved investigating our own attempts to bring change to our own teacher education practices. We also considered the perspectives of student teachers enrolled in our courses, as well as broader ecological factors that influence the pursuit of intercultural competence within teacher education programs. Sources of data included: a) student questionnaires; b) guided student reflective journaling involving a variety of representational media such as writing and art; c) student interviews; and d) instructors' observations and field notes. The following curriculum disciplines were represented: elementary art education, early childhood education, and second language education at the secondary level.

The findings from the study indicate that many of the students in our teacher education program do not have a wide range of personal experiences that involve interacting with people from ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The findings also suggest that these pre-service teachers generally feel unprepared to deal with the diversity they will face as teachers. At the same time, however, some of them questioned the pertinence of addressing intercultural competence in their subject-area curriculum courses. With respect to the experiences of the instructors, the study points out that teacher educators can employ a variety of ways to incorporate intercultural inquiry into their courses. It also suggests that there are some challenges, including student resistance.

Recognizing the role of teacher education in the formation of teachers' professional knowledge, skills, and practices, we expect the findings of the study to hold important implications for teacher education programs. We argue that infusing intercultural competence into existing curriculum courses carries the potential of creating closer ties between the pursuit of intercultural competence and everyday teaching practices within various disciplines. In sharing our findings with teacher educators and administrators within faculties of education, we aim to influence the ways in which teacher education programs foster the development of intercultural competence. The findings can also be used to make a case to government partners for the need for greater emphasis on intercultural competence in the provincial government-mandated expectations for the knowledge, skills, and attributes of licensed teachers. With respect to schools and NGOs, the study can assist in advocating for educational practices that are responsive to the needs of diverse student populations.

Final Report

Background

The overarching goal of this study was to investigate ways in which teacher educators can foster intercultural inquiry among the future teachers enrolled in their university courses. The study was initiated in part by community members who work with immigrants and refugees in local organizations, and who approached us with their concerns about the extent to which future teachers will be prepared to respond to diversity in the classroom. With this in mind, and with our belief that institutions of higher education have the responsibility to prepare the next generation of teachers to meet the diverse needs of their multi-ethnic and multi-lingual students, we undertook an investigation of our own teacher education practices in order to better understand ways of fostering intercultural inquiry. While this goal can be achieved through program-level initiatives such as creating stand-alone courses on diversity and multiculturalism, we wished to focus on ways in which individual instructors can take the initiative to infuse intercultural inquiry into their pre-existing courses.

Specific research objectives were: 1) to understand what pedagogical discourses and processes teacher educators can use to assist pre-service teachers in attaining, maintaining, adapting, or creating ideologies for increased commitment towards diversity, and 2) to understand how these processes can be infused into existing subject-area courses as a means of creating closer ties between the pursuit of intercultural competence and everyday teaching practices within various scholastic disciplines. The rationale for the study is tied to the expectation that promoting the development of pre-service teachers' awareness of and commitments to ethnic and linguistic diversity can foster greater equity and social inclusion.

Research Method

In the study we used an action research design to investigate systematically our efforts to transform our own teacher education practices. We also took into account the perspectives of student teachers enrolled in our courses, in addition to broader ecological factors. Sources of data included: a) student questionnaires; b) guided student reflective journaling involving a variety of representational media such as writing and art; c) student interviews; and d) instructors' observations and field notes.

Each course involved in the study was adapted by the instructor/researcher to incorporate intercultural inquiry as a key course objective. In an elementary art education course, intercultural inquiry became the theme of students' artistic work. For example, students expressed their views of the concept of community through painting, and they explored student-teacher relationships in multicultural classrooms by creating masks. Intercultural inquiry was incorporated into an early childhood education course through a field experience in a local multicultural childcare setting. After initial field observations, students were asked to develop activities, to implement one of them with the children, and to reflect on the experience. In a second language education course, intercultural inquiry centred around exploring links between languages, communities, power, and social inclusion or exclusion. Students reflected on these concepts and their relevance for

their future teaching practice by completing a series of guided entries in an “intercultural teaching journal”. For example, students were asked to reflect on topics such as how their own cross-cultural experiences had shaped their desire to teach a second language and how language serves as a means of discrimination.

Key Findings

1. **Pre-service teachers reported limited prior experiences with diversity (ethnic, cultural, linguistic, etc.).** In the questionnaires, most of the respondents indicated that they had attended schools with largely homogeneous populations. Student reflections and interviews supported this finding and indicated that pre-service teachers experience feelings of anxiety and uncertainty in relation to working in diverse classrooms.
2. **Pre-service teachers reported feeling unprepared to work in ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms.** Findings from the pre-course questionnaires indicate that many of the pre-service teachers did not believe that explorations of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity had been a major aspect of their teacher education program. The pre-service teachers’ understanding of diversity as expressed in the questionnaires tended to focus more on differences in learning styles, abilities, and behaviour than on culture, ethnicity, and language.
3. **Pre-service teachers reported intercultural encounters during their student teaching practicum in which they felt uncertain of how to respond and unable to find the guidance that they needed.** Such instances were described in the post-practicum interviews. The instructors’ observations and field notes attribute this situation in part to an emphasis in the practicum on performance and evaluation, which creates a situation in which student teachers do not wish to reveal or discuss their uncertainties.
4. **First-hand experiences with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds can assist pre-service teachers in overcoming their initial anxieties related to teaching in diverse contexts.** Student reflections on the field experience completed for the early childhood education course suggest that the pre-service teachers were challenged to develop new instructional approaches for responding to diversity, that their conceptions of teaching were altered, and that they felt better prepared for their future teaching practice. The instructors’ observations and field notes caution, however, that unrealistic expectations for preparedness could result following a single field experience.
5. **Intercultural inquiry was met with some resistance from students.** A major theme expressed in the instructors’ observations and field notes related to feelings of student resistance toward attempts to incorporate intercultural inquiry into the courses. This was attributed in part to the pervasiveness of discourses focusing on curriculum content and delivery rather than the human needs of individual students. Some students questioned the relevance of intercultural inquiry within courses on art

education, second language education, and early childhood education. One theme that emerged from the student interviews was the belief that younger generations have overcome racism and no longer need to dwell on it. Instructors expressed reluctance to introduce discord into the classroom by raising topics such as racism, discrimination, and privilege.

6. **Individual instructors can foster intercultural inquiry in their courses even in the absence of program-level initiatives or in addition to such initiatives.** Teacher preparation programs are complex and involve many components under the jurisdiction of universities, schools, and provincial governments. This complexity makes the implementation of comprehensive and programmatic initiatives difficult. The course adaptations developed in relation to this study, as well as the instructors' observations and field notes, suggest that individual instructors can foster intercultural inquiry through such means as adding a field experience component to a course, using artistic expression, and exploring course content through a critical lens.

Recommendations

1. Continue to explore innovative ways to incorporate intercultural inquiry into teacher preparation as a means of broadening pre-service teachers' experiences with diversity (ethnic, cultural, linguistic, etc.).
2. Promote a broad view of human diversity as a means of preparing future teachers to engage all students and to respond to their individual needs.
3. Extend intercultural inquiry beyond the classroom component of the program and into the student teaching practicum.
4. Adopt evaluation practices in the student teaching practicum that recognize the importance of intercultural inquiry and that allow "safe" opportunities to explore uncertainties and seek guidance.
5. Address pre-service teachers' feelings of anxiety and uncertainty related to working in diverse classrooms.
6. Understand that intercultural inquiry can be met with resistance from and seek ways to address the resistance while being responsive to students' perspectives.
7. Create field experiences that involve working in the community with diverse populations.
8. Provide supportive structures for individual teacher educators who wish to promote intercultural inquiry within the specific component(s) of the teacher education program in which they are involved.

Dissemination of Research Findings (as of July 2007)

Publications

Dunn, W. E., Kirova, A., Cooley, M., & Ogilvie, G. (in preparation). *Fostering Intercultural Competence in Pre-service Teachers: Using Infusion Strategies in Subject-Area Curriculum Courses*. Submitted to the Working Paper Series of the Prairie Metropolis Centre.

Dunn, W. E., Kirova, A., Cooley, M., & Ogilvie, G. (in preparation). *Creating a space for fostering intercultural inquiry in subject-area curriculum courses*. Submitted to the *Canadian Journal of Education*.

Cooley, M., Dunn, W., & Kirova, A. (2005). *Promoting the Pursuit of Intercultural Competence Among Pre-Service Teachers*. In J. Walrond-Patterson (Ed.) *One Visions-Many Voices: Cross-Cultural/Anti-Racism Education Conference*. Submitted Proceedings from the Cross-Cultural/Anti-Racism Education Conference (pp. 51-57), University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada: Faculty of Education.

Presentations

Dunn, W. E., Ogilvie, G., Kirova, A., & Cooley, M. (2007, June). *Fostering intercultural inquiry in second language teacher education*. Paper presented at the Fifth International Conference on Language Teacher Education, Minneapolis, MN, USA.

Dunn, W. E., Cooley, M., & Kirova, A. (2007, April). *Promoting the pursuit of intercultural competence among pre-service teachers*. Presentation to local community members, sponsored by the Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration, Edmonton, AB.

Dunn, W. E., Kirova, A., Cooley, M., & Ogilvie, G. (2006, November). *Fostering intercultural inquiry across the disciplines in teacher education*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Teacher Education, Calgary, AB.

Dunn, W. E., Kirova, A., & Cooley, M. (2006, May). *Creating a space for fostering intercultural competence in subject-area curriculum courses*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Toronto, ON.

Kirova, A., et al. (2006, March). *The development of intercultural competence through teacher preparation programs*. Workshop presented at the National Metropolis Conference, Vancouver, BC.

Dunn, W. E., Cooley, M., & Kirova, A. (2006, February). *Engaging with discourses of diversity: Fostering the pursuit of intercultural competence in subject-area curriculum courses*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Canadian Association for Student Teaching, Vancouver, BC.

Dunn, W. E., Kirova, A., & Cooley, M. (2006, January). *Promoting the pursuit of intercultural competence among pre-service teachers*. Roundtable presentation to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, sponsored by the Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration, Edmonton, AB.

Dunn, W. E., Cooley, M., & Kirova, A. (2005, November). *Promoting the pursuit of intercultural competence among pre-service teachers*. Paper presented at the Cross-Cultural and Anti-Racism Education Conference, Edmonton, AB.