Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions Toward Global Learning Experience: Implications for Teacher Intercultural Competency Development

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Abstract

Drawing on existing frameworks of orientations and pedagogical knowledge and skills for enhancing teachers' intercultural competency, this study examined pre-service teachers' (*N* = 17) attitudes and perception of their global professional experience in a fieldwork assignment where New York-based teacher educators conducted a 'virtual school visit' to a school in India where they were guided by their Indian global partners to survey the host schools' learning environments and teaching practices. Results indicate that while most participants are aware of pedagogical knowledge related to ESOL and aware of the need to work with students from diverse cultures, there were significant levels of knowledge gaps when they were taken out of their cultural and linguistic comfort zones. The authors recommend that teacher education programs incorporate global learning experience in teacher education programs to address these knowledge gaps in theory and practice throughout the curriculum to foster empathy and understanding toward differences across cultures.

Keywords: Intercultural competency, global learning, teacher preparation, cross-cultural communication, cultural awareness, diversity.

Introduction

In our responsibility as teacher educators to facilitate the development of relevant skills in pre-service teachers, from exploration of intercultural understanding and material in the classroom at one end of the continuum to open reflection and discussion at the other, we have observed that regardless of engagement and critical reflection upon linguistical and cultural diversity within teacher education development, concepts related to intercultural understanding and awareness remain on the margins, rather than a central dimension in the teacher education development.

In the wake of the widening social and economic divisions, conflicts and inequalities on both national and international fronts during the global pandemic, we realized that a new approach is needed to re-examine the nature of intercultural competency development involved in teacher education curricular designs where an intercultural stance related to anti-bias, including privilege, power, oppression, and prejudice is an intended outcome. This has pushed us to envision new ways of facilitating intercultural understanding and exploring the continuum of intercultural competency development with pre-service language teachers.

As teacher educators who work at educational institutions with limited resources and opportunities for study abroad programs, we also recognized that it is our responsibility to find creative and meaningful ways to engage teacher candidates in intercultural learning that would prepare them to create a culturally responsive classroom for students. Drawing inspirations and ideas from numerous studies relating to global education (Moloney et al., 2016; Seeberg & Minick, 2012), we proceeded in our teacher education courses to develop and integrate an international "virtual school visit" in Fall 2020, which provided cultural contrast to challenge candidates' intercultural communication skills and provides common points of entry for inquiries into what it means to be globally minded and culturally competent. The purpose of this study was to explore in what way a semester long intercultural communication 1) affects teacher candidates' perception and attitude about other cultures, 2) heightens their cultural awareness, 3) builds their skills in navigating cultural differences and ultimately, 4) strengthens their commitment to diversity and inclusion. In the following, we reviewed the literature relating to teacher intercultural competency development and explored how teacher candidates manifested intercultural competence through intercultural communication.

Literature Review

While educational benefits of teacher cross-cultural competence and communicative competence have been well documented (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Keengwe, 2010; McAllister, & Irvine, 2000), research indicates that the lack of cultural awareness and communication skills in teachers remains to be a key factor affecting student learning outcomes such as dropout and discipline rates across many school districts in the United States. And yet, as Cushner & Mahon (2009) stated, the majority of teachers in the United States are still limited in their experience with other cultural groups and tended to operate within broad stereotypes and generalizations about the ''Other''. Wiley (2014) also noted that due to the long history of monocultural and monolingual policies in the United States, teachers may be more likely to develop a strong cultural orientation and ideological alignment associated with members of a dominant culture and may have less opportunities to learn about the cultural values and practices of diverse communities, despite the increasingly diversified school environment and demographics.

Indeed, research reveals that teachers' intercultural competence has not significantly developed as a result of their immersion experience in a culturally and linguistically diverse school environment (Hammer & Bennett, 2012; Mahon, 2006). Realizing that intercultural

competence must be intentionally fostered at teacher education programs through curricular and co-curricular efforts, National Council for Accreditation of teacher education (NCATE) standards (2001) clearly argue for the necessity for intercultural competency skills as one of the standards for teacher educators: "the development of educators who can help all students learn and who can teach from multicultural and global perspectives that draw on the histories, experiences, and representations of students from diverse cultural backgrounds." (p. 34) The same standards also stated that teacher education programs must provide sustainable opportunities for teacher candidates to understand the role of diversity and culture in teaching and learning processes.

Unfortunately, unlike other notions that underlie most of the discipline-centered approaches to teacher education, intercultural competency and communication skills have not been readily identifiable as a discipline-based core in teacher educational curricula (Cushner & Mahon, 2009). Due to today's ever-increasing high-stakes, test-driven school environment that many teachers find themselves in, intercultural understanding as the shared pattern of behavior and interaction is often not considered as an integral part of language learning and teaching and consequently not as the key aspect of teacher education curriculum (Grossman, Hammerness & McDonald, 2009). While some TESOL teacher training programs have integrated pedagogical content that emphasizes multiculturalism and cultural sensitivity, these courses tend to stay at the theoretical level and focus on the abstract understanding and appreciation of the "Other", rather than a strong emphasis on active engagement and interaction within a culturally and linguistically diverse environment (Martin, Pirbhai-Illich & Pete, 2017; Moloney, Harbon, & Fielding, 2016). Research shows that to prepare pre-service ESL teachers for culturally diverse classrooms, programs need to shift to a more contextualized, dynamic and multifaceted approach in developing pre-service English language teachers' intercultural competence in their efforts to engage the individual teacher's perceptions, perspectives and values of the world (Lopes-Murphy & Murphy, 2016; Malewski, Sharma & Phillion, 2012). This brings intercultural competence and diversity to the fore of what needs to be addressed within teacher preparation. Given the growing diversity in today's classroom, it becomes imperative to examine more closely what intercultural competency development entails and how best to support teacher candidates' development in this regard.

While no single study can be cited that lists all of the essential characteristics of intercultural competence, many studies have pointed to the power of teacher perception and attitude toward promoting cultural diversity and interaction in relation to student outcomes. In Deardorff (2006)'s landmark study where she "documented consensus among leading intercultural experts" (Deardorff, 2006a, p. 242) on 22 dimensions of intercultural competence, she developed a framework that has fifteen components under the following broad categories: 1) attitude/perception, 2) knowledge/comprehension, 3) skills, and 4) outcomes. Deardorff's framework has been revised and updated by authors such as Seeberg & Minick (2012) to reflect a more nuanced understanding of teacher intercultural competency.

While we agree with Deardorff that an important goal of interculturality is "to better understand others' behaviors to interact effectively and appropriately with others and, ultimately, to become more interculturally competent" (Deardorff, 2009, xiii), we urge caution that teacher intercultural competency development in the U.S. continues to be U.S. based and conveyed in predominantly abstract and cognitive ways. Intercultural learning is often taught as an intellectual exercise, relying on course readings, and has not been approached as a multifaceted concept involving aspects of "increasing self-efficacy, challenging ideas about self and others, and on global mindedness" (Cushner & Mahon, 2009, p. 316).

To *concretize* intercultural learning for teacher educators, we argued for the incorporation of international experience as a critical component of intercultural competence development for

educators. Impactful international encounter can lead to prospective teachers' being more skilled at crossing cultures, and shaping pedagogy, curriculum and classroom interaction in ways that build on their vision of diversity and interaction. The notion has been supported by a series of ongoing studies that documented the personal and professional impact international field experience can have on developing intercultural competency for pre-service teachers (Quezada & Alfaro, 2007; Seeberg & Minick, 2012).

Building on the literature reviewed above and the intercultural competency frameworks developed by Deardorff (2009), Seeberg and Minick (2012) and Rawal and Deardorff (2021), we identified the following key intercultural competency standards in guiding our exploration regarding developing intercultural competency in pre-service teachers.

Attitude

Initially, a person's desire and motivation to learn about, interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and engage in discourse on diversity must be considered. This includes being more open-minded and respectful to other cultures as the key to positive cultural communication and interaction. If a person has never developed a healthy curiosity toward other cultures, then the components of intercultural competency dimensions discussed next won't come to fruition. Contrarily, if a person has a positive attitude toward other cultures that drives him or her to communicate across cultures in order to learn more about self and others, then there is a foundation from which intercultural communication can evolve into a rewarding and lifelong learning process.

Knowledge

Attitude, curiosity, and motivation alone cannot create intercultural competency. Building knowledge of our own cultures, identities and communication patterns requires us to step out of our comfort zones and develop insights and awareness in multiple contexts. Interacting with people who think differently and with a wide range of cultures contributes to cultural self-awareness. Understanding of key concepts of diversity such as privilege, power, access, and social construction of identity and understanding of theories and sources relevant to diversity is a key component of developing self- and other-knowledge.

Skills

Developing intercultural competency is a complex learning process. Since these abilities don't come naturally, accumulated knowledge doesn't necessarily help us in situations where we have to apply that knowledge. Transformative learning can only take place when we systematically reflect on one's bias and assumptions and continuously engage in a process of self-reflection.

Outcomes

While attitudes, knowledge and skills are all key components of intercultural competence, it is necessary for these components to be put into practice through action during intercultural encounters. For this reason, cultivating intercultural competency requires ongoing commitment to interacting in good faith and building positive relationships with individuals and groups across differences, commitment to recognizing and transforming status quo in an intercultural setting and commitment to furthering discourse on diversity. Individuals must also apply their intercultural attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills through equity-oriented actions.

The framework above reflects a growth pattern that may be interdependent, and having the right attitudes, perceptions and skills/knowledge can enhance and strengthen teachers'

commitment to building a diverse and inclusive community in their classroom and beyond (Deardorff, 2009; Seeberg & Minick, 2012).

The Study

Setting and Aim

This study took place at a graduate level TESOL course at Touro College, titled *Classroom Management and Curriculum Development*, which "focuses on the theory and practice of program and curriculum development for English language learners with diverse needs, including those who qualify for special education. Attention is given to the process of developing a PreK-12 ESL program, and associated curriculum, that promotes a culturally responsive school environment, facilitates learning, and accommodates students' individual needs". As a course encompassing processes and knowledge of becoming an active participant and change agent in the TESOL profession, this course provides a viable setting to investigate teacher candidates' intercultural competency development.

The course is delivered in a video-conferencing format, combining both synchronous and asynchronous learning over twelve weeks. The weekly modules include lectures, assigned readings, and participations in forum and live discussions. The course requires candidates to pursue a series of curricular investigations in both local and global contexts, (though only data collected from the global school visit is included in this study). Our goal was to challenge teacher candidates' abilities to interact and cross social and cultural boundaries. In order to provide this challenge, we set up experiential learning opportunities via digital platforms that provided direct contact with teachers from other cultures. The purpose here was to build communities of practice across geographic and cultural distance through bilateral intercultural engagement in global partnership.

In this study, candidates interviewed a classroom ESL/EFL teacher overseas and conducted curricular investigations in regard to the planning and preparation challenges faced by teachers with regard to selecting content, planning instructional experiences, and developing learning goals that address the needs of individual students, including students with diverse learning needs. The candidate-led inquiry approach allowed for authentic explorations and discoveries within and across diverse cultural contexts. Throughout the process, we, as author-instructors, conducted focus groups and collected written final reflections.

Our vision is to shift teacher preparation practices and outcomes from U.S. centered to more globally focused in the hope to center multilingual learners and the continuum of their experience in language education. The study, exploratory in nature, was guided by the following three specific research questions:

In what ways does international experience, as operationalized through the interconnected components of the Intercultural Competency Development Framework (Deardorff, 2009) such as 1) perception and attitude about other cultures, 2) cultural awareness and knowledge, 3) skills in navigating cultural differences and ultimately, 4) commitment to diversity and inclusion, influence teacher candidates' intercultural competency development?

Methodology

To explore and gauge the knowledge and skills candidates gained through this intercultural experience in the teacher education courses, 1) we analyzed candidates' forum discussions (three or four posts from each participant per week) throughout the 12-week course as they discussed the findings of their curricular investigations in their collaborations with their cross-cultural partners; 2) we also observed selected participants via zoom and discussed their learning through various digital platforms, such as emails, discussion boards and video-

conferences; and 3) candidates' reflective journals were analyzed within a few weeks after the implementation of the project during the same semester.

Participants

Teacher candidates participating in this study were matriculated graduate students at Touro College. Participating candidates were primarily full-time NYS school teachers who were pursuing a MA degree in TESOL in order to better serve an increasingly diverse student population at their schools.

Participants in our study reflect the demographics of the teaching force in the United States in the last decade. According to the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) in 2017–18, about 79 percent of public school teachers were White, 9 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent were Black, 2 percent were Asian, 2 percent were of two or more races, and 1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native. Similarly, among the 26 teacher candidates who enrolled in this course where the current study was situated, there were mostly White females, three White males, three Hispanic females and one Black female. Pre-semester surveys showed that no participants had experience in study abroad programs, though many have had extensive experience of traveling abroad throughout their lifetime.

While U.S. teacher candidates were encouraged to recruit their global partners, many candidates were gravitated toward countries where they would anticipate little or no language barrier, such as Canada, Australia, Ireland, etc. or for those who were able to communicate in Spanish, Puerto Rico, Columbia, or Peru. The remaining candidates (N=17) who were not able to find a global partner on their own were offered the opportunity to connect with a group of Indian teachers from different schools in New Delhi, India, through the mediation of the co-author of this paper, Prof. Kirti Kapur, a faculty member at the National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi, India. The data in this study were drawn from participants' international experience with their Indian partners, (for the group arrangement in this study, see below). The teachers in the partner schools were not participants in this study. Participants and their global partners' last names were suppressed to ensure privacy.

Table 1. Participants Information

Group	Indian Teachers	U.S. Teachers
Group A	Sonia Mamta	Maria Yevette Fernandez Alex
Group B	Meena Asha	Shahida Christina Francesco Margherita
Group C	Dolly Rajni	Coyette Gianna Victoriaann
Group D	Pankaj Nandini	Dana Aileen Erin
Group E	Jagriti Renu	Emily Meagan Maxwell

Data Analysis

For this study, we conducted a qualitative content analysis, which is generally defined as a replicable technique for systemically compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Weber, 1990). As mentioned above, an intercultural competency framework was developed to guide a reiterative analysis using the literature, fieldwork notes and candidates' work. In the analysis phase, the data were examined for emerging themes until saturation is reached. Emerged themes were organized into categories and subcategories through a recursive process. The emerged themes were then checked against the above-mentioned intercultural competency framework. Following the principle of constant comparative analysis, categories were grouped into the following themes: 1) attitude, 2) knowledge, 3) skills and 4) outcomes.

Table 2. Coding Examples

Overarching Theme	Subtheme/Category	Sample of Coded Context
Attitude	Desire to learn about other cultures	I really loved about this assignment
	Desire to interact with others	It is nice to feel that you are not alone
	Open-minded and respectful	It was very rewarding getting to hear about how their culture differed from ours
Knowledge	Awareness about one's own culture and identity	In my local district, the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) works with the schools to implement programs and create celebrations for schools in the district.
	Understanding of key concepts of diversity	Globally, teachers need to either work with the resources they have or provide additional types of resources that is mandatory to meet the needs of students
	Understanding of theories and sources relevant to diversity	Eeducators should often incorporate culturally responsive instructional strategies in lessons that help create inclusion, connection, and promote meaning.
Skill	Ability to see things from others' perspectives	The process of teaching and learning English different in different contexts.
	Ability to reflect on one's bias and assumptions	I feel that in my district the school is too caught up on teaching the curriculum word for word rather than teaching the students the basic skills that they need.
	Ability interact across differences with sensitivity	The teacher there connected and reached out to us with open arms, answering any questions we had for her.
Outocme	Commitment to building positive relationships with others	I would like to work closely with someone who is more experienced this way I would be able to learn more about my career
	Commitment to recognizing and transforming status quo	Teachers must eliminate cultural stereotypical assumptions and focus more on reflecting upon cultural and linguistic responses instead.
	commitment to furthering discourse on diversity	Now that I had an opportunity to look at how instruction differs in different parts of the world such as India, I would need to know how instruction differs in Italy to have a successful experience while I am there.

Findings

For the ease of presentation, the findings were arranged around how participants perceived and interpreted the four dimensions of intercultural competency according to their reports, forum discussion and reflection, while taking into account the interconnected and recursive nature of intercultural competency development:

Attitude

Deardorff (2009) identified positive attitude about other cultures as the key aspect contributing to intercultural competence in the everyday practice of teaching. Overall, candidates found the fieldwork assignment a challenging and yet rewarding experience. Six candidates demonstrated curiosity and genuine interest in a different educational system and openness to their cultures. Their reflection demonstrated their desire to seek knowledge to

strengthen cultural consciousness and their positive attitudes toward other cultures. The following quotes exemplify their self-discovery:

> One thing that I really loved about this assignment, is that I feel as if the issues that I go through with my students are not an isolated incident. The same situations seem to arise from students all over the country/world. It is nice to feel that you are not alone, and to know that there are methods/strategies to implement to help any situation. (Maxwell)

> It was very rewarding getting to hear about how their culture differed from ours and how that impacted their schools. One of the most interesting and valuable things I learned from my two global teachers is India's determination to make sure students are successful and taken care of. India has a Right to Education Act 2009. Which requires the school to take in the new student no matter their socio-economic status or family background. Additionally, one of the most interesting things I learned was that India in the past few years has had a significant increase in female dropout rates because of their culture and family needs. (Alex)

These findings show that candidates demonstrated positive attitudes toward other cultures and were well equipped to get involved in meaningful interactions with strangers. In a similar vein, they were aware that learning about new cultures required active learning and personal engagements on their part, that is, getting involved in meaningful communication with individuals who were raised in culturally different backgrounds. The direct communication between global partners provided moments of reflection in which the U.S. teacher candidates were challenged to clarify their notion of educational rights and motivated to integrate diverse perspectives. We found this to be evidence of their eagerness to engage the discourse of diversity.

Knowledge

Defined as awareness about one's own culture and identity in multiple contexts, intercultural knowledge is the competency to recognize the differences in everyone represented in the classroom. Through this project, candidates learned the similarities and differences not only in instruction methods, but the ways that education is handled and how culture is implemented into instruction across cultural differences. For example, the following candidates wrote:

> In New Delhi, there is a School management Community (SMC) that promotes this connection. This committee is made up of eleven parents, teachers, social workers and administrators. This committee goes into the community and evaluates how they can help and collaborate with the schools. During the pandemic many students went back to their communities and did not have access to internet, laptops, and instructional resources. The SMC went door to door to give students worksheets and resources to continue student learning. The SMC collaborates with students and teachers to fundraise money for the community. The money raised is often donated to parents who could not afford to pay school fees. In my local district, the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) works with the schools to implement programs and create celebrations for schools in the district. This Association allows parents and teachers to communicate their needs. (Alex)

Globally, teachers need to either work with the resources they have or provide additional types of resources that is mandatory to meet the needs of students, which is beyond their reach and will cost out of pocket expenses. A challenge to meet student needs in India is that teachers there are compelled to work with resources which are provided as well as teaching the traditional way: teacher and black/chalkboard. Classes there do not yet possess technology resources as we do here to cater to students. (Shahida)

The findings of this study demonstrated that not only teacher candidates were actively involved in comparing systems and values of school practices, they also noticed how social, cultural, and historical contexts define and shape school cultures and classroom practices. They demonstrated their awareness on how power and privileges may inform and mediate a school's practices, relationships and curriculum. They noticed that their global teachers were connected to the communities they served in different ways and there were intentional educational practices to address diverse needs of students in their efforts to narrow inequality and shift power. Consequently, candidates deepened their knowledge and understanding on key concepts of diversity and reconfirmed the importance of promoting cultural awareness.

Skills

One key aspect of Deardorff's notion of intercultural competency is the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. Candidates' narratives revealed that they demonstrated their skills and ability to understand cultural differences and similarities, while not judging people based on who they are. For example, the following candidates managed to go beyond national stereotyping in their descriptions:

I liked how they have Neo-Nishtha and how it allows students to start with simple skills in order to gain the confidence that they need. I feel that in my district the school is too caught up on teaching the curriculum word for word rather than teaching the students the basic skills that they need. (Emily)

The process of teaching and learning English different in different contexts. For the local context, this is strongly urged as it will help them with subject content such as reading, writing, and speaking. English is reinforced and taught through phonics, reading, collaborative learning, and in pull out/in programs. English is critical as it also benefits these students when they transition to higher grades, utilized in careers, and socially. Whereas globally, it is taught as a foreign language and is not mandatory for survival, since their primary language spoken and used is Hindi. With the exception of, if they will work/teach in an American or English base setting. (Shahida)

While many teacher candidates were not familiar with the context of education in India, the cultural distance between them and their Indian partners challenged them to understand the role of English education and what it is like to be culturally competence for students in a multilingual society like India. Hence, the majority of the teacher candidates demonstrated their ability to navigate cultural differences – they tried to be unprejudiced, rejected stereotyping or overgeneralization and showed goodwill and sincerity toward their culturally

diverse interlocutors. This inquiry-based investigative project provided teacher candidates with a unique opportunity to hone their skills in developing cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competence.

Outcomes

Ultimately, intercultural competency is about teachers' commitment to action and supporting a safe and just place for their students. A great deal of accounts evidenced in the study manifested candidates' social justice orientation and demonstrated candidates' commitment to connecting social justice and educational opportunities. For example,

> Cultural context should be acknowledged and respected since schools have students coming from ethnic backgrounds that variate. I have learned that educators should often incorporate culturally responsive instructional strategies in lessons that help create inclusion, connection, and promote meaning. Teachers must eliminate cultural stereotypical assumptions and focus more on reflecting upon cultural and linguistic responses instead. This can be integrating lessons or topics on student interest such as games using games in word problems in math or presenting text that includes students' culture or community demographics in which they can relate to and brief on such as Jamaica tag-along or the recess queen which touches upon diversity, bullying, acceptance, and bullying. (Shahida)

Teacher candidates, in recognizing some shortcomings in US school communities, attempted to construct solutions from their international experience by extrapolating this to their work as future teachers:

> At the local investigation I found many similarities with the challenges a school community faces. Resources in low-income neighborhoods are limited, family structures vary from single parent homes to two parent homes and also kids being raised by grandparents, foster homes and/or other relatives. In the urban community the lack of education on the part of the guardians is the biggest impediment in supporting students. Within the DOE schools rely heavily on data to guide instruction and on most occasions, teachers have very little input into curriculum changes or design. At the global level, teachers and administrators work together to find a common ground to help students along. Parents are active participants and the value placed on education is high. Curriculums differ according to the population. Students are encouraged to maintain their L1 while understanding the importance of the L2 to predict future successes and needs. (Rosaline)

Thus, it seems safe to conclude that the global encounter creates opportunities for candidates to recognize injustice existing at the micro and macro levels and strengths their commitment to fostering a classroom community of conscience through their own classroom practices. Candidates had a proactive approach to diversity and inclusion issues – they challenged and wanted to transform the status quo.

Discussion

We understand that the findings by no means suggest that the teacher candidates will carry forward into their classroom their cross-cultural dispositions, knowledge, and skills that they demonstrated during the projects and become the change agents for social change. In fact,

contrary to what Cushner & Mahon (2009) suggested, our findings indicate that the incorporation of global contexts may not automatically lead to an increase in positive attitudes, critical awareness, the ability to reflect on one's assumption and ultimately, a commitment to enhancing one's intercultural competency

Despite their declared enhanced open-mindedness, few candidates took advantage of the ample opportunities to interact further with their global partners beyond the scope of the assignment. Based on data, we could speculate that the teacher candidates were not interested in their global partners' cultures since they share limited cultural knowledge or intercultural experiences with their global partners. We conclude that this is not a completely surprising finding since this discontinuity between the cultures of the teachers and their students has been a critical issue for teacher certification programs, according to our review of previous studies (Martin et al., 2017; Moloney et al., 2016).

Evidence further indicates that many candidates still heavily relied on broad generalizations and stereotypes when they interacted with their global partners. For example, in the finding section, "Shahida" commented that "globally, (English) is taught as a foreign language and is not mandatory for survival, since their primary language spoken and used is Hindi. With the exception of, if they will work/teach in an American or English base setting." This suggests that teacher candidates remained treating cultural differences as objective data, leading to perpetration of stereotypes, despite their international experience during this project. Apparently, many candidates failed to situate the dichotomy between EFL and ESL in the global and historical context. Due to the increasing dominance of English, English acquisition becomes a matter of survival as it empowers the already powerful and leaves the disadvantaged and powerless peoples further behind. As a result, many countries such as India have made English compulsory in primary schools. When intercultural learning exists only at the level of simplistic comparisons, it may continue to perpetuate fixed, essentialized notions of cultures and increase the generalization and stereotyping toward other cultures.

It is also not clear from the obtained evidence that teacher candidates have been able to identify their own assumptions beyond the surface level. For example, while we expected candidates to be aware of the significance of bilingualism in students who speak other languages other than English at school, the results from the data reveal inconsistent perceptions. Few candidates expressed an interest in learning bilingual/multilingual practices from their Indian partners despite India's long history in multilingualism and anti-colonialism. We surmise that candidates' culturally encapsulated existence may have contributed to their adhering to the national or institutional English only ideology, without questioning the role of English as a "Lingua Franca", as Grossman et al. (2009) suggested in their study. The invisibility of the dominant influence of English on both local and international school cultures may have led to their "epistemic blindness" (Andreotti, 2016, p. 104) to other ways of speaking, knowing, and being as valuable classroom resources.

It is also not clear from the finding to what extent the candidates developed a commitment to further developing intercultural competency. The results demonstrate that direct global encounter does not by itself guarantee intercultural development. It is vitally relevant to ensure that such encounter could encourage candidates to sustain their interests in intercultural learning and continue to strengthen their commitment to furthering the discourse of diversity.

Candidates' struggle to be culturally responsive to diverse knowledge systems through their global encounters hence may indicate that the development of teacher intercultural competency cannot rely on curriculum intervention or cultural exchange or narrative reflections but must also attend to the role played by the interaction and critical dialogue in this process and require collaborative and participatory approaches to engaging differences. In

other words, it must become a co-constructed and interactive process sustained over time rather than an isolated individual experience.

Conclusion

Our findings demonstrated for us in what ways international experience can facilitate teacher candidates' intercultural competency development in the course of one semester and in what ways it may affect their desire to take the skills and knowledge gained from their global professional experiences into their future teaching, and hence in what way it identifies the knowledge gaps needed to be addressed in developing teacher candidates' intercultural competency.

Compared to case studies or simulations where intercultural learning is often an abstract endeavor, this project concretizes intercultural learning experiences in teacher education. The experiential learning aspect of this project created the opportunity for discovery about diversity and intercultural interaction and engaged candidates in developing global perspectives and "genuinely enlarging the possibilities for learning" (Andraotti, 2013, p. 13) with an emphasis on dispositional transformation.

Through this study, we became aware that developing intercultural competency is a process and this includes working with stakeholders in the diverse communities of teacher education to examine the content, processes and practices by which teachers are prepared to enter the profession. While they cannot completely discard unnamed stereotypes about others, candidates spoke of examining multiple perspectives as a way to develop a global outlook and demonstrated a positive attitude toward learning from Indian teachers' experiences and perspectives. Direct communication with global partners, nevertheless, provides possibilities for co-constructed and interactive approaches to intercultural understanding. The discussion engages teacher candidates' cultural awareness, while examining different perspectives challenges pre-existing assumptions. Due to the greater distance between the U.S. mainstream and Indian cultures, and their willingness to "move through the psychological dissonance positive constructive positions" (Seeberg & Minick, 2012, p.16), we hope teacher candidates will develop necessary knowledge and skill to provide authentic, meaningful cross-cultural learning experiences for their students.

While our original focus was to engage pre-service teachers' in developing intercultural competency and facilitate intercultural dialogue, our study has helped us identify further research that would enhance effective intercultural competency development in teacher education. Engaging candidates in what we see to be an open and yet bilateral relationship, we realize that intercultural understanding and learning needs to be developed with the community-of-practice through co-constructive practice to enable participants to contribute to shaping understanding. Continuing to expand our knowledge base in long term research studies is important in allowing us to define common strategies to support pre-service teachers in developing their intercultural competency and to achieve greater integration within the teacher education curricula. We need comparative as well as collaborative work to be carried out to understand more in depth the impact of integrating intercultural competency in teacher education beyond the individual studies and outside of candidates' perceptions and beliefs. Though this need has been recognized in existing literature, more tools and resources need to be sought for accomplishing such goals.

Through a semi-structured study where we studied the pre-service teachers learning from global classroom teachers, we demonstrate that within a co-constructed classroom model, candidates can have the opportunity to pursue curiosity, to develop and respect multiple perspectives in collaboration, and to take initiative in challenging perceived stereotypes. In doing so, we have highlighted how our work might work towards helping teachers incorporate cultural competency and cultural awareness into their classroom.

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