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Strengthening Preservice Teachers' Understanding of Culturally Responsive Classrooms Through Exposure, Immersion, and Dialogue

Christina L. Wilcoxon, Amanda L. Steiner, and Julie Bell

Abstract

Schools around the world are incredibly diverse; therefore, understanding inclusion, equity, and social justice is an essential part of teacher preparation. Preservice teachers need guidance to identify and reflect on the personal lenses they bring to their classrooms. This reflection, in turn, helps them understand, relate to, and meet student needs. Partnerships between urban school districts, communities, and universities are necessary to strengthen preservice teachers' application of culturally responsive teaching practices. Using a mixed-methods, sequential design, the authors addressed the following research questions: In what ways, if any, does the structure of the teacher preparation program impact preservice teachers' comfort with, understanding of, and/or application of culturally responsive teaching practices in urban teaching environments? Were there specific components of the structure that supported preservice teacher development? The authors conclude by sharing a conceptual framework for structuring authentic field experiences to support culturally responsive teaching practices in preservice teachers.

For more than 20 years, educational researchers have argued that preservice teachers should be exposed to communities outside of where they grew up. Melnick and Zeichner (1997) explored the impact of historical and cultural knowledge on preservice teachers' ability to face their "cultural ignorance of groups different from their own" (p. 29). Nearly 2 decades later, teacher educators still see a need for this kind of work. Yuan (2018) advocated for giving preservice teachers opportunities to learn about the students and communities where they will be teaching; partnering with community agencies can help preservice teachers recognize how to apply culturally relevant practices. Within these partnership experiences, opportunities to reflect on how personal beliefs and dispositions impact teaching are essential to the development of culturally relevant practices (Lindo & Lim, 2020). Universities working with preservice teachers "must intentionally and systematically prepare... and provide meaningful experiences for preservice teachers to be immersed in diverse urban schools and communities" (Schaffer et al., 2017, p. 21). When teachers better understand students' life experiences, opportunities emerge for them to capitalize on that knowledge and embed it into the curriculum (Hedges, 2015). This helps increase the self-efficacy of both the students (Gay, 2010) and the teacher.

Culture walks began at our university as a way of helping preservice teachers get to know

various communities in our metropolitan area and the multiple urban settings that make up the city. During the walks, preservice teachers hear personal stories from community groups associated with the neighborhoods in which they will be teaching. Although building awareness is important, teachers need to "cultivate cooperation, collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility for learning among students and between students and teachers" (Gay, 2010, p. 45). Initially, the culture walks provided an opportunity for preservice teachers to learn about diverse environments and reflect, but they were missing an element of cultural self-study and occasions to consistently apply new learning in context (Lindo & Lim, 2020). Even with culture walks in place, preservice teachers still had misconceptions that affected teacher recruitment and retention locally. We also saw a decline in requests for student teaching and practicum placements in our urban areas.

Four years after the university instituted culture walks, a 60-hour field experience component in an urban area was tied to the culture walk. This additional field component immersed preservice teachers in urban classrooms Monday through Thursday for a half day over the course of five to six weeks based on the university calendar. The goal of the experience was "to create more intentionality, supervision, and authenticity" (Schaffer et al., 2017, p. 21). The new structure gave preservice teachers additional opportunities to

apply strategies and time to reflect upon their own cultural environments, beliefs, and experiences in the context of working with students. As a result of this addition to the teaching curriculum, we saw nearly a 25% increase in student teaching requests for urban areas.

In this mixed-methods, sequential design, we address the following research questions: In what ways, if any, does the structure of the teacher preparation program impact preservice teachers' comfort with, understanding of, and/or application of culturally responsive teaching practices in urban teaching environments? Were there specific components of the structure that supported preservice teacher development?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Bourdieu (1987) defined cultural capital as the understanding of and adept use of the dominant culture's codes and practices. The concept of cultural pluralism identifies diversity, or the commingling of dominant and nondominant cultures, as a resource (Schachner et al., 2016) that provides opportunities for the nondominant culture to engage with the dominant culture while maintaining cultural differences. Creating a pluralistic environment in classrooms requires educators to take the time to learn about their students' cultures, celebrate diversity, and incorporate students' backgrounds into their classrooms and curriculum. When effectively carried out, this environment promotes general well-being and academic achievement (Schachner et al., 2016). The idea that educators are more effective when they incorporate culture, relevant topics, and students' backgrounds into learning is not a new one. Multicultural education originated in the 1970s. In 1973, the focus moved to teacher preparation, and teacher limitations were identified as the reason for minority achievement gaps. In 1975, Gay identified the need for diverse curriculum material in classrooms (Gay, 2018). Over time, many words have been used to describe culturally responsive educational practices and their attributes, such as "culturally congruent" (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), "relevant" (Ladson-Billings, 2013), "responsive" (Gay, 2010, 2018), and "sustaining" (Paris, 2012). Other supporting concepts include "funds of knowledge" (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) and "funds of identity" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014).

Teachers who utilize funds of knowledge—what students bring to the classroom based on the knowledge and skills that they and their families use to maintain well-being at home—can better

understand their own actions and strengthen both teaching and learning (Hedges, 2015). An outgrowth of funds of knowledge is the concept of funds of identity, which shifts the focus from the household to the individual. When individuals internalize community, cultural, and family factors to find their sense of self, funds of identity are born. As outlined by Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), funds of identity refer to "historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for a person's self-definition, self-expression and self-understanding" (p. 31). Varied environmental experiences shape individuals' perspectives, emotions, and behaviors. These experiences and behaviors impact their sense of self in the world, which in turn affects how they communicate and receive information. Therefore, preservice teachers must recognize variations in students' races, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, communities, and so on and capitalize on them as funds of knowledge and identity.

Schooling and learning are context-specific social processes steeped in history (Rodriguez, 2013) and measured against White, middle-class norms (Paris & Alim, 2014). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 77% of teachers are female, and 80% are white (Loewus, 2017). With so many preservice teachers being White, middle-class women, implicit bias may affect their beliefs regarding teaching and learning. While teachers must reach beyond the classroom to utilize "various resources that exist in communities or sites beyond the formal academic setting" (Rodriguez, 2013, p. 92), these resources may vary greatly from what teachers have personally experienced. Therefore, preservice teachers need support in building and strengthening their capacity to understand the community context of their schools and to teach in ways that reflect the students they are serving.

Many preservice teachers who come from affluent, predominantly White communities begin teacher preparation with little personal knowledge of urban environments or the students who reside in them. Coming from outside the community, these preservice teachers' perspectives have often been shaped by secondary sources, such as what they have seen in the media or heard from others. Howard's (2016) book title reminds us that *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*, and Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity reminds us that there are stages of intercultural relations. Bennett highlights six

stages of intercultural relations: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Lindo & Lim, 2020). In *denial*, people see themselves as the only culture and may isolate, whereas in *defense* people may feel threatened or may stereotype others. In *minimization*, people recognize that differences exist, yet *acceptance* moves from recognizing to appreciating differences. In *adaptation*, people find more effective ways to effectively communicate, whereas in *integration* people can effectively transition between cultural perspectives different from their own. The first three are defined as ethnocentric stages, whereas the last three are considered ethnorelative stages (Lindo & Lim, 2020).

Exposing preservice teachers to varied cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic communities can strengthen their cultural competence and intercultural sensitivity and may alter any misconceptions. Field experiences give preservice teachers opportunities both to reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching and to apply strategies designed to positively impact student learning (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Clinical Practice Commission [AACTE], 2018; Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2012). Authentic field experiences also allow for complete immersion into the school community and support increased learning and cultural understanding through interaction. This is why the culminating student teaching experience for preservice teachers is often the most powerful experience in their program. Reflecting on how, when, and why decisions are made while teaching increases preservice teachers' ability to impact student achievement and facilitates their growth as professionals (Goodwin, 2011). Preservice teachers can discover students' funds of identity through conversations or artifacts or by compiling information about their interests. An immersive experience provides time to learn students' names, identify their likes and dislikes, and understand them as individuals within their school and community. Through these daily experiences, preservice teachers come to better understand how the decisions they make affect teaching and learning.

These experiences also provide time for preservice teachers to confront their own assumptions and beliefs and respond in the context of the classroom. One way to nurture the use of funds of identity in the classroom is through culturally responsive teaching (CRT), or "using the cultural characteristics, experiences,

and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Effective teaching involves mastering content knowledge and teaching skills, developing culturally sensitive classrooms, and building a positive learning community. Educators have a responsibility to shape students' experiences based on environmental conditions and to recognize what elements of students' cultural surroundings are conducive to their growth. These teacher-student relationships foster democratic engagement, which supports the teacher's role in helping students think about who they are and how they want to act within society (Carter & Wellner, 2013; Vygotsky, 1980). Applying students' perspectives and experiences to instruction increases the instruction's effectiveness and leads to stronger relationships and a more positive learning community (Gay, 2002). Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) noted that "cultural practices are mediated by psychological phenomena such as motivation, perception, memory, and self-concept" (p. 34). Through the psychological phenomena, people shape who they are, how they respond, and how they behave according to the norms of their environment. The cross-cultural exchange desired in the teacher-student relationship is not possible without first understanding the funds of knowledge and identities that shape it.

Freire (2014) advocated for value discussions regarding diverse perspectives, engagement through questions, and critical analysis through problem solving. Essential to this process is dialogue about culture (Daddow, 2016) and critical reflection (Giroux, 2011). Both dialogue about culture and critical reflection require nurturing intentional and purposeful thinking about us as teachers to better understand students. Constructive conversations help preservice teachers meet the needs of diverse learners (Kaden & Patterson, 2014; Lyon, 2013), and reflective practice engages preservice teachers in a more critical understanding of the lenses through which others see the world. Evaluating their own culture helps preservice teachers achieve cultural competence (Feize & Gonzalez, 2018). Tervalon and Murray-García (1998) used the term *cultural humility* in place of cultural competency, defining it as an acceptance and self-awareness of the aspects of one's own culture of which they are unaware and the acknowledgment that every individual's situation is different. Preservice teachers need opportunities to engage in cultural humility by examining their own sociocultural identities.

Paris (2012) introduced the idea of *culturally sustaining pedagogy*, “which seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a necessary response to demographic and social change” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 88). This kind of pedagogy can be supported through open, honest, and often difficult conversations among diverse groups. In their sample of 79 young adults, Cangià and Pagani (2014) discovered that when participants interacted with and heard from members of distinct cultural groups, they were more accepting of the groups’ beliefs and practices. This effect was amplified when the young adults had the opportunity to debrief about the experience. Specifically, when educators reflect on their experiences with diverse cultural groups, they must realize where their personal ideologies influence their instructional practice (Bondy et al., 2007). Effective, inclusive educators do not develop optimal culturally sustaining practices overnight; they must engage in multiple experiences to thoroughly reflect upon how their beliefs manifest in practice.

Methodology

Context of the Partnership

Over the years, university faculty have built strong partnerships with administrators, teachers, and community organizations. Each semester, we follow the same structure for planning and revising curriculum for preservice teachers. After determining the field locations, we collaborate with building administrators and community organizations to set a date for orientation and the culture walk. We use this opportunity to discuss what the university, community, and school all hope to gain from the experience.

Holding the culture walk within the community is essential. When possible, participating preservice teachers literally walk through the community. If there is inclement weather, participants gather at the offices of community organizations to hear from community representatives. Following both the culture walk and the field experience immersion, we debrief with those involved and utilize the information we gather to make changes for upcoming experiences. Table 1 shows an example culture walk agenda, including the community organizations and local vendors included in the walks. Community partnerships change as community and student needs change.

Examples of how these partnerships work in tandem for each culture walk are highlighted below.

- The Learning Community Center of North Omaha is dedicated to enriching the lives of families and children. The network connects public education, higher education, research, health and well-being, philanthropy, foundations, and the nonprofit community. Community members assist with the walks and provide tours to the preservice teachers. They highlight the history of the area, describe current issues and new developments, and visit businesses. The Hope Center is a local organization that strives to enrich the lives of youth in North Omaha through meaningful activities, mentorship, and academic support.
- After learning about the resources at the South Omaha Library, preservice teachers tour El Museo Latino, a Latinx art and history museum and cultural center. Preservice teachers then have the opportunity to meet with high school students who share firsthand experiences and perspectives. Following is a walking tour around the South Omaha community led by the founder of the South Omaha Museum.
- Yates Educational Community Partnership is a school for refugee children and adults. Preservice teachers learn about Yates, attend classes, take a walk to the community garden, and engage with parents. Refugees tell their own stories and share how they have settled into their new lives. At Lutheran Family Services, preservice teachers learn about the resources this facility offers, take a tour, and hear from a member of the refugee community who has worked with the organization.

Over the years, we have had to reach out to multiple potential partners to build enough partnerships to engage all of our students. Tours are led by local community members to provide context for the communities hosting the field experiences. The goal is to help preservice teachers build an understanding of the support systems at work in each community and how these systems operate in collaboration with schools and families. As mentioned previously, varied experiences shape perspectives (Esteban-Guitart and Moll, 2014) and impact how people communicate and receive information. Supplying preservice teachers with historical perspectives provides additional context

Table 1. Example Agenda

North Omaha	South Omaha	Central Omaha
		
<p>Learning Community Center of North Omaha</p>	<p>South Omaha Library</p>	<p>Yates Educational Community Partnership</p>
<p>The Hope Center</p>	<p>El Museo Latino</p>	<p>Lutheran Family Services</p>
<p>Partnered elementary and secondary schools</p>	<p>Partnered elementary and secondary schools</p>	<p>Partnered elementary and secondary schools</p>
<p>Get N' Go Catering</p>	<p>Sam's Leon Catering</p>	<p>Oasis Falafel Catering</p>

that may reduce any stigmas they have associated with certain areas.

Design and Participants

Our study engaged 174 preservice teachers over the course of five semesters. The university's institutional review board granted approval for this study. Participation was voluntary based on enrollment in the associated course. The study only included data from participants who completed all three of the surveys administered (one prior to the start of the experience, one following a cultural exposure experience, and one following immersion into the local schools). Like many institutions, our teacher preparation program has similar demographics to the teacher demographics provided by National Center for Education Statistics: 77% of students are female, and 72% of female students are White. Table 2 outlines additional participant demographics.

Participants attend a university that enrolls over 15,000 students, and 1.2 million people live within a 50-mile radius of the school. As with other large metropolitan areas, the city is segregated. According to historians, redlining

happened as early as the 1920s (Fletcher, 2015). This systemic practice denied loans and other financial support to low-income and racially marginalized communities in the city. We still see results of this today; a large African American/Black population lives in the northern part of the city, a large Hispanic/Latinx population lives in the southern part of the city, and a large refugee population lives in the center of the city. The extent of preservice teachers' prior interactions with these communities varied by participant (see Table 3).

Quantitative Analysis and Findings

We used a mixed-methods, sequential design to analyze quantitative and qualitative evidence in two phases (Creswell, 2014; Ivankova et al., 2006). To address the quantitative methodology, we conducted two one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures to determine the effect of preservice teachers' confidence levels. In addition, preservice teachers' self-reported levels of competence in implementing CRT at three intervals: pre-cultural exposure, post-cultural exposure, and post immersion. We selected this methodology as opposed to a *t* test to eliminate

Table 2. Age, Grade Level Pursued, and Previous Schooling Experience of Participants

Age	%
Under 25 years old	82.29
Age 26–39	13.14
Age 40–59	4.57
Grade level pursued	%
Elementary level (PK–6)	66.86
Secondary level (7–12)	30.86
PK–12	2.29
I attended my PK–12 school years primarily...	%
in a suburban district.	32.00
in an urban district.	30.29
in a rural district.	20.57
in a private school.	14.25
in an international school.	1.71
in a home school experience.	1.14

Table 3. Connection to the Community

How many times have you interacted with the community?	%
Never	19
1–5 times	34
6–10 times	10
11–20 times	6
More than 20 times	21
I live in the community.	10

errors. Participants responded to the following questions prior to the start of the experience, after a cultural exposure experience, and after immersion into the local schools: How comfortable do you feel teaching in the community you have been assigned? How competent do you feel implementing CRT practices? The quantifiers were *very comfortable* (5), *slightly comfortable* (4), *neutral* (3), *slightly uncomfortable* (2), *very uncomfortable* (1), and *I don't know enough about the community to have an opinion* (0). Results are in Table 4.

There was a significant positive effect on the preservice teachers' confidence level, $\Lambda = 0.592$, $F(2, 173) = 59.588$, $p = 0.000$. A second one-way repeated ANOVA was conducted to determine how competent preservice teachers felt implementing CRT. There was also a significant positive effect on the preservice teachers' confidence level, $\Lambda = 0.743$, $F(2, 214) = 37.075$, $p = 0.000$.

Since the data showed growth over time in preservice teachers' confidence and competence levels, we wanted to determine whether the interactions with the community prior to starting the experience or the field experience itself impacted CRT competence levels. Consequently, we conducted a two-way ANOVA that compared the main effects of prior interactions with the

community and the comfort with the community post-culture walk with participants' perceived competence in implementing CRT practices. Interactions within the community were not significant at $p = 0.581$, whereas comfort within the community post-culture walk was significant at $p = 0.017$. There was not a statistically significant interaction, $F(2, 164) = 0.602$, $p = 0.698$, indicating that there was not a combined effect between interactions with the community and comfort with the community.

Qualitative Analysis and Findings

Since the quantitative data determined that the experience, and not previous engagements with the community itself, made an impact on participants' competence levels, we wanted to determine what aspects of the experience were most beneficial for participants. The open-ended survey questions asked participants to consider which aspects of the experience helped them reach their identified comfort levels (e.g., What helped you reach this comfort level? What strategies have you used?).

The first question asked participants to explain how and why they rated themselves as they did on their competence in teaching CRT. Of the

Table 4. One-Way Repeated ANOVA Results

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
How comfortable do you feel teaching in the community you have been assigned?	2	144.826	72.413	63.627	0.000
How competent do you feel implementing culturally responsive teaching practices?	2	30.480	15.240	23.771	0.000

Note. Significant at the $p < .05$ level.

174 preservice teacher participants, 170 responded to this question. We used NVivo qualitative data analysis software to determine commonalities and emerging categories using inductive analysis (Yin, 2016). To honor participants' responses, we used in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016) to determine the following codes: classroom immersion (34%), support structures (31%), and relationship building (15%). The authors then reviewed the codes to explore the relationships between them and to identify meaning.

The first theme, *classroom immersion*, related to having time for authentic opportunities to teach and engage within the building. Participants mentioned things like dedicating an adequate amount of time to the experience, being in the school 4 days a week, and engaging with the students daily. Immersion into the school provided preservice teachers with opportunities to engage in the environment in authentic ways. The following quotes from participants exemplify the ideas outlined above:

- “Working with students who were different from me and realizing that they are very different from me, but they also share a lot of the same interests and passions as me. It helped me understand that, even though it sounds cliché, these differences are what make us interesting as individuals.”
- “The culture walk was beneficial to me. However, the best thing for me to reach maximum comfort in this community was just going into the school and teaching. I had many preconceived notions about this school that were mostly proved either wrong or more manageable than I had anticipated.”
- “Being in the community every day. When I first started, I was nervous, but after a few days of teaching in the community it started to become my normal routine and I realized there was no need to be nervous.”

The second prevalent theme was the *support received*. Participants mentioned receiving support via conversations and dialogue with school-based mentor teachers, university-based instructional coaches, university instructors, and building administrators. Participant responses coded for this theme highlighted the importance of feeling welcome, strong mentorship, opportunities for conversations, and debriefs that added context to their experiences. The following quotes from participants exemplify the ideas outlined above:

- “Having a mentor and other teachers in the high school willing to help me as much as they can by giving advice, strategies, and tips to improve each time. Getting great feedback from my instructor, coach, and mentor teacher.”
- “The culture walks, my past experiences, and my mentor teacher ‘debriefing’ us after class.”

We also saw an increase in participants who wanted to return to teach in the buildings they were placed in for the field experience, equating to almost a 25% increase in requests for urban districts. One participant noted, “I always felt welcomed. The staff there is amazing, and it made me want to student teach there for my clinical practice. The students are so kind and have such a desire to learn.” Another stated, “The confidence in the support I would have from the community really makes [the school] a promising choice for a workplace.”

The third major theme highlighted the opportunity to *build relationships* by meeting people, connecting with students, and getting to know teachers, parents, and other school staff. One participant commented, “I went into this practicum with no experience in this particular community. I began to feel more comfortable once I started building relationships around my assigned school and putting myself out there.” Participants also saw positive networking opportunities; one participant noted “connecting with the kids and networking with the other teachers and practicum students.”

After identifying the most beneficial aspects of the experience for participants, we wanted to analyze the application of CRT and the degree to which participants implemented it. To this end, we asked participants to share two CRT strategies they used during the experience. Of the 174 participants, 114 answered this question. (One answer was not included as it was unclear; it was, “and the other one said sorry.”) In the responses received, 48% of participants shared the application of a CRT strategy, 30% shared how they used CRT to make connections with students, and 22% provided answers that recognized student differences but provided no context for specific connections made or practices applied.

Participants who shared responses highlighting the *application* of CRT recognized the need for CRT and applied specific practices to increase student learning. One participant noted how they supported Spanish-speaking students in writing and math by “rewording and

breaking apart concepts in a way that reteaches or introduces new ways of looking at material; I also used what little Spanish I know to translate.... Making these connections built our relationship.” Another participant talked about changing names in word problems to match the names of students in the classroom and using community context when teaching. Others shared opportunities to let students “open up about their experiences,” including asking students what they wanted others to know about them and what misconceptions might exist, so that other students could engage with new perspectives. Another identified the need to use books that served as mirrors for learners (Bishop, 1990) and then to provide opportunities for students to share how the content applied to their own lives. One participant mentioned that an awareness of which students celebrated which holidays helped to identify connections that could be made made for students. Another shared the following: “I used a timer on the internet to show time left at stations. It was a bomb-themed timer and it made loud explosion noises when done. I changed it immediately after the first time because I know that I had students from war countries.”

Answers coded with *connectivity* indicated that the respondent recognized the need for CRT and made connections with students to increase student learning, but these answers did not provide context as to how CRT would impact learning. For example, one participant said that they “got to know students and a little bit of their backgrounds and used it in class when providing examples.” While this answer shows that the respondent used the information they gathered to make connections for students when learning, the respondent did not explicitly explain what they did or how they did it. Other comments related to connectivity included “connecting material to real life,” “I arrived early to sit and talk with students,” “I invited students to tell me about their experiences,” and “I made references relevant.”

Answers coded with *awareness* recognized student differences but provided no context. For example, one participant used tactile methods to teach geometry and added, “For triangles, I asked students when they are outside school or in school where they see triangles. Then we talked about building buildings and how construction workers have to know the measurements and angles to build things correctly.” While this shows an attempt to connect the learning to students, there is no connection to CRT aside from providing tactile and visual tools for varying learners. Other

comments qualifying as awareness included “treating students with respect,” “correctly pronouncing their names,” and “getting to know students.” Additional comments included allowing for choice, knowing student interests, and allowing students to share their experiences. A summary of all data is in Figure 1.

Discussion

Schools around the world are increasingly diverse, and inclusion and equity guide teacher preparation practices. According to Hue and Kennedy (2014), “The education of ethnic minority students is no longer peripheral to mainstream schooling. It is a central topic in general education” (p. 284). Preservice teachers need opportunities to experience the culture and history of school populations before beginning their fieldwork. In addition, they need extensive experiences that immerse them into school cultures so that they begin to understand the importance of connecting curriculum to their students. Helping preservice teachers strengthen their civic agency through critical reflection is essential to meeting student needs. “We don’t know what we don’t know” is an old adage, but it rings true when discussing education. Teachers must know their students to reach them. Effective teachers ask questions about students’ lives and show a genuine interest in who they are and what strengths they bring to school beyond what the curriculum outlines. Sometimes it is as simple as connecting popular icons, slang, and/or clothing styles to content.

Through our research, we learned the importance of a preservice teacher finding comfort with their surroundings. Little things are important. Preservice teachers need to feel welcomed and valued when starting in a new environment. They need opportunities to learn the layout of the community, who lives there, and what the community values. The data supports that three components—exposure, immersion, and dialogue—need to be present in field placements for the placements to be meaningful and purposeful for preservice teachers. These elements enhance field experiences by providing preservice teachers with authentic opportunities to engage in culturally responsive practices. Figure 2 outlines the key components of these experiences.

Exposure

Preservice teachers need opportunities to learn about the students and communities where they will be teaching (Yuan, 2018). Prefieldwork culture

Figure 1. Summary of Quantitative Data and Qualitative Data

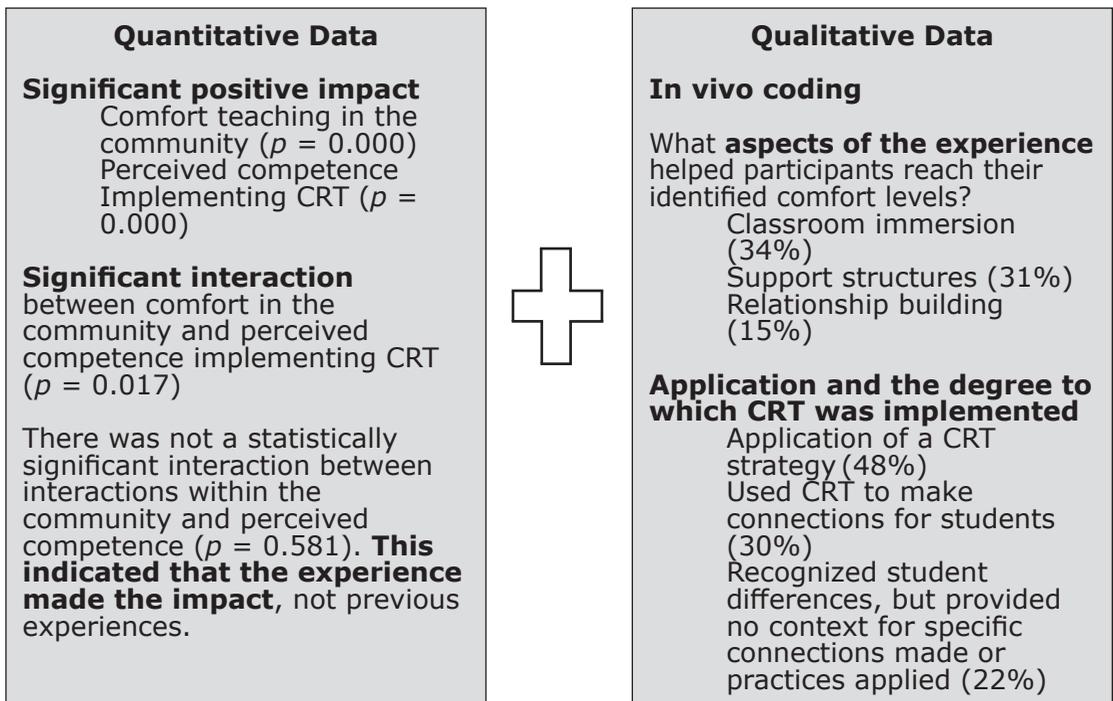
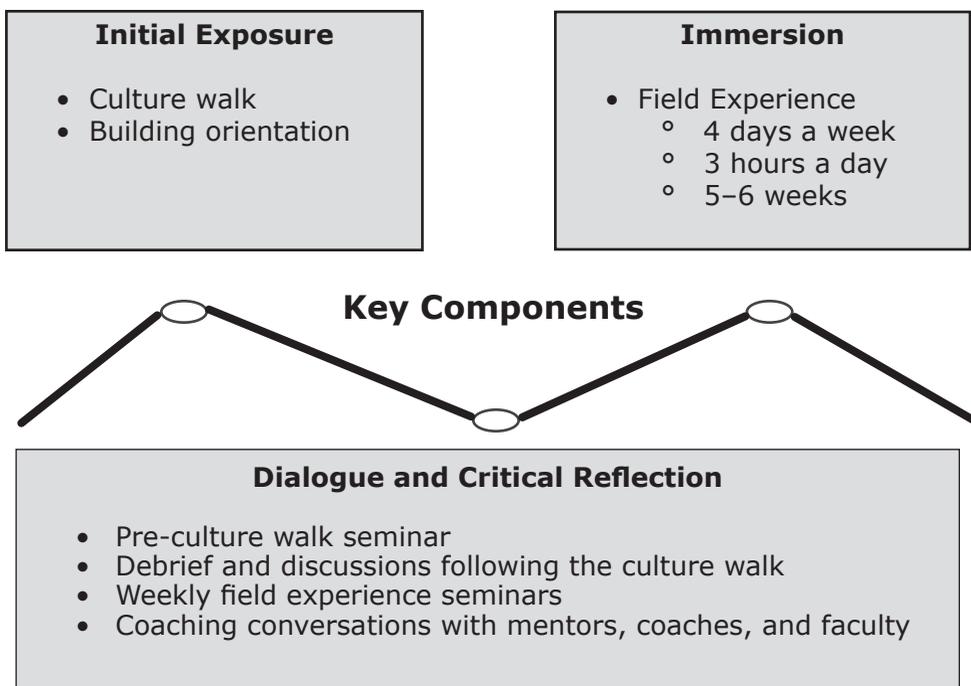


Figure 2. Key Components of the Experience



walks give preservice teachers opportunities to learn about the community, neighborhoods, and histories of the various populations they will be teaching on a local level. The day of the culture walk begins with a visit to the preservice teachers' assigned school. The principal or another school leader meets with the preservice teachers to review expectations, share information about the building, and provide a building tour. Their time at the building ends with finding the mentor teacher. Often, there are also opportunities to engage with students and families at the school. Following the school visit, preservice teachers walk through the community to a centralized community location. At this time, community members and district personnel share their stories, experiences, and expertise. Community members share resources, and the time is followed by a question and answer session and a fellowship meal. The event concludes with time for dialogue through a guided reflection led by university faculty.

If culturally competent teachers “know how to integrate students' culture and language in the teaching and learning process, respect their culture, reinforce their cultural identity, and use instructional strategies that meet students' cultural and linguistic needs” (Lindo & Lim, 2020), then preservice teachers need to understand and engage with environments unlike their own. Recognizing variances in students' races, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, communities, and so on and incorporating this knowledge effectively into the classroom (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) can impact academic success (Schachner et al., 2016). Culture walks and the building orientation serve as the first step in helping preservice teachers understand community needs and how these needs connect with and influence schools.

Immersion

Nieto (2006) defined cultural immersion as “exposure to persons or groups markedly different in culture (e.g., ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and/or physical exceptionality)” (p. 77). Field-based opportunities give preservice teachers time to apply what they have learned in their programs of study and allow them to develop effective teaching skills most likely to impact PK–12 student learning (AACTE, 2018; CCSSO, 2012; Zeichner, 2010, 2012). Preservice teachers are immersed in schools for a 5–6 week period during which they work 4 consecutive days each week for 3 hours at a time, resulting in a 60-hour experience.

Dialogue

Effective, inclusive educators engage in intentional and purposeful thinking to analyze the perspectives that they and their students bring to the classroom. The structure of the field experience permits preservice teachers to begin to understand their own personal beliefs and biases and how these impact their perspectives. Dialogue and critical reflection are embedded throughout the experience. Across the pre-event orientation, the postevent reflection, and the 60 hours spent in the field, preservice teachers have time to reflect upon how their own cultural environments, beliefs, and experiences affect their work with students and others who have had life experiences different from their own. University faculty and instructional coaches may have individual conversations with students in the field and also meet weekly with students on campus for seminars. These opportunities for dialogue both one-on-one and with a group of others help preservice teachers explore, engage with, and reflect upon their beliefs. This structure permits cultural self-study and provides opportunities for students to consistently apply new learning in context. Using this reflective cycle of self-study, knowledge attainment, and application strengthens cultural competence (Lindo & Lim, 2020). This was evident in the students' identification and application of CRT during immersion.

Even with these positive outcomes, the qualitative analysis revealed that preservice teachers need more opportunities to apply CRT in authentic ways. The data connect to Bennett's stages of intercultural sensitivity (Lindo & Lim, 2020). Responses that highlighted the *application* of CRT indicated more ethnocentric behavior, as participants shared how they used CRT strategies to increase communication and effectiveness in their teaching. Based on answers that displayed *connectivity*, participants valued relationships and a need to make connections with students, but it was unclear whether acceptance of students' cultures led participants to adapt their teaching or integrate student cultures into learning. Answers that displayed *awareness* demonstrated more ethnocentric tendencies.

Sustaining a Foundation of Partnership

Society must have a shared commitment to developing effective teachers. In order for this to happen, universities, schools, and communities must partner and work together. Collaboration can be difficult to establish even in the best

of circumstances. It involves trust, time, and a commitment to others' thoughts, ideas, and schedule. It is not something that spontaneously develops from an initial invitation but something that must be nurtured and developed over time. Partnerships must be approached with a willingness to jointly address challenges as they arise.

New teachers are developed across multiple contexts. These hybrid spaces (Sailors & Hoffman, 2019) or third spaces (Zeichner, 2010) bridge the gap between the university, schools, and communities. Each partner brings their own context to the work of teaching new teachers, and partners' unique experiences are then applied to create new collective knowledge in a shared space of learning. When collaboratively developed, these partnerships can provide preservice teachers with "opportunities to reject deficit notions they may hold about youths" (Sailors & Hoffman, 2019, p. 128). This requires giving preservice teachers a chance to "examine, critique, and support [one] another's work in a safe and supportive environment" (Murray, 2015, p. 23). Part of the difficulty in achieving sustainable partnerships is that, for decades, universities, schools, and communities have worked independently. Some community entities have referred to universities as "ivory towers" that provide only the knowledge base (Sleeter, 2014) or that are only focused on their personal research agendas, leaving practitioners without a voice (Bernay et al., 2020) and communities discounted.

In the last 20 years, researchers have outlined three elements of successful partnerships: trust, collaboration, and reciprocity. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) explained Lewicki and Bunker's stages of trust and the vulnerability involved. Relationships start with provisional trust, and a breach of expectations at this stage often ends relationships. When partners in a relationship start to recognize how each other may react in a given situation, knowledge-based trust develops. Identity-based trust is reached when "there is complete empathy with the other party's desires and intentions. Each of the parties understands and appreciates the other's desires to such an extent that each can effectively act in the other's stead" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998, p. 4).

The sustainability of our partnership is directly linked to consistently providing every partner a voice in the development of the field experience. This takes time, but as we have seen from the results, it has been time well spent. Following each experience, debriefs are held with community

partners and perspectives are collected from preservice teachers to determine the following:

1. Were the cocreated outcomes met?
2. What were the positive outcomes of the experience?
3. Does anything need to be modified?
4. What can we do to better support you?

Taking this feedback into account as we develop each unique experience showcases collaboration. From the input of the community organizations (culture walk), to the field experience immersion (schools), to teacher development (university), a systematic, reciprocal culture connects these pedagogies.

Conclusion

Further research is needed to address the study's limited number of answers demonstrating application. This lack of application may be due to an absence of detail in participants' responses, or it may be connected to participants' position on the continuum of intercultural relations. Future research could include redesigning the survey to prompt deeper reflection by the preservice teachers. Another avenue for future research might include conducting interviews or focus groups with preservice teachers, university faculty, and school partners.

Without collaboration between the community, universities, and practitioners, preservice professionals are unable to learn and apply CRT strategies in high-quality placements. School districts and community organizations use the field experiences as an opportunity to recruit, and students report a deeper connection to the community as a result of immersion. Community partners report increased participation in volunteer efforts and increased financial support as preservice teachers frequent local restaurants, grocery stores, and marketplaces. Beyond the education field, the structure of exposure, immersion, and dialogue is ideal for other types of human service professionals. Social workers, case managers, school counselors, therapists, community health workers, and public administrators could all benefit from a training model that helps soon-to-be professionals along the cultural competence continuum. This symbiotic relationship offers benefits to all involved.

Preservice teachers first must seek cultural understanding and then use this knowledge to enhance student learning. Exposure, immersion, and dialogue provide opportunities to collaborate, learn, and experience the culture of diverse neighborhoods and the people within them. These opportunities positively impact preservice teachers'

comfort level and ability to apply CRT strategies. When teachers are comfortable, they can engage in critical reflection to understand the various lenses through which students view the world, and they are better able to meet student needs. According to Gay (2018), "High-level learning is a very high-risk venture... and requires students to have some degree of academic mastery, as well as personal confidence and courage" (p. 32). This self-efficacy helps preservice teachers develop the civic agency necessary to work with all students. Preparing teachers to utilize differing perspectives to shape educational experiences for their students will ultimately strengthen both teaching and learning.

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