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The Impact of Intercultural Experiences on Preservice Teachers' Preparedness to Engage with Diverse Learners

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Abstract: The diversity of student populations globally is increasing more rapidly than the diversity of the teaching workforce. Concerns are that beginning teachers are ill-prepared to meet the needs of the diversity of students in their classrooms. This lack of preparedness has been partially attributed to inadequate preparation within teacher education programs. We advocate that preservice teachers need to understand how their prior intercultural experiences can be utilised to better prepare them for teaching diverse groups of learners. This qualitative study (n=40) draws on Hammer's (2009) Intercultural Development Continuum to explore the impact that these experiences have on shaping preservice teachers as teachers of diversity. We use the data to illustrate the breadth of positioning on the IDC of these preservice teachers. Findings indicate that prior quality engagement with diversity over time enhances preservice teachers' intercultural competence. We describe how teacher education can better prepare preservice teachers for engaging diverse learners.

Introduction

Globalisation, and its associated mobility of people, has changed the demographic profile of schools to now include a greater diversity of students. However, while student populations have become increasingly diverse in areas of ethnicity, culture, languages spoken and disability, the profile of the teaching workforce has remained relatively slower to change (Florian, 2012). In Australia, for example, there is a gap in the extent of diversity of the student population and that of the teaching force, which has remained largely Anglo-ethnic (Cruickshank, 2004; Han & Singh, 2007). Sawir (2013) suggests that because Australia is geographically isolated, higher education students from other cultures have the capacity to “introduce cosmopolitan notions and experiences” (p. 366) that are likely to change parochial narratives from the local to the global. We posit that teacher educators have been slow in utilising this valuable resource. Kumar and Hamer (2012), for example, argue that preservice teachers' lack of preparedness to meet the needs of culturally diverse students may be traced back to poor preparation by teacher education programs. As such, we contend that preservice teachers should have opportunities to consider how their own cultural positioning helps to shape their willingness to engage with diverse learners while they are still training to become teachers.

In recent years, there has been a greater intake of individuals from other countries into teacher education and that there are increasing numbers of new entrants into teacher education who have had broad experiential learning outside the classroom that can contribute to shaping their pedagogic engagement (McKenzie, Weldon, Rowley, Murphy, & McMillian, 2014). At the same time, there are other preservice teachers with limited intercultural

experiences to draw on to help them relate to working with diversity in schools. As more Australians engage in overseas travel for work and pleasure and more and more cultural diversity becomes the everyday fabric of life in Australia, it is important to explore if, and how, prior learning and experiences help to shape preservice teachers' understanding of how to meet the needs of diverse groups of students in schools. The authors of the current paper contend that prior learning and experiences have the potential for preservice teachers to develop intercultural competence. Intercultural competence we take to include elements such as respect and valuing other cultures, openness and curiosity about others as well as cultural self-awareness and adaptability to adjust to new cultural situations (Deardorff, 2007). Researchers such as Bustamante, Skidmore, Nelson, and Jones (2016) argue that the development of teachers' intercultural competence must be integrated explicitly into teacher preparation programs, as doing so will help to strengthen preservice teachers' understanding and practice of including diversity. It then follows that first, teacher educators need to have an awareness of the backgrounds and experiences that preservice teachers bring into teacher education and second, teacher educators need to consider how best to utilise and build on the pre-existing intercultural competences of preservice teachers to help them identify as inclusive educators.

Much research has focused on understanding how preservice teachers develop an identity as a teacher (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Korthagan, 2004) some with a specific reference to preparing preservice teachers to identify as inclusive educators who can teach a diverse range of students in schools (Costello & Boyle, 2013; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Pugach & Blanton, 2012). While there has been a great deal of research exploring preservice teachers' preparedness for teaching students with disabilities, Florian (2012) identifies that teacher education must also consider the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity presented by students in classrooms. This change in narrative about inclusion means that educators need to think beyond learning difficulties and disabilities when they describe inclusion and include the notion of intercultural sensitivity. We posit that this conversation needs to begin in teacher educator programs.

Having Intercultural Competence

According to Bennett (1986, 2004), intercultural sensitivity is identified as an individual's attitudes and understandings of differences specific to their worldview and the worldview of others. Worldviews encompass awareness of one's subjective cultural context and acknowledges how individuals embrace or reject phenomena in the world (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). An individual from a monocultural socialisation, for example, may not have as well-developed intercultural sensitivity towards others as an individual from a multicultural socialisation, as generally they would have had fewer experiences in working with people from other cultures. While intercultural sensitivity relates to the complexity of perceptions of cultural difference (Bennett, 2004), intercultural competence refers to the potential for enactment of culturally sensitive behaviours in another cultural context (Bennett, 2004; Cubukcu, 2013). In developing intercultural competence, intercultural sensitivities learned through engagement in one cultural setting can be applied to interactions with other cultural groups (Cubukcu, 2013). Researchers (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Mills & Ballantyne, 2010) caution, that many preservice teachers enter teacher education with negative or deficit attitudes and beliefs about children who exhibit difference. Garmon (2004) suggests that teacher education coursework tends to confirm rather than challenge pre-existing beliefs about teaching, which includes beliefs about teaching students

from different cultural backgrounds. Garmon also suggests that the more positive prior beliefs about diversity preservice teachers have the more able they are to embrace diversity as a teacher. In our study, we wanted to explore preservice teachers' intercultural sensitivity in relation to whether, by reflecting on their cultural experiences, preservice teachers could make connections between their prior learning and experiences and how they imagined themselves as teachers of diverse groups of students.

The Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) (Hammer, 2011, 2012) is a model of intercultural competence that has emerged from the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) originally proposed by Milton Bennett (1986, 2004) to explain how people interpret cultural difference (Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003). As shown in Figure 1, Hammer's IDC (2012) considers intercultural sensitivity as falling on a developmental continuum progressing from the more monocultural (ethnocentric) mindsets of *denial* and *polarisation* through a transitional orientation of *minimization* to the more intercultural (or global) mindsets of *acceptance* and *adaptation* (Bennett, 2004; Hammer, 2011). Each of the five orientations along the IDC continuum reflects a distinct set of perceptions and experiences around cultural differences (Hammer, 2009). Bennett (2009) suggests that an individual's orientation in relation to cultural sensitivity contributes to their identity formation and their future selves as teachers.

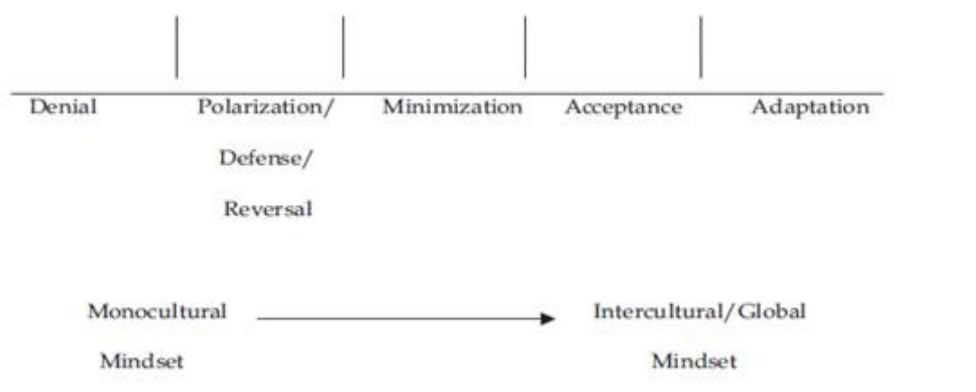


Figure 1: Intercultural development continuum (Hammer, 2009)

In the monocultural state of *denial*, a person acknowledges that only their culture is real, other cultures are either not noticed at all or are vaguely construed. In *denial*, a person is generally disinterested in other cultures and may act aggressively to avoid or eliminate difference. Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman (2003) purport that this orientation is characteristic of people who have limited experience with other cultural groups. However, Hammer (2009) argues that this is true only for people who are from the dominant culture and further suggests that people from minority groups are less likely to maintain a denial orientation, as minority group members often have to deal with cultural differences as part of the larger society. In an education setting, denial may be evidenced as the need for new diverse members (for example, a new teacher or student) to fit into the existing culture (Hammer) of the school. Noticing and confronting cultural differences provides a condition towards understanding cultural diversity. A further factor that contributes to moving from *denial* to *polarisation* is when people from different cultural groups enter a community or organisation as this will increase the need for interactions with members of these cultural groups (Hammer). In a *polarisation* orientation, cultural differences are viewed in terms of "us" and "them". This may take the form of a less critical view of one's own culture and an

overly critical view of other cultural groups (Hammer, 2011). Focusing on shared commonalities however can create the conditions for the emergence of the next orientation, *minimisation* (Bennett, 2004).

In *minimisation*, cultural differences are neutralised and one's cultural worldview is experienced as a universal absolute (e.g. everybody wants to live in a democracy) with a tendency to mask deeper recognition and appreciation of cultural differences. In this worldview, cultural differences are trivialised with the belief that human similarities far outweigh any differences (Cubukcu, 2013). As such, *minimisation* is not monocultural in orientation but instead is a transitional orientation in which an individual can recognise and respond to cultural commonalities but is challenged when complex cultural differences need to be adjusted through deeper understanding of the other cultural community (Hammer, 2011). To move from *minimisation* into an *acceptance* orientation, individuals must be given opportunities to explore cultural differences more deeply and recognise that cultural patterns of perceptions and behaviours need to be understood from the perspective of the other culture (Hammer, 2009; Hammer & Bennett, 2009). *Acceptance* is a state where one accepts that their culture is one of many complex cultural worldviews (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). In *acceptance*, people are curious and interested in cultural difference. Indeed, one may have a positive attitude towards other cultures without having experienced them in much depth. Bennett (2004) comments that acceptance allows a person to "take the perspective of another culture without losing your own perspective" (p. 70). As such, diversity feels understood (Hammer, 2012). A shift from *acceptance* to *adaptation*, involves deepening one's own perceptions of other cultures, demonstrating an understanding of different cultural practices (even those that are confronting and opposed to one's own personal values) and an increased capability to make ethical judgements taking into consideration the disparity between different cultural values (Hammer, 2009). An *adaptation* orientation, involves the capability to shift perspective to another culture and to adapt behaviour according to the cultural context (Hammer, 2009). Thus, diversity "feels valued and involved" (Hammer, 2012, p. 124) in an adaptation orientation.

Hammer's IDC (2009) and Bennett's DMIS (1986, 2004) are based on the premise that intercultural competence is not static but rather developmental. Progression along the continuum to higher levels of intercultural competence occurs through interrogation of a variety of cultural norms and differences (Cubukcu, 2013). Once progressed to a higher level, regression to a less sophisticated mindset is unlikely. Key factors to developing greater intercultural competence include being open to the ideas and beliefs of others, critically examining one's position about interculturality, having a commitment to social justice, actively seeking intercultural experiences both in one's personal life and through educational experiences and seeking out support groups who can both challenge and nourish intercultural sensitivities (Garmon, 2004). Marx and Moss (2011) suggest that opportunities for guided critical cultural reflection that are "calibrated to the students' intercultural readiness" (p. 45) are required for intercultural development. Simply immersing people into another cultural context does not automatically result in greater intercultural competence (Paige & Vande Berg, 2017; Wikan & Klein, 2017). Hammer's (2009) study considered the effects of short-term mobility programs in exploring students' interculturality. However, the research on short-term mobility programs indicates that the outcomes of such experiences can be highly variable with some individuals becoming even more ethnocentric while others revert to familiar routines once they return home (Jackson, 2015; Santoro, 2014). Intercultural educational support before, during and after these experiences is needed to propel students forward to more intercultural orientations (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012). In our study, we recognise that not all students have an opportunity to engage with study abroad programs, indeed most do not. The purpose of our study was to explore how preservice teachers' prior

knowledge and experiences helped to shape their intercultural orientations as they were and without the added intervention of a study abroad program. These preservice teachers represent the overwhelming majority who will be teaching in our schools.

Research Method

Participants

The aim of this exploratory study was to reveal the intercultural experiences and backgrounds that preservice teachers bring to teacher education. All participants were preservice teachers enrolled in the core subject, Engaging Diverse Learners, generally taken in the first semester of study of a one-year graduate-entry teacher education program. As the name of the subject suggests, the focus in the subject is on developing preservice teachers' knowledge and understanding of the theories and principles relating to the provision of socially just education, creating supportive learning environments for the diversity of learners in classrooms and the application of these principles to classroom practices.

All preservice teachers enrolled in the Engaging Diverse Learners subject were invited to participate in the study via an email sent out from the Blackboard site for the subject. Forty (n=40) preservice teachers of 305 enrolled participated in this study. Of the twenty-six preservice teachers were female and 14 were male. Twenty (n=20) preservice teachers identified as parents and an equal number identified as not having children. The ages of the preservice teachers ranged from early 20s to over 50 with the average age in the 31 to 40 bracket.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this qualitative study, data were collected through an online questionnaire which included preservice teacher demographics and 6 open-ended short-answer questions. The researchers drew on Hammer's (2009) IDC orientations to develop items for the questionnaire. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous with completion of the questionnaire indicating consent. The questionnaire was available online between weeks two and five of the semester; however the data were not analysed until the final grades were released as per the university ethics requirements.

Our overarching research question was: what impact do prior intercultural experiences have on shaping preservice teachers as future teachers? Our research sub-question explored how these experiences impacted on them more specifically as teachers of diversity. The first part of the questionnaire comprised questions collecting demographic data that included the preservice teachers' age range, parental status and gender (Table 1). Following this, the preservice teachers were asked to identify who inspired them to become a teacher, the qualities that the person/s had that provided inspiration and to reflect on what image they had of themselves of the teacher they aspired to become. Further open-ended questions focussed on the qualities or strengths that they perceived they had to engage effectively with diversity and on their prior experiences with diversity providing an example of their engagement.

The questionnaire responses were analysed using Creswell's (2012) six-stage process of content analysis. Following collation of the responses, each researcher read and re-read the data repeatedly to gain a sense of the whole set of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The data were analysed horizontally as well as vertically. That is, the complete set of responses for each questionnaire was examined as well as analysing the whole set of responses for each individual question. Following the initial independent analysis, the researchers collaboratively discussed the data in relation to the intercultural orientations of Hammer's

(2009) model of IDC. In responding to the research questions about this group of preservice teachers’ understandings and prior experiences of engaging with diversity and the impact on their imagined future selves as teachers, we use the data to illustrate a diversity of positions on Hammer’s IDC.

	Denial	Polarisation	Minimisation	Acceptance	Adaptation
Male - with children	Age 26-30 x 1		Age 31-40 x 2 Age 41-50 x 1	Age 41-50 x 1 Age 50+ x 1	
Male - with no children			Age 21-25 x 2 Age 26-30 x 1	Age 21-25 x 1 Age 26-30 x 3	Age 26-30 x 1 Age 41-50 x 1
Female - with children			Age 31-40 x 2 Age 41-50 x 4 Age 50+ x 1	Age 26-30 x 1 Age 31-40 x 1 Age 41-50 x 3 Age 50+ x 1	Age 31-40 x 1
Female - with no children			Age 26-30 X 1 Age 31-40 X 1	Age 21-25 X 3 Age 26-30 X 2 Age 31-40 X 1 Age 41-50 X 1	Age 31-40 X 2
Total	1	0	15	19	5

Table 1: Demographics of Preservice Teachers

Table 1 indicates that there is no discernible factor (age range, parental status or gender) that suggests a leaning towards one orientation or another. There was a fairly even spread across the different demographics of preservice teachers.

According to Hammer’s (2009) IDC, only one preservice teacher, Ben, {pseudonym} exhibited an orientation of *denial* in that he seemed generally disinterested in other cultures. When asked to describe his prior experiences with diversity, he responded:

I did an environmental assessment for the Aurukun people that also included recording cultural practices and stories. I have one close friend with Autism (though he has it in a good way) (Preservice teacher 35, male, with children, age 26-30)

Here Ben described some engagement with diversity but in a minimal way. He did not reflect on any impact working for the Aurukun people had on him and seemed to apologise for his close friend having autism, explaining that his friend had ‘it in a good way’. It is not clear what Ben meant when he described someone has having autism in a good way. Ben described his qualities to engage with diversity as:

Throughout school/uni I would often make friends with people with different backgrounds. These friendships tended to trail off quickly and now all of my lasting friendships come from similar backgrounds to me.

While it appears that Ben had opportunity to engage with diversity, he has chosen not to explore these opportunities further; rather he has allowed for them to ‘trail off quickly’. These statements reveal a basic lack of interest in other cultures. However, he then went on to describe areas he needed to consider for improvement in becoming a teacher of diverse learners as:

Improve my knowledge and understanding of other cultures while reflecting on my own culture, beliefs and prejudice.

When asked to describe the future teacher he imagined himself to be, Ben described himself as an inclusive educator but as someone who needs to *improve my knowledge and understanding of other cultures*. It is not clear if Ben would have made such a determination for his teaching future if he was not enrolled in a subject named: Engaging Diverse Learners. For some of the questions he provided no response, and from his limited responses, we have placed Ben within a *monocultural* orientation (Hammer, 2009) as he demonstrates disinterest or, at best, only a mild interest in cultural differences, preferring instead to operate only in his own cultural group. As individuals become more aware of and curious about cultural

difference they become more *intercultural* (Hammer, 2009) in their approach where they experience less anxiety or disinterest in other cultures and are more willing to engage in increased intercultural interactions. A change over point from monocultural to intercultural approaches begins to occur through the minimisation orientation.

A larger group of Preservice teachers (n=8) in the study fell within the *minimisation* orientation. In minimisation, individuals tend to neutralise cultural differences, focusing on the similarities of cultures rather than differences in striving to achieve world harmony but generally at a superficial level. When asked to describe what prior experiences they had engaging with diversity responses included:

... not much at all, taught one workshop to students with a disability through Access Arts. Have worked extensively with a blind pianist; go to see a diverse range of theatre, not really taught a diverse range of students (Preservice teacher 15; female, with children, age 31-40)

When asked to describe what personal qualities the Preservice teacher felt she had to engage with diversity she responded:

Understanding, flexibility, creativity, sensitivity, respect, knowledge of a person's background/circumstances where appropriate (Preservice teacher 15; female, with children)

In the above response it is not clear where it would or would not be appropriate to have knowledge of a person's background or circumstances in order to be interculturally sensitive. This qualifier indicates more a preservation of self than a deep understanding and acceptance of others. Other responses for minimisation included:

I treat people as individuals – always have, always will. I hope to be treated this way in return (Preservice teacher 20, male, with children, age 31-40)

Patience, awareness and content knowledge (Preservice teacher 36, male, no children, age 26-40)

These responses indicate a desire for equality rather than equity in that everyone should be treated the same: with understanding, respect and patience. Preservice teacher 36 has the additional consideration of 'content knowledge' that a teacher must have to be an effective educator. However, the subject under consideration was called: Engaging Diverse Learners, so it would seem that this preservice teacher had not understood differentiation as an approach to working with diverse learners. The focus for him was not the students but the content he would be teaching.

Acceptance was the most dominant orientation (n=19) represented in the data preservice teacher. Here preservice teachers described personal experiences and backgrounds that they felt would support their engagement with diverse learners. Some had been born outside of Australia and could relate to what it was like coming to a new country to live some had travelled and/or worked overseas while some described living in multicultural communities here in Australia:

Grew up in a multi-ethnic area of Melbourne and schooling was very similar. I have also travelled extensively and am fascinated how other cultures 'do life' (Preservice teacher 5, male, no children, age 26-30).

This preservice teacher demonstrates a keen interest in understanding how other cultures live (do life). He and the following preservice teacher draw on their travels outside of Australia and prior experiences to understand different cultures.

I was born in Ghana, West Africa and grew up and went to school in the UK and Australia... I have always been aware of issues related to class, wealth and power...moving from the UK to Australia in the late 60's as a child also made me very much an outsider for many years (Preservice teacher 16, female, with children, age 50+)

The following preservice teacher, being younger perhaps, has had fewer experiences but has embraced the ones she has had in developing her intercultural sensitivity:

Grew up learning two languages, grew up with family friends being from many different countries, befriended various exchange students throughout middle and high school (Preservice teacher 9, female, no children, age 21-25).

These, and other preservice teachers in the acceptance orientation, recognised that their culture and background was one of a range of complex cultures. They invariably had prior experiences interacting within and with different cultural groups and were curious about cultural difference. In this orientation individuals become increasingly self-reflective about theirs and others' cultural positioning in order to gain a deeper understanding of cultural differences.

A final group of preservice teachers was categorised as being in the *adaptation* orientation. In this orientation individuals demonstrate an increased capacity to shift perspectives to another culture and to make ethical judgements in consideration of the disparity between different cultural values. Five (n=5) preservice teachers in the study fell within the adaptation orientation describing their prior experiences as seminal in shaping their approach to diversity, for example:

I'm aware of how much my cultural background affects the way I perceive different behaviours...I've understood and adapted my behaviour to different expectations from patients of diverse backgrounds (Preservice teacher 34, male, no children, age 26-34).

This preservice teacher had worked in the health care industry in various parts of Australia before deciding to become a teacher. Another preservice teacher described growing up in a country where there are now eleven official languages and as a student was expected to participate in outreach programs to support other students and how this shaped her orientation to diversity:

Adapting to other cultures and languages became a necessary way of life, and anyone who did not adapt and try to live in isolation tended to get left behind (Preservice teacher 11, female, with children, age 31-40).

This preservice teacher continued by reflecting on her cultural background and how others may both perceive and interact with her:

I recognise my own cultural background may play a role in how I approach things, quite often differently to what may be expected...I appreciate that my cultural background may engender immediate assumptions about me by others that may or may not be applicable, and that if they act upon these it's about my culture, not about me.

In a similar vein, another preservice teacher describes how her multicultural background (Polish, Hungarian, Canadian, American and extended family: Mexican, Chinese) has helped to shape her cultural orientation:

...Understanding that my personal world view has been developed from a specific set of experiences within a particular framework of knowledge. In order to learn more about the world, I must continually observe myself within a specific context, and understand that I have much to learn from other people and communities who carry a different set of experiences and world views (Preservice teacher 40, female, no children, age 31-40).

Preservice teachers in the adaptation orientation were able to shift their perspectives and adapt their behaviour according to the cultural context.

Discussion

This research considered preservice teachers' willingness to engage with diverse learners through the lens of Hammer's (2009) Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC). In presenting our data we use the IDC to highlight the distribution and range of mindsets of the group. We have attempted to highlight how understanding prior engagements with diversity are important, particularly when preservice teachers recognise how to translate this knowledge and experience into future teaching. Findings revealed that quality opportunities to interact with diversity of over extended periods of time have the potential to increase the development of intercultural sensitivity. However, as Paige and Vande Berg (2012) and Santoro (2014) argue, immersion in other cultures alone is insufficient in changing intercultural mindsets. What was evident from the data was that those preservice teachers who were in the acceptance or adaptation orientation had actively sought opportunities to engage with others from different cultural backgrounds and had deeply reflected on and attempted to understand cultural differences from the perspective of the other culture (Hammer, 2009). One preservice teacher, Hannah (Preservice teacher 11), for example, described living in a multicultural country where she actively immersed herself in intercultural experiences. Ben, in contrast, also lived in a multicultural country (Australia) but chose not to engage with diversity, preferring instead to stick to his own cultural group thereby limiting his intercultural awareness and sensitivity. His apparent lack of interest in pursuing engagement in intercultural experiences (Garmon, 2004) indicates that Ben's intercultural readiness (Marx & Moss, 2011) might be quite low. It further suggests that Ben's intercultural competence would be unlikely to change unless provided with opportunities that pushed him to reflect deeply on cultural differences that challenge his current intercultural perspectives (Hammer, 2009). Hannah was able to continue her worldview into her future teaching roles whereas Ben had limited capacity to see himself in such a role. She was the only preservice teacher able to imagine how she would negotiate her cultural orientation with being in the classroom with her students, accepting them on their own terms and indeed learning from them. Ben seemed to be caught up more in Thomas and Cooper's (2008) notion of the 'idea of teacher' without really considering how to make that idea a reality for himself as a culturally sensitive teacher.

The preservice teachers in the current research were in preservice teachers in a one-year graduate entry teacher education program. A degree-level qualification outside the field of education is a pre-requisite for entry to the program. As such, many of these preservice teachers have had experiences in other professional working contexts. Therefore, these preservice teachers have had opportunities to participate in a range of intercultural activities before entering teacher education as a career. However, as we have described, there may be resistance to taking up such opportunities. For example, Ben seemed reluctant to challenge his prior beliefs about engagement with cultural difference. These findings concur with much research in this area (Bennett, 1986, 2004, 2009; Garmon, 2004; Mills & Ballantyne, 2010) where some individuals resist opportunities, expressing disinterest in other cultures. This monocultural orientation handicaps preservice teachers' effectiveness to engage diverse learners as fully included members of the classroom.

While it is encouraging that 24 of the 40 preservice teachers came to teacher education with intercultural mindsets, the challenge for teacher educators is how to progress those with monocultural mindsets towards intercultural worldviews. The preservice teachers who exhibited a minimisation orientation had experienced some cultural contexts different from their own and yet did not utilise these opportunities to develop more intercultural worldviews. This confirms previous research (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012; Wikan & Klein, 2017) that indicates that immersion is insufficient alone to develop more sophisticated levels

of intercultural competence. We echo the sentiments of Marx and Moss (2011) who posit that guided critical cultural reflection “calibrated to the students’ intercultural readiness” (p. 45) is required for intercultural development.

While we agree that teacher education programs must be intentional in their efforts (Bustamante et al., 2016) to develop preservice teachers’ intercultural competence, we ponder how rigorous and extended opportunities for developing intercultural capacity can be built into a one-year program, particularly given the pre-existing monocultural mindsets of some individuals entering the program.

Limitations and Conclusions

In conducting this study, we aimed to identify how prior intercultural experiences impacted on shaping preservice teachers as future teachers and, more specifically, as teachers of diversity. We acknowledge however, that this study was conducted within one subject in one graduate entry teacher education program and so may not be generalisable to other teacher education settings.

While there is consensus that teacher education has a key role to play in developing the intercultural competences of future teachers, we posit that the greater challenge is how to embed meaningful experiences into these programs that progress preservice teachers towards more intercultural mindsets. The effects of self-awareness in relation to developing intercultural sensitivity as a teacher is an under-researched area that warrants further scrutiny; for example, what role do dispositional factors have in one’s development of intercultural sensitivity? What role does self-awareness play? We have identified that sustained intercultural engagement over time provides a range of opportunities to develop intercultural sensitivity but suggest that more research is needed in this area. We suggest that providing learning opportunities and mentoring in both course work and through professional experience placements that allow preservice teachers to practice new ideas, challenge old ideas and reflect on the process of becoming inclusive educators for the whole range of diverse learners is a starting point for developing greater intercultural competences with the next generation of teachers.

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