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Examining Culturally Responsive Understandings within an Undergraduate Teacher Education Program

Kelly M. Gomez Johnson
University of Nebraska at Omaha, kgomezjohnson@unomaha.edu

Anne E. Karabon
University of Nebraska at Omaha, akarabon@unomaha.edu

Derrick A. Nero
University of Nebraska at Omaha, dnero@unomaha.edu

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Kelly M. Gomez Johnson

Anne E. Karabon

Derrick A. Nero
University of Nebraska Omaha

Abstract: This article examines how a group of elementary and secondary preservice teachers engaged in understanding "culture" and culturally responsive teaching while enrolled in an early program course. We analyze how culturally-related experiences, emotions, and perspectives contribute to the overall understanding of cultural competency training in teacher education. Preservice teachers varied in their use of individual- and structural-orientations, in isolation and in combination, as they developed and progressed as socially just teachers. These findings reveal that despite attempts to develop and shift toward asset-based perspectives, far more culturally embedded coursework and practicum experiences are necessary. This paper includes a reflection on the effectiveness of posing meaningful, reflective questions for preservice teachers as they experienced the concept of "culture" based on their own funds of knowledge.

This article describes the ways that the College of Education at the University of Nebraska Omaha embeds cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) practices in courses at the undergraduate level. It describes the theoretical underpinnings for making socially just teaching an important feature of teacher education programs. We address how intentional design of an introductory undergraduate course promotes preservice teachers (PSTs) to analyze the individual and structural factors that influence children's lives and develops teaching strategies that build on asset-based dispositions. Additionally, we examine what CRT means to PSTs and how their own historical, social, and cultural experiences (funds of knowledge) inform their lens.

Background and Review of Literature

Teacher educator programs in the United States have taken up the call to prepare candidates for the constantly evolving roles and responsibilities of 21st century educators. Teacher education programs frequently review and modify coursework and practicum (field experiences) to best prepare PSTs for the realities of the field. With lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment still essential functions of a teacher's daily work, other important indicators of teacher proficiency are also identified as key contributors to students' academic success.

Effective teachers must be able to use their understanding of individual differences, diverse cultures, and communities to create an inclusive learning environment where all students can meet high standards (CCSSO, 2013). Still, the practice of preparing PSTs to understand individual differences and diverse cultures is introspective and complex (Sleeter, 2016). Preparing PSTs with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of culturally competent and responsive educators requires thoughtful programmatic design where instruction honors and recognizes student differences while also avoiding generalizations and deficit perspectives of communities, schools, and students.

Disparities of student achievement for minority students and low resources teachers have been linked to the inequitable expectations of teachers (Anyon, 1980; Delpit, 1995; Lareau, 2003). Early studies

(Haberman & Post, 1992) found PSTs struggle with recognizing the existing systematic inequities linked to disparities in achievement. Situating academic success based on individual and generalized characteristics of students can victimize them without acknowledging the influence of race, class, gender, and language in society (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Training is necessary to bridge the cultural gaps between students and teachers long before they enter their professional career in education.

A wealth of research in culturally responsive education illustrates that educators who are knowledgeable and accepting of cultures improve student success in school (Gay, 2000; Grant, Elsbree, & Fondrie, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (2005) described culturally responsive teachers as those who embody and implement academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness concepts in their everyday lesson planning. These teachers also make pedagogical decisions about whether to include or exclude their students' or their own personal connections for the sake of increased student learning. Student engagement increases when teachers are able to draw upon their understanding of knowing and being (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Milner, 2011).

Most educators enter teacher education programs with a sense of what teaching and learning are based on their prior schooling experiences. Previous schooling attitudes and experiences become crucial elements in shaping PSTs' decisions to enter the profession, visions of their own teaching, and the approaches and practices they enact in the classroom (Olsen, 2016). Teacher education programs need to equip PSTs with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to examine their personal life experiences and resources alongside issues of the wider society (McLaren, 2009) through active participation in "problem-posing education." The trend in teacher education programs, however, continues to isolate curriculum and topics related to race and culture into one or two courses (King & Butler, 2015) rather than threading social justice and cultural competency into the fabric of the entire program. Training for PSTs to encourage critical dialogue (Freire, 1993) and the co-construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978) might be especially powerful in early-teacher development.

Cultural Competence and Funds of Knowledge

Cultural competence lacks a universally agreed-upon definition. Definitions of cultural competence vary and evolve based on environment and interests. Cross et al. (1989) provided a foundational framework for cultural competence still utilized and modified today. In their seminal work, they described cultural competence as "a set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that…enable a system, agency, or group of professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (Cross et al., 1989, p. 13). Four essential factors of culturally competent teachers include: (a) believing that all students can learn; (b) self-reflective and critical examination of one's own attitude and behaviors working with diverse populations; (c) setting and communicating high standards and expectations for students; and (d) addressing discrimination and prejudice when they occur (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006).

Challenges arise when the theory of what school "should be" differs among teachers, families, communities, and students, referred to as the "cultural divide" (Gollnick & Chinn, 2008). Far beyond purely explicit differences such as language and religion, the "cultural divide" is especially prevalent in aspects of the hidden school culture such as school expectations and communication styles (Sleeter, 2001). Rather than conceptualizing culture as a fixed set of qualities or descriptions which can generalize groups of people and lead to further stereotypes (Gramsci, 1971), teacher education programs have the opportunity to prepare PSTs as culturally competent and responsive educators who view culture as complex, dynamic, and fluid. Opportunities exist for teachers to develop strategies to learn about the cultural contexts to which their students belong, rendering openings to discuss and co-construct classroom content and interactions with their students (Sleeter, 2018). Cross-cultural experiences, defined as "opportunities for direct interaction with one or more individuals from a cultural group different than one's own" (Garmon, 2004, p. 207), have proven to be one way that PSTs gain increased openness to diversity.

Students are successful when teachers connect, honor, and utilize their students' prior knowledge and experiences to make sense of learning (Souto-Manning, 2013). However, teachers unaware or complacent about their students' life experiences sometimes underestimate or limit what students are able to display intellectually in classrooms (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Referred to as *Funds of Knowledge (FoK)*, these "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills" shape the lens from which individuals function in their daily lives (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992, p.133). The FoK

framework calls teachers to learn about students' cultural resources from home and draw on this knowledge to inform curriculum and pedagogy. This shifts the focus of schooling practices to highlight value and appreciation of students and families' rich resources.

Shifting PSTs knowledge, skills, and dispositions to an asset-based perspective is often met with challenges. Research indicates that PSTs initially have the desire for all children to succeed in schooling (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Whipp & Chubbuck, 2009). On the other hand, the belief that *all* children can learn and possess rich resources is less prevalent. Teacher educators play an important role in assisting PSTs to design lessons and teaching strategies that are equitable in nature. Structurally, teacher education programs must already include diverse practicum experiences and focus on CRT and social justice topics as a foundation for success. Implementing a framework for socially just education calls for a deep reflection of the individual and structural components present in society (Chubbuck, 2010; Whipp, 2013).

Chubbuck's (2010) *Framework for Socially Just Education* offers a guide for teachers on how to make pedagogical decisions framed in social justice theory. In the framework, teachers would consider both individual- and structurally-oriented influences on students when addressing instruction and student interactions. When a teacher is individually-oriented, they focus on an individual student's experiences and needs when problem solving through academic and/or behavioral needs (Whipp, 2013). For structurally-oriented student interactions, a teacher would consider the student "as a member of larger sociocultural group that may have experienced structural, institutional barriers to learning" (Chubbuck, 2010, p. 201). Focus on individual orientation can lead to extra support for particular struggling students, while structurally-oriented considerations might include increased emphasis on students' FoK (Rodriguez, 2013). The various degrees in which teachers use individual- and structural-orientations, in isolation and in combination, provide insight to both the development and progression of socially just teachers. Teachers have been categorized as individually-oriented, individually- and structurally-oriented, and structurally- and individually-oriented.

In thinking about the importance of cultural competency and CRT, we redesigned an undergraduate course to prepare PSTs to have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to provide an equitable education for all students. This research examines how early-program PSTs engage with course activities and practicum experiences designed to deepen their cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competence. In particular, we sought to examine:

(1) What does culturally responsive teaching mean to PSTs in this program and what course experiences and activities influence their perception?
(2) How to inform undergraduate course design to address and promote cultural competence in the future?

Methodology

Research Design

A sixteen week, general teaching methods course for PSTs served as the context for this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). The authors, three instructors of individual sections of the course, utilized a case study design to gain insight into an issue or theory, in this instance the socially constructed meaning of "culture" and "cultural competence" from undergraduate participants within their university classroom and practicum-site environments. In this type of case study, details of a particular group of PSTs' culturally-related experiences, emotions, and perspectives contribute to the overall understanding of cultural competency training in teacher education. The aim was to explore the intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences and reflections of the individual and structural components present in society (Saldaña, 2013).

Setting and Participants

The study took place at the University of Nebraska Omaha, a midwestern, metropolitan university. Of the fifty-two PSTs enrolled in the three course sections, 37 participants consented to having their assignments and discussions collected only after course grades were posted. The PST participants represented a wide range of educational teaching interests including early childhood, elementary, secondary, K-12 music and physical education, and special education endorsement areas. Recruited participants had no additional coursework or assignments.

The six-credit undergraduate course, focused on planning for effective teaching, was designed to address topics such as special education, English Language Learners, race, those living in difficult

circumstances, and gender representation. Numerous cultural competence, culturally responsive teaching, and social justice topics were integrated into what was formerly a more traditional "how-to lesson plan" course. Course designers, including the three researchers/instructors, integrated diversity and culturally responsive pedagogy theory concurrently with foundational planning in the hopes these concepts would serve as foundations for PSTs' planning and practice in the future.

Data Collection and Sources

Data were collected during a 16-week course that included a variety of experiences for participants to engage in critical dialogue and reflective activities related to cultural competence and education. Discussions and assignments occurred and centered on campus, online, in the community, and in local urban schools. Culturally related experiences, discussions, and written reflections serve as the primary data source for this study. The key data sources for this research were written assignments in which PSTs convey their understanding and perceptions of culture and their personal cultural competence.

Dialogic reflection provided an opportunity for PSTs to step back from readings and cultural experiences to weigh different situational perspectives (Whipp, 2013). Identical reflection prompts were utilized universally across all sections of the class to regulate data collection and provide opportunities to reiterate essential course content alignment among all course sections. With varied PSTs' background and individualized cultural events and practicum experiences, instructors utilized prompts to refocus experiential learning and reflection to course content.

The structure of the 16-week course was unique in that time was divided between course work on campus and time in the field. Thus, data varied in type, location, and nature (theoretical and experiential). Figure 1 provides a visual model of the sequence and organization of the course into three distinct phases: campus phase (weeks 1-5), hybrid phase (weeks 6-9), and practicum phase (weeks 10-15). The majority of data for this paper occurred in the hybrid and practicum phases where participants engaged with diverse communities and were able to reflect upon their cultural competence through authentic experiences.

Note: *ds* indicates data sources for this study. These sources represent preservice teachers' narratives and reflections based on their conceptions of culture.
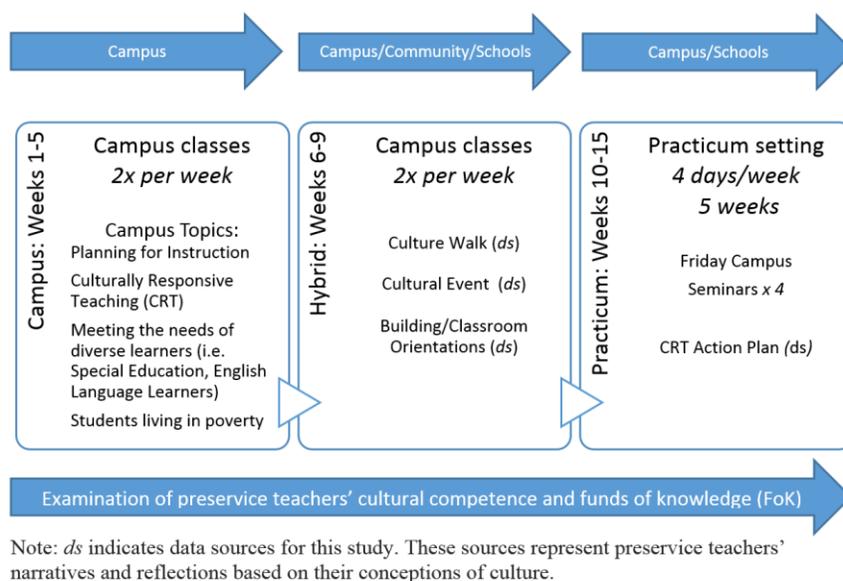
Figure 1. *Course Organization and Data Source Visual Model*

Campus phase

In the campus phase, data sources included participants' diversity reflections and instructors' notes based on classroom conversations. Participants reflected on their prior experiences and interactions, or lack thereof, with English Language Learners, people with disabilities, and people living in difficult circumstances and/or poverty. Instructor notes were based on classroom comments/conversations around current sociopolitical topics, current trends in education, and classroom activities around the concept of culture.

Hybrid phase

Three distinct data sources were collected in the hybrid phase, each course activity/source is described below:

Culture walks

Culture Walks are course experiences that include a group breakfast at, or catered by, a community restaurant, a guided walking tour of the community led by a neighborhood leader, and a panel discussion with community leaders, stakeholders, and/or respective K-12 students. Culture Walks occur prior to the 60-hour practicum experience and provide PSTs access to community resources they may be unaware of and researchers note these types of activities are beneficial to undergraduate teacher education programs (Zeichner, 2010). The goal of Culture Walks is "to assist preservice teachers in developing cultural competence through positive interactions with leaders and influential people of the communities and to dispel the misconceptions of these communities held by many of the preservice teachers" (Schaffer, Edwards, & Edick 2017, p. 24). Reflective activities and writing occur before, during and after the Culture Walk experience to highlight PSTs' conceptions of culture, reflect on whether their perceptions and reality correlated, and to share any "cultural moments" they experienced (Schaffer et al., 2017).

Cultural event impact paper

A required course assignment is to attend an event situated near their practicum placement to examine the often unconscious stereotypical classifications of the unfamiliar and push PSTs beyond their "cultural comfort zone". PSTs consider cultures or groups with whom they do not identify or experience often to experience a cross cultural activity or event. PSTs' respond to prompts focused on their overall experience, positionality, thoughts, and feelings. PSTs are encouraged to conclude with the professional and personal implications of attending their "cultural event." Cultural events chosen by PSTs vary greatly based on their personal comfort, decisions and experiences. While some PSTs dined at local restaurants in unfamiliar areas of town with a friend or attended a sporting event, others thought deeply about the cultural groups they belonged to and found alternative experiences based on race, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

Building/classroom orientation reflections

For one month prior to beginning their practicum, the PSTs attend their placement one time per week to slowly acclimate to the community, school, staff, children, and families. During this time, PSTs continue to attend classes on campus and receive support and guidance from course instructors and peers. PSTs attend a building orientation in which administrators provide background on the school's history and data on the students and teachers, a tour of the facilities, and are introduced to their assigned mentor teacher. PSTs observe classroom routines, procedures, curriculum, and culture of the classroom and work with their mentor to plan for ways to engage with the students and their learning during the intensive five week, practicum experience to follow. PSTs write reflections that describe, analyze and connect the campus-phase content to practices observed at their practicum site.

Practicum phase

PSTs join a public elementary, middle, or high school classroom four days per week for five weeks in the final weeks of the course. Once per week, PSTs meet on campus with peers and instructors to synthesize their understanding of course topics (e.g. lesson planning, classroom management, CRT, special education, student diversity) with their authentic, school-based observations. Throughout the five weeks, PSTs write reflections in a series of CRT papers focused on two main areas: (a) meeting the needs of all learners through inclusive classroom practice and (b) meeting the needs of individual learners based on their unique learning styles and needs. Reflections include analysis of their practicum learning environments, instructional techniques, accommodations and modifications for exceptional learners, and a mini-case study documenting a particular student's academic and behavioral needs.

Data Analysis

Prior to analyzing data sources collectively, we each collected, cleaned and evaluated our class's data sources (assignments, discussions, etc.). We then individually journaled about PSTs' experiences and potential themes within responses. Regular meetings were held to discuss course content and perceptions of students' understanding of culture and their trajectory as culturally competent PSTs. After drafting codes during initial meetings, we piloted preliminary codes using a sample of three data sources from another instructor's course. We met again to review, revise, and adjust the codes to alleviate gaps, duplicate codes, or add or edit existing coding protocols.

Data analysis was an ongoing, recursive process of examining, interpreting and reinterpreting the data (Patton, 2002; Richards, 2009). NVivo qualitative data analysis software housed all data sources, the instructor/researcher developed codebook, and journals and memos documenting student cases and comments of particular interest during analysis. The first coding cycle included attribute coding and simultaneous descriptive coding based on topics of the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Richards, 2009). Regular research team meetings to calibrate coding and examine emerging themes informed the second coding cycle. Queries were run individually and collectively to understand the relationships between themes and underlying concepts related to culture (Saldana, 2013).

Results

Woven into every aspect of the course, PSTs were challenged to stretch their understanding of "culture" and increase their skill set as culturally responsive and culturally competent teachers. Overall, PSTs were in agreement that building relationships with students and valuing diversity are cornerstones of CRT. PSTs drew on personal ideologies and FoK as they made sense of CRT from both an individual and structural perspective of society and schooling. We further examine how the variety of course activities and assignments shaped their understanding of culture and CRT.

The Development and Application of CRT pedagogy
Building relationships

PSTs analyzed and applied their knowledge of what CRT means to them in a variety of ways through early campus training activities, experiential learning during practicum, and reflective analysis during and after their practicum. Assignments like the Cultural Event paper provided an opportunity for students, like Ginger, to define their own cultural make-up, seek experiences outside of their identified culture, and reflect upon their positionality, feelings, observations, and key learnings. Ginger shares of her experience visiting a restaurant and walking down the streets of an unfamiliar community.

> Before this experience, I often viewed culture as people who had similar backgrounds and lived a similar type of life. While that can be true to an extent, it is so much more than that. Culture can be anything from where people go to eat, to the traditions they have or the sports they play. Anything that plays a role in someone's life can be a considered a part of their culture. The definition of culture is so broad. This experience really made me realize that someone's culture is not just based on their race or beliefs or faith.

Ginger's focus on the individual components of culture rather than the perception of culture as purely a "grouping" of people is noteworthy. In seeing that culture is a dynamic and unique potpourri of characteristics and associations, she recognizes that culture is not a concept outside of herself. Her evolution of cultural understanding disrupts the notion that particular groups of people have unique cultures (Ortner, 2005). This insight offers momentum to move beyond the "us" and "them" conversation dominated by ethnocentric perspectives. It also introduces the idea, for PSTs like Ginger, that seemingly very different people can share a variety of cultural similarities.

PSTs across all grade levels (early childhood, elementary, secondary) address the value of getting to know their students and making content relatable and relevant to their students and cultures. Numerous PSTs comment on the importance of building relationships based on their practicum observations. Sabrina states, while observing a middle school principal's interactions with students on the building orientation tour, that "the principal did not allow for any misbehavior from the students, and she immediately disciplined them if they were acting inappropriately." She adds that the principal made it clear to her and her peers that "building relationships with students and getting them willing to learn will make the classroom experience more peaceful and enjoyable." The reiteration of building relationships from the building principal is a direct connection for Sabrina to the CRT framework covered in her university coursework. Similarly, Nathan reflects on statements made by high school student panelists at the Culture Walk. For him, hearing students state their desire not to be pitied, but to be held to higher standards is powerful.

> I want to build relationships with these students so that they know I care about them and want to see them succeed. Even when I am nervous or uncomfortable, my goal is to stay confident, smile and build positive relationships with every student that I meet this semester.

Nathan's statement emphasizes CRT concepts related to valuing diversity, building positive relationships and also having high expectations for all students. We also note his, and others, apprehension and vulnerability with the expectation of relationship building during their practicum experiences. His peers (e.g. Helen, Jessi, Ginger, and Taylor) share similar concerns while attempting to establish relationships with students which they too note is an important aspect of CRT. We identify this observation as especially common among secondary candidates. For elementary and early childhood teachers, the closeness with one constant group of children each day tends to naturally lead toward building relationships. Conversely, secondary PSTs interacted with students for much shorter periods of time and often in less student-centered environments where authentic interactions can be potentially less frequent.

For many PSTs, observation of their mentor teacher's interactions with students serve as a key source of guidance on what their approach to building relationships might look like. On the whole, mentor teachers modeled their mastered skills the PSTs wished to emulate. There were instances, however, for PSTs to see the consequences of not building positive relationships with students, being too "friendly" with students, and/or lacking control of the classroom environment. Erica shares management challenges in multiple data sources where she mentions the laid-back, "lax" management of her mentor, while also praising him for his concern and attention to knowing and reaching his students. Other PSTs like Brian observe his mentor teacher using humor, which is an aspect of CRT. He perceives that her quick wit and relatable nature allows her to develop an environment of respect and high standards without sacrificing her position as the adult in the room.

Valuing diversity

Along with building relationships, we identified the importance and awareness of diversity as a frequent theme in PSTs' assignments and reflections. PSTs noted a variety of differences in the cultural make-up of the schools and communities they were assigned based on their personal and professional FoK. For the most part, PSTs' acknowledged differences neutrally without explicit judgement of "good" or "bad" (e.g. Brian, Erica, Helen, Nikki). However, their responses revealed cultural presumptions and stereotypes.

Many PSTs shared how their only previous knowledge of the communities existed from others' testimonials or news reports. The Culture Walk provided firsthand accounts from community leaders spotlighting assets and unique features of the community and residents. This experience provided a counter narrative to the pervasive discourse about the communities commonly portrayed in the media. Joshua recognized that having experiences like the Culture Walk and working in schools with students and teachers, "makes you forget about the actual numbers and focus on the potential of students." Joshua's comments speak to the impersonal associations often made towards people and communities. His comment about "actual numbers" reminds him, and others, to look beyond the second-hand stories, statistics, and news reports. To fully experience and understand the role of a culturally responsive teacher, more personal experiences and interactions with students and communities creates a more student-and person-centered outlook on education and the broader society.

Similarly, Erica expressed how powerful her experience was as she entered the diverse school buildings for the first time. She shares:

> As I have continued to expand my thinking and go out and experience different cultures, the more I am amazed with people. It frustrates me the stereotypes that have developed in regards to certain groups. I truly believe that if more people leave the bubble they have lived in their whole lives, their viewpoints will drastically change…This type of experience makes me want to give my students opportunities were they can experience cultures different from their own because I can see how beneficial they are.

Erica recognizes the value of diversity for herself both personally and professionally through course experiences like the Culture Walk and cultural event assignment. With minimal experience with diverse perspectives previously, Erica wrote how empowering the Culture Walk and cultural event assignment were to her both personally and professionally, "I can go out and actually see with my own eyes what it is like and not form an opinion based on stereotypical perceptions I hear about it."

Whereas valuing diversity was a reiterated theme, we also identified PSTs' underlying insecurities and presumptions based on their own background knowledge and experiences. Nathan wrote in reflection of the Culture Walk experience, "Despite our opposite backgrounds, these students had the same value on education as I did, and all wanted success. If anything, these students had a higher value on education

because their futures are riding on it." Nathan's comments, while positive in tone, express an underlying presumption that "these" students value education differently from people like him. In addition, the "riding on it" comment is presumptive as he interprets education as the only opportunity for these students to "make it in life." Nathan's comments echo the concept of meritocracy where educational attainment through the means of academic intelligence and effort are viewed as the only avenues to success without attention to other factors such as family or culture (Yosso, 2005). Nathan did not recognize the cultural assets of his students and how they might find success perhaps outside of education, success defined by their own standards and expectations and not what others might label or presume to be "success."

The inclusion of culturally-rich experiences was intended for exposure to unfamiliar communities and to provide thoughtful and deep synthesis of the cultural bedrocks of PSTs values, beliefs, and actions. As expected, some PSTs took a "tourist" view of the community. Others reflected honestly on how the experiences shook their understanding and perception of the community and perhaps world. Brian and Becky shared how experiences in diverse communities was important in breaking down stereotypes for PSTs. Brian wrote:

> What this night out in North Omaha has done is continue to break down the negative interpretation [of this community] that has been an influence in my life. This experience makes me feel more confident and comfortable being in and traveling through North Omaha. I believe that this will translate into a comfortability in the classroom. I will not be lowering my guard all the way, I still need to remain professional, but I will not feel as tense in unfamiliar territory.

Becky explains how her experiences in the neighborhood would help her in her practicum "to be more open to this experiences and not feel as much like an alien to the community." She continues, "I think if people could see past the 'South' part of South Omaha, they would be more open-minded to breaking out of their own community."

Becky and Brian's candid comments bring to light the complexity of developing cultural competence especially when there is a lack of experience and an abundance of prior negative stereotypes. Their comments simultaneously attempt to appreciate the cultural differences while sharing their prejudgment and uneasiness in the new communities. Becky's comment about seeing past the "South" part of South Omaha can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Her comments address the deeply held stereotypes of the area and attempt to cleanse her prior perceptions of the area which lacked personal experiences and interactions. In her effort to focus on the assets of the community, Becky could dismiss the notion of being "color blind" and reframe her historically accumulated body of cultural knowledge.

Joshua discusses that "from a cultural perspective, I have come to see that students of color probably have more in common with their white peers than differences." Joshua's conception of culture captures our attention in three different ways. First, Joshua recognizes that race is not the sole factor of identifying students' cultural differences. Second, his comment implies that perhaps prior to this authentic experience working with culturally diverse populations, he had assumed that students would be very different. His personal funds of knowledge perceived students of color to be far different from him and his white peers. Third, while his comment is individually-oriented, his statement potentially dismisses the structurally-oriented aspects of his students' culture and FoK. While recognizing that students from different communities have many commonalities, culturally responsive teachers recognize, honor, and use their students' life experiences to drive teaching and learning. Identifying students' intersectionality reveals a variety of characteristics and experiences that could be used to leverage relevant learning experiences.

Undergraduate Course Design Insights
Finding 1: deficit perspective
As teacher-researchers, our ultimate goal was to better understand how our students conceptualize, connect, and apply cultural competence and CRT practices in their early program teacher education to inform future course design. Despite our emphasis on FoK and CRT theory through asset-oriented course activities and assignments, we found deficit perspectives of the community, schools, teachers, and/or students pervasive for PSTs. PSTs with minimal exposure to diverse communities (the majority of our student population) held deeply engrained presumptions in which they rarely addressed in their reflections. Reflective PST data, even when focused on CRT and cultural competence, reflected an underlying deficit outlook.

> While walking down 10th street in South Omaha and stopping in the small businesses, I saw a culture that I wasn't used to seeing. Hardworking people who work just to try and make ends meet, people in my city that did not speak my language, and people who were happy just to be able to buy groceries to put a dinner on the table that night.

During her Culture Walk reflection, Helen made many assumptions about a community which she admittedly knew very little about. Her comments on community members' work ethic, language, and aspirations are ethnocentric and lack pragmatic backing. As she attends to the environmental differences and attempts to value the diversity around her, she concurrently creates conditions of the people and community that may or may not exist in reality but do exist in her perceptions of the area. Jessi shares a similar attitude towards the community in her early encounters during the building orientation.

> I was very surprised when I drove up to my placement the first morning of practicum. I was not expecting a newer school building or the amount of family involvement that was taking place just while dropping the students off for school…I was so surprised because I subconsciously thought how could this beautiful, peaceful area be located in a part of Omaha that I was supposed to be fearful of?

Jessi's amazement at the new facilities and family engagement project her assumption that the area would be "less than" her prior expectations of educational settings. Her anticipation of rundown schools and disengaged families present the common deficit and ethnocentric theme prevalent in almost all PSTs' reflections in both overt and inconspicuous forms. Connor's comments, while similar to Jessi's, introduced a more unique deficit perspective from many of his peers as he was cognizant of the potential outside factors influencing his lens of the community.

> To me, the school was surprisingly very nice in appearance on the outside. I say surprisingly, because I was unsure what to expect with this school. Whether that be a built in biased expectation of a South Omaha school that was previously discussed with our culture walk, or some other reason.

Connor's statement demonstrates the layers of deficit perspectives surrounding PSTs from the area with potentially years of negative presumptions about diverse areas of Omaha. When visualizing or assuming what the school might look like, Connor did not expect "nice" schools.

Over the course of the semester, we noticed PSTs' increased cultural awareness as they grappled with how their personal lens of themselves and others developed and was influenced over time. Although the prevailing deficit perspectives present in PSTs' was surprising, growth and awareness was identified as students progressed on the continuum of cultural competence. Findings suggest continued dialogue and attention around bias and increased focus on asset-based perspectives might further progress PSTs as culturally responsive teachers.

Finding 2: Out of sight, out of mind

Along with deficit perspectives, we found a decrease in PSTs' attention to individually- and structurally- oriented topics related to culture as the semester progressed. As PSTs transitioned from campus-based theory to school-based practicum, their attention to cultural influences was lost in the day-to-day classroom interactions and observations of the school, students, and mentor teachers. When explicitly prompted by instructors, the majority of PSTs shared surface-level and/or individually-oriented perspectives of their school environments. When instructor-provided prompts focused on classroom responsibilities of the teacher such as classroom management, PSTs rarely wrote of the cultural or societal implications potentially at play. PST reflections read more as play-by-play summaries firmly based on their own expectations (personal FoK) of both teacher and student behavior rather than structural or societal implications that were also at play. On a holistic level, PSTs neglected to connect their observations back to the principles of students' FoK, cultural competence, social justice, or culturally responsive teaching.

Sabrina was one such case. She describes a conversation with her mentor teacher regarding a student who is disengaged and sleeps in class nearly every day.

Mr. Walden has told me that the student has consistently demonstrated that he is not willing to do the work, and since he does not usually disrupt the classroom, it is better for the teacher to focus on the rest of the students who are willing to participate.

As Sabrina analyzes and reflects on the implications of this classroom scenario in her CRT paper, she shares how she both agrees and disagrees with her mentor teacher's perspective and interactions with the student. She introduces possible strategies she might use to engage the student and inquire as to why he sleeps each day. However, throughout her reflection she does not link CRT or structurally-oriented components to the student nor the teacher's actions.

During the Campus Phase of the course, Harrison's class read case studies on social justice education (Gorski & Pothini, 2018). Harrison's reflection of a racially charged event he read about supports this aforementioned finding. He explains that the case study focuses on two male, black students conversing with each other using the n-word and how the teacher addressed the students about the inappropriate language. When a white student joined the conversation and also used the n-word, the two black students told their white peer "only black people can say that to each other".

Harrison's brief recollection of the reading included a variety of details with minimal depth or cultural considerations. "Honestly this made me think a bit about how the teacher took the boys aside and talked to them about it." He explains how the teacher in the case study took the students in the hall to talk with them, yet ended his reflection without an examination of his own learning. Harrison instead stated, "I would use how [the white student] got upset over Anthony's comments to show how the word can affect other people. Explain why the N-word is not a term of endearment and why it is racist and offensive." His reaction to the case study demonstrates a missed opportunity for his own cultural understanding and growth to learn with and from his students' and mentor teacher's FoK regarding the deeper cultural and structural considerations.

"Out of sight, out of mind" reminds programs and course designers that PSTs are exposed to an incredible amount of information in their early preparation program course work and practicum experiences. Developmentally, PSTs may require more directed reflection to analyze teaching and learning conditions from the perspective of culture and other abstract constructs. In addition, PSTs without exposure to diverse, urban schooling settings likely experience barriers in translating theory to practice as they become accustomed to school environments different from their experiences as a student. For PSTs to reflect upon the engrained nature of culture in all aspects of teaching and learning, instructors should provide ongoing prompts and feedback to focus on both individual and structurally oriented components of schooling to develop their disposition as culturally competent and responsive teachers.

Discussion

One purpose of this study was to explore how PSTs were engaged in understanding "culture" and CRT to make sense of their role as future teachers. Another purpose of the study was evaluate a particular course redesign focused on posing meaningful, reflective questions for PSTs as they experienced the concept of "culture" based on their own historical, social, and cultural experiences (FoK).

Findings from this study suggest that while a semester-long course is a start to influencing PSTs' perceptions on culture, cultural competence, and culturally responsive teaching practices, far more culturally embedded coursework and practicum experiences are necessary at a programmatic level. The Culture Walk and Cultural Event experiences led PSTs, at various degrees, to consider the construct of FoK and make sense of cultural relevance in the classroom. The challenge for some PSTs was their inability to find comfort in being uncomfortable. For others, prior cross-cultural experiences provided much needed confidence to take risks and reflect at deeper levels about the implications and influences of diverse cultures. Our findings support prior research demonstrating that PSTs with prior cross-cultural experiences possess a strong commitment to social justice and urban teaching (Garmon, 2004; Taylor & Frankenberg, 2009).

Individually-oriented PSTs focus on teaching to the skill/content, exhibit "color blind" caring, and address deficits (Whipp, 2013). Individually-oriented characteristics were prevalent in PSTs as they reflected on the Culture Walk and practicum experiences in particular. With minimal cross-cultural experiences both personally and professionally, they were often in "comparison-mode," connecting and comparing their observations and perceptions with their own FoK. Helen, Jessi, and Joshua's comments are strong examples of the individual-orientation with minimal regard on the structural implications at play.

Individually- and structurally-oriented PSTs focus on culturally responsive caring, high expectations, and FoK pedagogies (Whipp, 2013). We found that course instruction was best aligned to this orientation category to, as Vass (2017) advises, move from thinking "about" culture to thinking about the implications of teaching and learning influenced by culture. The PST reflections of Brian, Erica, and Vera demonstrated their desire to create a welcoming classroom culture for all students to be successful. While their reflections remained focused on individual students and situations, individually- and structurally-oriented PSTs did not continue on towards the more social and political activism route advocated by justice theorists in teacher education (Picower, 2011; Zeichner & Flessner, 2009).

The third category, structurally- and individually-oriented, describes PSTs as those who challenge stereotypes, highlight social inequities, and are advocates for the school and community (Whipp, 2013). Structurally- and individually-orientations are influenced by adjacent (concurrent to pre-service training) experiences such as volunteer work, employment, and travel. While only a few PSTs in this study displayed this orientation, we note this orientation as an important consideration for future cultural competence and social justice progression. The Culture Walk and Cultural Event assignments were unique features of the early-program course and offer future extension potential as PSTs progress to clinical practice. Ladson-Billings (2009) asserts that often teachers erroneously believe that successful teaching of poor students of color is about what teachers should do, when really the problem is how teachers think.

Implications

Systematic planning and implementation by teacher education programs are necessary to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. Prior to course redesign, PSTs' exposure to topics related to cultural competence, culturally responsive teaching practices, privilege, and social justice were often isolated in courses designated to address human relations and diversity—a common trend in other teacher education programs (King & Butler, 2015). PSTs had been expected to connect theories of prior coursework to their future coursework and diverse practicum experiences with minimal scaffolding by university faculty. Concepts related to instruction, such as lesson planning, classroom management, content methods, were often taught without cultural considerations as an embedded aspect of practice. The redesigned course was a first step towards programmatic coherence around preservice CRT and social justice curriculum.

Developing PSTs' mindset as culturally competent and relevant teachers from the onset of their preparation program is of the utmost importance. In this way, the principles of a socially just educational experience for all students can be woven into the fabric of all future PSTs' learning. Initiated in this course, PSTs are to (1) include CRT in their lesson plans and (2) are assessed on their application to practice in the practicum. The lesson plan template requires students to highlight CRT practices throughout and also respond to the following prompt: "Write a paragraph (3-5 sentences) elaborating on the intentionally planned CRT components of your lesson. How did you demonstrate high expectations, make learning relevant, and motivate students?" Additionally, the teacher education program engrained CRT indicators on practicum observation instruments for three courses with practicum experiences (all prior to clinical practice). University faculty and supervisors provide feedback on the PST's ability to demonstrate cultural competence and integrate culturally responsive practices in each observed lesson as a sustained practice. These two explicit steps were taken to ensure CRT practices and cultural competence expectations remained consistent throughout the rest of the teacher education program. Both strategies serve as models for other programs hoping to create sustainable implementation of important concepts like cultural competence and CRT.

Through this study, we acknowledge the impact of the data collection and analysis process on their own teaching and learning practices related to CRT and cultural competence. The process of synthesizing PSTs' perceptions of culture informed our future planning and instructional practices. Through conversations with other faculty, we have been able to evaluate gaps in PSTs' cultural understanding and assess areas of potential emphasis for future courses (vertical planning). These aforementioned discussions will continue to advance the integration of cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching throughout the program to ensure such topics are fluid and visible aspects of all of our undergraduate teacher education coursework.

As instructors, we began teaching this course with varied degrees of expertise in social justice, culturally responsive teaching, and critical pedagogy. Even as a small group of instructors, the depth and attention to which we dedicated and connected our class time to these topics varied greatly. Noticing our own disparity within this one course heightened the need to involve all teacher education faculty (including full-

and part-time faculty, adjunct faculty, and university supervisors) in conversations regarding cultural competence and CRT preparation in our undergraduate program. For sustainability and cohesion, a shared program vision and execution is necessary. To expect PSTs from our program to reach a standard of excellence as culturally competent and responsive teachers, systematically, we as teacher educators must consistently model and articulate our practice.

Another finding suggests that PSTs continued to carry a deficit images of students and communities without considering societal influences and hegemonic culture. Deficit perspectives of students of color from low-income areas are so engrained in society that the relationship often goes unseen by teachers (Sleeter, 2018). Without explicit prompting and awareness, PSTs in this study often neglected the structural components and influences of culture all together. For future course design, instructors can increase their emphasis on cultural competence to include terms and vocabulary to better understand topics such as privilege and hegemony. With a common language, instructors can have more targeted feedback and discussions in class when addressing deficit comments about people and communities.

In addition, at the teacher education program- and course-levels, increased emphasis can be placed on the structural-orientation considerations of teachers and other situational factors facing students, teachers, and communities. In coursework, structural-orientation can be instilled in case study analysis, classroom management scenarios, course readings, and every-day class discussions. In practicum settings, PSTs can observe everyday situations with a lens of equity and social justice by considering sociopolitical barriers that might impact particular groups of students they work with. University supervisors for clinical practice are critical stakeholders, able to reinforce culturally responsive teaching practice. As PSTs progress to clinical practice (student teaching), programs could place increased emphasis on PSTs' evidence of cultural understanding similar to their theoretical and pedagogical understanding. This could be done through stronger explicit connections and requirements to CRT practices on assessments leading to graduation and ultimate certification of PSTs.

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