Methods that Matter in Addressing Cultural Diversity with Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

Drawing on a combination of prior experience, theoretical stance, and intuition, along with pedagogical practices identified to be effective in addressing diversity with teacher candidates, a model for teaching multicultural education to teacher candidates was designed. This study examined how particular elements of this model were effective in developing teacher candidate's cultural competence. The results indicate that teacher candidates gained substantial knowledge about and experiences with issues of diversity by the end of the course. Participants pointed to the multiple methods employed in the class; in particular the interactive strategies, group work, diverse cultural experiences, and opportunities to critically reflect on these experiences as accounting for their gains. Their sense of ownership and understanding has given them the ability to use these strategies in their own future work. Implications for research and teacher education are discussed.

Introduction

As the student population across the globe becomes more diverse, increasing importance and attention has been paid to the potential of multicultural teacher education to improve teaching and learning for diverse learners (Banks 2010; Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009). To this end, many teacher education programmes and educators in several countries, in many institutions, have altered courses, curricula, and field experiences as a way to develop teacher candidates' cultural competence (Acquah and Commins 2013; Sleeter and Owuor 2011; Ukpokodu 2011). However, decades after the inception of multicultural teacher education and attempts at better preparing teachers for diversity, teacher education programmes continue to graduate teachers who feel unprepared to teach diverse students. This lack of readiness has caused many researchers in teacher education to question how these courses are taught. Scholars suggest that although conceptually sound models have been developed to address diversity with prospective teachers, such models have not been implemented well enough to ensure that students attain the kinds of knowledge, skills, and disposition necessary to be effective with diverse students (Banks 2010; Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009). In addition, review studies on multicultural teacher education suggest that how to best provide such training and awareness has not been explained clearly in the literature (Hollins and Guzman 2005; Sleeter and Owuor 2011).

There is a need to refine theoretical frameworks and instructional approaches used to teach multicultural education to ensure that teacher candidates are provided experiences of other cultures, chances to examine their tacit assumptions and biases and change their attitudes. To explore the features of multicultural teacher education which would have a strong and sustainable effect, an experimental course integrating different theoretically driven instructional methods was developed. The framework for this course was designed around two essential concepts – cultural competence (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009) and transformative learning (Mezirow 2003; Taylor 2009). Cultural competence is defined broadly as a set of attitudes, behaviours, knowledge, skills, and

abilities that a teacher possesses to effectively work and respond to the needs of diverse students (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009). The development of cultural competences is understood in terms of transformative learning (Mezirow 2003), which incorporates three key elements including critical reflection, dialogue, and individual experience (Taylor 2009). This study examined the components of a model for a multicultural education course and how they influenced teacher candidates' development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to address the needs of learners from diverse backgrounds.

Developing Teacher Candidates' Cultural Competence

It is widely acknowledged that the mainly white / mainstream teacher candidates in teacher education programmes bring limited background experiences, prior socialisation, and skills about diversity (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2010; Lucas and Villegas 2013). In addition, these teacher candidates often hold deficit notions about diverse students (Valencia 2012). Deficit theories presume that some students fail in education because of their own deficiencies (perceived lack of ability, linguistic inferiority, and family dysfunction) not because of unfair school policies or differential treatment from teachers (Valencia 2012). Consequently, most teacher candidates need to analyse their tacit assumptions and beliefs and confront biases that have influenced their value system.

Teacher educators recommend helping teacher candidates examine their own attitudes, assumptions and values as a basic foundation from which to learn to become culturally competent (Banks 2010; Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009), and multicultural teacher education courses (or experiences) are an important means towards this end. But as noted by Trent and Artiles (1998), Ramsey (2000), and Ukpokodu (2011), fostering students' cultural awareness can be challenging and requires deliberate, intentional, and clear efforts and strategies. This involves using instructional strategies that create exciting active learning opportunities that put theory into practice, provide first-hand cultural interactions and experiences, and spaces for students to reflect on their

identities and those of diverse others, as well as create a classroom atmosphere conducive for such learning to occur.

Strategies identified in the literature as fostering such conditions and atmosphere for learning include critical reflection, writing autobiographies, structured field experiences combined with post experience reflection, preparing individual action plans for implementing multicultural education, case study analysis, and discussions around issues of diversity (Sleeter and Owuor 2011). Acquah and Commins (2015), Dray and Wineski (2011), and Garmon (1998) suggest that critical reflection challenges teacher candidates to examine their own beliefs and attitudes. Ukpokodu (2011) found that writing autobiographies allowed teacher candidates to examine their assumptions and transform their attitudes. Lastrapes and Negishi (2012) and Bowles (2011) observed that structured field experiences combined with post experience reflection fostered teacher candidates' cultural awareness while Ramsey (2000) demonstrates that engaging teacher candidates in discussions around issues of diversity provides space for them to reflect on and question assumptions and experiences.

Consistent across this research, diversity courses that transformed teacher candidates' beliefs and dispositions towards diverse students employed multiple strategies (Acquah and Commins 2013; Sleeter and Owuor 2011). Informed by these findings, the framework presented in this research incorporated a number of these theory-driven teaching strategies.

Theoretical Perspectives

This research draws on the perspectives of cultural competence (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009) and transformative learning theory (Mezirow 2003; Taylor 2009). The cultural competence perspective suggests that improving the academic achievement of diverse students requires that teachers acquire more knowledge, skills, and attitudes about linguistic and cultural diversity in education (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009; Lucas and Villegas 2013). Knowledge about culture helps teacher candidates become literate, as well as help them examine their existing attitudes and

feelings towards cultural differences. This, in turn, helps develop the skills teachers need to translate their knowledge and sensitivities into school programmes, curricular designs, and classroom instructional practices. Fundamental to cultural competence theory is that culture plays an important role in teaching and learning and teacher candidates need to thoroughly understand this to be able to address diversity.

The process of becoming culturally competent begins with acquisition of a knowledge base about cultural and linguistic diversity in education (Banks 2010; Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009; Lucas and Villegas 2013). This can be derived from the extensive scholarship on culturally relevant teaching practices, which addresses a range of topics related to diversity including historical perspective, culture and identity in education, cultural diversity in curricula content, educational equity, social justice, etc. (Banks 2010; Gay 2010; Nieto and Bode 2011). This work can offer powerful and enriching lessons that can help move teacher candidates towards becoming culturally responsive teaching practitioners.

In addition to this knowledge, students must be provided opportunities to engage in critical self-analysis to enable them examine their own cultural history and ethnic journeys (Banks, 2010; Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009). These examinations are necessary because most teacher candidates from mainstream backgrounds are unaware of their cultural socialisations. Understanding their cultural attitudes and those of their students is crucial for building honest relationships with them (Gay 2010; Lucas and Villegas 2013). Along with cultural self-analysis, teacher candidates must be helped to engage in professional analysis. This is important as teachers' beliefs and expectations have been shown to be strongly associated with instructional practices (Fang 1996; Zheng 2009). When teachers learn about their own cultures and those of their students, they are able to use this knowledge as basis for teaching them (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009). Teacher educators can foster this type of learning by deliberately creating conditions and curricula to help prospective teachers to develop this knowledge and skills.

This notion of challenging teacher candidates' beliefs and values through instructional methods seems consistent with Mezirow's (2003) conception of transformative learning, which he defines as "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mind-sets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (58). According to Mezirow (2003), transformative learning is a learning process and involves a direct intervention to foster the development of new knowledge, skills, and attitudes among students. He distinguished three main conditions necessary for transformative learning to occur: critical reflection, discourse (dialogue), and individual experience (Taylor 2009).

Mezirow (2003) also suggests that adults need to develop the skill and disposition of critical reflection to be able to think rationally. According to him, our ability to understand the meaning of our experiences and effective rational thinking are tied to critical reflection. Therefore, it is important that teacher candidates possess this skill. Teacher educators must help prospective teachers acquire this skill to become critically reflective of assumptions upon which beliefs, interpretations, and prejudices are based. Developing such disposition can foster their ability to carefully evaluate their own perspectives and engage in honest self-critique, both of which are essential requirements in becoming culturally competent (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009).

Another condition necessary for transformative learning is discourse. Mezirow (2003) defines discourse as dialogue involving the assessment of beliefs, feelings, and values. Discourse can consist of dialogue with oneself, literature, or other people. To participate effectively in dialogue with others, participants should be inquiring and collaborative, working together to share perceptions. Such activities and assignments can foster reflection on experiences, assumptions and questioning of beliefs. Moreover, it can serve to validate what and how students understand or arrive at best judgement regarding preconceived beliefs.

Lastly, individual experience, what students bring to class as well as what they experience in class can be explored to transform attitudes and beliefs (Taylor 2009). This involves creating a climate for cultural appreciation, respect and trust in the classroom, as well as opportunities for diverse cultural experiences and a chance to reflect on these experiences.

Mezirow's conditions for transformative learning can be understood in terms of pedagogical strategies employed in the teaching and learning process to foster the development of skills and disposition for critical reflection and dialogue. These strategies should be challenging, and engaging in order to stimulate students to learn. This ultimately requires multiple teaching strategies as documented in the literature (Sleeter and Owuor 2011). These principles were at the core of the model designed for a course in multicultural teacher education investigated in this study.

Research Questions

This study examined the components of a model for a multicultural education course and how they influenced teacher candidates' development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to address the needs of learners from diverse backgrounds. The following questions framed the research:

1. How does the transformative learning-based model for teaching multicultural education contribute to enhancing effective learning opportunities for teacher candidates?

2. How do students relate particular elements of the instructional model to their own developing multicultural awareness?

Method

Intervention Programme

The course (Multicultural Education) was an elective course taught in English to international master's degree students and exchange students from the ERASMUS student networks at a medium-size university in the South-west of Finland. The goals were to: (1) help teacher candidates understand themselves and others as cultural beings (2) understand the dimensions of diversity, and

how power, privilege and social status affect educational outcomes and (3) apply these understandings to enhance teaching and learning for children and adults. The content of the course covered a wide range of topics including:

- Defining culture: Who are we? Who are our students?

- Dimensions of diversity: power, privilege and difference.

- Perspectives on multicultural education.

- Tools for developing culturally proficient classrooms.

The course was taught once or twice a week for 1 h and 30 min for 12 weeks. The teachers used series of in-class activities and out-of-class assignments that aligned with the cultural competence perspective outlined by Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2009), and conformed to Mezirow's (2003) transformative concepts. During the first class, students were told that although several of the assignments and activities were requirements for the course, they were not going to be graded.

Small group activities embedded in interactive lectures

The lectures that were given were interactive and incorporated a variety of strategies including large and small group activities that required students to move around (e.g., line-up game – students stand in alphabetical order according to a particular criterion such as first name, language etc.), small group discussions, pair discussions (e.g., "turn and talk"), and shared and individual writing responses to class topics. Students were told and reminded that the teachers were modelling strategies that they could use in their or classroom to increase the likelihood that their students would talk to and learn from each other.

To foster interaction and the sharing of experiences about other cultures, students were asked to create a Personal Cultural Inventory and to participate in a Values Exercise (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell 2003). In this exercise, students were encouraged to write about their own cultural history using a variety of criteria and prompts, and values of importance to them using a

step-by-step protocol described by Lindsey et al (2003) and bring their responses to class. In this activity, candidates encountered and were encouraged to understand differences by sharing their cultural backgrounds with their classmates. They shared, compared and contrasted their views and experiences and talked about the implications of what they discovered about their similarities and differences in groups.

Readings

A more cognitively oriented part of the model for this class was the set of assigned readings. In line with the goal of challenging and changing teacher candidates' prior beliefs, readings were drawn from current literature related to multicultural education. The central text was Nieto and Bode's (2011) *Affirming Diversity: The Socio-political Context of Multicultural Education* supplemented by articles and book chapters from: Johnson (2013) and Gay (2010), and others. Students were required to incorporate their learning from the readings into the required reflective journals.

Case studies

The case studies, drawn from Nieto and Bode (2011), were an analysis of individuals within the context of their cultural and social environment. Cases were selected so that they reflected the dimensions of diversity talked about in class: race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and ability. Small groups consisting of three or four students each chose a different case study to read and discuss outside of class. Each group was then required to present the key elements of the case to the whole class and orchestrate a discussion about its content. Students were encouraged to use some of the interactive strategies they had seen modelled to involve the whole class in discussion.

Cultural immersion

An important aspect of the course model was exposing teacher candidates to the realities of a diverse educational setting. Students were required to observe at least 5 h of elementary or secondary classes at a school where 30% of the students were recent immigrants and more than 50% spoke a native language other than Finnish. They were guided by a note-taking protocol that

focused on equity of treatment. As students' experiences with new environments and diverse groups of people become educative only with time for reflection (Lastrapes and Negishi 2012) students were required to reflect on their observations in their journals.
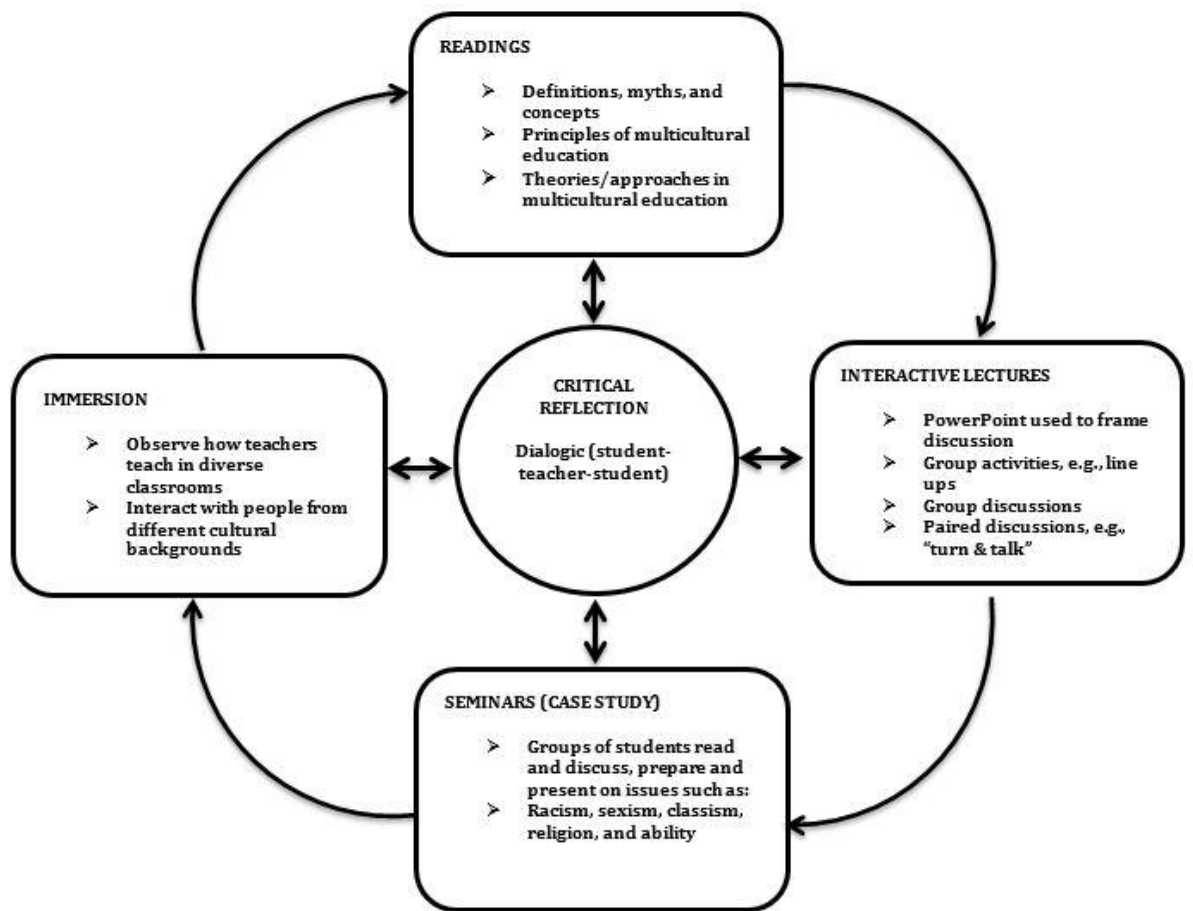
Reflection

The central aspect of the course model was that students were required to keep learning journals detailing their developing understandings from the readings, lectures, observations, and the seminars and reflect on their learning process throughout the semester. To encourage these students to go beyond superficial reflection, students were directed to respond to specific sentence stems. For example:

- What are two important things you have learned from the reading and case study?

- In what ways does the reading/case study/observations/ class activities connect to your own experience?

- What are their implications for your teaching?

The teachers responded to students' journals three times during the semester, providing each student personalised feedback and posing questions for further reflection. The graphic in Figure 1 captures the basic design of the course model and how the different aspects worked together to develop the cultural awareness of the teacher candidates.

READINGS

➢ Definitions, myths, and concepts
➢ Principles of multicultural education
➢ Theories/approaches in multicultural education

IMMERSION

➢ Observe how teachers teach in diverse classrooms
➢ Interact with people from different cultural backgrounds

CRITICAL REFLECTION

Dialogic (student-teacher-student)

INTERACTIVE LECTURES

➢ PowerPoint used to frame discussion
➢ Group activities, e.g., line ups
➢ Group discussions
➢ Paired discussions, e.g., "turn & talk"

SEMINARS (CASE STUDY)

➢ Groups of students read and discuss, prepare and present on issues such as:
➢ Racism, sexism, classism, religion, and ability

Participants

All 45 students (male = 4, female = 41; age range19 – 41) enrolled in this class were recruited for

this study. Twelve were degree students (10= international master's degree students, 2 Finnish

degree students) and 33 exchange students from the ERASMUS students network. The class was

very diverse consisting of the following nationalities: Australia (1), Austria (1), Czech Republic (1),

Denmark (1), Finland (2), France (2), Germany (12), Greece (3), Hong Kong (1), Hungary (3),

Japan (1), Korea (1), Lithuania (1), Mexico (1), Moldova (1), Nepal (1), The Netherlands (1),

Russia (1), Serbia (1), Slovenia (1), Spain (6), and USA (2). All students consented to participating

in the study and agreed that quotes from their coursework could be used as data in this study.

Participants were promised anonymity and confidentiality. Participants are referred to using pseudonyms. Pseudonyms were chosen to reflect the gender of the participants.

Data Sources

Several data collection techniques, outlined below, were employed to understand how different aspects of instructional methodology contributed to students' learning and how particular instructional methods related to their developing multicultural awareness.

Questionnaire

A modified version of Henry's (1986) Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) was used as a pre-test and post-test measure. This questionnaire measures prospective teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism and was used to assess changes in teacher candidates' attitudes. There are 28 belief statements (e.g., I believe I would prefer to work with children and parents whose cultures are similar to mine) that asked participants to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). In this study, the test-retest reliability of the CDAI was found to be at the .94 level.

Written assignments/course evaluation

All of the students' written work from the course including students' journals, and final reflections was collected and analysed. To evaluate the course, students were given a survey that asked them to comment on the aspects of the course they considered most and least helpful to their learning. The survey included 17 questions of which 9 were open ended. The closed questions asked participants to rate how each aspect contributed to their awareness of multicultural issues on a 5-point Likert-type scale as follows: 1= least helpful, 2= not very helpful, 3= somewhat helpful, 4= helpful, 5= most helpful. The open ended questions asked participants to specify ways in which each of the various aspects contributed to their learning. Student course evaluations were anonymous.

Focus group

Three focus group discussions were set up with volunteers. These were organised to obtain information from students regarding their awareness of issues around diversity after taking the course, how the newly acquired knowledge challenged their prior beliefs, aspects of the course that contributed to their development of awareness about diversity, and how the new knowledge was going to affect their future practice. The focus group discussions were held a few days after the last class. There were three groups of four students and each session lasted one hour. The sessions were recorded and transcribed.

Analysis

Quantitative analysis

To determine if there was a difference in teacher candidates' multicultural attitudes before and after the course, a paired t-test was conducted. Descriptive statistics of participant's course evaluations provide information on aspects of the course that made the most impact on prospective teachers.

Qualitative analysis

All the written data produced by the 45 students in the class, including their learning journal, final reflections, and focus group transcripts were analysed using Content Analysis (CA) (Krippendorff 1980) for evidence of students' attributions of gains in their knowledge. CA is a robust technique for analysing content-sensitive data and developing an understanding of the meaning of communication (Krippendorff 1980).

A systematic review of all selected documents was conducted three times. In the initial reading, the data were approached in a holistic and open way, seeking to identify and describe aspects of the course that were most often mentioned as contributing to students' learning. During a second reading, the text was systematically marked with accompanying notes to indicate aspects of the course that recurred from the collective written assignments and interviews. For example, when

teacher candidates repeatedly cited an aspect of the course in their journals and group interview as helping raise their awareness, this was interpreted as evidence of the effectiveness of this strategy.

In the final phase of reading, the data within each of the aspects were combined to develop more structured evidence of its impact on candidates' developing cultural awareness. These core categories were then refined and trimmed to form emerging themes. Using this process, three themes emerged: small group activities and opportunities for dialogue, learning through reflection, and field experiences.

Results

Knowledge and Attitude Change

The data from the CDAI indicated that overall, teacher candidates did, develop an awareness of diversity issues after taking a multicultural education course. A paired samples t-test of students' beginning and ending knowledge of diversity revealed a statistically significant difference between knowledge at the end of the course ($M = 103.02$, $SD = 10.13$) and the beginning of the course ($M = 98.88$, $SD = 7.13$); $t(41) = -2.169$, p = .015. Cohen's d was estimated at -0.68 which is a medium effect size. Additionally, paired samples t-tests of the subscales scores yielded statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test on cross-cultural communication and assessment subscales. The average post-test score for cross-cultural communication and assessment (M=12.76, SD=2.35 and M=9.85, SD=1.66, respectively) were statistically significantly higher than that of the pre-test score for the cross-cultural communication (M=10.24, SD=2.13); $t(41) = -5.044$, p =.000, Cohen's $d = -1.12$; and assessment scale (M=8.85, SD=1.91); $t(41) = -2.520$, p =.012, Cohen's $d = -.56$. Although there were slight difference in the mean scores of the pre and post-test for the culturally diverse family, multicultural environment, and cultural awareness subscales, they did not reach statistically significant levels. The means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, and Cohen's d for the pre-test and post-test CDAI measure are reported as a supplemental online material.

Most and Least Effective Aspects of the Course

Results based on students' course evaluations address individual aspects of the course that contributed to their learning (Table 1). In general, the results indicate that teacher candidates' perceived all components of the course as helpful in contributing to their developing cultural awareness. Participants' views on the lectures, small group activities, course content and readings, reflective journals, and seminars were overwhelmingly positive. An exception was preparing the case study presentation with about 7% of respondents indicating that it was not helpful. Teacher candidates' comments suggest that the case study was least helpful either because some presentations were uninteresting, or they would have preferred to conduct similar interviews themselves.

Table 1

Students' Self-report of how each Component of the Course Contributed to their Developing Cultural Awareness in Percentages

Components	Level of help				
	Most helpful (%)	Helpful (%)	Somewhat helpful (%)	Not very helpful (%)	Least helpful (%)
Small group activities	38	48	10	5	0
Lectures	41	50	10	0	0
Readings	19	50	31	0	0
Case study – analysis	33	41	26	0	0
Case study – presentation	17	21	38	5	7
Case study – discussions	12	55	29	5	0
School observation	24	33	17	7	0
Reflective journals	36	38	26	0	0

Students Relate their Learnings to the Elements of the Model

Overall, participants' narratives provided evidence regarding their transitions toward greater understanding of how to make classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students. Across narratives, participants described gaining benefit from engaging in the different activities, dialogue, and assignments in this course that challenged their prior beliefs. This is embodied in the comment by an Asian, male, master's degree student and represents sentiments expressed by many students in the final reflection:

> The different aspects of the course provided an opportunity for constant reflection which in turn led to the development of new ideas and assumptions and the confirmation and/or rejection of previously held ones. I personally see the course as an exercise on empowerment than a mere academic activity… thoughts are provoked as assumptions are challenged and new ideas are introduced.

> This student, like many others, became more aware of their cultural socialisation that previous to this time, they had never thought about. Such an understanding did not come naturally, it took deliberate scaffolding using a number of strategies to raise and heighten students' awareness. What follows is a synthesis of the themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis.

Small group activities and opportunities for dialogue

According to the analysis, the aspects of the course that most impacted students were the lectures and the small group activities and discussions embedded within them, as well as the case study analysis and discussions. Approximately 95% of the teacher candidates in the class found the lectures and activities to be powerful and an eye-opening experience. Across all sources of written data, candidates often attested to the value of the classroom activities in developing their cultural awareness. As an example, a European, female, master's degree student wrote in her final reflection:

The course was very interactive and productive … it made people active and made them think. It allowed me to understand the important aspects of multicultural education. We did different activities, which are very interesting to use in my future practice.

This student clearly and thoughtfully connected her learning to the group activities, opportunities for dialogue, and the instructional style and delivery method used. Two activities that were linked together consistently came across from the various data sources as contributing to students' cultural awareness - the personal cultural inventory and values exercise. An overwhelming majority of teacher candidates (98%) reacted positively to this activity in which they shared and listened to each other's cultural histories and then the values most important to them. Candidates' post-reflections demonstrated that this activity helped them to realise how they have been shaped by their culture and the people around them throughout their life, and how this has influenced their attitudes and worldviews. One American, male, master's degree student recounted:

The introspective exercises, in the context of everything else we were learning in the class, made me realize the extent of these views and opinions, as well as their origin. It also was really interesting to think about my personal cultural inventory as a white male, which as we read, is often considered "not a culture".

Another aspect of the group activities that teacher candidates found eye opening was the combination of theory and personal interaction, especially in a class full of people from different cultural backgrounds though most of them represented the mainstream of their own countries. The diversity of the class members appears to have contributed to everyone's learning. In writing their final reflection, almost all of the teacher candidates connected the knowledge they gained to the group activities and diversity of the participants. A European, female, ERASMUS exchange student wrote:

I found out that talking about different topics in small groups and then sharing the results were really helpful to get an insight of how the others understand these concepts. I am sure

that you could teach this class to a group of students from the same culture, but because we were so different many of the ideas were easier to discuss and get examples of.

This comment illustrates that engaging in dialogue with diverse others helped candidates acquire a heightened level of cultural awareness and critical consciousness. This suggests that group activities and experiences may be most effective when there is diversity within students.

During the focus groups discussions, participants reiterated sentiments analogous to their reflections. When asked to talk about how the lectures and group activities had contributed to their new learning, Anna and Xenia responded as follows:

Anna: It wasn't actually a lecture. I am not sure how you would term it…. It was really quite powerful…. At first group work for me was strange, for me and for many different people. It wasn't their way of doing things. Turning to talk in the small groups, but then we got used to it and it was very helpful. Actually some days we couldn't stop talking.

Xenia: I loved when the lecturers talked from their own experience and life. I mean it is like "I am here and I am showing you about life" not like "I am here and I just know these things, I am God." I would like to check with all the [hand-outs of the PowerPoint] because there were lots of things to discuss and think, and very complicated.

This dialogue indicates that the variety of activities embedded in the lectures triggered cross-cultural discussions which they found to be enlightening. Responses like these that consistently emerged from the focus group interviews and journals highlight the importance of designing instruction to be student-centred as opposed to the traditional lecture or teacher-centred approach.

The case study analysis, presentation, and discussions, despite receiving the highest number of 'least effective' ratings still fostered dialogue and interactions among students. Students' narratives revealed that most teacher candidates believed that working with other people in the case

study analysis, the stories told in these cases themselves, and the discussions that followed the presentations helped change their prior beliefs and attitudes as illustrated in the following examples:

> Working with 3 people from total different cultures and countries, made me realise the importance of diversity, and be aware that we can't run from it, we are constantly surrounded by it, and have to cope with it too.

> This moment tried to put us into the real situations that many children and teenagers are going through… It has been an opportunity to improve, share and integrate different opinions from our own mates.

Working together with other people in the groups caused differences of opinion that led to "respectful" conflict. While such incidences may have caused uneasiness, they provided varying learning opportunities regarding knowledge and skill development around diversity. A European, female, ERASMUS student's comment during the focus group discussion is indicative of this: "My group was completely freaked out like - Poland, Finland, Pakistan, and China. It was great. We really enjoyed the case studies presentations much more than we expected."

Learning through reflection

The opportunities for critical reflection emerged as extremely important for teacher candidates' learning. Analysis of their written assignments supported the conclusion that teacher candidates found the opportunity to reflect extremely useful in supporting their continuous exploration of issues of diversity and in shaping their thinking about diversity. The following are examples from students' final reflection:

> I learned so much about myself. I am more aware of who I am in terms of culture. I reflected on everything I heard and read about, being more and more aware of what culture means and how to put it into action. The feedback was extensive and great.

> It made me think about myself as a cultural being. Who really am I? I started to really think about it. Am I from country X, does that describe me in any way?

These comments point to critical self-examination by these students. They appeared to question and confront their prior beliefs and assumptions. The rhetorical question "who really am I" is indicative of deep reflection and an awareness of oneself – self-consciousness, which is crucial in becoming culturally competent.

Another aspect of the reflection journals is that there was no one right answer – students had the opportunity to write from a personal stance based on their unique experiences in the class. This is exemplified by comments from the focus groups:

I liked this a lot, this learning journal reading stuff because that is when it really started making sense to me and the fact that we could reflect from our own point of view and didn't just have to sum up. That was actually real.

It was still my favourite part of the class, it was when I had the greatest ability to reflect and apply course content to my own experience.

Clearly, the space and time created for reflection helped teacher candidates to think about the issues of diversity at a deeper level. As this was the essence of the reflective journals, the result thus shows that this strategy is an essential part of a class that seeks to foster candidates' cultural competence.

A few candidates, however, found the reflective journal overwhelming and questioned its usefulness to their future work. The following are examples from students' course evaluations:

It helped in the beginning but I definitely think that 2 per week (one for the reading and one for the lecture) are too much. It started to become a burden.

I have been writing many reflection journals during my studies.... I never have time to read them again e.g. five years later to check how my thoughts have changed.

Field experience

Data from teacher candidates' written assignments suggest that they found observing a diverse school to be quite useful in developing understandings of diversity. Teacher candidates indicated

that the school experience gave them first-hand experience of diversity in a school context where they could see theory put into practice. A European, female, master's degree student wrote in their final reflection:

> Most important for me, in a multicultural school …, we have been able to see the reality and how to put in practice all the theoretical content, learning in the workplace; it is the best way to learn.

It appears that visiting this multicultural school helped students visualise and relate the content knowledge to the classroom environment. Students, who were assigned to the school for a brief internship, also had a chance to work with diverse children and to practice what had been taught in the lectures. For example, a European, male, ERASMUS student reflected:

> I have had the chance to work with many students from different backgrounds, countries. In some way, all the theory that I learnt in the lectures I bring them to practice in the school. At some points it was difficult, much more when I had to teach the lesson, but in general, I can say that I have learned a lot from this part of the course.

Students' written evaluations at the end of the course show that some students were critical of the school visit, not because they did not learn, but because they felt some aspects of the visit were not necessary:

> The individual school observations were valuable and interesting, but the 1st school visit felt a bit like a waste of time (why have the principal's presentation?). We could have done the observations and the principal's presentation on the same day.

> This feedback was the impetus to modify the programme for the school visit in the subsequent years. Classroom observations have been incorporated into the visit from the outset.

Discussion

This study examined the components of the model designed for a multicultural education course and how they influenced teacher candidates' development of cultural competence. The model was

purposefully designed to provide candidates with knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in diverse cultural context (Banks 2010; Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009). The model integrated activities and assignments that challenged students to assess their own beliefs and value system through individual experience, critical reflection, and dialogue (Mezirow 2003). The findings suggest that teacher candidates made substantial gains in knowledge as a result of taking the course. Candidates attributed their knowledge gains, in large part, to the components of this model outlined in this study (Figure 1).

The pre-test and post-test results of the CDAI suggest that taking the multicultural education course positively influenced pre-service teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards diversity. This result is in accordance with several studies that have shown that multicultural education courses with a reflective component can have a positive influence on pre-service teachers' attitudes towards issues of diversity (Acquah and Commins 2015; Garmon 1998). In addition, analysis of students' course evaluation revealed that all aspects of the course contributed to their growing cultural awareness (Table 1).

Perspectives shared by teacher candidates positioned group activities and dialogue as contributing to their growing cultural competence. To move candidates towards greater personal appreciation and experiences with diversity, the model incorporated several group and pair activities (discussed previously). As the evidence show, these activities and assignments appeared to have challenged the prior understandings teacher candidates brought to this course and provided them with a wide range of experiences. This finding is in accordance with studies that have shown that engaging pre-service teachers in structured experiential exercises, cross-cultural conversations, and group activities can foster their developing cultural awareness (Acquah and Commins 2013; 2015, 2016; Ramsey 2000; Ukpokodu 2011). We found that having a college class full of students from diverse backgrounds in terms of race, culture, and language contributed to students' experiences as it brought more critical and rich perspectives to the discussions, which promoted

students learning during such interactive activities and discussions. This is consistent with Ukpokodu (2011) who found that intentionally grouping students into learning teams by race, ethnicity, gender, etc. in a cross-cultural project facilitated their cultural awareness.

The findings suggest that providing opportunities for critical reflection can foster teacher candidates' cultural awareness. In this course that sought to promote teacher candidates' cultural competence, students were required to keep a journal detailing their learnings from readings and activities, and assignments. As the evidence show, consistent with past research (Acquah and Commins 2015; Dray and Wineski 2011; Garmon 1998) engaging in critical reflection contributed to their cultural awareness. The extent to which teacher candidates genuinely reflected on their prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences and the changes that followed these experiences attest to the effectiveness of critical reflection in transforming beliefs and attitudes. This reinforces the importance of transformative learning processes in the role of developing culturally competent teaching practices (Mezirow 2003).

To foster teacher candidates' experiences in this course, a field work component was incorporated into the assignments. This was complemented by activities that created opportunities for discussions and dialogue as discussed previously, which were intentionally embedded into the lectures and students' presentations of case studies. These levels of experiences were used because they met Mezirow's transformative learning characteristics which suggest that students bring experiences to and experience new things on a course (Taylor 2009). As evidenced from students' excerpts, engaging teacher candidates in authentic and real cultural experiences and engaging them in activities such as discussing their values and cultural histories fostered transformative thinking, helped students to openly and deeply talk about cultural differences and systems of privileges and oppression, which as the results show, led to heightened cultural awareness and critical self-consciousness (Mezirow 2003). This suggests that teacher candidates can be scaffolded toward

cultural knowledge of themselves and others through field experiences (Acquah and Commins 2016; Lastrapes and Negishi 2012) and dialogue (Mezirow 2003).

Finally, it is important to note that while the discussion focused mainly on the three key findings from the analysis, the components of this model have an interdependent relationship, they do not stand alone. Without readings or cultural immersion, there is little or nothing to engage in critical reflection. In order to frame the discussions and reflections, students were exposed to the literature on multicultural education.

As researchers, we endeavoured not to let our position influence the data collection process and thus put in place some measures to check this. For example, we explained that participation was voluntary and assignments and activities which were done as part of this course and that constituted aspects of the research were not graded. This was to ensure that students engaged in these activities and assignments mainly for learning and not because of a motivation to earn better grades.

However, the findings must still be interpreted in light of several limitations. Our sample group was very heterogeneous, consisting of many international students. Applying these teaching strategies to other samples (a more homogenous group for example) will most definitely yield further interesting results. Often, students who enrol on diversity courses are predisposed to the issues of multiculturalism. This may have contributed to the effectiveness of this course. Finally, because this study focused on teacher candidates in only this course and there was not a controlled group, claims about causality cannot be made. This also limits the generalisability of the findings.

Conclusions and Implications

There are several implications for teacher education highlighted by the present study. The model outlined in this article provides a powerful example of how teacher educators can successfully address the increasing diversity in public schools in Europe by challenging teacher candidates' prejudices and beliefs through instructional strategies and empowering them to engage in transformative experiences as they acquire cultural competence. However, it is not intended to

prescribe a set of strategies for multicultural teacher education. There is not one single way for effective teaching. Rather, for maximum effectiveness, these strategies have to be adapted to the instructional context, students' background, and resources available to the instructors.

Of particular importance is how teacher education programmes in general, and culturally and linguistically responsive education, in particular could be improved. The present study indicated that rather than solely planning the content of and the frequency of which multicultural education courses are taught, teacher education programmes should focus attention, as well, on how to teach such courses. Courses should be organised interactively to encourage critical social perspectives while providing opportunities for field experiences and reflection on all aspects of the coursework.

Furthermore, while having more courses available for teacher trainees is important, this study suggests, consistent with Ramsey (2000) and Ukpokodu (2011), that more than attendance is needed if teacher candidates' prejudices and misunderstandings can be changed into more informed and realistic perspectives. Approaches are needed that provide teacher candidates with transformative learning experiences and the chance to examine their own cultural socialisations and those of other cultures.

In conclusion, knowledge about how to prepare teacher candidates in culturally relevant teaching is both timely and critical, since now, more than ever, teachers need to be prepared to face the challenges related to the teaching of diverse student populations. These findings are important to share because throughout Europe there is an urgent need for teacher education programmes to infuse multicultural perspectives into teacher preparation. The components of the model outlined here offer potent strategies for transforming teacher candidates' attitudes and beliefs about cultural diversity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Table 1

Students' Self-report of how each Component of the Course Contributed to their Developing Cultural Awareness by Percentage

Components	Level of help				
	Most helpful (%)	Helpful (%)	Somewhat helpful (%)	Not very helpful (%)	Least helpful (%)
Small group activities	38	48	10	5	0
Lectures	41	50	10	0	0
Readings	19	50	31	0	0
Case study – Analysis	33	41	26	0	0
Case study – Presentation	17	21	38	5	7
Case study – Discussions	12	55	29	5	0
School observation	24	33	17	7	0
Reflective journals	36	38	26	0	0

<u>Figure Caption</u>

Figure 1. Elements of a model for teaching multicultural education to teacher candidates