

# Fostering Intercultural Inquiry in Subject-Area Curriculum Courses

*William Dunn, Anna Kirova, Miriam Cooley, &  
Greg Ogilvie  
University of Alberta*

This study investigates the infusion of intercultural inquiry into subject-area curriculum courses in a teacher education program. Drawing from data that include questionnaires, student assignments, and interviews, the research focuses on how student teachers responded to critical explorations of diversity within curriculum courses in second language education, early childhood education, and art education. The findings indicate that most student teachers had limited prior experiences with diversity, leading to anxiety and uncertainty about their preparedness to work in diverse classrooms. Although many were receptive to intercultural inquiry and perceived its value, some resisted efforts to critically challenge social inequality and privilege.

**Key words:** teacher education, diversity, multicultural education, intercultural inquiry

Cet article porte sur l'intégration de la recherche interculturelle dans un programme de formation à l'enseignement. Puisant dans des données tirées entre autres de questionnaires, de travaux d'étudiants et d'entrevues, les auteurs cherchent essentiellement à examiner comment des étudiants-maîtres réagissent aux explorations critiques de la diversité dans des cours en enseignement d'une langue seconde, en éducation préscolaire et en éducation artistique. D'après les résultats obtenus, la plupart des étudiants-maîtres avaient au départ peu d'expérience de la diversité ; ils se sentaient donc anxieux et peu sûrs d'eux par rapport à la perspective de travailler dans des classes hétérogènes. Si certains voyaient d'un bon œil la recherche interculturelle et étaient conscients de sa valeur, d'autres se montraient réticents à défier de façon critique des inégalités et des privilèges sociaux.

**Mots clés :** formation à l'enseignement, diversité, éducation multiculturelle, recherche interculturelle

Given the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity present in Canadian schools, institutions of higher education have the responsibility to prepare the next generation of teachers to meet the needs of diverse student populations. One means to work toward this goal has been for teacher education programs to adopt an “additive approach” by offering specialized courses that focus on topics such as diversity, multiculturalism, and anti-racist education (e.g., Goodwin, 1997; Schick & St. Denis, 2003). Some faculties of education have instituted a program-wide “infusion approach” to address diversity across various components of their teacher education program (e.g., Clark, 2002; Vavrus, 1994). However, change at the program level can be difficult to implement and may require years of development as well as movement through various levels of institutional approval. Evidence indicates that the additive approach alone is not sufficient to prepare teachers for diversity (e.g., Grant, 1994; Murrell & Foster, 2003; Sleeter, 2001). Consequently, it is important to explore alternative approaches.

This study was carried out by a group of teacher educators working to promote intercultural inquiry among the preservice teachers enrolled in their subject-area curriculum, or “teaching methods,” courses. Situating intercultural inquiry within subject-area curriculum courses offers several advantages compared with other approaches. First, it provides a means to address cultural diversity specifically in relation to the everyday teaching practices of various school subjects. Second, it can be implemented by individual instructors without the need for program-wide change. Third, it offers the potential for infusion across the teacher education curriculum, but without the need for a lengthy process of program-level adoption.

#### DEFINING INTERCULTURAL INQUIRY

Central to this study is the term *intercultural inquiry*, which we use to refer to processes that assist preservice teachers to respond optimally to all children, understanding both the richness and the limitations reflected by their own socio-cultural context, as well as the socio-cultural contexts of the students they are teaching (Barrera & Kramer, 1997). As noted by Milner (2003), achieving this goal involves the pursuit of increased awareness, sensitivity, and understanding with respect to racial

and ethnic identities. Others (e.g., Craig, Hull, Haggart, & Perez-Selles, 2000; Schensul, 1995) have pointed to the importance of a capacity for cultural self-assessment, an ability to understand one's own socio-cultural context, and a willingness to assume that good reasons or explanations exist for differences across groups. Intercultural inquiry also involves the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build on ethnic, socio-cultural, and linguistic diversity (Lynch & Hanson, 1998).

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature addressing diversity reveals that teacher education programs have adopted numerous approaches to promote intercultural inquiry. Historically teacher education programs have addressed the "cultural gap" (Murrell & Foster, 2003) between predominantly white teachers and an increasingly diverse student population in an additive fashion – by creating courses on multicultural education or by including multicultural content in curriculum foundations courses (Goodwin, 1997). This additive approach to multicultural education has yielded results in terms of student teachers' beliefs about diversity (Murrell & Foster, 2003). However, research into the influence of the courses on students' actual practices has shown limited effects (Grant, 1994; Murrell & Foster, 2003; Sleeter, 2001). From his review of multicultural approaches adopted in various institutions, Grant (1994) concluded that a multicultural course "is not long enough to provide pre-service students with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement multicultural education in urban schools or to teach students of colour" (p. 6).

Acknowledging the inadequacy of an additive approach to multicultural education, scholars have advocated an infusion strategy for addressing diversity (Horm, 2003; Vavrus, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996). This strategy involves the integration of multicultural education across various elements of a teacher preparation program. Rather than attending to issues of diversity in isolation from methodology courses and practical field experiences, the infusion strategy calls for intercultural inquiry to be an essential component interwoven into all areas of professional development.

The adoption of an infusion strategy has assumed numerous forms. Cooney and Akintunde (1999) infused issues of social inequality into a program by holding a campus-wide two-day symposium, while Carson (2009) described a workshop-based "Diversity Institute." Clark (2002, 2005) advocated intergroup dialogue among students from varying backgrounds to promote open discourse about issues related to diversity. Boyle-Baise and Sleeter (2000) promoted the use of community-based service learning to promote intercultural inquiry. The authors claimed that service learning had the benefit of providing student teachers with genuine cross-cultural experiences, while also addressing needs within particular communities. Similarly, Murtadha-Watts (1998) recommended establishing school-based, multi-agency collaborations between universities and schools with a culturally diverse student body. She suggested exposing prospective teachers to multicultural classrooms at the beginning of their teacher preparation program as a strategy to bring students' long-held beliefs into question so that they become more receptive to new ideas about diversity presented in coursework. In comparing the effects of a monocultural practicum experience and a student teaching experience in a culturally foreign setting, Cooper, Beare, and Thorman (1990) found that students in the culturally foreign setting demonstrated greater multicultural awareness than their counterparts in other settings.

Literature on addressing diversity in teacher preparation programs largely focuses on specific strategies used within specialized multicultural education courses (e.g., Limburg & Clark, 2006; Wiest, 1998; Schick, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2003) or on infusion strategies implemented at a broad program level. This study investigates the infusion of intercultural inquiry into individual subject-area curriculum courses by presenting research carried out in three courses representing the following fields: elementary art education, early childhood education, and second language education at the secondary level.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN AND GOALS

An important feature of this study is that it was initiated by members of three local community organizations who brought to us their concern that the needs of immigrant and refugee children were not being met in

schools. The stories that they shared urged us as individuals and teacher-educators to strive to better prepare future teachers to work with these populations in schools. In carrying out the study, we sought to increase our own understanding of anti-racist and anti-oppressive education (e.g., Schick & St. Denis, 2003, 2005; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005) while incorporating these and related principles into our courses to promote intercultural inquiry among student teachers. In this article, we focus on the following research question:

- What are student teachers' responses to the incorporation of intercultural inquiry into their subject-area curriculum courses?

#### *Researchers and Student Participants*

Our research team consisted of three teacher educators and one teaching and research assistant who came from different subject areas and who brought to the research a range of professional and life experiences. In reflecting on how our identities shaped our study, we concur with Banks (1998) that the "biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct" (p. 5). As white teacher educators, we recognize that because our identities confer privilege and power, we must constantly examine this issue in relation to our educational practices and other forms of action. We consider it important to point out, however, that we do not identify ourselves as a single 'cultural' group, given our differences in to socio-economic background, native language, country of origin, ethnicity, culture, gender, and sexual orientation.

We do hold one assumption in common: our view that knowledge is not something to be grasped, but something that is co-constructed through interaction among people (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). A fundamental question for us, not only as researchers but most of all as educators, was how do we engage preservice teachers in activities to foster a way of being in the world that acknowledges their life histories while also challenging their taken-for-granted ways of being, thus inspiring changes to bring forward new understandings and new ways of being that are consistent with the context and the time in which they live.

In describing our students, we identified a parallel with the characteristics described in several research studies conducted in the United

States: namely, that teachers tend to be predominantly of European origin, middle class, and female, with only a relatively small percentage being from ethnic minority groups (Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Furthermore, like those described in other studies (Milner, 2003; Milner & Woolfolk Hoy, 2003), many of our students had never attended racially diverse schools or lived in intercultural neighbourhoods. However, we also recognize that our students did encompass many forms of diversity with respect to their backgrounds, identities, and perspectives, as indicated below in the sections that describe each course in greater detail.

#### *Data Sources*

The study focused on courses offered during one academic term that followed an initial student teaching internship but preceded the final internship at the culmination of the Bachelor of Education program. Sources of data were a questionnaire, course assignments, and student interviews. Data from the questionnaire and course assignments were collected during the academic term, and interviews were conducted after the term and the final internship had ended. Analysis of the data was ongoing both during and following the data collection period.

*Questionnaire.* The questionnaire allowed us to learn more about students' background experiences and perspectives on diversity; thus, we administered it at the beginning of the academic term, using the same questionnaire in all three courses. It consisted of 10 open-ended questions about the student teachers' experiences with diversity, the degree to which they felt their Bachelor of Education program was preparing them to work in diverse classrooms, and their understanding of intercultural competence. Questionnaire prompts included:

1. Describe the environment of an ideal school where you would like to teach.
2. What will be your role as a teacher in addressing the needs of the students?
3. How did the school where you completed your initial student teaching internship compare to your ideal school?
4. Have there been courses in your B.Ed. program in which you learned something about cultural diversity?

5. What does the term intercultural competence mean to you?

*Course assignments.* The student assignments were developed in relation to the particular goals of each course to stimulate intercultural inquiry through guided reflection about course-related topics and activities. We collected written responses in the second language and early childhood curriculum courses, while art and creative work served as the medium of expression in the art education course. The assignments are described in greater detail below in the sections that present the research findings for each course.

*Student interviews.* We conducted individual interviews following the final student teaching internship of the students' Bachelor of Education program to gain more in-depth information about their experiences of intercultural inquiry and to ask them to reflect on these experiences in relation to their student teaching. The interviews were semi-structured, and prompts included:

1. How do you understand cultural diversity as it pertains to you as a teacher?
2. Can you describe one point in your student teaching where you became more aware of cultural diversity or social inequality?
3. Do you feel prepared to address cultural diversity in your classroom?

*Data Analysis*

The questionnaires, student assignments, and interview transcripts were analyzed qualitatively to identify major themes using a procedure described by Creswell (2005). The process involved reading the transcripts and students' written responses to assign codes or labels to each piece of relevant information that represented a common viewpoint or perspective related to the research question. Subsequently, all the textual extracts that had been assigned the same code or label were combined to form categories or themes. The art and creative works were interpreted through a visual analysis of their content and how elements were combined and spatially arranged.

### *Ethical Considerations*

When conducting research in one's own classroom, there is particular concern that students should not fear that their success in the course will be jeopardized if they choose not to participate. To address these concerns, questionnaires were anonymous and were collected while the instructor was out of the room. Requests for interviews and permission to use examples of students' work were made through a general invitation after the course had ended and grades were submitted. Only comments by those who chose to participate are cited. The images published in this text appear with the consent of the artist.

### *Modifications Made to the Curriculum Courses*

Modifications were made within each course to infuse intercultural inquiry; the approach to infusion varied in each case. In the course on second language education, intercultural inquiry was connected to the course content by having students explore the links between language and culture using critical concepts for analysis. In the course on early childhood education, an experiential assignment was created to provide an opportunity for students to work with children who spoke languages other than English. In the art education course, the approach used intercultural inquiry as the content or theme of artistic works.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### *Second Language Education*

The second language curriculum course, designed to prepare students for a teaching internship in a second language classroom, met intensively for approximately 20 hours per week during the first six weeks of the academic term to allow students to complete their internship in the second half of the term. Of the eight students enrolled in the course, two were of Latin American heritage and had grown up speaking Spanish at home. The other students, who were of white, European heritage, were native speakers of English.

To incorporate intercultural inquiry into the course, two key concepts were emphasized: critical multiculturalism (e.g., Kubota, 2004) and critical language awareness (e.g., Train, 2003). These concepts offered a



means to explore links between languages, communities, power, and resistance. Given the short-term, intensive nature of the course, guided written reflections provided a feasible way to introduce intercultural inquiry within the context of the course constraints. Examples of reflection prompts included:

1. How have your cross cultural experiences shaped your desire to teach a second language?
2. In what ways does language serve as a means of discrimination within our society?
3. What are the implications of referring to a language or culture as "foreign"?

The goal was to cultivate an understanding of how language education is neither innocent nor neutral, but rather implicated in the perpetuation of oppression while also offering opportunities to resist oppression.

Five of the eight students completed the anonymous questionnaire at the beginning of the course. After the course had ended, three students agreed to take part in individual interviews that were audio-recorded and transcribed. Based on the analysis of the data from both of these sources, the following key ideas emerged:

1. Most student teachers' indicated that they felt unprepared to work in ethnically, culturally, or linguistically diverse classrooms;
2. They considered themselves to be open-minded, but noted a lack of open-mindedness among some of their classmates; and
3. They expressed awareness of the need for teachers to learn from their students to respond to diverse needs and circumstances.

*Feeling Unprepared.* With the notable exception of one participant who had grown up bilingual and who had attended schools with diverse populations, participants had had limited experiences with linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity. For example, in describing her hometown, one participant stated that it "*does not have the most culturally diverse population.*" Consequently, many of the student teachers felt unprepared to work with diverse groups of students. This view was expressed very

explicitly by one participant, who commented: *"I don't really feel prepared to teach [in] a multicultural classroom."* Furthermore, some student teachers felt unprepared even when linguistic, cultural, or ethnic diversity had been addressed in one or more of their introductory education courses. For example, one interviewee stated: *"I had all of the discrete ideology in my head, but how do I actually make it work in the classroom."* This comment suggests that feeling unprepared may be due, in part, to uncertainty about how to translate knowledge about diversity into pedagogical practice.

*Open-mindedness.* All the student teachers who volunteered to be interviewed for the study considered themselves to be open-minded, expressing the view that they subscribed to an inclusive ideal and believed that all students should be treated equitably and with respect. For example, one stated: *"I consider myself to be very open minded. . . . I'm careful to not make judgements."* However, the interviewees also indicated that not all the students in the curriculum course shared their open-minded views. For example, when asked what she thought of making intercultural inquiry an even greater focus of the course, one interviewee stated: *"It would have been, I think, really uncomfortable for some people because it's a very sensitive subject I think for some people."* Another stated:

*I think some students who don't really care about it, they get sick of hearing about it. Even the little bit that we're exposed to. . . . If you ask someone who, it's maybe never been an issue for them because they fit the norm, they fit the status quo, then I don't think they see the real importance, maybe, of how it actually affects people on a day to day to day basis. They don't see it. Even if it happens in front of them they probably still don't see it, or the long[-term] implications.*

Thus, while the participants considered themselves to support intercultural inquiry, they also suggested that some of their classmates were resistant.

*Learning from Students.* The data also pointed to the development of an awareness of the complexities of working in culturally diverse classrooms and the need for teachers to learn from their students. For example, one student teacher stated: *"I would say that I'm competent [to teach in a culturally diverse classroom] because I'm aware that I don't know everything. . . . It would always be a learning process."* This observation supports the

view that becoming a culturally responsive teacher involves more than acquiring in advance knowledge about all the other cultures represented in a classroom, an impossible task given the extent of cultural diversity and the constantly shifting composition of Canada's multicultural society. Rather, it is necessary to be open to engage directly with students to learn *from* them, and *about* them, within the context of the classroom.

Other student teachers also expressed an understanding of the importance of learning from students. One stated:

*I think that all of these students have a lot to offer. And if we listen and not just teach them what we need to teach them, but actually listen to what they're saying, then we can learn from them, too. And the students can, like not just me, but the other students could as well, if they let themselves.*

Another recounted a specific instance from her student teaching experience in which such a moment of learning had occurred for her:

*This girl broke down and cried in our class and shared with us what it was like as an Asian growing up in a predominantly Caucasian school system. And I really had no idea. So that was something that I became more aware of – the expectation that Asian students are, you know, more shy, more academically inclined. I don't know, somehow less human almost. And so that was something that made me more aware of those students in my own classroom.*

On the other hand, the same student teacher described a situation in which this type of realization did not occur for her. She stated:

*We had two ESL students in our French class, which was really, really frustrating. . . . And so I think that was really hard from that perspective because I couldn't motivate them to get them to learn anything because I couldn't connect with them in any way.*

In this instance, due to the lack of a shared language, the student teacher did not have the opportunity to hear the students recount their experiences. Consequently, she did not succeed at learning from them. The fact that this student teacher reached a new understanding in one instance but not in the other points to the importance of ongoing opportunities for intercultural inquiry and consciousness raising.

*Early Childhood Education*

There were 16 students in the early childhood methods course, none of whom was a person of colour, or a representative of a linguistic or ethnic minority group. To foster intercultural inquiry in the course, the major assignment was a field experience followed by guided reflection. For the assignment, the students had first to observe one childcare setting that was part of an immigrant settlement agency or an inner city child and family resource centre (e.g., Head Start programs, the child minding program at a centre for newcomers). The students then had to select materials, develop a plan for three activities to complement and expand the learning opportunities for the children in that particular program, and engage the children in one of these activities. The last portion of the assignment included making a presentation of their learning to their classmates and submitting a written reflection.

Six of the students chose to complete the anonymous questionnaire, and 12 consented to allow their written reflections to be used as research data. In their questionnaire responses and reflections, students expressed the following main ideas:

1. Their prior experiences with diversity were limited;
2. They felt anxious and apprehensive about working with diverse populations of learners;
3. The field experience helped to expand their views of teaching; and
4. The field experience was seen as valuable preparation for their future teaching.

*Lack of Prior Experiences with Diversity.* Data from the questionnaires suggested that the student teachers had limited experience with diversity; their reflections indicated that working at the community daycare centres was the first such experience for most of them. For example, one student teacher stated:

*This experience was eye opening for me. It was my first experience in a classroom with ESL students since I grew up in [name of the city], a predominantly white middle class town. I did my practicum [initial student teaching internship] there, and have not been exposed to that much diversity in children.*

Another wrote: *"This was my first experience with a group of children from another country that had no English language skills. It was definitely a task at first trying to communicate."*

*Feelings of Anxiety.* The lack of prior experiences with diverse groups of children created anxiety and apprehension among participants. Seven of the 12 participants who provided their written reflections reported such feelings as anxiety, confusion, and frustration. One student teacher noted, for example:

*My initial reaction to the classroom [where] we were to conduct our activity was worry and confusion. After noticing that there was going to be a major language barrier, I was confused and worried if my partner and I could develop an activity that the children could be successful in.*

Another wrote: *"At first you get a little frustrated with yourself for not being able to communicate and help these [ESL] children."*

However, when faced with the challenges of the real context and real children, the student teachers, guided by the staff at their placement, used their resourcefulness and creativity and attempted new teaching strategies that differed from the ones learned in their teacher education program. They also realized the need to use non-language-based teaching strategies, as indicated by the following comment: *"With the help of the [daycare] staff and the children, I discovered different ways of interacting and communication with the kids. You just have to be very clear and really **show** what you are trying to say."* Thus, there was evidence that the experience provided opportunities for student teachers to work through some of their initial anxiety, challenges, and frustrations.

*Expanded Views of Teaching.* The field experience helped some students to realize that teaching is not just about the curriculum but also about meeting the needs of children and helping them grow and develop within the context in which they live. For example, one student teacher stated:

*This experience led me to examine my ideas and reconstruct my [white middle class] conception of the role of teachers. Previously I had been more focused on the academic*

*aspect of teaching but this experience made me more aware of the importance of considering the emotional, social, and basic needs of all children in the classroom.*

Another wrote:

*First of all, I have realized the struggles that are involved in working with ESL students, but at the same time, I appreciate learning that there are ways of dealing with these challenges; it is only a matter of figuring out what works best for each individual student. Second, I understood the importance of involving and getting to know the families of the children that you work with.*

A third reflected: *"I now realize how much more of a struggle it must be for the families that access the centre's services since most often parents and the children have very little to no English language skills."* These comments suggest that some of the student teachers' initial conceptions of teaching began to change as a result of the field experience.

*Value of Field Experiences in Diverse Settings.* In addition to indicating that the field experience helped to change or expand their notions of teaching, the student teachers perceived the experience as helpful in preparing for their future pedagogical practice. One student teacher noted:

*This experience has prepared me for diversity in the classroom. I became more conscious about developing tasks that were free of any cultural or gender bias, and forced myself to ask the question if the children have the appropriate background knowledge to complete the activity.*

Another stated:

*This experience helped me get ready to work with diverse groups of children in that I now feel comfortable dealing with children with very limited [English] language. I know that I will have some children who need help with language in my classes and I am no longer afraid to teach them.*

These student teachers felt that they had become more sensitive to issues of diversity and more thoughtful about planning learning experiences for children who are not from the dominant culture.

*Art Education*

Thirty-two students were enrolled in the curriculum course in elementary art education. With the exception of one (second-generation) Asian student, all were white. Two students had emigrated from Europe as children; another student, who had immigrated more recently, received her Canadian citizenship during the term.

A key objective of the course was to show that artistic images and forms, which are not neutral (Gross, Katz, & Ruby, 1988), provide a means to break from "the confinements of privatism and self-regard into a space where we can come face to face with others" (Prescesky & Cooley, 1998, p. 31). With this goal in mind, course assignments required students to create artistic works through which they explored aspects of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. For example, students created clay sculptures to consider their own immigrant background by representing the precious things that their ancestors might have carried with them when they chose to, or were forced to, immigrate to Canada. The concept of community was explored through painting, and in a mask-making project, students created dual-sided masks to represent different perspectives of what it is like to be a newcomer in Canada. The series of assignments encouraged students to recognize their own families' immigrant backgrounds and to understand that experience as part of their cultural identity and social experience before endeavouring to promote their empathetic recognition of the realities of today's newcomers.

Of the 32 students enrolled in the course, 11 elected to complete the anonymous questionnaire at the beginning of the term. After the course had ended, four students consented to provide images of their artworks for use as data, and one was contacted again later to provide permission to publish the images of one of her works. Based upon the analysis of the questionnaire responses and artistic creations, the following main ideas were identified:

1. Most student teachers had attended schools with largely homogeneous populations;
2. They expressed both openness and resistance to intercultural inquiry; and

3. Some were able to express empathy toward the difficulties faced by immigrants and those from different cultural backgrounds.

*Homogeneous Schools.* As in the second language and early childhood courses, the majority of the students in the art education course indicated that the schools they attended while growing up did not provide many opportunities to encounter and engage with diversity. For example, in describing the schools that she had attended, one student stated: *"Most of the children came from similar backgrounds and experiences."* Another student described her schools as follows: *"My elementary and junior high were very upper middle class, with mainly a white population of students."* In the one instance in which the presence of different cultures was explicitly mentioned, the overall impression was still not primarily one of diversity: *"There were a few different cultures, but it was predominantly a white, middle class school."* In one case, a student teacher indicated that her school not only had a homogeneous student population but that there were also negative attitudes towards diversity. She stated: *"I attended an upper middle class school that was heavily prejudiced against minorities."* On the other hand, another student teacher stated that although her schools were *"not multicultural,"* she perceived them to be *"relatively friendly and open-minded."* It is notable that despite the occasional presence of different cultures and differences with respect to attitudes toward diversity, none of the questionnaire respondents described their schools as truly culturally diverse.

*Openness and Resistance.* Although the student teachers had limited experiences with diversity, the questionnaire responses also indicated that some of them were open to intercultural inquiry and that they perceived the importance of teachers responding to the different needs of learners. For example, one student teacher expressed the following understanding of intercultural competence: *"It means being culturally sensitive to the cultures and diversities within one's classroom. The teacher would need to plan lessons that would relate to all students' experiences and not to the dominant, white, middle class ideal."* Another stated: *"We live in such a diverse society that all citizens must be knowledgeable in a vast array of cultural customs and norms."* However, evidence also indicated resistance toward engaging in intercultural inquiry and challenging notions of privilege in



the classroom. For example, one student teacher stated: *"I do not think the school or the curriculum should change to try to accommodate everyone's culture. That should be the parents' job."* In relation to intercultural competence, she added:

*It means to be able to adequately meet the learning needs of any child from any cultural background, which is unrealistic. The children should assimilate to school and learn in a safe, warm and neutral environment. When children grow up and want to seek out their culture, they should have the reading, research, thinking, math, and science skills to be able to do so on their own.*

These comments suggest that not all the student teachers perceived the need for teachers to become culturally responsive.

*Expressing Empathy.* The artistic works created through the process of intercultural inquiry in the art education course provided evidence, however, that some of the student teachers were aware of, and able to express empathy in relation to, the difficulties faced by immigrants and those who are not from the dominant cultural group. One example is shown in Figure 1.

Students were asked to create masks to represent, on the inside, the qualities of Canadian life that they as a teacher would hope to extend to a young newcomer to Canada. On the outside, they represented the face of Canada as it might be perceived by an immigrant student. The interior of the mask shown in Figure 1 uses the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to depict the ideal of the teacher within Canadian society. The image expressed is one of equality and justice. This ideal of a welcoming classroom and society contrasts sharply with an immigrant child's perspective represented by the dark blue monochromatic exterior of the mask. The depiction of the eyes being closed and the mouth sealed shut suggests the student teacher's awareness of the exclusion faced by many immigrants. The X-configuration of the tape sealing the mouth serves to emphasize the harshness of the situation.

## DISCUSSION

The curriculum courses engaged students in intercultural inquiry using three distinct approaches. Each approach was selected based on its potential for promoting critical reflection on diversity in relation to the



Figure 1: Interior and exterior views of a mask created by Bronwyn Leifer, reproduced with the permission of the student teacher.

particular subject-specific context. Although an important feature of the study was tailoring the intercultural inquiry to the goals of each course, this aspect also resulted in challenges and limitations. The differences between course contexts and experiences resulted in a wide range of data types, and this, in turn, made it difficult to compare and analyze the findings across the three courses. Another limitation stems from the small class sizes, which restricted the number of research participants. Although approximately half the students volunteered to participate in some way, very few took part in all aspects of the study (i.e., questionnaire, assignments, and interview). Thus, it was difficult to trace individuals' experiences over time from the beginning of the course, to the end, and into the student teaching internship.

Despite the very different learning environments and experiences offered in each of the three courses, the data collected revealed several commonalities. In all the courses, the majority of the participants reported limited personal experience with cultural, ethnic, or linguistic diversity. Most student teachers indicated that they had attended schools with largely homogeneous populations, which they described as “white” and “middle class.” Similar findings have been reported in previous educational research (e.g., Milner, 2003; Milner & Woolfolk Hoy, 2003; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). This relative isolation from diversity resulted in many student teachers feeling anxious, uncertain, and unprepared to work effectively with diverse student populations. In the early childhood education course, these feelings were heightened by the immediate need to design educationally enriching experiences for the young children in the field experience settings.

In addition to experiencing feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, some student teachers also demonstrated resistance to intercultural inquiry. Some participants indicated that they had observed examples of resistance as well as reservations about the relevance and value of promoting intercultural inquiry in curriculum courses. Other studies have identified similar instances of resistance in response to encounters with difference and intercultural inquiry (e.g., Carson, 2009; Lather, 1991; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003).

Although confronting difference promoted anxiety and resistance, it also prompted awareness of the complexities of teaching. Novice teachers often associate the act of teaching with the delivery of content, and as noted by Kumashiro (2002), it is common to misconstrue teaching as simply a process of delivering the curriculum. This commonly held belief, problematic for multicultural education, fails to acknowledge the importance of learners’ identities and unique needs. The findings from this study suggest that intercultural inquiry can help to challenge this view of pedagogy by fostering a greater understanding of learners’ needs and perspectives. For example, student teachers from the second language curriculum course demonstrated awareness of the importance of listening to students’ experiences and learning from them. Similarly, the field experience in the early childhood education course challenged some students to examine their preconceived notions about teaching and

to identify strategies for promoting meaningful experiences in a multicultural setting. Furthermore, the mask discussed above and shown in Figure 1, which demonstrates understanding of learners' perspectives, reflects Greene's (1995) assertion that engaging the imagination provides opportunities to "experience empathy with different points of view, even with interests apparently at odds with ours" (p. 31).

The findings of this study suggest that individual instructors can foster intercultural inquiry in their courses even in the absence of program-level initiatives. Teacher preparation programs are complex, involving many components under the jurisdiction of universities, schools, and provincial governments. This complexity makes the implementation of comprehensive and programmatic initiatives difficult. The results associated with course adaptations developed for the purposes of this study suggest that designing a field experience, using artistic expression, and exploring course content through a critical lens are potentially effective infusion strategies to use in curriculum methods courses. However, we acknowledge that our efforts in isolation would not fully prepare students to respond to the realities of contemporary classrooms. We note that students who had the opportunity to meet and work with groups of newcomer children appeared to gain a clearer understanding of the nature of their responsibilities as future teachers than those who did not have such an opportunity. Considering the requisite shifts in personal perspectives and ways of being in the world, along with the acquisition of subject content knowledge and pedagogical practice in each field, student teachers need time and a broad range of experiences to construct new understandings of their role in the classroom and their relationships with their students.

#### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, we believe that it is important for teacher education programs to continue to explore innovative ways to infuse intercultural inquiry into teacher preparation to broaden student teachers' experiences with diversity. In addition to considering broad, program-level changes, teacher education programs can usefully provide support for individual teacher educators who wish to promote intercultural inquiry within specific components of their program. Examples of

such support, both formal and informal, might include (a) drafting statements indicating an institutional commitment to diversity and intercultural inquiry across the curriculum, (b) encouraging the voluntary formation of groups of faculty members to explore collectively possibilities and strategies to promote intercultural inquiry in their courses, and (c) sponsoring opportunities for larger groups of faculty members to come together to share their experiences. We also recommend that faculties of education aim to ensure that all teacher candidates take part in field experiences that involve working in communities with diverse populations. In relation to these experiences, teacher educators should recognize and acknowledge student teachers' feelings of anxiety and uncertainty related to working in diverse classrooms. The findings of this study further suggest that initiatives to promote intercultural inquiry should be approached with an understanding that critical challenges to inequality can be met with resistance. It is important for teacher educators to address the resistance while also being responsive to student teachers' perspectives.

Finally, although we as instructors and researchers continue to develop our own understanding of anti-oppressive education, to engage in intercultural inquiry with our students, and to refine our instructional practices, we encourage further collaborative research to explore additional approaches to infusing intercultural inquiry across the teacher education curriculum. Our positive experience as a multidisciplinary research team suggests that such collaborations may be valuable in fulfilling the possibilities of such an initiative. Collaborative efforts not only offer the prospect of collegial support to undertake the challenges of this work, but also contribute to the development of an archive of experiences, practices, and resources from which instructors can draw inspiration. We are well aware that when teacher educators develop successful approaches to prepare student teachers to address the cultural realities of education in the twenty-first century, many classrooms of children and youth will be the beneficiaries.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We gratefully acknowledge the Prairie Metropolis Centre for funding this research.

## REFERENCES

- Banks, J. A. (1998). The lives and values of researchers: Implications for educating citizens in a multicultural society. *Educational Researcher*, 27(7), 4-17.
- Barrera, L., & Kramer, L. (1997). From monologues to skilled dialogues: Teaching the process of crafting culturally competent early childhood environments. In P. J. Winton, J. A. McCollum, & C. Catlett (Eds.), *Reforming personnel preparation in early intervention: Issues, models and practical strategies* (pp. 217-251). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.
- Boyle-Baise, M., & Sleeter, C. E. (2000). Community-based service learning for multicultural teacher education. *Educational Foundations*, 14(2), 33-50.
- Carson, T. (2009). Teaching and cultural difference: Exploring the potential for a psychoanalytically informed action research. In S. Noffke, & B. Somekh (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of educational action research*. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Clark, C. (2002). Diversity initiatives in higher education: Intergroup dialogue on campus. *Multicultural Education*, 9(4), 30-32.
- Clark, C. (2005). Diversity initiatives in higher education: Intergroup dialogue as pedagogy across the curriculum. *Multicultural Education*, 12(3), 51-61.
- Cooney, M. H., & Akintunde, O. (1999). Confronting white privilege and the "color blind" paradigm in a teacher education program. *Multicultural Education*, 7(2), 9-14.
- Cooper, A., Beare, P., & Thorman, J. (1990). Preparing teachers for diversity: A comparison of student teaching experiences in Minnesota and South Texas. *Action in Teacher Education*, 12(3), 1-4.
- Craig, S., Hull, K., Haggart, A. G., & Perez-Selles, M. (2000). Promoting cultural competence through teacher assistance teams. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 32(3), 6-12.

- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives*. London, UK: Routledge Falmer.
- Goodwin, A. L. (1997). Historical and contemporary perspectives on multicultural teacher education. In J. King, E. Hollins, & W. Hayman (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for cultural diversity* (pp. 5-22). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Grant, C. A. (1994). Best practices in teacher preparation for urban schools: Lessons from the multicultural teacher education literature. *Action in Teacher Education*, 16(3), 1-18.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Gross, L., Katz, J., & Ruby, J. (Eds.). (1988). *Image ethics: The moral rights of subjects in photographs, film, and television*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Horm, D. M. (2003). Preparing early childhood educators to work in diverse urban settings. *Teachers College Record*, 105(2), 226-244.
- Kubota, R. (2004). Critical multiculturalism and second language education. In B. Norton & K. Toohey (Eds.), *Critical pedagogies and language learning* (pp. 30-52). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kumashiro, K. (2002). Against repetition: Addressing resistance to anti-oppressive change in the practices of learning, teaching, supervising, and researching. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(1), 67-92.
- Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy within the postmodern*. New York: Routledge.
- Limburg, F., & Clark, C. (2006). Diversity initiatives in higher education: Teaching multicultural education online. *Multicultural Education*, 13(3), 49-55.
- Lynch, E. W., & Hanson, M. J. (1998). *Developing cross-cultural competence: A guide for working with young children and their families* (2nd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.
- Milner, H. R. (2003). Reflection, racial competence, and critical pedagogy: How do we prepare pre-service teachers to pose tough questions? *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 6(2), 193-208.

- Milner, H. R., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2003). A case study of an African American teacher's self-efficacy, stereotype threat, and persistence. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19(2), 263-276.
- Murrell, P. C., & Foster, M. (2003). Teacher beliefs, performance and proficiency in diversity-oriented teacher preparation. In J. Rath & A. C. McAninch (Eds.), *Teacher beliefs and classroom performance: The impact of teacher education* (pp. 43-64). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Murtadha-Watts, K. (1998). Teacher education in urban school-based, multi-agency collaboratives. *Urban Education*, 32(5), 616-631.
- Prescesky, R., & Cooley, M. (1998). The creative act: Researching lived experience. In B. Walker (Ed.), *Connect, combine, communicate: Revitalizing the arts in Canadian schools* (pp. 185-205). Sydney, NS: University College of Cape Breton Press.
- Schensul, J. J. (1995). *Comments on ethnicity, culture, and cultural competence*. Hartford, CT: The Institute for Community Research.
- Schick, C. (2000). 'By virtue of being white': Resistance in anti-racist pedagogy. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 3(1), 83-102.
- Schick, C., & St. Denis, V. (2003). What makes anti-racist pedagogy in teacher education difficult? Three popular ideological assumptions. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 49(1), 55-69.
- Schick, C., & St. Denis, V. (2005). The discourse of denial: How white teacher candidates construct race, racism and 'white privilege'. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(2), 147-169.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(2), 94-106.
- Solomon, R. P., & Levine-Rasky, C. (2003). *Teaching for equity and diversity: Research to practice*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Solomon, R. P., Portelli, J. P., Daniel, B., & Campbell, A. (2005). The discourse of denial: How white teacher candidates construct race, racism and 'white privilege'. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(2), 147-169.
- Taylor, S. V., & Sobel, D. M. (2001). Addressing the discontinuity of students' and teachers' diversity: A preliminary study of preservice teachers' beliefs and perceived skills. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(4), 487-503.



- Train, R. W. (2003). The (non)native standard language in foreign language education: A critical perspective. In C. Blyth (Ed.), *The sociolinguistics of foreign-language classrooms: Contributions of the native, the near-native, and the non-native speaker* (pp. 3-39). Boston, MA: Thomson/Heinle.
- Vavrus, M. (1994). A critical analysis of multicultural education infusion during student teaching. *Action in Teacher Education*, 16(3), 46-57.
- Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002). Preparing culturally responsive teachers: Rethinking the curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(1), 20-32.
- Wiest, L. R. (1998). Using immersion experiences to shake up preservice teachers' views about cultural differences. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 49(5), 358-365.
- Zeichner, K. M., & Hoeft, K. (1996). Teacher socialization for cultural diversity. In J. Sikula, T. Buttery, & E. Guyton (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education: A project of the Association of Teacher Educators* (2nd ed.; pp. 525-547). New York: Macmillan Library Reference.

*William Dunn*, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Second Language Education in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta.

*Anna Kirova*, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta. Her research interests include understanding culturally and linguistically diverse children's experiences of loneliness and isolation at school, and the possibility such an understanding offers for culturally sensitive pedagogy.

*Miriam Cooley*, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Visual Art Education in the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta.

*Greg Ogilvie* is a doctoral student in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta.

Contact Information: Please address correspondence to William Dunn, Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta, 341 Education South, Edmonton, AB. T6G 2G5. Phone: (780) 492-4280. Email: wdunn@ualberta.ca.