

# **Fostering Cultural Humility among Pre-Service Teachers: Connecting with Children and Youth of Immigrant Families through Service-Learning**

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## **Abstract**

This article documents a community-initiated service-learning project within a teacher education program. A social justice model guided the initiative to raise critical awareness on power and privilege while countering deficit-model thinking. Partnering with community agencies serving immigrant children and youth, the faculty researcher worked with an office for community-engaged learning. Data included pre- and post-experience interviews with pre-service candidates. Findings showed benefits from this justice-based approach in improving self-awareness, appreciating the strengths of immigrant children and youth, and an increased sense of cultural humility in pre-service teachers.

*Keywords:* service-learning, pre-service teachers, cultural humility, professional education, immigrant children, social justice

## Résumé

Cet article renseigne sur un projet service-apprentissage initiée par des organismes communautaires travaillant avec des immigrants. Un modèle de justice sociale a guidé le projet afin de sensibiliser les futurs enseignants au pouvoir et privilège de certaines sphères de la société à l'encontre d'un modèle déficitaire. Le chercheur en collaboration avec le bureau d'apprentissage-communauté de l'Université a travaillé en partenariat avec des organismes communautaires au service des enfants et des jeunes immigrants. Les données comprenaient des entrevues pré-et post-expérience et des enquêtes auprès des candidats pré-service. Les résultats ont montré les avantages du modèle dans l'amélioration de la conscience de soi, l'appréciation des forces des enfants et des jeunes immigrants, et un sens accru de l'humilité culturelle chez les futurs enseignants.

*Mots-clés* : apprentissage par le service communautaire, futurs enseignants, humilité culturelle, formation professionnelle, enfants issus de l'immigration, justice sociale

## **Introduction**

Growing cultural diversity has transformed the population of school-aged children and youth in many Western nations, including Canada. Our study addresses an approach to teacher education that speaks to this growing diversity through an intentional focus on developing “cultural humility” among pre-service teachers. In a Bachelor of Education course entitled “Diversity in Learning,” the authors have participated in a collaborative partnership that engages community agencies, campus groups, and a university’s faculty of education to include a service-learning placement as part of their coursework. Immigrant-sector community organizations, with a focus on enhancing the well-being of children and youth from immigrant backgrounds, initiated and led the partnership, working with the university’s school of education to strengthen the ways pre-service teachers understand and engage with children and youth of immigrant families beyond the traditional classroom. The authors are a university professor and a former manager of a community agency and who is now a graduate research assistant. Using a social justice framework to raise critical awareness on power and privilege while countering deficit-model thinking, the collaborative approach has seen success with raising awareness and developing skills along with cultural humility in pre-service teachers. Pre- and post-experience interviews were used over the first two iterations of this innovative professional education project.

## **Context**

Approximately 6.2 million immigrants call Canada home, approximately 20 percent of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2011a). Among Canada’s immigrant population, approximately 14 percent are under the age of 25 years old (Statistics Canada, 2011a) and immigrant children and youth under 25 years old accounted for almost 34 percent of the newcomer population in the last five years (Statistics Canada, 2013a). Also, 6.3 million people identify as a member of a “visible minority” group in Canada. Of these, almost half identify as first- and second-generation children and youth (Statistics Canada, 2011b). Over the next 20 years, Canada expects to welcome 334,000 new immigrants each year, one-third of whom may be children and youth (Statistics Canada, 2013b). This

means that over the next 25 years Canada's K–16 school systems can expect to see an additional 2.8 million immigrant children and youth.

While some research indicates that, overall, children and youth from immigrant backgrounds are civically engaged (Bishop, 2005), succeeding at school (Worsick, 2001), and moving toward post-secondary education and careers (Bonikowska & Hou, 2011; Picot & Hou, 2011), these assertions are often critiqued for failing to account for variations in socio-economic status, levels of English language proficiency, cultural and ethnic background, experiences in their country of origin, and years since immigration (Boyd, 2002; National Research Council, 1995). Studies that examine these variations often find that children and youth from immigrant backgrounds experience a myriad of persistent barriers and challenges at individual, family, school, community, and socio-political levels. At the individual level, many children and youth from immigrant backgrounds faced challenges in terms of learning a new language, becoming familiar with a new school system, and being placed in inappropriate grades (Sweet, Anisef, Brown, Walters, & Phythian, 2010). Low self-esteem, feelings of marginalization and not belonging, and weak ethnic identities can contribute to a deep sense of alienation, social exclusion, and discontent, all of which are risk factors for school disengagement and violence (Cooper & Cooper, 2006; Pruegger, Cook, & Richter-Salomons, 2009).

At the family level, many immigrant parents experience socioeconomic issues, cultural and language barriers, unemployment or underemployment, social isolation, and discrimination, and may have different views about the roles of and relationship between schools and parents (Cooper & Cooper, 2008; Nakhaie & Kazemipur, 2013; Ngo, 2010). At the school level, many researchers have highlighted the need to increase resources for appropriate English as an Additional Language programming and supports, deeper integration of cultural diversity into all aspects of governance and practices, and the need to better-prepare pre-service and practising teachers to foster learning within culturally diverse classrooms (Guo, Arthur, & Lund, 2009; Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004; Ngo, 2009; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). Immigrant and ethno-cultural youth experience a range of barriers in community and socio-political contexts, including limited access to role models, to culturally responsive and youth-centred community supports and human services, and barriers to community and civic participation, with few leadership roles (Hurlock, McCullagh, & Schissel, 2004; Ngo & Schlieffer, 2005; Seat, 2003).

Research increasingly highlights the need for teachers to understand the ways individual, family, community, and socio-political contexts impact the educational pathways and outcomes of children and youth of immigrant families. Studies also show that teachers often have limited experience working with diverse populations, and have little or no training in how to adapt curriculum to accommodate culturally diverse learners (Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). Cultural competency training programs can be problematic because they may promote cultural competence from the perspective that professionals must reach a point where they demonstrate their mastery of a finite body of intercultural knowledge, make sense of the “other,” and master certain static cultures that have core characteristics (Elhoweris, Parameswaran, & Alsheikh, 2004; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Kumagai and Lypson (2009) discuss the dangers of focusing exclusively on the cultural norms of non-dominant groups, particularly through one-time lectures, or touristic brief visits to community initiatives and services. This approach turns cultural competency education into what Wear (2003) has termed “safari experiences” (p. 553). We borrow Wear’s terminology and understanding of cultural safaris in teacher education, where the notion of novelty replaces that of equity and social justice in approaches to working with children and youth of immigrant families.

Another challenge with traditional cultural competency training is pre-service teachers’ perception that material discussed in classes is disconnected from practical experiences in the classroom, contributing to their feeling ill-equipped to work with culturally diverse children and youth (Guo, Arthur, & Lund, 2009). They also found that cultural competency training often simply teaches pre-service teachers about “others” and ignores or minimizes critical analyses of cultural, linguistic, ethnic, racialized, and social class differences. As an example, some multicultural education courses may have a positive impact on pre-service teachers’ awareness, understanding, and appreciation of other cultures, but the focus remains problematically on knowledge and skills regarding the assimilation of diverse learners into the dominant culture, and understanding culturally related behaviors (see Capella-Santana, 2003). But is this an adequate end goal of teacher education?

## **Service-Learning Approach**

Our response to the challenges of traditional cultural competency training programs has been the development of a partnership among a faculty of education (FOE), a centre for community-engaged learning (CEL), and an umbrella agency for ethno-cultural children and youth (ECY), and its member organizations. This multi-sectoral partnership led to the development and implementation of what we call the Service-Learning Program (SLP).

Service-learning is an educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and then reflect on that activity to gain further understanding of course content and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Butin, 2010; Cipolle, 2010; Roessingh, 2012). The positive impacts of service-learning on students' intellectual, personal, and leadership development are well documented: Students involved in service-learning throughout their undergraduate careers are more likely to graduate, report closer relationships with faculty members, demonstrate better critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and are more prepared to reapply their learning in different settings, including their future careers (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Lund, Bragg, Kaipainen, & Lee, 2014; Sax & Astin, 1997). Reciprocity is a fundamental service-learning principle that highlights the need to promote both student and higher education outcomes, and that honours the vital role of community organizations in addressing community-defined needs (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Miron & Moely, 2006; Ndu-na, 2007; Stoecker, Tryon, & Hilgendorf, 2009). The FOE, CEL, and ECY agreed that service-learning was an ideal framework to support the partnership because it addressed the needs and strengths of all partners. Community leaders and practitioners identified the opportunity to address academic underachievement in some children and youth of immigrant families by strengthening pre-service teachers' understanding of those children and youth.

Community leaders and practitioners felt that service-learning could provide practical opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage with culturally diverse children and youth in settings outside of the traditional classroom, with practitioners who have experience supporting immigrant families. At the same time, the FOE would benefit from the partnership by strengthening links between theories of social justice, power, privilege,

and identity and practical experiences, contributing to pre-service teachers' ability to work more effectively in culturally diverse classrooms.

The SLP was developed using a critical social justice framework and provided students with opportunities to examine their privilege and sources of injustice, and to work for social change. This involved weekly readings and reflective discussions relating to a textbook, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012), and other readings addressing issues of equity, marginalization, and discrimination from a range of critical perspectives. Pre-service teachers completed two course assignments: The first assignment asked pre-service teachers to identify, attend, and participate in an event with a group of people with whom they personally did not self-identify. Pre-service teachers wrote a reflective essay about their experience, drawing on relevant literature, and were offered the option of writing about their service-learning experiences. For the second assignment, pre-service teachers created a Learner Profile and Learning Plan for an imagined K–12 child who was differently abled in some way, and who was also an English Language Learner. Many pre-service teachers completed this assignment by drawing on a young person from their service-learning placements. Pre-service teachers also engaged in ongoing class and small-group discussions related to course readings and their service-learning experiences.

Justice-based service-learning, distinct from typical service-learning experiences, incorporates multidisciplinary, issue-based education that “places the service experience in a social, economic, historical, and geopolitical context” (Megivern, 2010, p. 63). This article examines from the perspective of pre-service teachers how justice-based service-learning experiences can impact cultural humility in pre-service teachers and support their understanding of the teacher's role in providing equitable learning experiences for children and youth of immigrant families.

### **Service-Learning Placements**

The SLP provided pre-service teachers with a menu of community placement options that ranged from after-school/life-skills programs, tutoring programs, mentoring programs, recreation programs, child-minding programs, family literacy programs, and programs offered by the reception centre of public school boards. Each pre-service teacher was “matched” with a community mentor throughout the duration of the program. The

community mentors facilitated ongoing debriefing and discussions with pre-service teachers, and supported pre-service teachers in their development of learning goals. These goals were reviewed during intermediate and final meetings between the community mentor and pre-service teachers.

Pre-service teachers placed in after-school/life-skills programs typically engaged in one-on-one and group activities around themed lessons such as global citizenship, community, identity, friendship, and healthy living. The pre-service teachers placed at reception centres participated in interviews with ELLs and their families who wished to enrol in public education; these interviews included a language proficiency assessment and an introduction to services for newcomer families. Pre-service teachers placed in family-based programs typically interacted with immigrant parents and their toddlers, focusing on family literacy and supporting immigrant families in building networks with immigrant families that may share similar integration experiences. Regardless of the placement, community mentors provided opportunities for pre-service teachers to increase their leadership role within the program, which typically involved observing programs, planning activities, and then implementing or leading activities.

## Theoretical Framework

This research is informed by a critical social justice approach to reveal and better understand the complex structural issues surrounding privilege and power that underlie these and all educational projects. It is a standpoint that recognizes that

society is *stratified* (i.e., divided and unequal) in significant and far-reaching ways along social group lines that include race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. Critical social justice recognizes inequality as deeply embedded in the fabric of society (i.e., as structural) and actively seeks to change this. (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. xvii)

Others have termed this “an anti-oppressive approach to teaching for social justice” with a commitment to equity (Kelly & Brandes, 2010, p. 389), to help pre-service teacher candidates and their students to understand and challenge inequality and injustices including homophobia, racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and the intersections between them.



Applying an emancipatory educational framework following Freire (1970), this research strives to honour the experiences of pre-service teachers and community players as active agents in their collaborative pursuit of meaningful and relevant experiences within service-learning projects. We frame all learning within an approach that interrogates self-identity, roles, and hidden sources of oppression to “examine the links among teacher preparation for diversity and teachers’ own learning, their professional practices, and their K–12 students’ learning” (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004, p. 966). It is a collective undertaking that consciously encourages uncomfortable conversations on difference through a critical social justice framework that can overcome “bottlenecks” in learning for many pre-service teacher candidates (Gorski, Zenkov, Osei-Kofi, & Sapp, 2012).

Following Nieto (2010), Banks and Banks (2010), Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries (2004), and other scholars who have long researched the importance of critical social justice understandings in professional education, we strive to move pre-service teachers beyond surface level understandings of diversity, and toward cultural humility. Moving beyond the desire to somehow remain “neutral” or colour-blind in the classroom is fraught with resistance from many mainstream pre-service teachers (Kelly & Brandes, 2001). Our approach entails foregrounding racialized oppression and privileges, and having all students implicate themselves in complex analyses of sources of inequity. Often, these efforts are met with resistance, particularly by White-identifying students who are not accustomed to having their identities come under scrutiny through a racialized lens (Kelly & Brandes, 2001; Lund & Carr, 2012; 2015; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005; Swalwell, 2013). Disrupting the oppressive impact of Whiteness and White<sup>1</sup> privilege in schools and schooling is a key feature of our approach to the course, and fostering humility is central to this project. Using readings, films, role-play scenarios, assignments, and our weekly community engagement with diverse youth, we are guided by the question, “How can those who are in positions of power, many of whom are White, effectively understand and challenge racism and unearned privilege?” (Lund & Carr, 2015, p. 3).

To be effective, we argue, teacher education must move toward an approach that requires a sense of humility in how pre-service teachers bring into check the power

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1 The terms “White” and “Whiteness” are capitalized here to denote their description of a social category of racialization and to differentiate them from simply describing colour or other meanings.

imbalances that exist in education, classrooms, and the broader community. Although the concept of cultural humility has been widely adopted within the health care and medical education fields (Chang, Simon, & Dong, 2012; Cruess, Cruess, & Steinert, 2010; Kumagai & Lyson, 2009; Wear, 2003), it has yet to emerge in education. Inevitably there are professional differences in that we do not view students as “clients,” nor do we offer “care” in the usual manner of health services provision. However, in terms of the shared desires for professional education, this approach offers a promising way to reframe problematic notions of cultural competency models as described above. As in the medical education models we studied, fostering cultural humility in teacher candidates can be seen as a life-long process that involves self-reflection and self-critique, learning from and actively listening to culturally diverse students, building partnerships with students and communities, and a willingness to negotiate mutually acceptable alternatives to communication, engagement, and education (Chang, Simon, & Dong, 2012). According to Kumagai and Lyson (2009), cultural humility “moves beyond rigid categories of knowledge, attitudes, and skills and towards the continuous critical refinement and fostering of a way of thinking and knowing—a critical consciousness—of self, others, and the world” (p. 783), and it fits well within a critical social justice framework. As an example, Darling-Hammond (2002) described an approach that sought “to work consciously and systematically to help prospective teachers develop the empathy and vision that will help them truly ‘see’ their students” (p. 4). For this program, it offered an approach to fulfilling the ends of a critical social justice perspective in a manner that attended to difference while seeking to build empathy through ongoing critical self-reflection.

## Methodology

***Pre-service teacher participants.*** Of the 380 students required to take the first-year after-degree B.Ed. course, Diversity in Learning, 27 students requested to participate in the service-learning option. The professor and research assistant invited all students to participate in the research component in class, 11 self-selected to participate, and a total of 10 students completed all components of the research.

Based on introductory questions during the interview, the demographics of the research participants had several collective similarities and differences. The following notable similarities among the participants were noted:

- All were female.
- All had a previous undergraduate degree.
- Of the 10 participants, 9 identified as White.
- Most participants, through academic study, personal experience and/or through work/volunteering, had some encounter with diversity that encouraged them to deepen their understanding, specifically of White privilege, marginalization, and discrimination.
- Nine noted that English was their first language.
- All of the participants expressed an understanding that classrooms in their city are becoming more ethnically and linguistically diverse and if they were to meet the educational needs of their students they needed to become more familiar working with children and youth from immigrant backgrounds, specifically English language learners. None of the participants had been employed or volunteered for community organizations working to support immigrants. One student was employed as an ESL teacher, but had no formal training in diversity work.

The following notable differences among the participants were noted:

- One identified as an immigrant having moved to Canada as a teenager.
- Three were from households with first-generation immigrant parents.
- One identified as a member of an LGBTQ minority group.
- Five had worked, taught, or volunteered overseas.
- One was trained and had worked as an ESL teacher for several years overseas.
- Three had previous undergraduate degrees with an emphasis on critical theory and exposure to diversity studies.
- Three were parents (two were single parents and one was a parent of a son with a disability).
- Ages ranged from 23 to 49 years old.

**Community organization staff (community mentors).** Along with the pre-service teachers from the university, the community organizations and school boards offering service-learning placements gave informed consent for their organization and employees to participate in the research project. This allowed for some community mentors to have informal conversations with the researcher to provide their perspective and feedback on

the project, and for the research assistant to make occasional site visits. Due to restrictions of length, this article will focus on the perspectives of pre-service teachers.

**Data collection.** In giving their consent to be included in the research, students agreed to participate in one initial-placement interview; and one post-placement interview; the potential to be observed by the research assistant<sup>2</sup> while at their community placement; the potential for the researcher and a representative from ECY to meet with their community mentor for project feedback; and the opportunity to be observed and have their comments recorded by the researcher during their class and seminar time. Research questions included open-ended prompts such as: To what extent did your service-learning experience with this agency enhance your university learning? Were there any challenges or barriers you faced in this experience? Describe a specific positive experience with this service-learning placement? Was there anything about this experience that surprised you? The interviews were conducted in a dialogic, conversational manner with a skilled research assistant who also had considerable experience in community agencies.

Only the research assistant was aware of the names of the research participants and the location of their community placements. Participants chose pseudonyms that were used throughout the research project and community mentor names were kept confidential throughout research documentation. Any information that could identify the participants was kept confidential until all final grades for the course had been submitted to the Faculty of Education. Research participants were also sent copies of their transcripts via email of both their pre and post interview transcriptions and given a one-week opportunity to make any changes or clarifications prior to submission of the data to the faculty.

All community mentors were asked a series of guiding questions designed to solicit their feedback on the project as well as to record their perspectives on the overall effect of the service-learning project. During the academic term, only the community placements with pre-service teachers participating in the research were and the mentors from those locations interviewed.

**Data analysis.** This research is derived mainly from 21 recorded interviews (and transcripts), with observations documented during seminar/class time, and field notes

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2 We thank Kait Cooper for her excellent work on this study.

collected during the research assistant's interviews with the community placement mentors and working group meetings over a 10-week period. Themes were coded and clustered along meaningful recurrent topics based on protocols of critical ethnography, following Madison (2010), with the principal researcher and a research assistant providing a form of data triangulation on the eventual key emergent themes. Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to human freedom and well-being, where the researcher delves "beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control" (p. 5). Applying our critical social justice framework from the course to the data analysis meant specifically foregrounding and attending to these equity issues in our reading of the accounts of the pre-service teachers.

## **Findings: Emergent Themes**

### **A. Justice-based service-learning can enhance pre-service teachers' ability to self-reflect critically and to identify and appreciate strengths of children and youth of immigrant families.**

Prior to the service-learning placements, pre-service teachers were asked if they anticipated any challenges with the SLP and the community agency at which they were placed. Many pre-service teachers responded by identifying socio-economic challenges and language barriers faced by children and youth from immigrant backgrounds and their families:

A lot of immigrant families have English language issues or just things that get in the way of working, so some of them are lower socioeconomic status. So not only are they dealing with a different culture but dealing with the fact that they can't afford to live here and they can't afford things that their children want. (Willow)

The only thing I am wondering about, since I have been at [the placement] a couple of times now, is the students in the class are very multiethnic, but they've

actually been in Canada a very long time. Almost all of them have language issues and so I am trying not to assume that they are all *Canadianified*. (Student 86)

Willow's comments express an assumed economic deficit for immigrants, and Student 86 suggests that the longer immigrant children or youth have lived in Canada, the more "Canadianified" they become. However, regardless of how much time immigrant children and youth have spent in Canada, perceived language issues make them less Canadian. This student's definition of a Canadian is, in part, based on proficient English language skills. She did not, however, identify multilingualism as an important part of Canada's social fabric. This often places immigrant children and youth who have apparent accents or language issues in an assumed position of deficiency.

One pre-service teacher not only externalized the challenges, but also implied that the immigrant children and youth themselves will be the challenge:

If you take, let's say East Indian or Arabic, those are two good examples... Hispanics are generally agreeable...but you know where a kind of White-looking woman is going to be telling you how to do math... I feel like I will always have to know what I am doing and I would always have to be right because if I am wrong, than that will be an excuse for [the children] to be like "Ah, a woman," because it is a mentality that I know a lot of people have in those cultures. Being stereotypical, again stereotypes exist for a reason, I know people hate hearing that but it's true. (Elaine)

Based on generalizations Elaine makes about specific ethnic groups, she feels she needs to "always be right" in order to avoid gender discrimination. Not only does Elaine ignore cultural, linguistic, and social class differences among and within Indo-Canadian, Arabic, and Latino/a people, but she validates these as something that is "true." Elaine's pre-program comments align with Montgomery's (2005) description of the ways racialization is represented through division or separation (i.e., "the partitioning of humanity into groups based on real or putative differences"); naturalization (i.e., "the representation of these separated groups as heritable and more or less inescapable facts of nature"); and essentialization (i.e., "a representative practice of redundant marking that reduces the people in these groups to a set of unchanging characteristics") (p. 319).

A number of pre-service teachers internalized the challenges, focusing more on their feelings of discomfort, including this student's pre-program expectations:

I think initially there might be more challenges as we have more kids [in the SLP] and as they are getting to know me—because initially I am this White middle/upper-class person who has an education, who seems very separate from [the children and youth of immigrant families]—I think I might seem like a big outsider at first. Everybody who is working with this organization, they are all from varying ethnicities and cultural backgrounds and there are not very many people who are White. I think initially there might be a bit of a, “who is she and why is she here?” (Natasha)

In this instance, the pre-service teacher expresses some self-awareness of her “Whiteness” but in a problematic way that positions her as inexorably different from the non-White individuals who are assumed to have less education and fewer resources. She expected to experience an undercurrent of hostility directed toward her privileged racialized identity.

When pre-service teachers were asked about their service-learning experiences in the post-interviews, many remarked on both the needs and the strengths of children and youth of immigrant families. Pre-service teachers commented on the resiliency, intelligence, kindness, potential, and expertise in children and youth of immigrant families. Toward the end of the program, one pre-service teacher commented on the children and youths' thirst to learn and share knowledge and experiences:

Resiliency, and they're desperate to learn and help others, was very inspiring and it's something that I will take with me. There were a couple of students in that group who, traditionally, when it comes to classroom learning, they don't want anything to do with it, but when it comes to mentoring they are all over it. Because it's hands-on and they are sharing themselves and their experiences, and for them that was a huge part of the program...if you allow students to not just sit there and write on a piece of paper, but to share themselves with the class, it makes a big difference as to what you are going to be able to get out of them. (Natasha)

Her acknowledgement of individual learning styles, and of the need to vary educational activities in order to meet specific student needs seemed to encourage a greater appreciation of their strengths and enthusiasm. Another pre-service teacher described the kindness of the children in the program, and remarked on the role of the community mentor in fostering that:

The children were kind on the day that I had my lesson. I thought I had it all together and then this day, wouldn't you know it, twice as many kids showed up as have ever showed up. So I didn't have enough resources... I worried about the dynamics of it all. So I said at the beginning, "I look really old but I'm really a newbie. This is like one of my first teaching experiences with you so could you please be kind," and they were so kind. OMG they were kind... What more could you ask? They could have taken that opportunity and just *schmucked* me, you know they could have been a bunch of jerks but that's not who they were and that's not what [community mentor] had brought them to be either. (Student 86)

Implied in the statement above is that a hidden expectation was that she was initially worried that the students would somehow sabotage or undermine her as a teacher, but their positive responses to her offered a surprising revelation about them. Another pre-service teacher commented on the resiliency of children and youth and saw community building as a valuable way of fostering resiliency and engagement in children and youth. According to Willow, the children and youth in the service-learning placement

taught me that they are really resilient, and children are resilient, and they need the time to run around and just be crazy. And when they do have a chance to create a community, they feel so safe to be there, and they want to be there, and it doesn't matter if it's their after-school time, they come because they want to be there and it's a safe place. So I think [the SLP] definitely taught me how important community-building within a classroom would be. (Willow)

Our analysis of the data shows that the community placements contributed to relatively privileged pre-service teachers' ability to see beyond the challenges of children and youth of immigrant families, and to begin to identify and appreciate their strengths. In terms of long-term systemic change, this may appear to be a fairly small step, but as Swalwell (2013) notes, all social justice educators "ought to care about the ways in which



and to what ends we educate privileged [students]: to better understand how inequalities persist, to be strategic about harnessing the power they inherit, and to demonstrate concern for them as sufferers of dehumanization” (p. xx). This newfound appreciation largely stems from the relationship building that occurred among pre-service teachers, community mentors, and children and youth of immigrant families.

### **B. Justice-based service-learning can foster cultural humility and greater self-awareness in pre-service teachers through building positive relationships with children of diverse backgrounds.**

During the course component of this service-learning program, an emphasis was placed on exploring issues of equity, power, and privilege. Most of the readings, assignments, and seminar discussions centered on questions of White privilege, power dynamics, and inequities as they exist in education and greater society. In interviews with research participants, many reflected on how much they enjoyed the book *Is Everyone Really Equal?* (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012) and felt the issues it raised regarding equity, awareness of privilege, and power were most applicable to their discoveries through the service-learning component of the course. Through the follow-up interviews it became clear that, for several of them, their time at their service-learning placement had presented an opportunity to gain critical insight into how the dynamics of power and privilege can affect a classroom, encouraging a process of self-critique and acknowledgement that there was more to learn:

I learned a lot. But I know it is just the tip of the iceberg and I do not think “Well, I did this practicum and good for me so now I can go work in [affluent neighbourhood] and I’ve done my time.” Like, I feel I have been exposed to it but I am not an expert. I’m still a White middle class person, and there is only so far I can go. But definitely I have a better understanding than I did before. I think I am just more comfortable being around people who are not like me and, does that sound bad? I don’t know, and, is there a word for cultural respect? Like having awareness that not everybody is going to celebrate Christmas, and not everybody has a mom and dad at home, and not everybody can eat breakfast in the morning. (Eudora)

I realized that the “shed landlord” [manager of the community program meeting space] assumed I was the person running the program because I was the only White person in the meetings. She kept directing her questions to me even though I said I wasn’t employed with the organization and had no information for her. I realized then the privilege that my Whiteness affords me. It was awkward and embarrassing...but a good “aha moment” for me. (Jill)

Interestingly, in another part of Jill’s interview, she said, “The ‘immigrant’ aspect of things never came up. Nor did race. Nor did socio-economics.” Jill said the youth in the community program were “just typical teenage girls,” yet later Jill said she realized that she took her social class for granted:

I assumed that the girls could just get a ride somewhere, and then learned that their parents didn’t have a car. When I was a kid, my parents drove me to stuff and were home after school, so I was ignorant about the fact that this isn’t “normal” for everyone. (Jill)

The discrepancy between Jill’s assertion that immigrant status “never came up” in the SLP and her realization of privilege illuminates the ongoing complexity of, and contradictions within, education for cultural humility.

Another student appeared open and honest about her self-critique:

I learned that I am slightly racist. Like, I always knew; that sounds absolutely horrible... So for example, because some of the kids are writing exams, so knowing you could use some of those things against them, like “Your mom and dad are probably going to want you to go to university so you have to learn this.” You don’t know their parents. You have no idea whatsoever. Their parents could be like, “I want you to become a goat farmer.” You have no idea, but [are] using the stereotype that Asian parents want to drive their kids...it’s little tiny things that make you more self-aware. (Elaine)

This instance of a student candidly acknowledging a revealed bias, and a personal implication in racism, is a promising step in the kinds of outcomes that can be encouraged through our approach to fostering cultural humility. Mainstream White students are typically given ample opportunities to justify inequity through discourses of deficit in diverse

“others” but shifting that positioning even slightly will require deliberate critical self-reflection, experiences with real people, and ongoing in-depth study.

Regarding teaching children from immigrant backgrounds, most of the pre-service teachers said that the SLP gave them the opportunity to experience and practice handling “uncomfortable diversity situations” as they may arise within the classroom. In their pre-placement interviews, some students expressed concern that their lack of awareness about issues of diversity might result in them overlooking, or handling inappropriately, manifestations of discrimination and prejudice in the classroom. Their concerns were expressed in two ways. Some were concerned they themselves could be the agents of discriminatory behavior, and secondly, how to handle such matters as they might arise between students in a way that promotes change. All participants felt a professional obligation to be able to recognize manifestations of discriminatory behavior on the part of themselves as teachers or on the part of other students. Several participants shared their experiences of critical incidents and how they pushed pre-service teachers to negotiate their positionality and predetermined ways of knowing:

There was a point when one of the girls had come up to me and said one of the girls had called her a “black dog” and I was just, I was taken aback. I told the girl, “You know we need to deal with this. This is more than bullying. This is really hurtful stuff,” and she was obviously upset about it. So the next day we talked about racism and bullying. The girl actually gave the example and we sort of deconstructed it. The girls apologized after, so they understood that these things do matter and that there are deeper roots with what we are saying to each other.  
(Willow)

I came in with a pretty broad understanding of diversity but I think there were things that the students brought up that I hadn’t really thought about. Like, something as simple as coming to the country and going to the school and not knowing how to use the vending machine. I never thought about things like that, things we take for granted... It’s like being plopped into the middle of all these people who know how to do everything, and you feel like you know how to do nothing.  
(Natasha)

One pre-service teacher had an experience in which a child directly elicited hate toward a minority group with which she identified as a member:

I had a very interesting experience with one of the students. We got into this whole conversation and he was: “Homosexuality is wrong. I hate all gay people.” He comes from a country where being gay is illegal, so this is something he feels very strongly about... Finally it came down to me saying: “Do you know that I am gay?” I think that maybe that’s a really good positive step for him, to know someone who is gay...it just sort of maybe opened his world a little bit. It also opened my world to how do I deal with this as a teacher in a classroom... How do we make that work so that everybody is feeling that they are being honoured and being safe? (Natasha)

The above anecdote is an example of how the SLP provided an opportunity for students to reflect upon the “diversity challenges” they might encounter as teachers working with children and youth from immigrant backgrounds on both a professional and personal level. There is an implicit assumption in her comments that some immigrant students will inevitably carry and display homophobic values from their parents’ home countries, one of the stereotypes we were able to address and confront during the semester.

Several pre-service teachers commented on how they immersed themselves in a bi-directional process of relationship building with children and youth of immigrant families, which required emotional investment from both them and the youth:

I think [the SLP] raised my overall sensitivity to all of the issues we’ve been discussing in class, because once you create a relationship with the “other” it makes it so much more emotionally real. I have some life experience that has already exposed me to lots of diversity, but emotional realism is more powerful than all the meetings and whatever in the world. (Student 86)

**C. Professional education for cultural humility needs to anticipate and accommodate people with different motivations for being involved, unique life experiences, and a range of understandings of diversity.**

Pre-service teachers expressed a variety of reasons for wanting to be involved in the SLP. Reasons for pre-service teachers' involvement were shaped by various life experiences that influenced their understandings of diversity. Some pre-service teachers, including June, shared that they had limited exposure to and experience with diversity and wanted to understand and effectively respond to diversity in their classrooms:

I grew up in a small town where there was no diversity; I don't want to say that because I could be totally wrong, but I don't remember anyone being different from me...so I'm not really used to difference... I went into [the SLP] because I want to be a better teacher and I can maybe take care of the more diverse needs of the students or at least be aware of how and what I'm doing will affect them.  
(June)

Disclosures such as this one remind us that many of our pre-service teachers come to us with very limited personal experience with diversity, and a self-conscious awareness of their own feelings of inadequacy in addressing diverse students' needs. Other pre-service teachers demonstrated some understanding about increasing cultural diversity in urban classrooms and joined the program because they "wanted to know more" so they could effectively respond to diversity as teachers:

Well, especially living in Calgary, I've definitely realized—through other courses—that the English Language Learner population is 25 percent right now and is only getting higher, so I definitely have been sort of told by fellow teachers that are already in the field that it's something that I should really get my hands around. (Kathy)

Kathy's comments here reflect a more pragmatic sensibility not unlike the cultural competency model we sought to eschew with this program. She expresses a desire to "manage" diversity and to address the demographic changes that are being reported by teachers in the field, in a manner that sounds much like addressing a problem rather than embracing a rich new challenge.

Some pre-service teachers reported anecdotally in class that they joined the SLP because of their personal experience as an immigrant or as a member of a marginalized group. Among our research participants, some made explicit links between their personal experiences and the challenges with diversity:

Since I have been through the same thing, maybe I can help them better...because I know from my own experience I would have really liked it if there was someone there helping me through the transition, with the whole culture, the language; even finding friends at that age is really crucial. (Jenny)

I came out later in life...I was privileged, White, middle upper-class, living in a nice community. I didn't really have a great grasp of what diversity was so when I came out, it was a huge "wow so this is what it feels like for people to give you dirty looks just for walking down the street" you know...and I was always very very uncomfortable with the comments my parents would make. (Natasha)

One pre-service teacher talked about the role of her parents in shaping her understanding of diversity and her motivation for joining the SLP:

It's actually a really big issue for my parents; they had us do a lot of volunteer work when we were younger...we grew up around really affluent people and it was really important for them to make sure that we saw that it was not how it was for everybody. So I spent time working in Siberia, Burma, and some other places doing volunteer work at a really young age, I...had to feel what it's like to be an outsider somewhere else. It sucked. It was really, really hard, but that has informed my ability to empathize with people who are in that position here. (Jill).

Our analysis of the data shows that pre-service teachers have different personal and professional motivations for enrolling in a diversity-focused course and have different understandings of diversity, yet in their post-interviews, all of the pre-service teachers expressed that the SLP fostered their understanding of children from immigrant families, strengthened their ability to work in culturally diverse settings, and specifically enhanced their self-critical identity awareness, including around their own racialized identities as White educators:

Everything we covered in the textbook was somehow reflected in my service learning. Like when we were talking about White privilege—you know, here I am this White Canadian, third generation Canadian, coming into this group and every one of them are all immigrants who have been here less than five years who have a very different perspective. All of them are living in a community with a lower socio-economic status than the community I come from, so there's a whole lot of cultural stuff, religious differences, like you name it, it was covered. (Natasha)

Traditional cultural competency training models are planned and implemented from the perspective that there is set of optimal and discrete attitudes, knowledge, and skills that people should internalize and competently demonstrate by the end of the course (Kumagai & Lyson, 2009; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). This approach assumes there is a distinct endpoint that places individuals into one of two categories: competent or incompetent. Instead, cultural humility education is framed from the perspective that people are influenced by diverse life experiences and multiple understandings of diversity. By reframing education from this perspective, “cultural humility becomes a process, not an endpoint, one that requires humility as individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique as lifelong learners and reflective practitioners” (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 118).

Our analysis of the data suggests that the combination of practical experiences provided through the community placements, the theoretical investigation facilitated through the course, and the personal and in-class reflective activities woven throughout the program, supported pre-service teachers in making connections between theory and practical experiences, engaging in self-critique, negotiating their position, power, privileges, and assumptions, and investing in the bi-directional process of building relationships with children and youth of immigrant families.

## **Implications, Challenges, and Conclusion**

By adopting a critical social justice framework in the course readings, curricular materials, and assignments, the professor afforded students engaged in this service-learning experience the ability to engage with a range of diversity concepts in a manner that foregrounded issues of oppression, power, and privilege. Results from student interviews

revealed ample evidence of the strength of using a cultural humility approach—as contrasted to a cultural competency model—of engagement with child and youth participants in community settings. As noted above, numerous social justice teacher educators have documented their struggles with addressing critical issues with pre-service teachers, and this approach is offered as a possible model. It allows for opportunities for research-informed critical self-reflection embedded in the context of weekly experiences in community programs where they can build positive relationships with children of diverse identities.

Specific illustrations indicate ways pre-service teachers express their learning from justice-based service-learning experiences. For example, their accounts point to the importance of a cultural humility approach to foster openness to a wide range of motivations, life experiences, and understandings of diversity. Likewise, social justice-based approaches improve pre-service teachers' ability to identify and appreciate the many strengths of children and youth from immigrant families. In sum, the pre-service teachers we interviewed who had participated in one of the two iterations of this program offered evidence of an increased sense of cultural humility, and understanding of the teacher's pivotal role in creating more equitable learning experiences for all children and youth, including those from immigrant families.

This program aided our goal, as Darling-Hammond (2002) expressed it, to “empower teachers to define for themselves what it means to be personally affected by social issues involving equity and diversity, as well as what it means to become efficacious in their teaching for social change” (p. 7). Findings from this study strongly suggest that professional education faculties can strengthen their service-learning experiences by eschewing deficit-model thinking and cultural safari approaches, and increasing their focus on fostering critical engagement and reflection on social justice issues. Inevitably there exist many structural barriers within faculties of education in implementing such collaborative community-driven programs with a focus on social justice. Limitations in resources, ideological resistance to acknowledging and addressing notions of privilege and oppression, specific faculty expertise and experience, and broader concerns about systemic structures of oppression and resistance remain. However, we hope this brief account of some of the successes of this program will help guide and encourage the design of other innovative approaches to professional education.



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