

## The ABCs for pre-service teacher cultural competency development

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### **Abstract**

In an effort to combine pre-service teachers' self-reflection with their field experiences to enhance their cultural competency, this study adopted Schmidt's ABC's (Autobiography, Biography, and Cross-cultural Comparison) Model in two courses in a pre-service teacher education program. Through group comparisons, this study measured the impact that self-reflection combining autobiography, field experiences involving the writing of student biographies, and field-based reflection focused on conducting cross-cultural comparisons had on the development of pre-service teachers' cultural competency. The results of the study illustrated the discomforts pre-service teachers experience in working with diverse student populations and documented the impact of the ABC's model on participants' cultural awareness development.

**Keywords:** pre-service teacher; teacher education; multicultural education; cultural competency; reflection

### **Article:**

#### **Introduction**

The importance of enhancing teachers' understanding of the diverse student population is widely recognized in the teacher education field. National and state standards require that teacher candidates demonstrate their understanding of students' backgrounds and make instructional decisions based on their knowledge of students. Among the different approaches used in teacher education programs, reflection and field experiences are believed to be two key components in the development of teacher candidates' cultural competency (Banks, 1984; Bennett, 1993; Helms, 1984; Villegas, 1991; Zeichner, 1993). The challenge, however, lies in searching for successful tools to effectively combine reflection and field experiences in teacher education programs.

While most pre-service teacher education programs typically include at least one diverse learners or multicultural education course and require field experiences, the reflection and discussion regarding teacher candidates' cultural awareness and enhancement of their cultural competence tend to take place in isolated courses or depend on the placement of their field experiences. Systematic integration of cultural competence reflection across teacher education programs is uncommon (Prater, Wilder, & Dyches, 2008).

As we prepare our teacher candidates to collaboratively serve the increasingly diverse student population in our schools, we should demonstrate such collaboration in our teacher education programs as well. Therefore, it is crucial for teacher educators to explore models and approaches leading to more systematic and consistent efforts in doing so. In this study, we: (1) described the integration of a cultural awareness project across two undergraduate courses in a pre-service teacher education program; and (2) examined the impact of the project on teacher cultural awareness development and pre-service teachers' understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

#### **Literature review**

As teacher educators, to facilitate our teacher candidates in becoming reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983), we need to provide them with opportunities to thoughtfully consider their own experiences in applying knowledge

to practice (Schön, 1996). Cochran-Smith (1995) argued that teachers need to examine both their own experiences and the tacit assumptions they have regarding teaching and learning in order to form their understanding of their roles as teachers. She stated:

In order to learn to teach in a society that is increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, prospective teachers... need opportunities to examine much of what is usually unexamined in the tightly braided relationships of language, culture, and power in schools and schooling. This kind of examination inevitably begins with our own histories as human beings and as educators - our own cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds and our own experiences as raced, classed, and gendered children, parents, and teachers in the world. It also includes a close look at the tacit assumptions we make about the motivations and behaviors of other children, other parents, and other teachers and about the pedagogies we deem most appropriate for learners who are like us and who are not like us. (Cochran-Smith, 1995, p. 500)

For teachers to promote a healthy identity for themselves and their students, they must first come to understand themselves through their reflection practice (Hollins, 1999). Hollins (1996) identified four approaches which examine the self from a different perspective. One of those approaches includes the examination of one's own cultural identity, something that requires a working definition of culture, one that "encompasses a world view that shapes thoughts and responses to people, events, situations, and phenomena" (p. 193). The outcome of such an examination can potentially impact teachers' standards for "deciding what can be, standards for deciding how one feels about it, and deciding how to go about doing it" (Goodenough, 1980, p. 62) or in this case deciding how they perceive their students and how their students perceive them. The findings of this examination can strengthen teachers' cultural competency development and can assist them in building stronger relationships with all of their students, especially those who are culturally diverse.

With the increasing number of studies on multicultural education, more and more teacher educators realize that it is paramount to prepare teachers to be cross-culturally competent, i.e., to recognize and understand their own worldviews, learn about their students' cultures, and confront their own racism and biases as a means of effectively communicating with their students, especially those with diverse backgrounds (Banks, 1994; Bennett, 1993; Gillette & Boyle-Baise, 1995; Nieto & Rolon, 1995; Sleeter, 1992; Villegas, 1991). While some may consider the centrality of race as most visible, it is also important to recognize the existence of classism, sexism, linguisticism, anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, and ableism. These multiple identities, unpacked separately, may provide one viewing point to personal biases; however, considering the identities as they exist in the whole person can reveal prejudices that could indeed affect how we teach and communicate with all students.

Based on those premises, Schmidt (1999) developed the ABC's model to better prepare teachers for bilingual and bicultural students. The ABC's model (Schmidt, 1999) includes five major components:

1. Autobiography, written in detail by each participant including key life events related to education, family, religious tradition, recreation, victories, and defeats.
2. Biography of an ESL student.
3. Cross-cultural analysis of similarities and differences between the life stories charted by the participants (Spindler & Spindler, 1987).
4. Analysis of cultural differences examined in writing with encouragement for participants to explain personal discomforts and identify positive affect.
5. Modification for classroom practice.

Schmidt's (1999) model placed the emphasis on the study of self. The development of cultural competency, therefore, needs to start with the study of self, for it is from the study of the self that we can potentially gain more knowledge about how to work with diverse learners. This self study also extends to an examination of the self as a teacher; for the implementation of this model also requires reflection on how the role of teacher and teaching practices are influenced by past experiences and prevailing ideologies.

## **Course context**

In this study, we adapted the ABC's model and focused on the first three components of the model (autobiography, biography, and cross-cultural comparison) in two of the required courses in a pre-service teacher education program to allow participants attending both courses to have the opportunity to explore their own cultural self and better understand the students with whom they work (Appendix A). Participants were selected from among the pre-service teachers enrolled in CUI 450 - Psychological Foundations of Education and CUI 545 - Diverse Learners.

CUI 450 covers general educational psychology topics including cognitive and developmental theories, learning theories, motivation, classroom strategies and assessment. Diversity is addressed through the discussion related to topics of the class. In the CUI 450 class, all the pre-service teachers were required to compose their initial autobiography at the beginning of the semester to reflect on their cultural and educational background and their perception of their roles as classroom teachers. At the end of the semester, the pre-service teachers were asked to revise their autobiography and reflect on their understanding of their roles as teachers.

In the CUI 545 class, students explore their dispositions (in general and more specifically in schools) regarding race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, gender (including sexual orientation), religion, and exceptionality. Encouraging the examination of dispositions were required readings such as *How real is race: Using anthropology to make sense of human diversity* (Mukhopadhyay & Henze, 2003); *Developing a cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in pre-service teacher education* (Gay & Kirkland, 2003); and *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack* (McIntosh, 1990). All the pre-service teachers enrolled in CUI 545 had the experience of working with students from local high schools on a one-on-one basis. They were required to conduct a biography of the high school student with whom they worked and compose a cross-cultural comparison in terms of cultural and educational backgrounds between the student they worked with and themselves.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research questions***

The general research question for this study was: "How does pre-service teachers' self-reflection combining autobiography, field experiences in writing student biography, and field-based reflection by conducting cross-cultural comparison impact the development of their cultural competency?" The following specific research questions were addressed in the study:

1. How does the use of the ABC's project impact participants' cultural diversity awareness development?
2. How does use of the ABC's project impact participants' self-perception of their roles and responsibilities as teachers?

### ***Participants***

During the spring 2006 semester, there were 56 pre-service teachers enrolled in CUI 450, and 46 enrolled in CUI 545. Among the 102 pre-service teachers who granted consent to participate in this study, 13 were enrolled in both CUI 450 and CUI 545.

In order to examine the impact of the ABC's project on participants' cultural awareness development and their understanding of teachers' roles and responsibilities, a quasi-experimental design was applied in this study. Twenty participants were selected to form the two groups in this study with 10 in each group: Group A only took CUI 450 (autobiography only); and Group B took both CUI 450 and CUI 545 (autobiography, biography, and cross-cultural comparison). The 10 participants in Group B were selected from the 13 pre-service teachers enrolled in both CUI 450 and CUI 545 based on the completion of the biography project. Then, 10 participants were selected from pre-service teachers enrolled only in CUI 450 with the purpose of matching the demographics (including age and gender) of the Group B participants for comparison (see Table 1).

Among the 10 participants in Group A, there were eight females and two males. At the time of the study, all the participants were traditional undergraduate students in their junior or senior year. The average age of the participants was 21. All of the participants were secondary teacher candidates whose content areas included: history (4), English (3), mathematics (1), science (1), and special education (1). All Group A members were White. Eight of 10 were born and grew up in North Carolina. One participant was from New York and one from Houston, Texas; both of them moved to North Carolina when they were in middle school. Nine mentioned the role of their family in their education, and the influence of their family on their decision to become a teacher. Four participants described their mothers as the major influence in their childhood and as those persons who centrally impacted their learning and career choice.

Table 1. Participants' descriptions.

	Group A (N=10)	Group B (N=10)
Course	CUI 450 only	CUI 450 & CUI 545
Gender	8 females; 2 males	6 females; 4 males
Average age	21	21
Ethnicity	Caucasian	9 Caucasian, 1 Multiracial
Major	History; English; math	Social studies, English; math

Ten participants constituted Group B. There were six females and four males. Like participants in Group A, all of the participants in this group were traditional undergraduate students who at the time of the study were juniors. Their average age was 21. The members of this group wanted to teach in high school in the areas of social studies (4), English (4), and mathematics (2). Of the 10 participants, only one identified herself as multiracial; three explicitly identified, in writing, their ethnicities as White. All Group B members chose, however, to complete biographies of students who were African American (5), Mexican or Latino (2), Asian (2), and multiracial (1). Group B participants engaged in school-based internships at five district schools. Three schools were located in rural or suburban environments with ethnically diverse populations of students. On the other hand, two additional schools were complete opposites in student ethnic composition. One rural school was notoriously known as a White flight high school; the other school had a high ethnic minority population. All five schools were chosen based on partnership agreements with the district school system and the willingness of principals to accept interns. Furthermore, students in CUI 545 had to engage in two distinct internship experiences during their three-semester (second semester junior year and the entire senior year) school-based involvement. For instance, if a student was assigned to an urban/suburban school during CUI 545, then during his/her year-long practicum, s/he would be assigned to a rural one. After completing the cross-cultural comparison of themselves and a student with whom they tutored, participants noted comparative differences with their students' upbringings, especially in geography (6) and students' stories of discrimination (4); they most often mentioned the commonalities of love of family (9), family composition (7), and value of education (10).

### Data collection and analysis

Both qualitative data and quantitative data were collected for the purpose of this research. Qualitative data were collected from the participants' written autobiography, biography, and cross-cultural comparison, and the follow-up interviews. Quantitative data were collected using the Cultural Diversity Attitude Inventory (CDAI). The CDAI instrument was used to measure teachers' attitudes about multiculturalism and diversity (Larke, 1990). The CDAI instrument contains 27 Likert-scale items. In order to measure teachers' cultural diversity awareness, this study employed the five subscales used in Larke's study:

1. General cultural awareness.
2. The culturally diverse family.
3. Cross-cultural communication.
4. Assessment.
5. The multicultural environment.

In an effort to compare the development of teachers' cultural diversity awareness across groups, a CDAI profile was provided for each group based on their responses to the CDAI instrument. NUD\*IST 6 software was used in managing and analyzing the qualitative data. The qualitative data were analyzed using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initially, all data were coded at the sentence level by two researchers separately using free nodes in NUD\*IST 6. During the initial analysis, researchers met regularly to compare memos and coding categories in order to reach consensus and resolve any discrepancies in coding. Established coding themes were then applied to all qualitative data and the analysis results were stored in NUD\*IST 6 for further comparison and interpretation. Finally, cross-group comparisons were conducted based on both quantitative and qualitative findings.

## Findings

In this section, a description of participants' backgrounds based on their ABC's document data and interviews is provided. The major findings of the study are discussed to address the two research questions.

### Cultural diversity awareness

The CDAI instrument data were collected from 20 participants from Group A and Group B. Seven participants from Group A and nine participants from Group B completed the survey and provided complete data for analysis. The reliability of the CDAI instrument is .75. No statistical analysis was conducted because of the small number of participants. Instead, the CDAI profile based on participants' responses from each group was provided for comparison (Figure 1). Qualitative data were also used to illustrate the findings.

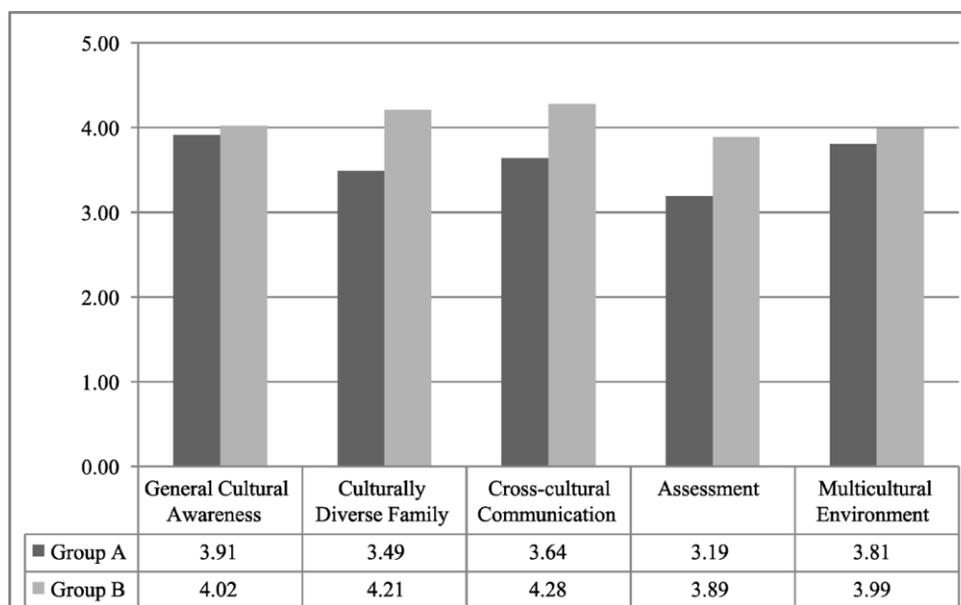


Figure 1. CDAI profile.

In terms of participants' understanding of *general cultural awareness* (Items 1-5) and *multicultural environment* (Items 20-27), participants from both Group A and Group B demonstrated similar levels of understanding. It was noted that while all the participants from Group B stated *strongly disagree* or *disagree* when asked if they prefer to work with children and parents who share their cultural background (100%), several of them reported they would feel uncomfortable working with people who have values different from themselves (N=4). All participants from Group A, on the other hand, reported *strongly disagree* or *disagree* when asked if they would feel uncomfortable working with people who have values different from themselves.

Participants from Group B mentioned in their ABC's reports that they felt nervous before they conducted the ABC project knowing that they would be working with a student whose background was different from their own. For example, one participant was quite apprehensive about completing the student biography assignment. He said:

I was apprehensive at first and was worried that I would be seen as butting my nose where it was not wanted. I may have felt this way because I am a very private person and don't like unwarranted disruptions in my own life. (JA, ABC's report, 4/06)<sup>1</sup>

Another student felt fearful because she “did not know what to expect” (AR, ABC's report, 4/06). Still another felt “overwhelmed at the differences between myself and others” (SZ, ABC's report, 4/06).

To compare participants' responses regarding the *culturally diverse family* (Items 6-12) and *cross-cultural communication* (Items 13-16), it was acknowledged that most participants from both groups (>90%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that teachers should establish interactions with parent/caregivers' outside school activities and schedule individualized education plan (IEP) conferences at parents' convenience. All participants in Group B selected *strongly disagree* or *disagree* when asked if parents know little about assessing their own children, and agreed that teachers should consider families' preferences for ethnic identification. None of the participants from Group B reported feeling uncomfortable with people who speak non-standard English and believed that sometimes non-standard English should be accepted; participants from Group A expressed various levels of agreement.

Participants' responses regarding *assessment* (Items 17-19) rated the lowest of all five subscales in both groups. Although the participants in Group B demonstrated higher levels of understanding compared to those from Group A, their responses varied along the five-point Likert scale. Based on the qualitative data, only one student in Group B voiced concern about assessment. She indicated the desire to test English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students before they are placed in classes. She wanted these students to be “put in the right place and start them off with a strong base and move them up from there instead of just putting them somewhere they [teachers] think is good for them” (EB, interview, 20 November 2006). Additionally, the participant recognized the difficulty of learning another language; in fact, she mentioned she did not want ESL students to be totally American. She wanted ESL immigrant students to sustain in their memories their own countries and their own cultures along with learning American ways. She did not want them “to forget who they are” (EB, interview, 20 November 2006).

### **Teacher roles and responsibilities**

The interviews and document data supported the quantitative findings and further revealed that the focus of participants' self-reflection differed based on their field experiences. Participants who did not conduct the biography and cross-cultural comparison (Group A) appeared to be concerned about their content expertise, instructional strategies, and their students' academic growth.

Participants from Group A tended to attribute the reasons for teaching to their preference for their content area expertise or their willingness to provide support or resources for learners. Five out of 10 participants admitted they chose to teach in the particular content area because of their competency or their interest in it as a student. One participant, for example, mentioned in her autobiography that: “I plan to teach English based solely on the fact that I find myself competent enough in the subject to feel comfortable passing it along to others” (BA, ABC's report, 23 January 2006). Through another autobiography, one student wrote: “I have a passion for history and I want to spark their (students') passion for it as well” (HL, ABC's report, 23 January 2006).

Three participants referred back to teachers who ignored them while they were in school and stated that they wanted to become a teacher to help the students who were just like themselves. “I want to teach because I want to help those who have not found a direction and for those who know their direction I want to help them get where they are going. I think I can do this by being their resources - the resources they need to succeed in their life” (JD, ABC's report, 23 January 2006). “I enjoy helping students reach their full potential as well as show that school can be interesting” (JG, ABC's report, 23 January 2006).

Another student admitted that she wanted to be a teacher because she loves being in charge: “I love standing in the front of the room and talking. I'm also still a bit of a know-it-all, so it's nice to be able to tell people things that I know, and have them listen to me” (SE, ABC's report, 23 January 2006).

Based on participants' autobiographies, it was also suggested that most of the participants considered it their primary responsibility to incorporate various activities and strategies in their class to deliver the content for learners with various learning styles:

...with this knowledge (learning styles), a teacher should construct a curriculum and style that embraces all of these methods on a day-to-day basis, and frequently alternate between different types of tasks within a single class period. This method ensures the inclusion of all students, and the diversity of approaches facilitates a deep understanding of the content. (PS, ABC's report, 17 April 2006)

In fact, most of the participants in this group (>80%) believed they needed to be more familiar with the content area of their teaching and learn more about general educational psychology theories in order to become a better teacher in the classroom.

Unlike participants from Group A, Group B participants addressed their understanding of teachers' roles and responsibilities in their assignments - the school internship-based student biography and the cross cultural comparison - and in individual interviews. Their descriptions of teachers' roles and responsibilities can be categorized by several themes. These themes are: importance of knowing students, difficulties in relating to others' cultures, learning as an ongoing process, and benefits of completing the assignment.

### **Importance of knowing students**

Since participants in Group B completed the biography and cross-cultural comparison assignment in their assigned school-based internships, they recognized their roles and responsibilities as teachers to all students, no matter how diverse their students are. As such, to meet the needs of all the students, participants in this study especially cited the importance of getting to know their students in their ABC's reports. For example, KR reiterated this recognition when she wrote:

Being an intern at [name of the school] and getting to know students like [high school student's name] will really help me as a future teacher. I think one of the biggest things that I will take from this experience is that if you take the time to get to know your students, you will learn so much about them and yourselves, and [this] will make a truly personal connection with them. (KR, ABC's report, April 2006)

CT also understood the benefit of knowing his students when he admitted:

I must be ready to learn about each individual student and understand what makes him or her tick. In the end, when it comes to dealing with diversity, we can learn just as much from our differences as we do from our commonalities. (CT, ABC's report, 26 March 2006)

### **Difficulties in relating to other cultures**

Because of perceived differences in cultures, some participants disclosed possible difficulty in relating to students once they become teachers. To teach most effectively and in ways that are relevant to the students' lives, teachers, in one participant's estimation, would have to do research at other times:

If I were to be [student's name], there is a great chance that I could have a difficult time relating to her and her peers. I am very unfamiliar with the majority of her music (this is true for popular music from all cultural groups in my case), so it would be a stretch for me to be relevant in the ways I would teach my lessons. Many teachers find it useful to bring popular culture into the classroom and relate their

subjects to what their students are familiar with, but in order for me to do that I would have to do a little culture research on my off time. (AR, ABC's report, 27 April 2006)

Another perceived difference in culture was the conflict between home and school interests. The participant recognized the discontinuity of home-school cultural experiences. Noting that sometimes ethnic minority students in schools have to make choices about living up to a societal stereotype, in this case, believing themselves to be “dirty Mexicans” or taking a stand against such stereotypes. Furthermore, she realized that some of her students were torn between fulfilling family expectations or the culture of home and obligations of and expectations in doing school work. The participant wrote:

Making this a little more general, we, as teachers, have to understand that our students could be getting a completely different curriculum at home and in the community than what we are teaching them here... If we can learn what is going on in their homes, and get to know our students to the point where we know their culture right down to the food they eat and the bedtime stories they were read or told as a child, we can choose to try to integrate those different cultures into our classroom. (VH, ABC's report, 27 April 2006)

The same participant felt discomfort, especially with voiced discriminatory behaviors being demonstrated at school. She wondered how she would handle such situations. It was important for her to keep her emotions controlled. Furthermore, in her reflection, her desire was to teach her students more than academic content. She went on to say:

It makes me a little concerned about what to expect when I start teaching... When this does happen to me, and these students come into my classroom saying these hurtful things, how do I handle that in a way in which all students do not feel as if they were attacked? Being multi-racial myself, I especially take offense to all of the racist statements I myself heard while in that school. When it [voiced discriminatory behaviors of students] does happen in my classroom, I do not want to let my frustrations show to the point where my anger takes over. I want to be able to handle it so that all of my students understand those kinds of statements and actions are not acceptable in my classroom. Not only do I want them to know I will not tolerate it, but why it is so unacceptable, especially in the society we live in today. I feel as if it is my obligation to prepare these students for the world outside of my four classroom walls... All in all, my biggest discomfort is possibly having this situation done to me, and I might not handle it appropriately. (VH, ABC's report, 27 April 2006)

Finally, one participant acknowledged that she still needed to learn as a teacher when she stated, “to teach them [her students] what they need to know but also as a learning experience for me, to learn how to teach them to learn is going to be tough” (AS, interview, 1 December 2006). AC agreed when he said his role as a teacher would be “an ongoing learning process” (AC, interview, 1 December 2006).

### **Learning as an ongoing process**

While the participants hoped as teachers to make their teaching more culturally relevant, some also wanted to make sure the desire of their students to keep learning beyond the classroom would be sustained. For instance, one participant voiced, “I would like them [my students] to become lifelong learners” (BR, interview, 1 December 2006). Another participant wanted his students “to get ready for the real world and just get ready for dealing with different people... I want them to respect each other and I want them to respect different people” (CT, interview, 1 December 2006). Still another participant stated she hoped to “help by any means necessary”. Nevertheless, she noted that it would be difficult at times and that she would have to work to learn another culture. She went on to say:

Some of these students have discipline problems or they need someone to be there just to listen to or that kind of thing and you know obviously your role as a teacher is to instruct.... but I think it's mainly to make things

relevant so that students really want to learn. I think that's my role and that's probably going to be one of my struggles. (MP, interview, 21 November 2006)

One participant summed it up when she said:

I think teachers have to let their students see that they're a real person... I don't think there is one role [of a teacher]. I think that within the role there are several different roles to play and there are tons more and it just depends on the situation, I think. But always, whatever role you're in, you need to keep your students and their best interests at the center of it. (EL, interview, 21 November 2006)

EB suggested a method to do this, especially when working with ethnic minority and immigrant students when she described her role:

My role as a teacher is not just to teach lessons and units, and [give] tests and quizzes. It's to be their scaffolder if that's a word. I must be the one that scaffolds them throughout their journey through school... but it's my job to make sure they comprehend it, make sure they understand, make sure they feel comfortable in the classroom, make sure they don't think that going to an American school is the worst thing they could have ever done for themselves. [I must] make sure they come and have a satisfying journey. (EB, interview, 20 November 2006)

### **Benefits of completing the ABC's assignment**

After conducting the ABC's study, most participants reported they have benefited from the study and would recommend this project to other pre-service teachers. Citing a benefit of doing the assignment and how it will impact his future teaching experience, one participant wrote:

I have unquestionably come from my discussions with [student's name] with a different sense of how the Mexican community sees the world around it and of how this affects their daily lives. This assignment has also opened my eyes to the fact that as teachers we need to take into account a student's background when judging their responses to assignments that we give them. It could be as simple as viewing the situation from a different angle. (JA, ABC's report, 27 April 2006)

A participant, who was completing her internship at the school system's most ethnically diverse high school, credited the ABC Project with helping her:

... relate to my students. Know where they're coming from, know how they're thinking, know how they're being taught to think by teachers, by the educational institutions... just paying attention to what their culture is and coming to it and meeting it so that they can learn. (HJ, interview, 21 November 2006)

Additionally, the assignment led another participant to critically think about being of a different culture. She stated:

In some ways, saying that someone is of a different culture is a way of dismissing them as not worth the effort to get to know them. It is as if, someone is saying, "they don't understand me and I'll never understand them so why is it worth bothering about". Cultures as wonderful and captivating as they are, can act in this way as a blindfold. It is a way to dismiss getting to know someone on a more personal basis. It causes us all to make judgments on those we see on the street, but never stop to talk. ... It is something we need to consider when we actually teach. (MP, ABC's report, 12 April 2006)

## **Discussions and implications**

This study demonstrated the impact of the ABC's project in facilitating participants' field experiences and their self-reflections so that they increase their cultural self-awareness and their understanding of their cultural roles in culturally diverse classrooms. Participants' expanded understanding of culturally diverse families and comfort level with cross-cultural communication further illustrated the impact of the combination of field experiences and self-reflection in teacher preparation. While the collaborative application of the ABC's project in the two courses demonstrated its potential, the study also brought up several issues of concern for teacher educators.

As is demonstrated by the CDAI survey data, the participants who completed the ABC's project demonstrated higher levels of understanding in cross-cultural communication and culturally diverse families. Their experience working with the students provided them with opportunities to learn about students' family backgrounds and cultural backgrounds that they would not have learned merely from their university coursework or self-reflection. The fact that participants in Group A indicated a higher comfort level in working with people whose values are different from themselves than Group B - whose members actually worked with students from different cultural backgrounds - led us to speculate if those Group A participants would rate this item differently if they were given the opportunity to work with a student whose cultural background is different from their own. In other words, our pre-service teachers may not realize their discomfort level until they are provided the opportunity to actually face the cultural difference in the school environment. While we did not experience any explicit resistance from Group B participants in completing the biography and cross-cultural comparison, the concerns expressed by the Group B participants also illustrated the importance of providing opportunities in the teacher education program for all pre-service teachers to interact with culturally diverse families.

Through the comparison of participants' perceptions of teachers' roles and responsibilities, it was revealed that participants from Group A tended to focus on their roles as instructors to deliver content knowledge, and provide resources and help to their students in classroom settings. On the other hand, participants who conducted the ABC's project recognized the importance of knowing the students' backgrounds and facilitated ongoing learning beyond classrooms. When addressing their roles and responsibilities in diverse classroom settings, it was also suggested that participants from Group B appeared to be concerned with relating students' backgrounds to the school setting in both social and academic contexts. Participants' recognition of the benefits of conducting the ABC's project indicated the potential of the model in pre-service teacher education programs. In addition to continuing the application of the project in these two courses, we plan to adapt the other two components of the ABC's model (cultural difference analysis and classroom modification) to other courses in our teacher education program as well.

The results of the study also led us to consider if the model could be applied to the professional development of teacher educators. In order to better prepare our students to teach to and to teach about diverse populations, teacher educators should also engage in similar activities to better understand our teacher candidates, our school partners, as well as members within our school systems' greater community, but most importantly, to better understand themselves as personal and professional beings. With such an understanding of ourselves as teacher educators we can not only better model the professional dispositions and behaviors for our teacher candidates but also help them to understand diversity that lies within and outside themselves. Furthermore, such intentional engagements and activities can help us as teacher educators to better understand our university colleagues and promote stronger collaborations.

In this study, because the ABC's project was conducted in a teacher education course setting, it was recognized that the course readings and discussions might have had an impact on participants' responses as well. Further, the diverse field experience settings also had an influence on participants' understanding while they were conducting the ABC's project. Finally, it is hard to measure the impact of the ABC's project without examining the long-term impact of the project. Therefore, we plan to follow up with the 10 participants in this study through interviews and observations while they are student teaching and during their first year of teaching in an effort to more clearly comprehend their development as teachers and to measure the long-term impact of the project.

## Conclusion

In order to prepare highly qualified teachers for increasingly diverse classrooms, pre-service teachers need to be equipped with knowledge of the learners and their families in addition to content expertise knowledge. Teachers' self-reflections and field experiences have been proven to be effective strategies for pre-service teacher development; the application of Schmidt's ABC's model within the teacher education program linked these two powerful teacher preparation strategies. With such practice, pre-service teachers are not only asked who they are, but also who they are in relationship with others and who they are as professionals in the teaching field. This study provided both a model of practice in teacher education programs and a series of measures to track the impact of such practice.

Finally, the study speaks to the practice of teacher educators. If we ask pre-service teachers to implement the ABC's model, why not do it ourselves? Improving our professional practice is ongoing; it is not static. Therefore, to most effectively teach pre-service teachers about human diversity, we should ourselves be equipped with first-hand experience. In other words, whatever we require our students to do, we should be willing to do it ourselves. Such an activity can first benefit and prepare our teacher candidates for real world classrooms, and second can also help us become more aware of ourselves and the needs of others. It would be an ideal way to learn about our students, and their students as well, and the strengths that lie within them.

## Notes

1. We used student initials, data type, and the date to indicate the sources of the quotes.

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## **Appendix A. ABC's assignment in CUI 450 and CUI 545:**

### **Autobiography assignment in CUI 450**

As we begin our work this semester, I think it will be very helpful to reflect on the experiences and beliefs that have shaped who we are. See the guiding questions below.

#### ***Thinking about our backgrounds***

*Think about your family background*

- Who is the person in your family that has the most impact in your life?
- How would you describe your major values? How are your values shaped?

#### ***Learning experiences in my life***

*Think about the your K-12 learning experiences*

- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a student?
- Under what conditions do you learn best?
- What are some of your successful learning experiences? What do you think are the major reasons for your success?
- Have you ever experienced frustrations in your learning? What are some of your struggles? What would you do if you experienced frustrations?
- What feelings/emotions do you associate with learning?

#### ***Teacher's role***

*Think about your experience as a teacher/tutor or your motives to be a teacher*

- Why do you want to become a teacher?
- What are your major beliefs regarding classroom teaching?
- What kind of teacher do you want to be?

### **Biography and cross-cultural comparison assignment in CUI 545**

During your field experiences, you will discuss with your supervising teachers and select one student whose cultural background is different from yourself to complete the biography and cross-cultural comparison.

***In student biography, you will***

- Describe the student's family background, community he/she lives in, key life events in his/her previous experiences, and his/her attitude toward language learning.
- Identify the sources of your information.

***Aspects you want to consider***

*Family background*

- Family history.
- Parents' education background.
- Parents' cultural experiences.

*Community*

- Living community.
- School community.

*Previous experiences*

- Cultural experiences.
- School experiences.

***Potential sources for information***

- Parent interview.
- School interview.
- Student interview.
- Classroom observation.
- Assignment analysis.

***In cross-cultural comparison, you will***

- Compare the aspects of the student's biography with your own experiences.
- Discuss any similarities and/or differences you find.

Please check the box that best reflects your beliefs.

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	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Neutral 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
1. I believe my culture is different from some of the children I teach.					
2. I believe it is important to identify immediately the ethnic groups of the children I teach.					
3. I would prefer to work with children and parents whose cultures are similar to mine.					
4. I would feel uncomfortable with people who have values different from my own.					
5. I am sometimes surprised when members of certain ethnic groups contribute to particular school activities.					
6. I believe that teachers should establish parent interactions outside school activities.					
7. I believe that it is necessary to include on-going parent input in program planning.					
8. I believe that cultural views of a diverse community should be included in the school's yearly program planning.					
9. I believe parent conferences or program planning should be scheduled at parent convenience.					
10. I would experience frustration when conducting conferences with parents whose culture is different from my own.					
11. I believe that parents know little about assessing their own children.					
12. During initial meetings, teachers should ask families their preference for ethnic identity.					
13. I feel uncomfortable in settings where people speak non-standard English.					
14. I believe that students' spoken language should be corrected by modeling without any further explanation.					
15. I believe that there are times when the use of "non-standard" English should be accepted.					

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Strongly  
agree 5    Agree 4    Neutral 3    Disagree 2    Strongly  
disagree 1

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16. I believe that regular curriculum should include ESL for non-English speaking children.
  17. I believe that students should be referred for testing if learning difficulties appear to be cultural or language differences.
  18. I believe that adaptations in standardized assessments are questionable since it alters reliability and validity.
  19. I believe that translating a standardized achievement or intelligence test to a child's dominant language gives the child an added advantage.
  20. I believe that in a society with as many racial groups as the US, I would accept the use of ethnic jokes or phrases by some children.
  21. I believe that there are times when racial statements should be ignored.
  22. I believe that the solution to communication problems of certain ethnic groups is the child's own responsibility.
  23. I believe that teachers should not provide opportunities for children to share cultural differences.
  24. I believe that teachers should make program adaptations to accommodate diversity.
  25. I believe that classroom displays and materials should reflect at least three cultural groups.
  26. I believe that one's knowledge of a particular culture should affect one's expectation of the children's performance.
  27. I believe that each child should be involved in a regular rotating schedule for job assignments.
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