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**The Potential of Modelling Culturally Responsive Teaching: Preservice Teachers'  
Learning Experiences**

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# **The potential of Modelling Culturally Responsive Teaching: Preservice Teachers' Learning Experiences**

## **Abstract**

This qualitative case study examined two pre-service teachers' learning experiences in relation to encountering modelling culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in a multicultural education course. Using Constant Comparison Approach, the researchers searched for evidence of observing aspects of modelling in the course, and described the preservice teachers' learning experiences that occurred in relation to this observation, as well as the possible transformation they went through. The study revealed that the critical, justice oriented teacher education course that implemented modelling CRT activities and behavior seemed to help preservice teachers to transform and extend their conceptual knowledge of CRT, critically reflect and reconstruct prior knowledge, and connect these experiences to future teaching practice. Based on the data, a framework for modelling CRT in teacher education is delineated. Implications for teacher education are addressed.

**Keywords:** Modelling culturally responsive teaching, pre-service teachers, teacher education, instructional strategies, multicultural education, qualitative case study

## **Introduction**

Preparing educators to teach in multicultural classrooms has gained increasing attention globally, and more specifically, in Europe. European countries represent remarkably different contexts, languages, histories and educational systems. Therefore, there is little agreement on how such teacher preparation should happen. Particularly in Finland, there is an ongoing debate about multicultural education and how teacher education should address the issue (Holm and Londen 2010). Generally, scholars emphasize the need to equip prospective teachers with effective teaching strategies, and build cultural and linguistic awareness in order to ensure that teachers meet the needs of all students (Hollie 2018; Sleeter and Owuor 2011). While many teacher preparation programs have attempted to attain these goals by implementing well designed curricula encouraging teachers to practice responsive teaching with a more critical, social reconstructionist framework (Acquah and Commins 2017; Lucas and Villegas 2013), still few teachers enter classrooms prepared to meet the needs of diverse students (Acquah, Tandon and Lempinen 2016; Sleeter and Owuor 2011). This means that approaches are needed in teacher education that will help prospective teachers translate such new visions into actual teaching practices in schools (Hollie 2018). Consequently, modelling that helps connecting ideas to practice is crucial in teacher education. However, as Lunenberg, Korthagen, and Swennen (2007) noted, explicit modelling is not a common practice within teacher education and there is little evidence that recognizes modelling as a teaching method in teacher education. This study aims to provide a descriptive account of an untapped aspect of teacher education – modelling culturally responsive teaching and its potential to transform pre-service teachers’ attitudes and visions about teaching.

## ***Teacher Education and Culturally Responsive Teaching***

Teacher education has become ever more focused on the challenge of helping prospective teachers learn to form relationships with students from culturally diverse backgrounds and apply equity pedagogy in the classroom so all students can succeed in

school (Adams 2016). One of the strategies aiming at reaching these goals is culturally responsive teaching (CRT) which has been defined as an approach to teaching that uses the cultural heritages, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students as conduits to facilitate the teaching-learning process (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009). CRT challenges deficit models of teaching, validates students' cultural and linguistic background and perceives students as active producers of knowledge (Freire 1970/2005; Hollie 2018; Valencia 2012). If educators teach from this asset perspective, they are able to utilize relevant material and thus provide equitable education (Gay 2010; Hollie 2018).

However desirable, existing teacher education curricula are not meeting these goals – teacher educators rarely enact culturally responsive teacher education let alone utilize CRT activities strategically and intentionally (Gorski 2009; Hollie 2018; Conklin 2008). The lack of CRT in teacher education might be explained by the extreme demands it poses to teacher educators: a considerable awareness and knowledge of oneself, pedagogy and students; that might be particularly difficult to develop alone. It is not just “something that you do but something that you have in all that you do” (Hollie 2018:11). It requires that teacher educators build relationships with future educators. Like students, educators respond best when teacher educators build relationships. However, this praxis is a challenge for many teacher educators because it deviates from the traditional teaching methods in higher education.

The author (Acquah and Commins 2017) began to explore how to create equitable classrooms in teacher education and presented a model for teacher educators to utilize for developing the knowledge and skills of pre-service teachers in order to address diverse learners. The model suggests exciting, active learning strategies that translate theory to practice, providing first-hand cultural interactions and opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage in critical self-analysis. Specified strategies include critical reflection, writing

autobiographies, field experiences followed by reflection, and discussions on diversity and culture (Acquah and Commins 2017). These activities must build on students' prior knowledge, cultural heritages, learning styles and personal identity. Hollie (2018) identified four factors in developing relationships with students including validation, affirmation, building and bridging. These factors are core to CRT.

### ***Explicit Modelling and Transformative Learning***

The role of the teacher educator in the actual delivery of a CRT curriculum is most salient. Teacher educators must embed pre-service teachers' learning in ways that enable them to "experience the 'doing' of the curriculum more than the information of the curriculum" (Korthagen, Loughran, and Russell 2006,1030). Transformative learning rooted in explicit modelling might enhance this learning for pre-service teachers.

Mezirow (2003) developed the concept of "*transformative learning*" defined as "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mind-sets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (p. 58). It involves "re-evaluation of identity, values, and opinions" through critical reflection and an analysis of one's own learning and schema. For transformative learning to occur, it is recommended that teacher educators explicitly model instruction.

Explicit modelling is defined as intentionally displaying teaching strategies and the underlying thought processes (Lunenberg et al. 2007). According to Loughran and Berry (2005), modelling by teacher educators is most effective if they explicitly state the strategies and choices made through "thinking aloud" (p.194). Through effective modelling, pre-service teachers can observe the thinking behind the methodology, as well as analyze what their own students will experience in the classroom allowing pre-service teachers to experience the culturally responsive teaching environment themselves. Teacher educators should model an

affirming attitude, compassion, empathy, and respect for their students, so that pre-service teachers can transfer those characteristics into their own teaching (Howard 1999).

By utilizing the aforementioned strategies, and adapting them to the specific learning environment, pre-service teachers can critique and reflect on what they find to be the most effective. The author (Acquah and Commins 2015, 2017) found that pre-service teachers re-evaluated previous stereotypes, misconceptions, and beliefs about themselves after bringing them to the transformative learning stage. Further, by observing the explicit modelling of the teacher educator, preservice teachers gained an understanding of the importance of reflection and self-critique as a quality needed by teachers in order to adapt to each classroom.

The question arises if these ideals of teacher education are achievable in a multicultural education class. This study examined the learning experiences of preservice teachers in a multicultural education course that focused on explicit modelling of CRT strategies, and whether it carried the potential for transformation. It also explored the learning trajectories of two students with different levels of experience with cultural diversity and teaching. The research questions were:

- 1) How do students describe their learning experience in a multicultural education course and the role of explicit modelling in this process?
- 2) Do these learning experiences reflect transformation?
- 3) What learning trajectories are visible in the learning experiences of students' with different levels of experience with cultural diversity and teaching?

## **Method**

The nature of these research questions required an investigative approach that allows an in-depth and comprehensive study of preservice teachers the way they experienced explicit modelling in this class. Descriptive case study is considered a robust research method particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required. It can help derive a richer,

more contextualized, and more authentic interpretation of the phenomenon of interest (Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe 2010). As the goal was to describe the learning experiences preservice teachers had in a course that sought to model responsive teaching, case study methodology was the most adequate with its dependence on inductive forms of data analysis and emphasis on the case subjects' perspectives and the meanings they construct of a phenomenon (Mills et al. 2010).

### ***Research Context***

In the autumn of 2013 and 2015, one of the researchers co-taught a multicultural education course to Finnish and international students (master's degree students and Erasmus exchange students) at a medium-sized university in Southwest Finland. The course was elective, taught in English. The goals of the course were to help teacher candidates: (1) understand themselves and others as cultural beings; (2) understand the dimensions of diversity, and how power, privilege, and social status affect educational outcomes; and (3) apply these understandings to enhance teaching and learning for children and adults. The 12-week course covered a wide range of topics including defining culture: who are we? Who are our students? Dimensions of diversity: power, privilege, and difference, and tools for developing culturally proficient classrooms.

### ***Modelling Culturally Responsive Teaching***

The teacher educators targeted both a transformation of preservice teachers' mindsets towards cultural diversity, and enabling them to be able to implement CRT in their future practice, therefore the teacher educators opted for explicitly modelling CRT. They constantly exposed their choices, reflections, and self-critique through "thinking aloud" in order to make the strategies explicit. Throughout the lessons, they encouraged students to critically reflect on the activities and teacher educators' practices, enabling them to connect the observed teaching to their future practice, and reflect on their own learning in the class. The data

revealed three dimensions of modelling CRT that the teacher educators implemented, delineating a framework (Figure 1): responsive teaching strategies and activities (RTSA), responsive teacher behavior and attitude (RTBA), and responsive learning environment (RLE).

The teacher educators modelled RTSA by employing specific activities and strategies that pre-service teachers could use in their own future work including line-up games, group discussions, critical reflection, writing autobiographies, structured field experiences combined with post experience reflection etc. (See Acquah and Commins 2017 for detailed description of the course; Table 1 for teaching methods and intent). Many of these were small-group activities (collaborative learning) embedded in lectures. Unlike many active learning methods in higher education (Cavanagh 2011; Prince 2004), all activities in this class built on students' prior knowledge, cultural heritages, personal identity and learning styles, which is a cornerstone of CRT (Gay 2010). Consequently, modelling did not only cover principles for pedagogies but also experiences and activities as examples of strategies preservice teachers could include in their future practice.

The teachers modelled RTBA by creating an open classroom atmosphere (a nurturing and challenging space in which to work), showing respect and affirming attitude, and demonstrating genuine care for all students. They learned and addressed students by their names and encouraged students to share their culture with the rest of the class (e.g. learning ten things about ten cultures in the class).

RLE was modelled by creating a feeling of safety in the course, assigning relevant readings, orchestrating collaborative learning experiences through small group exercises and discussions, and employing an integrated approach to learning. Classroom dynamics were managed by allowing students to verbalize their thoughts freely in class, and when conflicts emerged, they were used constructively to negotiate differences and enhance learning.

-Insert Figure1 about here-

-Insert Table1 about here-

### ***Participants***

Two preservice teachers were chosen from a larger sample of eighty-two preservice teachers enrolled in a multicultural education course in the autumn 2013 or 2015. Fifty-two out of the eighty-two participants discussed aspects of modelling in their journal entries on three different levels. On a first level, participants observed modelling in the course but did not connect this experience to their future teaching (in other words, they realised that modelling CRT happened to them, but did not transfer this observation to pedagogical contexts as future teachers). Another level of recognising modelling CRT involved connecting modelling in the course to future practice through reflection, here participants formed ideas about future teaching as a result of the reflection the observed modelling ignited. Moreover, directly transferring modelling to future practice also occurred, here participants stated an observation from the course (mostly teaching activities, and to a small extent teacher educators' behavior or course environment), and indicated they would implement exactly the same in their future practice. These categories were not necessarily exclusive to each other, but participants might have belonged to more than one. Based on this analysis, the researchers then aimed at describing specific learning experiences of preservice teachers with different personal/professional background on the field of cultural diversity. Therefore, cases were selected that (1) recognised modelling on these three levels (2) showed different profiles in personal and professional experience with cultural diversity (3) elaborated on their learning experiences in detail in their journals. These selection criteria were important in order to explore in-depth how participants experienced modelling in the course and understand the particularities of transformation related to their specific profiles.

The aim was not necessarily to show how the participants (Debby<sup>1</sup> and Tara) belonged to each of those three categories. It was rather to portray their learning experiences in the course that modelled culturally responsive teaching and that they recognised on three levels. Debby and Tara were not the only ones who recognised modelling in all these three ways, but they described their learning experiences in detail in their journals that allowed a close analysis of their learning journeys.

Tara was 24 years old, MA degree student studying to become an adult educator, experienced with cultural diversity in her own personal life. Tara had little teaching experience but showed a positive attitude for learning about cultures and confidence in her ability to deal with multicultural situations.

Debby, age 31, MA degree student, was an experienced teacher who has taught in culturally diverse contexts for many years, including multicultural primary schools and educating adult refugees. Due to her firm teaching background, she did not reflect on every CRT strategy, rather, she elaborated on concepts through which she transformed her understanding of culture, situated in the socio-political context.

### ***Data source***

This study utilized students' written work from their learning journal entries. During the courses, students were asked to keep learning journals detailing their reflections on the readings, lectures, activities and observations they participated in. In order to reach deep reflection, students were required to write structured journals guided by the following questions:

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

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<sup>1</sup> Names of participants are pseudonyms.

- In what ways does the readings/case study/observations/class activities connect to your own experience?
- What are their implications for your teaching?

Reflections were collected three times during the course: at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. The requirement for the final reflection was that students give an account of their own learning and synthesize their journey over the period of the course; moreover, they describe the aspects of the course that made the most impact on them. During the first class, students were told that although the learning journals were requirements for the course, they were not going to be graded. With students' permission, journals were collected and examined.

### ***Data Analysis***

The learning journals of the participants were analyzed qualitatively using Constant Comparison Approach (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The researchers searched for evidence of description of aspects of modelling observed in the multicultural education course and the learning experiences that occurred as a results of this observation.

A case-by-case data analysis was conducted on three levels using an inductive approach. First, the written assignments of each case were separately read in a comprehensive manner in order to identify data that showed aspects of modelling and how they related to described learning experiences. Second, the selected texts were further dissected by revealing the specific processes of learning that observing modelling CRT induced. Third, evidence from both cases were synthesized to corroborate emerging categories in both cases that reflect the learning trajectories the participants went through. Finally, the data were refined and organized into three main themes: conceptual understanding and self-discovery, reconstructing past experience, and connecting experiences to future teaching practice.

In qualitative research, as the researcher is often the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, reflexivity is crucial (Attia and Edge 2017). As the first author was also one of the teachers of this course, this was particularly important. He strived to maintain reflexivity, constantly reflected on his role in the construction of meaning and in the research relationships. The second author conducted the analysis of the journals. Throughout the entire process, the first author questioned various aspects of the analysis and rationalized ideas together. In the end, the first author independently completed an audit of the final report to verify the rigor and maximize the accuracy of the final report thus minimizing researcher bias.

## **Results**

Three main themes emerged from the analysis of the data: conceptual understanding and self-discovery, reconstructing past experience, and connecting experiences to future teaching practice. Conceptual understanding covered understanding of concepts taught in the course, for example, culture, identity, equality and equity, power and privilege. Conceptual development often triggered individual self-discovery; thus, the reflections on this theme were entwined with a re-examination of self and worldviews. The students also reconstructed their personal and/or professional assumptions in the past and re-interpreted certain behaviors or social phenomena, now supported by a greater conceptual understanding and self-awareness. Further, they developed principles, attitudes and behaviors for future practice and identified specific activities that they would apply.

### ***Tara***

#### ***Conceptual understanding and self-discovery***

Tara was experienced with cultural diversity, therefore, learning abstract concepts helped her find adequate terminology to better describe and understand her previous experiences. However, reflecting on the readings and activities in the course made her realize

her lack of conceptual understanding and limited worldview. Because of the stimulating RLE, her static view has been challenged and she established a base for further critical reflection, extending conceptual knowledge and personal self-discovery. She wrote:

I was most certain that I know how to “deal” with cultural issues because I am biracial and I can relate. Now I know that mostly I was right but I never realized that I am sometimes colorblind and sometimes have difficulties to accept certain things.... The more I read in the course, the more I listened to the lectures and spoke to other students, the more I understood that multicultural education is something you have to work on your whole life.

Tara begun to untangle her cultural identity after being exposed to a RLE. Before, she identified as an immigrant, but during the course, she started to comprehend the interrelations between the many layers of cultures she participated in and her own personality. The class activities helped her in realizing the several facets of cultural identity, not only heritage and host country cultures, but the subcultures of the host country as well:

The last part of the class was a lecture about culture and what it means. I realized that I am participating in so many cultures and have a broad cultural identity because of my immigration. I inherited the X (*heritage culture*) culture, learned so much about the Y (*culture of the host country*) one by living and going to school there. When coming to Z (*another region of the host country*), I also learned a lot about the Z (*another region of the host country*) way.

Tara also grew in her understanding of the relation between culture and language in schooling. She understood this relation better while observing the teacher educators’ behavior and participating in multilingual activities:

We were the students and our teachers showed us that they are aware of our different cultural backgrounds... What I really liked was the comment about talking in your

native language. We had an assignment to do and I immediately switched from English to Y (*host country language*) while talking to my Y friend. When it was pointed out that so many students switched to their mother tongue, I became aware of it and thought it was not good at first. The teacher thought differently and I liked the way. It is not important that everybody speak only one language. There should be one to understand each other and it is nice to have English. However, at the same time, it should not be punished that students switch to their mother tongue naturally at some point. The important part is, to understand it and to tolerate it. That gives the student the feeling to belong. That is how I felt at that moment.

Tara observed that the teacher educators were conscious of the students' different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the class. They promoted the use of multiple languages, allowing the participants to practice their mother tongues. This gesture made Tara aware of the usefulness of allowing students' to practice their mother tongues, and she developed a feeling of belonging to the group. Because of her positive experience in this activity, she could connect the concept of culture and language to the teaching and learning process better.

Tara also extended her understanding of the concept of privilege in relation to the social world. Although she already understood what being underprivileged meant in her personal life and displayed confidence in showing her history, she did not understand why others, having experienced similar difficulties in their past lives, felt uncomfortable. During the privilege-walk activity and the discussion afterwards, she comprehended that privilege invokes several life situations in which individuals can and have the right to feel differently than what she would expect:

I was not one of the people who felt uncomfortable, perhaps because I already thought a lot about my past and things that happened. I also learned not to be ashamed of who

you are... There were others though, who were very uncomfortable with going a step back. It made me think. I was taking steps back, because it was the truth and my past. It is so normal for me and I would be very open to strangers about some things, so it was not a problem to show my steps in this exercise. Others, who took steps back, told me that it felt very bad. I wonder if it is because they are ashamed of something. We learned that culture is something you cannot change; it is a part of who you are, but obviously that does not mean you cannot be ashamed of it. I liked this exercise. It made me think about others and myself in a very different way.

### *Reconstructing experiences in the past*

Tara usually reconstructed a memory in the past, now supported by a deeper conceptual and personal understanding. She often described how differently she would act now if she could go back in time. This was noticeable when she reflected on the dynamics of culture, language and learning:

... It happened to me. I am X (*heritage culture*) and perhaps a little shy. I always thought that Y (*host country culture*) pupils are so direct and out forward. The teachers (*in host country*) always were complaining that I am not saying much in class. Now when I think about it, I had to speak in a non-native language all the time in a class full of Y children. That is what I realized on a personal level.

Tara also changed her attitude about open and affirming classroom atmosphere after observing RTBA. Previously, she seemed to have internalized the school practices that she participated in her childhood, which typically emphasized good grades, strict assessment and grade as indicator of a good student. However, for the first time in her life, she experienced in a course that a teacher educator cared for students and for their emotional well-being, which made her feel as an important part in the teaching-learning process. Consequently, she

transformed her view on formal evaluations, replacing her vision of educational success to one where students are affirmed and respected as individual human beings:

I also realized how openness is important for teaching and learning... being open to the problems the students are facing gives them the feeling that they are understood and respected in their uniqueness. For the first time in my life, I was able to tell a teacher, that I am not able to write my essay because (*personal reason*)<sup>2</sup>. I think besides the fact that it felt good to be able to tell, it also felt like I am important and not the marks I get. As a child, I always felt like marks are more important than my feelings and me. I could feel awful but if I had good marks, everything was just fine. I believed in this for a long time, but now I realized that the only thing, that really is important, is I. When telling about my personal problem and not being able to fulfill the requirements for this course in time, I felt like I am the most important part in this course, not the mark I get and it feels good.

Observation of the RLE and RTBA made Tara ponder on her previous teaching style. She identified the problem in transmitting fixed knowledge rather than creating knowledge together with learners. She understood that being receptive to the knowledge that learners brought to class would have enhanced teaching and learning, and showed openness and a vision for changing her behavior in the future:

I was training unemployed people once. I thought I was very open to their needs and to their cultures and backgrounds. What I realized now is that one can never be open enough... Those people were not looking for the perfect training in “how to get a job” but for someone who understands them, someone who values them, and for respect. ...It would also have been so important to show them, that they know these things already; they just need to realize that... I think they would have respected me even

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<sup>2</sup> Personal sensitive data. Removed for privacy purposes.

more, when I would have been so good to show them that they are the ones' who can teach me something. I feel somewhat ashamed that I did not do this back then but we always can learn out of our faults.

### *Connections to future practice*

Tara began to form her future pedagogical vision early on during this class. She identified some strategies she would like to use in the future work, transformed the image of the kind of teacher she would like to be and teaching principles due to observing modelling in this course. She deconstructed her past, personal and professional experiences in ways that were reassuring, and demonstrated an implied willingness to transform her practice in the future.

Tara had a traditional mindset about teaching –transmitting content knowledge where students had limited opportunities in creating the teaching and learning experience. However, at the end of the course she clearly exhibited a new vision of teaching and found it essential to involve students more in the instructional process. She now saw students as active creators rather than consumers of knowledge, detached herself from the view of the teacher as a depositor of knowledge and saw herself more as a scaffolder and guide for learning. She reflected on the principles, attitudes and behaviors she would like to show towards students in the future:

I was tutor before and the most important thing for me was to teach what I needed to.... Because of this course, I will now look at my students more closely, which will improve my teaching... Now I think that I should recognize more that students, whom I was teaching, did not have this understanding. Most of them had so many difficulties with methodology and using media. I will now try to integrate this more in my teaching processes and to give them the possibility to tell me, how I could teach them better.

After reconstructing her experience-teaching adults seeking employable skills, she noted:

I would do it now differently. I would talk to and with them about what could help them. I would discuss with them how their situation could be improved and of course train them in “how to get a job” but by heightening their confidence not by teaching what they already knew.... Now I would ask them to help each other, instead of telling them what to do as persons who are unemployed, and who cannot possibly understand... that, is a very important thing that will change.

Tara even acknowledged the usefulness and appropriateness of the RTA used for adult education:

Those methods we learned were especially designed for children but as we used them, I realized that also adults respond to them. They respond differently of course, but the metaphors, the games, the questions and the discussions touch everybody in the same way.

Evidently, because of the experiential learning environment created by the teacher educators, Tara articulated RTA she was going to translate into actual teaching practices in her own future work pointing to the transformative power of modelling CRT.

### **Debby**

#### *Conceptual understanding and self-discovery*

Debby has been developing a deeper understanding on culture and privilege as a part of her identity and knowledge as a teacher throughout her journals. She examined her identity in relation to the concepts discussed in the readings, and although she identified with several aspects of the dominant culture of her home country, started to uncover other subconscious layers of her own personality, such as hybridity due to travels and moving to a new country. This critical self-examination began upon completing the Cultural Inventory exercise:

The biggest shift for me has been (the sometimes uncomfortable) inward gaze. The way this course has forced me to examine, and re-examine my own prejudices, my own cultural lenses through which I view and make sense of the world. Crucially, this course has also enabled me to locate myself in relation to issues of power and privilege, nicely synthesized in the *cultural inventory* activity.

Debby also reflected on her personality after completing a reading assignment that touched on the concepts of multiple identities and hybridity:

The idea that we have multiple cultural identities is interesting to me. Nieto points out that each of our multiple identities is not necessarily claimed or manifest equally. As I begin to reflect on my own multiple cultural identities; X (*home country*), white, female, working class background; I cannot decide which ones are stronger, but I am sure that it is hard to examine your own layers of identity objectively... I also think that I feel very hybrid these days, having spent a lot of time outside of X traveling the world, and now living in Y (*current country of residence*).

Coming from this background, Debby reflected extensively on her privileged status when confronted with it in the RLE:

I really liked how (*the teacher educator*) asked us to confront our own cultural privileges today, and I did notice that this was a difficult thing for many people, including myself, to think and talk about... The point that those who have the most privilege are the least aware of it rang true to me. I think that while I am aware of certain aspects of privilege... there are aspects that I am not often asked to confront. I raised this point with some of the students that I was discussing with, that in fact we are all extremely privileged to be here at this university, and that if I were a woman from Afghanistan or Somali for example, the chances of sitting here in this privileged position would be minimal... As a member of the dominant cultural group in many

ways myself, I cannot change this, I can however be aware of the certain privileges that I have as part of this group, and ensure that I do not exercise those privileges, and work hard to ensure that the needs of all students are met.

The course environment seemed to challenge Debby's privileged status in society. As she participated in conversations with her peers and examined her social status in-depth, she realized her highly privileged position as a member of a dominant group. Consequently, she showed willingness to constantly beware of privileges, yet work for creating equitable education for students.

### *Reconstructing experiences in the past*

Debby constantly revisited cases from her past, now examining them with an extended understanding of culture, power, oppression and privilege. Debby reflected deeply about teaching refugee children, their background; the sublayers of culture and personal history that were not made visible enough in the way she taught before. Re-evaluating this experience, she realized the students probably had complex cultural and personal histories that now she wished for articulating more, also introducing the issue of power into the classroom:

The other thing that I find important in terms of my teaching practice is that, it is what is invisible about culture that can lead to misunderstandings and conflict. In my own experience, teaching ESL to migrant and refugee youth, cultural conflict happened a lot, I think particularly because the majority of my students were newly arrived, had little experience outside of their own culture, and were dealing with shock. On top of 'normal' 'culture shock'... many of my students had experienced war, torture, and loss, and were dealing with vulnerable visa status; some were even living in community detention, while their 'refugee' status was being determined... In hindsight, I wish I had made an even greater effort to reflect upon which aspects of X

(*home country*) culture my students were struggling with the most, and to really delve into what invisible aspects may have been causing my students problems.... I wish I could have worked more on issues of cultural invisibility and issues of power, within the classroom.

Working with immigrant parents in the past was an issue she analyzed after reading a chapter on school and family interactions. After developing knowledge on cultural invisibility, power and culture, she realized that most of the absent families were from a minority ethnic group. While she may have strived to include all the students in the teaching-learning process, this may not have been extended to the whole family. After this class, she reflected on this experience, and recognized the importance of positive parental relations as well:

The thing that stuck with me the most, long after reading this chapter was the issue of teacher/student/parent interaction....This relationship must extend to parents too... I know I have always tried to engage all of my students as individuals, and to foster positive relationships with every one of them, but I have not always managed to do the same with their parents. I recall that in my last post as a primary school teacher... it was a limited number of parents who presented themselves.... Furthermore, it was almost always the parents of the students who belonged to the white, higher socioeconomic class.... As I was a relatively inexperienced teacher in those days, I didn't realize the need to, nor feel the confidence to, run after the parents who didn't come to me (and if I look back this was often the parents of students who were not members of the dominant ethnic and socioeconomic cultural group).

### *Connections to teaching practice*

Debbly transformed the way she thought about teaching, teacher's role, and school curricula. As a former teacher, she had acquired extensive skills and knowledge in teaching,

consequently, transformation rather occurred within the principles of teaching and the role of a teacher in teaching. She exhibited readiness to advocate for students and challenge existing power relations in the current school system, now saw the responsibilities of a teacher in deconstructing culturally hegemonic practices and negative stereotyping in school and would involve all her students in discussions in order to make them fully realize the meaning of social construction of culture, cultural reproduction, and stereotyping:

As a teacher, I think that it is fundamental that we value all of the cultural groups, which exist within the classroom. In addition, I think that teachers have a responsibility to challenge negative stereotypes and to not accept or reproduce practices, which devalue cultural groups. When I return to the classroom, I would like to explicitly teach and involve my students in discussions about the constructed nature of culture.

Debby showed a strong commitment to promote equity and willingness to advocate for her students by critically evaluating and challenging the social processes of schooling. She was particularly enthusiastic about deconstructing stereotypes and fighting oppressive policies and forces in schools. She moved towards being an agent of social change after observing the RLE:

The lectures, readings, and case studies have helped me to realize that while I cannot give up that position of power and privilege, I can recognize it, and I can choose not to exercise it. I can fight harder on behalf of my students when they are disadvantaged because of where they stand on the continuum of power and privilege. I can always strive to challenge power and privilege, and how it operates and is reproduced in the school context. I think that the key thing here is that what educators themselves say and do in relation to cultural diversity, construction of stereotyped categories and the

hidden issues of power and privilege are fundamentally important, and do make a big difference for their students.

She clearly outlined what she would do differently in her future practice:

In my future teaching practice I will continue to challenge curriculum, texts and practices which are constructed from positions of power and privilege and that as a consequence position minority groups in the margins, and as 'outsiders'. For me part of doing this successfully means explicitly teaching my students the skills of critical literacy, so that nothing is 'normalized' or taken for granted.

Debby developed a commitment not only to change her own classroom practices but also to advocate for multicultural curricula in order to ensure the inclusion of minority perspectives in the teaching-learning process. Clearly, she departed from the conventional scope of teaching responsibilities and situated herself within the wider socio-political context of education; ready to advocate for her students by critically examining existing practices, building culturally relevant curricula, and teaching critical thinking skills to promote understandings of the socio-political context of education.

## **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to examine the learning experiences of preservice teachers in a multicultural education course that focused on explicit modelling of CRT strategies, and the possibilities for transformation. Tara and Debby's reflection revealed the importance of modelling CRT strategies in multicultural teacher education for prospective teachers. The teacher educators' practice of critical, justice oriented teacher education that focused on modelling CRT activities helped prospective teachers to extend their conceptual knowledge of CRT, critically reflect and reconstruct prior knowledge, and connect these experiences to future teaching practice.

The learning journeys of Tara and Debby were initiated by observing and reflecting on explicit modelling of CRT in this course. In their journals, these pre-service teachers discussed the self-reflection that occurred because of the activities, openness of the learning environment and acceptance they felt in class, and the transformation of their thinking. Through the explicit modelling of CRT activities and environment, the teacher educators enabled the pre-service teachers to experience the “doing” of the curriculum, not just provide information, so that they could later reflect on their own experience in a critical way (Korthagen et al. 2006). Because of this experience, they have demonstrated an on-going willingness and open-mindedness to change (Hollie 2018).

Tara and Debby showed a clear connection between their experiences of modelling CRT in the course and developing conceptual knowledge of CRT. Over the semester, through engagement in the various activities, assignments and readings, they acquired a greater conceptual understanding of culture and identity as it relates to teaching and learning. At the beginning of the course, they demonstrated limited knowledge or conflated views about CRT. However, at the end of the course, they acquired greater knowledge of CRT, restructured their frames of reference and imbibed specific strategies they would transfer to their future practice, indicating that they experienced transformation (Mezirow 2003). This finding is important in light of evidence suggesting that a first step in becoming responsive is developing a knowledge base on diversity, diverse learners and families (Gay 2010). The fact that they extended their conceptual knowledge, and considered such thinking central to teaching, offered clear recommendation for the role of modelling in teacher education (Lunenberg et al. 2007). Due to the limited evidence regarding the value of modelling CRT in teacher education, the presence of conceptual development is of no small consequence.

The findings suggest that participants reconstructed their prior knowledge based on new impressions from the activities and environment in this class. Tara and Debby

relinquished previous truths, and took on a new meaning of CRT; made possible by the safe and permissive environment. By participating in the responsive environment, they reflected and re-evaluated their personal identity and roles as teachers; revisited previous personal experiences and teaching practices, and now examined them applying an expanded knowledge of concepts such as privilege and oppression in multicultural settings. They further connected these understandings to pedagogical situations and transformed the way they thought about teachers' role in education. Concomitantly, they depicted strong new perspectives on pedagogy and articulated new teaching objectives and principles. This commitment is aligned with Loughran and Berry's (2005) claim that simply providing information will not lead to transformation, but explicit modelling is necessary for teacher educators to create a more interactive, critical, and safe learning environment. This finding advances the literature which has identified modelling to be a better alternative to the traditional methods of teaching in higher education (Lunenberg et al. 2007) if students are to go beyond the "foods-and-festivals" approach and practice responsive teaching with a more critical, social constructionist framework (Acquah and Commins 2017).

Tara and Debby developed strong beliefs against deficiency models and passive, knowledge-transmission methods of instruction that characterize many classrooms in schools (Freire 1970/2005; Valencia 2012). This transformation was evident in participants' expressed plan of action both personally and professionally. Tara and Debby articulated being moved into doing something new that attended to the wider social, historical, political, and cultural contexts of education. They articulated a vision for creating an environment for learning, a nurturing and challenging space in which to work, and claimed confidence in applying specific activities in their future work. The course has provided these preservice teachers the opportunity to be immersed in CRT and therefore, experience CRT through their own life. They reflected on different learning tasks that allowed them to interact with each

other and discuss their own cultural backgrounds; gain self-awareness; and feel empowered to combat stereotypes and inequality. Due to their own positive experiences in the class, they were eager to utilise this new knowledge and awareness in the future.

Tara and Debby critically reflected on the three dimensions of modelling CRT proposed in this study (Figure 1). However, the extent and ways of reflecting on these aspects varied tremendously, delineating different journeys. Tara realized the deficiencies in her previous attitude and knowledge and built strong new principles and values for teaching, mostly because of CRT attitudes/behaviors and environment. Debby reflected on identity and developed teaching principles, values and roles situated in the socio-political context, advocating for deconstructing cultural hegemony. In this way, the range of experiences of the participants provided multiple perspectives around modelling CRT. That the different elements of CRT strategies (Figure 1) had different impact on the learning journeys of the participants indicates the importance of all three pillars to be present in diversity courses to provide learning opportunities for students.

The results of this study must be interpreted in the light of several limitations. Even with evidence of the impact of the modelling of CRT on participants' knowledge and visions about teaching, no set claims can be made about the effectiveness of these strategies in the actual transfer into the classroom setting. Future research that follows pre-service teachers from this type of CRT environment into their actual classrooms is recommended. Given the case study, the findings did not aim to reach generalisability to all programs in teacher education, but offered valuable insights into the learning experiences of preservice teachers who encountered modelling CRT in teacher education.

## **Conclusions**

This study explored how two preservice teachers experienced modelling CRT in a teacher education course, and the consequent transformation of their knowledge and vision

about teaching. Modelling as an organic whole had a stimulating role in participants' transformation in becoming culturally responsive teachers. The transformation observed included highly interrelated aspects of self-development and professional learning as teachers, situated in a socio-cultural perspective and complemented with critical reflection. It is recommended that teacher education educates preservice teachers as 'whole persons' and not only to 'deliver instruction' (Freire 1970/2005; Gay and Kirkland 2003). The current study also delineated a framework for modelling CRT. It is recommended for teacher educators to model responsive teaching strategies and activities, responsive teacher behavior and attitudes, and responsive learning environment if they are to transform prospective teachers personally and professionally, and help them become compassionate, successful teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

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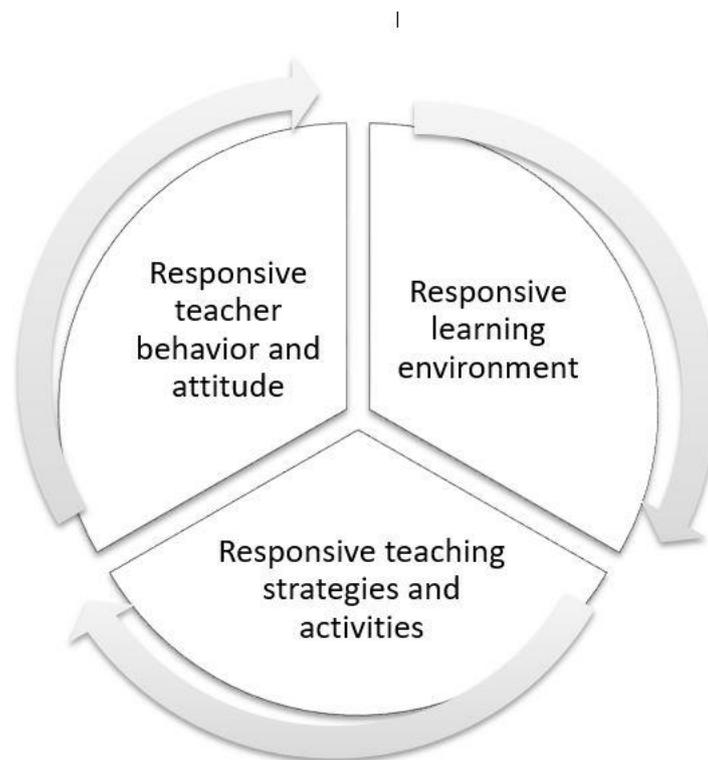


Figure 1. Key elements in modelling CRT.

**Table 1. Teaching Strategies Used and Their Pedagogical Purposes**

<b>Teaching Strategy</b>	<b>Description of Activity</b>	<b>Pedagogical purpose Reference</b>
Line-Up-Game	Fun icebreaker game. Students stand in alphabetical order according to a particular criterion such as first name, language, etc.	Cross-cultural interactions and experience.
Pair-Group-Discussions ('turn and talk', 'mix and match')	Students talk in pairs or group. Example, post-it activity where students wrote their ideas and displayed them on the walls, and then discussed those in groups.	Opportunities for interaction and exchange of ideas. Effective way of having students discuss topics and respond to questions.
Letter H- Game Nine-Dot-Game	Simulation games for exploring cultural frames of reference, e.g. connecting nine points with a single line.	Understanding of cultural socialization, open-mindedness.
Privilege Walk	An experiential activity in which Participants line up in a straight line across the middle of a room and move forward and backward depending on whether a statement applies to them or not.	Highlights how people benefit or are marginalized by systems in the society. (Many versions exists online).
Cultural Market	Students' share and exchange things about their culture (both artefacts and values and beliefs) that are important to them. They are asked to learn ten things about ten cultures.	Cross-cultural communication, cultural awareness, and open-mindedness.
Cultural Inventory	Students write about their own cultural history using a variety of criteria and prompts.	To facilitate cultural self-awareness.
Case study	Small groups of students work on a case (read text or interview a student from marginalized background) and present their findings in class.	Learn dynamics and manifestations of cultural worldviews, how to mediate behavior, interactions, communication, relationships.
Field Immersion	Exposing teacher candidates to the realities of a diverse educational setting.	Intercultural development, self-cultural awareness.
Critical reflection	Students keep learning journals detailing their developing understandings and learning process from the readings, lectures, observations, and the seminars.	Fosters critical self-examination and reflection on practice. Acquah and Commins (2015)