

# Embracing Alter-Identities: Socio-Cultural Development for Graduate Education

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## Abstract

*This qualitative case study examines one faculty member's approach toward instilling culturally immersive experiences into graduate curriculum. Participants completed course assignments designed to enhance their multicultural understanding and competence. Course assignments culminated in an immersive experience where students embodied an alter-identity representative of a culture, sub-culture, or group either foreign to the student or opposite themselves. Results indicated that the designed cultural immersion did assist students in transitioning their cultural knowledge from a basic understanding to a greater cultural competence.*

Keywords: culture, identity, graduate education

The cultural gap between teachers and students in secondary education is vast (Sleeter, 2001). While this is true for all public education, it is particularly relevant for agricultural education. In fact, Schmitt and Bender identified a professional cultural gap as early as 1971. In their article, *Teacher Preparation for the Culturally Different*, they proposed eight premises for which teacher education programs could prepare future teachers to better serve minority populations. Their proposal stipulated teacher education institutions provide unique experiences, activities and preparation for teachers of minority populations (Schmitt & Bender, 1971). Yet, in the four decades since, agricultural education has continued to be a relatively homogeneous profession (Luft, 1996; Sleeter, 2001; Webster & Hoover, 2006).

Researchers in agricultural education have examined diversity issues within the profession for decades (Alston, English, Graham, Wakefield & Farbotko, 2010; Jones, & Bowen, 1998; Talbert & Larke, 1995; Woods, 2004). Several sought to determine the extent to which cultural diversity was addressed at both the secondary and post-secondary level. Luft (1996) examined this topic with secondary educators in Nevada. Luft found agriculture teachers made little effort to recruit minority students into their programs.

Additionally, the extent to which secondary agriculture teachers' incorporated cultural diversity was often limited. Within the same study, he established the means by which teachers were prepared to work with culturally diverse students. Only 33% of participants reported having multicultural education integrated into multiple university courses. The remaining two-thirds professed having one course or one in-service workshop focusing on multicultural education. Results from Luft's (1996) study begged the question, "How effective were the pre-service/in-service programs at providing multicultural understanding and culturally relevant pedagogy for future educators?" Luft's results provide a foundation for Brown's (2005) assertion that often times, individuals who complete a stand-alone cultural diversity course leave unchanged; many have their cultural stereotypes and perceptions reinforced.

Warren and Alston (2007) examined agricultural educators' perceptions of cultural understanding and student inclusion in North Carolina. Study participants confirmed, secondary agricultural educators should strengthen relationships with all students by gaining an understanding of their respective cultures and learning styles. Respondents also agreed that student diversity broadens the perspectives of teachers

and students alike and viewed multicultural education training as a possible solution to increase student inclusion within the classroom. Multicultural education is defined as a process of preparing teachers for social, political, economic certainties they will encounter within a culturally diverse society (Warren & Alston, 2007). Results from Warren and Alston's (2007) study support Luft's (1996) claim that agriculture teachers are not adequately prepared to teach diverse audiences, maintaining teachers can do much better at meeting the needs of diverse students within their current schools.

It is evident that agriculture teachers need multicultural exposure and culturally relevant training to be effective in culturally pluralistic classrooms reflective of our diverse society (Woods, 2004). This includes embracing broader definitions of diversity. Within this study we incorporated Talbert and Edwin's (2008) assertion that embracing broader definitions of diversity moves teachers past mere knowledge of cultural variety and into the realm of application, valuing students of different gender, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle, and sexual orientation (Talbert & Edwin, 2008). Once teachers understand and embrace diverse students they must be able to adapt their pedagogy to meet student needs. This includes the ability to recognize cultural transitions and adapt teaching practices to reach broader audiences (Talbert & Edwin, 2008).

Teacher educators can offer pre-service and in-service students opportunities to expand their multicultural scope as well as pedagogical application by challenging them with creative and engaging immersive experiences (Webster & Hoover, 2006). To become culturally competent, pre-service and in-service teachers must not only be exposed to different cultures, but also immersed into cultural life, gaining a deep understanding of cultural practice and meaning (Brown, 2005). These experiences are needed to address the increasingly diverse and constantly changing demographics of the student population (Banks, 2008; Brown, 2004, Webster & Hoover, 2006; Woods, 2004).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Two developmental theories inform this study. The first relates to teachers personal and

professional identities. Brown (2005) affirms that it is important for educators to gain an understanding of factors that shape their moral and ethical belief systems prior to examining their relationship with other cultures. Therefore, researchers used Chickering's (1969) theory of identity development as a basis for the study. Chickering (1969) proposed seven vectors of identity development, intertwining such social cognitive factors as intellectual and interpersonal competence, emotional regulation, cultural tolerance, individual purpose and integrity; key characteristics associated with multicultural development (Banks, 2008; Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). It is important to note that Chickering's vectors are not sequential in nature; rather they intertwine with one another at various developmental stages. Chickering's (1969) work focused extensively on post-secondary student identity development, specifically the time frame between late adolescence (ages 18-24) and early adulthood (ages 22-34), making it germane to this study.

The second theory focused specifically on multicultural development, particularly the process of understanding and interacting with diverse cultures. Helms (1990) posited that as individuals interact with diverse cultures, they negotiate a five-step process, known as Helms' (1990) Racial Identity Model. She speculated that an individual's first encounter with race begins with a lack of knowledge and understanding, resulting in issues of color-blindness, or disregard for racial intricacies. They then exhibit bouts of defensiveness, denial, and contradiction as a result of personal beliefs being challenged by concrete experiences. It is not until, what Helms (1995) identified as the pseudo-independence stage, that an individual has a defining experience that brings prior naïve behaviors to light. Once pseudo-independence has been achieved, the individual reflects, sets personal goals, and redefines their personal beliefs and attitudes (Helms, 1990). While Chickering's (1969) vectors intertwine with one another during multiple stages, Helms (1995) process is quite sequential.

As both theories directly inform graduate student cultural and identity development, it was imperative that a conceptual model be developed

that crosswalks the primary tenets of both processes. See Figure 1.

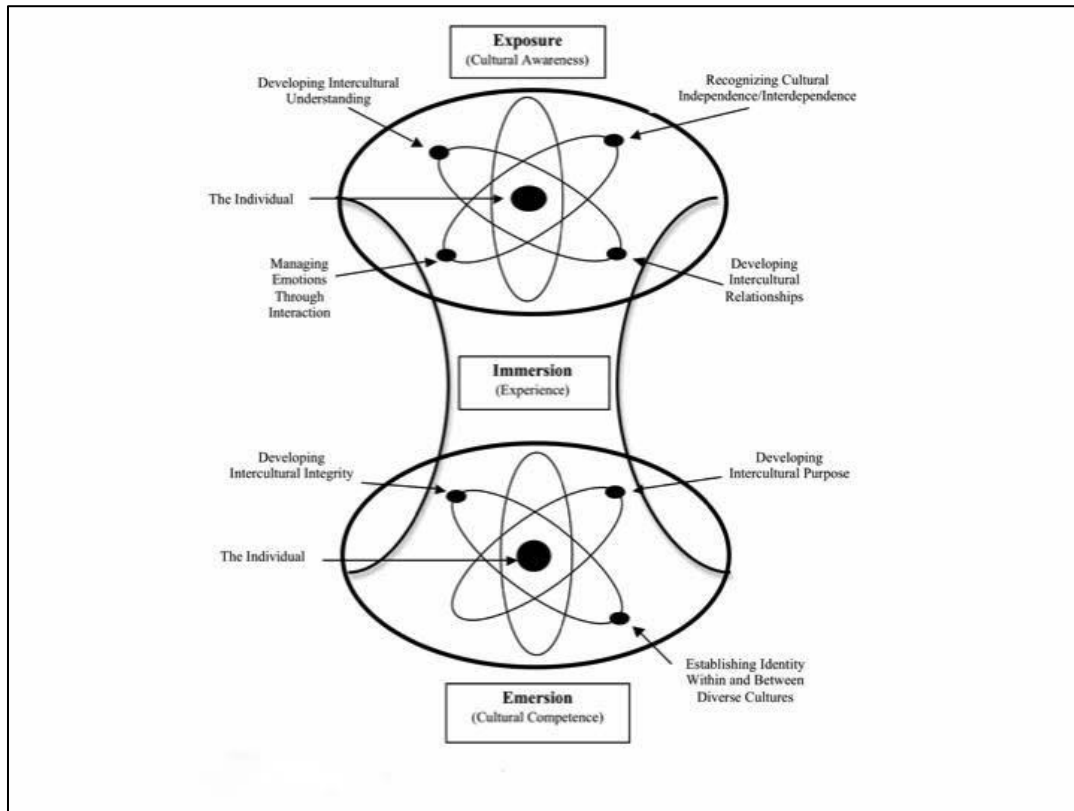


Figure 1. Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice

The *Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice* is a conceptual representation of both individual student identity and cultural development processes. However, analogous to both foundational theoretical models, it is complex. The developmental stages *Exposure*, *Immersion*, and *Emersion* are intended to be linear in nature; similar to Helms' (1990) model. However, the sub-phases within each stage are not successive; rather individuals travel within and between each phase at different rates, allowing both self and others to be discovered simultaneously (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Damon & Hart, 1982).

**Exposure.** The first developmental stage, *Exposure*, encompasses pre-service and in-service educators who have limited exposure to one or more diverse populations. As students are introduced to diverse populations, they negotiate between four experiential phases in no particular order. Students experiencing the phase

titled, *Developing Intercultural Understanding*, cultivate a basic understanding of cultures within society (Helms, 1995). This knowledge is derived from individual perception and is susceptible to embedded bias and social conditioning. The phase titled, *Recognizing Cultural Independence and/or Interdependence*, includes students recognizing their own unique culture and the characteristics that define them (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Concurrently, the individual recognizes the interconnection between themselves and other cultures. The third phase, *Developing Intercultural Relations*, depicts students seeking out relationships with those different from them (Helms, 1995). However, embedded bias and social conditioning often hinders students as they develop these relationships. Lastly, students learn to *Manage their Emotions*, as they interact with diverse cultures (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Within this phase, students identify and manage their own emotions as well

as develop empathy toward the cultures they seek to understand. It is important to note that while most students experience some aspect of cultural awareness, they may never progress toward becoming culturally competent (Spring, 2007).

**Cultural Immersion.** Researchers recommend pre-service and in-service educators be immersed in cultural settings to enhance their cultural development (Banks, 2008; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; Wiest, 1998). However, the recommended length of the experience is being debated and is often dependent upon the individual's prior experiences (Ishii, Gilbride, & Stensrud, 2009; Nieto, 2006). Throughout the cultural immersion stage, students utilize their basic cultural knowledge as they become immersed into one or more cultures, enhancing their cultural competence. As students experience more and more cultural nuances they often begin to think and react as part of the chosen culture (Nieto, 2006).

It is imperative to understand that the overall quality of the immersive experience may be dictated by both the student's openness to the explored culture and their perceived intensity of each cultural experience. In other words, student embedded cultural bias could lead to negative experiences. Conversely, negative reactions from the identified culture can also influence the immersive experience. The experience could be the catalyst to propel an individual into the culturally competent phase, or send students back to the cultural awareness phase (Banks, 2008; Brown, 2005). Therefore, it is critical that students engage in quality immersive experiences, that are both challenging yet educational.

**Emersion.** The final developmental stage, *Cultural Competence*, includes pre-service and in-service students who embraced or had a positive immersive experience and moved beyond a basic understanding of cultural awareness (Sue, 2001). Within this stage, students experience three sub-phases both individually and simultaneously. As students traverse the phase titled, *Developing Intercultural Integrity*, they transition from a rigid understanding of culture and begin incorporating others' interests. They may also begin to *Re-establish their Identity*. Within this phase the individual becomes comfortable with themselves both intra and interpersonally.

Finally, educators *Develop Intercultural Purpose* as they evaluate their purpose in relation to cultural inclusion and interaction. The developmental model is intended to allow educators to "emerge" from their experience with and enhanced cultural efficacy. This model is meant to be re-entered, at various stages and phases, as an individual encounters new cultures.

### Purpose/Objectives

Researchers in education recommend students be immersed into diverse cultures to deepen their multicultural understanding, empathy, and educational practice (Banks, 2008; Talbert & Edwin, 2008). This qualitative case study examined one faculty member's approach toward instilling culturally immersive experiences into an advanced teaching methods graduate course. The case study was framed using the research question, "How do students, participating in a graduate level advanced teaching methods course, respond to course assignments derived from the Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice?" In order to better explore the proposed question, researchers' examined the educational process and its influence on student multicultural competence. Lastly, researchers examined the personal and professional impact of the experience one year after completion.

### Methods and Procedures

#### Research Context

This qualitative case study examined one faculty member's approach toward infusing culturally based practices into an advanced teaching methods graduate course. More specifically, the instructor/researcher, co-researcher and graduate research assistant examined a six-phase educational process titled *Cognitive Cultural Competency* (CCC), derived from the Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice. The CCC process was an attempt to infuse the cultural model into educational practice.

**Cognitive Cultural Competency Process (CCC).** As part of the course, students were given several assignments informed by the researchers conceptual model. While educational

researchers' suggested students be fully immersed into a cultural setting for an extended period of time (Brown, 2005); it is understood that several barriers exist when implementing this process at the post-secondary level. Some of these barriers include course scheduling, student credit hours and courses covering multiple student learning objectives. Therefore, the CCC was infused within established course assignments. The primary purpose was to assist in-service professionals and graduate students in transitioning from a basic cultural understanding to implementing culturally competent pedagogy. Assignments were designed to scaffold student multicultural development using the Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice. The six-phase CCC process is outlined below:

### **Identity Confirmation And Cultural Exposure**

**Understanding of self.** Educators must first understand themselves before they can begin to understand others, and more importantly their relationship with others (Chickering, 2008; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). The first cultural assignment included reflective questions that assisted in defining one's identity (i.e. citizenship, culture, race, class, religion, sexual orientation) as it relates to societal norms, self and others. This assignment lasted two weeks and allowed students to identify and reflect on imbedded biases. Finally, students presented their reflections to the professor and each other using a media of their choice.

**Alter-identity selection.** Students were challenged to create an alter-identity once they clearly articulated their individual identity and embedded biases. Identifying ones embedded cultural bias was critical as it provided a rubric for alter-identity development. For example, a student may have religious values that promote modesty and valuing of the human body. This individual may choose a social subculture that is identified by tattoos, piercings, and revealing clothing to serve as their alter-identity. Alter-identities represented a culture, sub-culture, or group of people that was either foreign to the student or opposed tenets of their true identity. It is important to note that students selected their

alter-identities within a broad context, allowing for individual ownership of the experience.

**Alter-identity research.** Next, students were given four weeks to research their selected role. Students were given time to examine the cultural nuances of their chosen roles in an attempt to accurately portray their new identity. They accomplished this task by conducting personal interviews; shadowing individuals who embodied their identity of interest; reviewing literature pertinent to their new identity and social observation.

**Alter-identity development.** Lastly, students enacted their alter-identity in a social setting of their choice. This "practice" phase limited one's tendency to proliferate cultural stereotypes as they obtained feedback within a chosen environment. Furthermore, this step allowed students to become more comfortable with their alter-identity, enhancing their identity transformation.

**Cultural immersion.** Once students obtained a clear understanding of their new identity and had practiced embodying their new role, they were immersed into a public mall setting. The mall was chosen as it allows students to interact with diverse cultures across the community. For two hours, students personified a cultural identity that was either foreign or opposite their own. As part of their assignment students were encouraged not to break character when interacting with others, and embrace the cultural interaction associated with the public setting. The length of the immersive experience is much debated (Ishii, Gilbride, & Stensrud, 2009; Nieto, 2006), therefore, the two-hour time frame was chosen as it fit within the time constraints of the course.

**Reflection.** Immediately following the immersion, students gathered with the instructor/researcher to orally reflect on their experience and re-establish their personal identity. This reflection period, lasting an hour and a half, allowed students to reflect on their experience and compare their stories with their peers. It also allowed the instructor/researcher the opportunity to interact informally with his students, enhancing his understanding of their process experience. Finally, a written reflection was due one week after the experience, allowing for deeper analysis.

### **Research Design**

While the research incorporated a graduate level advanced teaching methods course, the primary unit of analysis was the individual graduate student. Therefore, a layered case study analysis was deemed most appropriate (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). Layered case studies are small individual cases (individual graduate students) that provide insight and/or explain the larger case (all student responses to the CCC) (Patton, 2002).

Eight students within an Advanced Teaching Methods in Career and Technical Education course participated in the study. All participants received prior academic training in one of three areas: agricultural education, extension education, or leadership education. Six participants were practicing professionals; two were full time graduate students. Participants were studied over a 15-week spring semester.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Students maintained course journals throughout the CCC process. Within their journals students were asked by the instructor to reflect on each phase. Additionally, non-formal conversations with both the instructor and students were documented in an instructor journal. Furthermore, course assignments associated with the CCC were collected for analysis. Upon course completion, data were collectively gathered for analysis. Finally, a co-researcher interviewed study participants, by phone, after a year had passed to examine the long-term impact of the process. Phone interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis consisted of both first cycle (open) and second cycle (axial) coding techniques (Patton, 2002). One member of the research team, trained in qualitative analysis, coded student data. The analyst was chosen based on their limited exposure to the educational process and research design; this was purposeful as it assisted in reducing bias associated with participant observation and/or course instruction. Additionally, the analyst had a substantial interest and background in researching processes as-

sociated with multicultural education and diversity awareness.

The coding analyst used holistic coding as a first cycle technique. Saldaña (2009) described holistic coding as method of coding which looks at a set of data and records or grasps emerging and basic themes based upon the entire selection as a whole; holistic coding does not transcribe line by line.

Next, the coding analyst used developmental stages and sub-phases associated with the Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice as a rubric to categorize first cycle themes, completing the second cycle analysis. The coding analyst triangulated first cycle and second cycle data from such sources as 1) student journals 2) instructor's journal 3) course assignments and 4) post experience phone interviews; confirming thematic categories associated with the Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice. Participant quotes, representing thematic categories, were referenced back to student participants as a form of member checking; establishing credibility (Patton, 2002). Finally, the analyst met with their co-researchers, who were participant observers throughout the study, to further clarify and discuss both first and second cycle codes, enhancing the confirmability of the data.

### **Limitations to the study**

This study represented eight participant responses toward a culturally based educational process. One primary limitation includes the students' ability to choose their alter-identity. While students are encouraged to stretch their cultural capacity during this process, they may choose roles that are familiar to them or even support established biases. Another limitation may include the time frame students were given to embrace their alter-identity. Yet, the research surrounding time for immersion is still inconclusive. Additionally, the length of experience is often dependent on the intensity of the individual experience. Moreover, the CCC is tied to a course grade; students may embellish their experience if they perceived it would enhance their grade. Furthermore, results only pertain to the participant's chosen alter-identity and cannot be generalized to other cultures or subcultures. Lastly, while the analysts substantiated back-

ground in multicultural education and diversity was viewed as a strength during the coding process, his passion toward the topic could have influenced the coding process. This was countered through member checking and peer debriefing.

**Results and Findings**

Researchers’ sought to evaluate graduate student responses toward a faculty developed

cultural educational process. The following results are presented using the participant’s voice. It is important to note that the presented quotes are representative of a larger data set categorized by the CCC process. In some cases, thematic categories, identified within each stage, are presented as subheadings. In order to maintain anonymity, all students are identified by their alter-identity (Table 1).

Table 1

*Student alter-identities*

Autistic Adult	Abusive Wife
Victorian Goth	Goth
Pregnant Teenager	Lesbian
Homeless person	Adult with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

**Understanding of Self**

Researchers’ emphasize the importance for students to understand themselves before they comprehend their relationship with others (Chickering, 2008; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). The first CCC assignment prompted students to clarify their adult identity and examine their relationship with others, setting a foundation for their cultural journey. This self-identifying process allowed students to internally reflect on personal morals, ethics and embedded biases.

The following outlines student responses to the self-identification process. This process best represents the sub-phase Recognizing Cultural Independence and/or Interdependence within the Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice as students began to recognize their unique culture and characteristics that define them.

**Cultural bias: Initial recognition.**

While all students were able to sufficiently articulate their adult identities, a few used the assignment as a first step toward examining their relationships with others. In fact, as if for the

first time, the assignment highlighted cultural bias and/or unfamiliarity; “Being a little bit of an extrovert, I enjoy meeting with people and socializing. I don’t know what it would be like to not be able to communicate with others” (Autistic Adult). This was also the case with the student who embraced a gothic identity, “I’m usually a very happy person that likes to smile, I love bright colors, and I’m pretty plain. I don’t normally like to stand out or do things that draw attention to myself” (Victorian Goth). During an informal discussion she stated that she had never thought about what it was like to live what she considered to be a “darker” lifestyle.

**Pre-determined bias: Religious base.**

Other students were openly able to acknowledge their cultural biases, leading the researchers to believe there had been prior reflection regarding cultural dealings. Many students credited their religious beliefs as a catalyst for their cultural viewpoints, “As a devout Catholic, I am opposed to homosexual relationships and don’t understand their choices.” (Lesbian). “I have grown up with a grounded family life and the Christian belief. Therefore, among the many morals instilled in me is saving sex for

marriage” (Pregnant Teenager). “I am also a devoted Christian who teaches the teen Sunday school class... Stating this, I know that it is wrong to be judgmental towards others no matter what the reason” (Homeless Person). During the self-identification process, most students identified their family, friends and/or church as having great influence on their cultural perceptions. These entities helped shape their moral and ethical values. However, upon entering their profession, they interacted with individuals who often challenged their personal values. This was specifically the case of the Homeless person who identified himself as a Christian, yet admittedly passed judgment on the homeless population.

### Alter-identity Selection

**Individual motivation.** Once students were able to articulate their identity, they were asked to choose an alter-identity representing a culture, sub-culture, or group of people that was either foreign to the student or opposed tenets of their true identity. One participant chose to explore an alter-identity associated with autism as he had difficulty relating to an autistic student he had in his classroom, “I want to gather the view point of what it is like for autistic individuals to focus and live out their day to day lives” (Autistic Adult). Another student expressed difficulty understanding family members who were either seen as verbally abusive or verbally abused, “I don’t understand how people can have complete disregard for the feelings of others... I would like to see what that really must be like” (Abusive Wife). However, there was hesitation toward immersion into subcultures:

I’ve never really had sympathy for Goths when they complain about the stereotypes they receive and the looks and comments because I feel like they bring it upon themselves.... I was not the least bit excited about this activity. I was confused and most of all, worried that I could not pull off someone who was not me. (Victorian Goth)

In direct contrast, the student who personified the Pregnant Teenager hoped the experience would solidify her moral beliefs and expectations through social reaction, “While I real-

ize that many folks do not view sexual relationships the same way, I am hoping for some hateful glances or concerned looks because without these reactions I will fear that teen pregnancies have become an accepted norm in our society.” It was interesting to find that each student chose his or her role for completely different reasons. The Autistic student used the opportunity to enhance his professional aptitude and student relations. Yet, the Abusive Wife chose her role to gain deeper insight into her family. Finally, the Pregnant Teenager chose her role in hopes of confirming her moral and ethical beliefs. These examples highlight the sub-phase Developing Intercultural Understanding, as students varied regarding their basic understanding of cultures within society.

### Alter-identity Research

Next, students were encouraged to research their newly established identities. The methods by which they researched their roles also varied from individual to individual.

**Social observation and individual discussion.** Several students honed their alter-identities by observing cultures within a natural setting, “I have taken a two-fold approach, one being observation and discussion and two being the study of autism on a small scale” (Autistic Adult). One student did not have to externally observe her identity as many of her family members exhibited characteristics of her chosen identity, “In order to prepare for this role, I have watched my peers, family and continued to read” (Abusive Wife). Others requested interviews with cultural members, “I went to the (county) County Health Department and spoke with a health educator who deals with pregnant teens” (Pregnant Teenager). “We [participant and an open lesbian] met to break the ice and get to know each other better. We talked a lot about our background ... and aligned our date night” (Lesbian).

**Literary research.** Others used written sources such as internet sites, books and pamphlets to become culturally informed. “To research for this role, I spent quite a bit of time online. I looked up informational sites...as well as sites specific to religious tolerance and the Goth



lifestyle” (Victorian Goth). “In preparation for the social role play night, I have read articles from medical research journals, as well as publications from the International OCD Foundation to learn more about the condition” (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder).

Within the course, students were given latitude regarding research development. This allowed students to tailor their research toward their alter-identity. It also allowed them to explore multiple social perspectives, establishing a more comprehensive understanding of their alter-identity. Variance in student research mirrors the sub-phase Developing Intercultural Relations, as students sought out relationships with or observed cultural groups different from themselves.

### Alter-identity Development

**The continuum of comfort.** Once students adequately researched their roles and were confident in their cultural knowledge, they began to enact their alter-identity in a setting of their choice. Students who were more comfortable with their alter-identity pilot-tested their role, experiencing cultural immersion for the first time. The Goth student’s cultural eyes opened as she saw firsthand how members of society perceived her newly formed identity:

When I finally got out of the car, the salesmen who were huddled outside the building like vultures nodded to each other and started laughing hysterically as they turned away... I wish now that I had pranced back through the mechanics’ bay and into the customer service department to glare one last time at the inconsiderate, closed-minded men who worked in ‘customer service’, but were hesitant to wait on me.

The Autistic Adult also perceived a difference in social communication when enacting his new identity, “At the checkout counter it was one word responses to the point it made the cashier uncomfortable and although she wanted to carry on a conversation, she was unsure how to do so.” While the cashier may not have identified the student as autistic, his limited communication assisted him in understanding how diffi-

cult social communication could be for autistic individuals.

Other students found it difficult to embrace their new identity even in a familiar social setting such as church:

I tried to practice maintaining a solemn attitude on the Sunday afternoon before the role play. It was fairly easy for me to do when I was home alone, but I wasn’t very good at keeping it up around people at church. It just didn’t come natural for me. (Victorian Goth)

Participants who committed to practicing their alter-identity professed frustration, expressing emotions associated with identity transition and social reactions toward their alter-identity. Student emotions exemplified the sub-phase Developing Intercultural Understanding and Managing Emotions within the Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice.

### Cultural Immersion

Once students had a clear understanding of their new identity, had researched their role and had practiced their identity, they were immersed into a public mall setting.

**Emotional reactions to public perception.** The immersion experience struck an emotional chord with student participants. Specifically, it was the lack of social interaction that seemed to disturb the Autistic Adult, “Tonight was intense. For an hour I did not have a person say a single word to me. I got a lot of stares and glances, but zero interaction from the public.” The Goth student also professed being angry, as she perceived discrepancies associated with the way the public interacted with social subgroups, “It was surprising to me how blatant people were with me. People will turn their heads to abusive spouses or homosexuals, but look at a Goth chick like she does not deserve to live. Why? I do not understand.”

**Amplified social perception.** Many students professed feelings of being socially evaluated or judged. And while all students enacted their roles prior to the mall, the larger public setting seemed to enhance feelings of social scrutiny, “Those high class ladies kept an eye on

me; I assume for shoplifting” (Pregnant Teenager). This was also the case with the student portraying a Homeless individual, “There was a period where the parking security drove by, circled around back in front of me, stopped to look, and then continued on.” The perception of social scrutiny seemed to enhance student understanding of being different, however, it may also have been a catalyst for individual cultural assumptions associated with “high class ladies” and “teenage shoplifting”. However, one student was cognizant that her chosen role was the reason for heightened public perception:

The mindset that you take on with obsessive compulsive disorder almost increases your sensory perception ... I found myself more aware of what people were doing, wondering if they were watching me and if I was really noticeable at all. (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder)

In direct contrast, the Victorian Goth student found members of society to have greater tolerance for socially diverse identities, “I was surprised when I walked by an older woman and she asked me if I liked the dress she was looking at. I really didn’t think anyone would ask me for my opinion on style, seeing as how I was dressed a little out of the norm” (Victorian Goth).

The public immersion assignment surprised students, both positively and negatively, as they evaluated public perception. Several students experienced an array of emotions while enacting their alter-identity, supporting the sub-phase Managing Emotions. Moreover, one student affirmed very few differences in social perception, “One woman looked us up and down...we had a lot of interesting conversations on our date which was great” (Lesbian). This example later led students to pose the questions, “Do behaviors differ between heterosexual and homosexual couples in a public setting?”

### Reflection

After the immersion experience students reflected on their experience for one week. This allowed for a metacognitive process in which participants aligned their experiences with their initial personal identities and biases as well as

their course readings. Analysis revealed three developmental themes.

**Social discrimination.** As part of their reflection students acknowledged a deeper understanding of covert social discrimination and its impact on individuals with limited social skills:

Incredible, how we discriminate unwittingly, those who are different. I do not know if the individuals in stores and kiosks who decided not to help me were purposeful in their ignoring me, but it gave me a very isolated and lonely feeling that was uncomfortable for me ... I can never fully comprehend his [autistic student’s] reality, but I do realize now where the anxiousness and discomfort come for him... The knowledge I have gained from this allows me to form better ways to communicate with people of all ability. (Autistic Adult)

This was also true of social identities. One student began to understand the complexities of individual identity. She was also able to experience first hand social reactions associated with the general unfamiliarity of Goth identity in society.

We really should be more open-minded to others’ individuality and not so quick to judge. I’ve also come to realize that a person’s outward appearance may be a reflection of how they feel inside, so maybe what the person needs is not judgment, but rather compassion and understanding. (Victorian Goth)

**Cultural empathy.** In addition to social perception, students began to gain a deeper appreciation of social groups associated with their alter-identities:

At the end of the experience, I felt exhausted, both mentally and physically. I do not understand how people with OCD can carry on with normal, everyday activities and deal with their obsessions... It makes it even harder to imagine how students with OCD can manage to focus and do well in school without some kind of help. (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder)

The Homeless Person viewed the experience as a first step toward remitting his bias toward homeless people, “I have definitely seen a per-

spective that is not common for most people and have hopefully created an experience that will help ease initial communication between someone who appears homeless or of lower income in the future.”

**Professional enhancement.** Others viewed the experience as an opportunity to enhance their professional skills. Especially those pertaining to social populations challenging their moral and ethical values, “Experiences like the role play, and the research done prior to that night, will only help broaden my way of thinking when presenting information, counseling, and advising” (Pregnant Teenager).

After a week of reflection, students seemed to value their immersive experience. Most students Developed Intercultural Integrity as they transitioned from a rigid understanding of culture (self-identification) and began to incorporate the interests of others. Moreover, students Re-established their Identity as they became comfortable with themselves both intra and interpersonally. Finally, participants Developed Intercultural Purpose as they examined their purpose in relation to cultural inclusion and interaction.

### Participant Reflections: A Year Later

Results indicated participants generally valued the CCC educational experience shortly after its completion. However, researchers followed up with the participants to see if they continued to value the experience after a year had passed. During a follow up interview, participants were asked two questions. The first question, “After a year of reflection, do you find last year’s cultural immersion experience to be beneficial?” received several positive responses. The Autistic Adult spoke of his challenges toward understanding individuals and students who were not like him:

Yes, one of the biggest professional struggles I had up till the course was understanding people’s decision making. I had a firm belief that most everybody was like me, thought like me and most importantly learned as I did. Personally, I had never placed myself in other people’s positions and would genuinely be

irritated with people because they did not do things the way that I would.

Similarly, the student with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder addressed the general comfortableness associated with one’s identity and taking it for granted:

You often don’t realize what you have or how much you have until you try to experience things from another person’s shoes. I think we often take things for granted and assume that we know what people feel ... but you can’t ever really know unless you experience the same kinds of situations as they do. You have to go to that next level.

Many students viewed their experience with the CCC as being a catalyst for enhancing their cultural competence. However, two students conveyed limited cultural growth, “Personally, I have not had intense social or professional contact with a GLBT person since the lesbian “date”]. While I have nothing against gay people, I just don’t have much social contact with them” (Lesbian). Relatedly, the Pregnant Teenager perceived the CCC as a method to broaden her cultural exposure, but professed difficulty in embracing her role:

The idea of seeing and living a different viewpoint was a great way to think outside the box and offer new perspective on situations. I will admit that it was very difficult to break through the awkwardness of the assignment and really act the part to truly gain the beneficial effects that the project had to offer.

Results indicated some students allowed their internal bias and/or inability to embrace the assignment limited their experience. Their lack of buy-in or strong imbedded bias kept them in a state of Cultural Exposure and Awareness, rather than motivating them to continue onto Cultural Emergence and Competence.

The second question, “Did the experience influence your personal and professional life?” provoked a wide array of responses. The Homeless Person indicated the process enhanced his ability to provide quality educational programming for people from all socio-economic backgrounds:

It has definitely helped me to not be judgmental or quick to assume things

when seeing people that are in a tough position. Conducting programming within the public school allows me to work with kids from all different financial and personal backgrounds. It has helped me not overlook those that seem less financially supported.

Others viewed the process as setting a foundation for their professional practice, "I try to be more accepting of others and less quick to judge. I haven't got to put this into action yet, but I would like to think that I will be accepting of Goth in my future profession" (Goth). In contrast, the experience not only helped the Abusive Wife relate to coworkers, it enhanced her relationship with her husband:

This experience influenced my personal life in that my now husband and I had some eye opening experiences to what could have been. I do think the fact that we both reflected on the experience very deeply impacted us beyond the actual experience. One of the issues in mine was having an emotionally abusive family and how to control emotions enough so that I do not become that in the future out of habit. I do think that if others would consider these experiences they too could connect to those people in their workplace of a different gender, even sexual orientation.

After a year to reflect, student responses ranged from strictly professional to quite personal. Their development aligned with several aspects of the Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice. While some students were still developing Intercultural Relationships (Goth), others were Developing Intercultural Integrity (Abusive Wife). Finally, it is important to note that even those who professed strong imbedded bias toward their alter-identity (Lesbian) professed attitudinal change, "I have more of an attitude that how people live their lives is their own business. I think people cannot choose their sexual preference, so you can't expect them to change just to conform to societal norms" (Lesbian).

## Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications

All students enhanced their understanding of their chosen culture. While there was variance in cultural development, participants who committed to the CCC process seemed to move beyond basic cultural knowledge and proceeded to the realm of application (Talbert & Edwin, 2008). Not only did these students deepen their cultural knowledge but often-professed feelings of cultural empathy. Furthermore, participants expressed a need to adapt their educational practice to better suit individual needs (Banks, 2008; Brown, 2004, Webster & Hoover, 2006; Woods, 2004).

Results indicated the CCC, informed by the Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice, varied in its application toward developing student cultural competency. In fact, a few students retracted to the Exposure – Cultural Awareness stage as a result of the experience. While not every student progressed to the *Culturally Competent* stage, most exhibited characteristics associated with its' sub-phases. The researchers' believe this is due to the CCC's scaffolded process.

Student results both support and challenge Brown's (2005) assertion that individuals who complete a stand-alone cultural development course may leave unchanged, or with stereotypes being reinforced. The process was intertwined within an Advanced Teaching Methods of Career and Technical Education course; showcasing that culturally based assignments can be implemented within a particular course. Overall, students who committed to the experience seemed to enhance their cultural development challenging Brown's assertion. However, a few participants chose identities that seemed to deepen their cultural bias. One individual held true to her own identity so much that it seemed to hinder the individual's development.

The results from this study are limited to its participants and the alter-identities they chose. While most participants enhanced their cultural awareness and/or competence regarding their experience, it is important to note that cultural understanding may not transfer to other cultures. Therefore, it is recommended that the CCC process be replicated with other agricultural education in-service and pre-service teachers and be

tested in various cultural venues. It is further recommended that the Model for Cultural Identity Development and Practice and correlating Cognitive Cultural Competency educational process be further examined regarding its application of cultural development within agricultural education.

Researchers caution that there are ethnic limitations associated with the CCC. The process is limited in its application toward ethnic and racial diversity as a student may not be able to alter their skin pigment to portray an alternate race effectively. Therefore, it is recommended that social diversity be looked at as a means for immersion in addition to ethnic diversity. As was evidenced, social diversity played a large role with participants in this study.

Instructors wanting to implement the CCC may be hesitant due to limited exposure to the

process. It is therefore recommended that faculty experience the process themselves, prior to their course implementation. Additionally, faculty should pre-reflect with participating students about the process prior to their experience.

Upon implementation, it is recommended that the focus remain on the six-phase CCC process itself rather than the developmental outcome. Participants in this study varied in their commitment to the process and maturity toward cultural diversity. By focusing on the process, students are able to better understand each phase, allowing them to replicate the process with other cultural groups in the future. In doing so, pre-service and in-service teachers will have the tools needed to enhance their cultural competence in multiple cultural settings.

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