



Intercultural Experiential Continuum: A Case Study of Early Childhood Teachers Working with Refugee Children

Ekaterina Strekalova-Hughes^a & X. Christine Wang^b

^a University of Missouri - Kansas City, corresponding author, e-mail: strekalovahughese@umkc.edu

^b State University of New York at Buffalo

ABSTRACT: To address the cultural mismatch between early childhood teachers and refugee students in urban public school settings, this qualitative case study explores how teachers working with young refugees develop interculturally. Grounded in Dewey's experiential transaction theory, we analyze two teachers' contrasting trajectories of intercultural sensitivity development. Our findings highlight the agency of teachers (pre-experience worldview and motivation) and key qualities of intercultural experiences (cultural immersion, cultural isolation, authentic cultural dialog) within experiential transactions. Finally, the study bring to light teachers' *intercultural experiential continuums* where relevant previous, present, and future experiences are interconnected.

Keywords: *teachers of refugee children, intercultural experiential continuum, urban teacher education*

Introduction

Teachers tend to either minimize importance of their students' cultures (Mahon, 2006) or engage in "analytic stereotyping" (Sarangi, 1994, p. 409) and consistently underserve children who would benefit from culturally responsive teaching (Hollins, 2015). *Intercultural sensitivity*, the ability to notice and experience cultural differences (Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003), is critical for culturally responsive teaching (Banks et al., 2005; Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2001). Culture is fluid, evolving (Paris, 2012) and embedded in

the “dynamics of social life” (Sarangi, 1994 p. 410). For teachers to support “cultural dexterity and plurality” in the classroom (Paris, 2012, p. 95), they have to recognize evolving cultural aspects (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006) within their diverse learners in order to sustain cultures “in both the traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used” in society (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

The teacher-learner cultural gap appears to be widening in U.S. schools with increasing numbers of refugee children, a population under recent political scrutiny. In addition to differences from teachers in age, often gender, position, socio-economic status, and experiential background, refugee children come to the U. S. from over 100 countries, speak more than 200 languages (Capps et al., 2015), and generally differ ethnically/racially from their teachers (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Teachers struggle to meet the academic needs of refugee students (Dryden-Peterson, 2015) and continue to veil their students’ cultural backgrounds under what Mahon (2006) refers to as the “invisibility cloak” (Mahon, 2006, p. 139). Likewise, teachers often view cultures as rigid independent entities not “contextualized in terms of social, political and communication-based realities” (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006, p. 475). These views can be especially harmful to refugee children who bring additional layers of intersectionality to the classroom (Davis, 2008; Dervin & Tournebise, 2013). Based on refugee critical race theory (Author, 2016), refugees are manoritized, racialized, and politically stasused members of the society. Refugee researchers need to consider the weight of socio - political contexts on education theory and practice (Gorski, 2008).

Holliday (2010) calls upon researchers to “seek broader picture” when re-imagining the intercultural (p. 27). Grounded in Dewey’s (1938) transactional theory, we look at the contexts and time of participants’ intercultural encounters from an emerging perspective of an *intercultural experiential continuum* from childhood to present. We explore the intercultural development of early childhood educators in an urban public school district with a large refugee student population. We focus on early childhood context as a critical space for continuation of care between home and school.

The overarching question guiding our inquiry is, “How interculturality develops as a result of interaction between a person and experiences?” Specifically, we explore the agency of the teacher and the power of the experience in developing interculturality. Our study centralizes the connection between past, current, and future experiences that are actively mediated by teachers who are the able agents and fluid recipients within each intercultural transaction.

Literature review

Theoretical framework

This study is informed by Dewey's (1938) transactional theory and its principle of experiential continuum. According to the principle of continuity of experience:

...every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. For it is a somewhat different person who enters into them...The principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after. (p. 35)

In this view, a person changes with each experience and these changes affect subsequent experiences. The change is not simply an outcome of bidirectional interaction, but the result of interconnected transactions between a person (organism) and intercultural encounters (environment) — it is a “mutually manipulating process where ‘doing’ and ‘undergoing’ are observed not as dual, alternately assumed roles, but rather as perpetually simultaneous throughout all phases of organismic-environmental transaction” (Roth, 1998, p. 44).

Many studies treat intercultural experiences (e.g., diversity coursework, teaching diverse students, having diverse friends) separately and linearly instead of acknowledging their continuity and interconnectedness. Implicitly, this approach views teachers as newly and passively encountering each experience as opposed to actively synthesizing past and present experiences that collectively impact future. To address this theoretical gap, our study of teachers' intercultural sensitivity employs Dewey's principle of an experiential continuum and experiential transaction. Our participants reflect on interconnected experiences throughout their lifetime and share how these experiences may have changed their interculturality.

Power of experiences in intercultural experiential transactions

Previous research links *intercultural experiences* (domestic/ international encounters with contrasting cultures), to teachers' intercultural sensitivity development. This view originates from what Allport (1954) referred to as the “contact hypothesis”—i.e., the idea that under the right conditions intergroup contact may lower prejudice. Research on intercultural experiences mostly focuses on two areas: a) types of intercultural experiences, and b) specific conditions (qualities) of these experiences.

International and domestic encounters emerge from research as types of intercultural experiences. International experiences include, for example, *studying* (e.g., McGaha & Linder, 2012; Phillion & Malewsky, 2011; Malewski, Sharma, & Phillion, 2012; Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009) and *teaching* abroad (Cushner, 2007; Mahon, 2007; Marx & Moss, 2011; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007). Teacher preparation programs are urged to do all they can to provide teacher candidates with opportunities to engage in such international activities (Cushner, 2011).

In addition to international activities, domestic intercultural experiences provide alternative and more accessible opportunities for intercultural interactions. For example, *intercultural friendships* (Hurtado, 2005), *living in diverse communities* (Bayles, 2009), *learning foreign languages* (Durocher, 2007; Erwin & Coleman, 1998), and *university diversity courses* (Bowman, 2010; Brown, 2004; Chang, 2002). To date, teacher education research has explored the impact of *diverse field placements* (Howell & Arrington, 2008), *inservice diversity training* (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Kose & Lim, 2010), and *teaching in diverse schools* (DeJaeghere & Zhan, 2008; Bayles, 2009).

Under undesirable conditions, intercultural experiences (foreign or domestic) may provoke or reinforce negative intergroup views (Hurtado, 2005). Studies offer some insights regarding more desirable conditions (qualities) of experiences. For example, Dwyer (2004) considered the duration of experiences. Marx and Moss (2011) explored the availability of guided cultural reflection. Correlational studies suggest that no single experience explains all intercultural sensitivity gains (e.g., Brown, 2009). Rather, other factors such as personal differences among people (Coffey, 2013) might mediate effects of intercultural experiences. To address existing gaps in research, this investigation goes beyond isolated experiences and places teachers in the center of experiential transactions as unique and fluid persons actively shaping their *intercultural experiential continuums* (relevant interconnected past, present, and future experiences).

Overall, research on “intercultural experiences” narrowly links the conception of “culture” to foreign countries, languages, and/or race/ethnicity. Dervin (2016) warns that such limited understanding may contribute to discourses of “othering” (p. 43) and mislead teachers to perceive cultures as exotic and foreign. Teachers may fall into “analytic stereotyping” (Sarangi, 1994, p. 409) of their students and their families based on some obvious elements of otherness (e.g., different skin color, foreign accent). This path reinforces the dominant ideology (Holliday, 2010) and sweeps away the underlying cultural plurality and intersectionality present in every classroom. In our analysis we pay close attention to a broader view of culture and intersectionality, “interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices,

institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies” (Davis, 2008, p. 68) to interpret participants’ experiences within their multiple identities in the society (Dervin & Tournebise, 2013).

Person’s agency in intercultural experiential transactions

Coffey (2013) suggests that “a key but under-examined aspect in the development of intercultural competence is understanding our own (inter)subjective predispositions which we bring to intercultural encounters” (Coffey, 2013, p. 266). Research on effectiveness of intercultural experiences underrepresents the importance of individual differences in pre-experience attitudes and predispositions. While qualities of experiences (e.g., longer or shorter duration) have a potential to affect teachers’ intercultural learning, such an effect depends on teachers’ pre-experience characteristics, agency, and social position. In this section we review literature that highlights the role of the person in experiential transactions. Particularly, we look at pre-experience worldview and motivation for experience across differences.

Pre-experience worldview

Pre-experience worldviews, the intercultural sensitivity that teachers have prior to an experience, drives the quality of learning from the experience. First, the pre-experience worldview may determine how well teachers detect cultural traces (Abdallah-Preteillea, 2006) or “repertoires of practice” (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003) during the experience. Because intercultural sensitivity is the “ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences” (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003, p. 422), teachers with higher pre-experience intercultural sensitivity might notice and experience more cultural aspects, thus potentially benefit more from the same intercultural experience.

Second, the pre-experience worldview may mold teachers’ reflection throughout the experience. Rodgers (2002) suggests that “attitudes that the individual brought to bear on the act of reflection could either open the way to learning or block it” (p. 858). In other words, pre-experience worldview colors teachers’ reflective lenses and may nurture or hinder intercultural sensitivity growth.

Motivation for experience

Variations in motivation for intercultural experiences may influence resulting intercultural development. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a theoretical framework exploring motivation, emphasizes the importance of the level of motivation (i.e., how much motivation) and the orientation of motivation (i.e., intrinsic or extrinsic) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation is one’s behavior guided by inherent satisfaction from the

activity. Extrinsic motivation is behavior driven by desire to acquire an award or avoid punishment as a result of the activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, students may take diversity training to satisfy their curiosity about different cultures (intrinsic motivation) or to be more sought-after in the job market (extrinsic motivation). Another example could be a student seeking out mentorship of an older professor to learn more about the discipline (intrinsic motivation) or to access power and privileges associated with her position (extrinsic motivation).

Intrinsic motivation promotes greater engagement in learning activities, deeper conceptual understanding, and persistence with the learning task (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006) and yields positive outcomes in these areas (Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004). Based on decades of motivation research, Ryan and Deci (2000) conclude, “the quality of experience and performance can be very different when one is behaving for intrinsic versus extrinsic reasons” (p. 55).

Only few studies look at motivation for intercultural experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Studies find that stronger intrinsic motivation leads to higher foreign language learning outcomes (Comanaru & Noels, 2009; Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand, 2000). In a study on intercultural encounter between local and international students in Ireland, Dunne (2013) reports evidence of extrinsic motivation (e.g., foreign language knowledge) and intrinsic motivation (e.g., curiosity and interest in international peers). No studies directly explored how motivation for experience influences intercultural sensitivity growth and how such experiences shape future motivation for intercultural encounters (*motivational continuum*). In addition, the existing studies on motivation present culture as mainly associated with different countries and foreign languages, or the “foreign Other” as critiqued by Dervin and Tournebise (2013).

This study examines how teachers’ motivation and pre-experience worldview shape intercultural development within each experiential transaction. We also highlight what we call an *intercultural experiential continuum* – a path of relevant past, present, and future experiences actively mediated by and interconnected through the person.

Methods

This study presents the qualitative component of a mixed-method study of early childhood teachers in an urban public school district with a growing refugee population. A quantitative survey preceding qualitative data collection measured intercultural sensitivity levels of teachers (Author, 2016). The qualitative case study (presented here) investigates the complex transactional relationship between teachers and intercultural experiences.

Participants engaged in hour-long, in-person, semi-structured interviews. The interview questions probed the role that experience might play in intercultural development of early childhood educators teaching young refugees. Seidman's three-step interview sequence—background/history, experiences, and meaning of the experiences—guided the interviews (Seidman, 2006).

Researchers transcribed the interviews and organized the data by matching intercultural experiences across the participants. Then, using constant comparative analysis, we coded the data to identify themes across experiences. Trustworthiness of data coding and interpretation was achieved through peer-debriefing and member-checks (Creswell, 2012; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007).

Holliday (2012) warns researchers that “descriptions of culture are themselves ideological, and... claim to scientific neutrality and objectivity comprise a naive denial of ideology” (p. 39). In conducting and interpreting this study we were conscious that culture is deeply connected to researchers' ideologies. The senior author is a white female in her thirties who came to the U.S. from Russia to pursue doctoral studies. The co-author is an Asian female in her forties who also emigrated from China to pursue a doctoral degree. Sharing an immigrant background, we were cautious about potential biases of oversimplified views of culture as exclusively related to nationality.

Participants

Teachers were selected based on the number of reported intercultural experiences and intercultural sensitivity scores assessed in the quantitative study. Two teachers presented contrasting trajectories of intercultural sensitivity development and were selected as focus cases for in-person interviews. Both teachers travelled internationally, learned several foreign languages, and worked with refugee children. However, their intercultural sensitivity scores were at the opposite ends of the scale. The participants were representative of the U.S. teaching force majority (female, white, native-born, middle class). At the same time, their 22 year age difference added an interesting aspect of intersectionality.

Diane, a 47-year-old white woman, was born and raised in New Orleans and later moved to Northeastern U.S. She earned a bachelor's degree in History, master's degrees in Christian Education and Elementary Education. At the time of the study she taught preschool in an urban public school district where she had worked for 13 years. Diane encountered numerous intercultural experiences (see Figure 1), but had one of the lowest intercultural sensitivity scores (bottom 5% among 281 teachers). Despite her exposure to multiple intercultural experiences, she showed limited intercultural sensitivity growth.

Jane, a 25-year-old white woman, was born and raised in Northeastern U.S. She earned a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and a master's degree in Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). At the time of the study, Jane was teaching kindergarten English as a Second Language (ESL) in an urban public school. Similar to Diane, Jane had a wealth of reported intercultural experiences (see Table 1). In contrast to Diane, she showed a significantly higher level of intercultural sensitivity (top 5% among 281 teachers).

TABLE 1 Reported intercultural experiences

Time	Diane's Experiences	Jane's Experiences
Early Childhood	Lived in a diverse community (New Orleans) Learned French Associated with culturally different peers	No reported intercultural experiences
Middle Childhood	Lived in a diverse community (New Orleans) Continued Learning French Associated with culturally different peers	No reported intercultural experiences
High School	Lived in a diverse community (New Orleans) Learned Spanish Associated with culturally different peers	Learned French
College	Learned German Took diversity course	Learned Spanish Studied abroad (Quebec) Traveled abroad (St. Martin) Taught abroad (Mexico, Wales) Developed intercultural friendship (Mexico) Served ESL students in practicum Majored in ESL Attended extracurricular diversity workshops Volunteered at a refugee resettlement agency
Inservice	Volunteered at a refugee resettlement agency Traveled abroad (Italy, twice) Attended cultural workshops	Developed intercultural friendships (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, India) Learned Arabic Learned Tigrinya

	Teaches refugee children	Teaches ESL in an urban district Teaches refugee children Visits homes of her refugee students Attends cultural community events Organizes cultural events Managed afterschool ESL parent program
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Participants' intercultural experiential continuum profiles

Below we describe intercultural experiential journeys of our two case study participants (Diane and Jane). The ongoing interconnectedness of their past and present experiences served as a pivot for formulating the emerging understanding of an *intercultural experiential continuum* (see findings).

Diane

Diane recalled “growing up in New Orleans. It’s a very integrated place to be...” Brought to New Orleans by her parents, Diane had an early exposure to a potentially transformational intercultural experience. However, when asked to reflect on it, she responded, “I don’t know that I learned anything... not really sure if there’s learning from that.” When later Diane had a choice to move and settle down with her own family, she picked a culturally homogeneous community. “Now we live in [a predominantly White middle/upper class neighborhood], which is not diverse at all.”

Diane learned several foreign languages: French in elementary school, Spanish in high school, and German in college. Foreign language can provide an access to culture. In Diane’s case, however, learning a foreign languages was a “dead-end” experience not used to communicate or learn about cultures. The only value Diane took related to her native language: “I think they really helped me understand English more... it helped me understand some of those irregular verbs in English.”

Diane encountered most of her intercultural experiences circumstantially. For example, Diane’s first travel abroad was incidental (her daughter’s class needed a chaperon for a school trip to Italy). Her second trip to Italy emerged as one of the few exceptions -- it was entirely her idea: “We enjoyed it [first trip] so much that two years later we took my whole family.” Despite the clear motivation, both trips were mediated by tour guides, hardly immersive, and left her intercultural sensitivity intact. Diane’s travel abroad failed to lead to other intercultural experiences. In fact, the second trip potentially damaged Diane’s future motivation. After getting lost without the tour guide, she was worried about feeling “disoriented” again in a foreign country.

Diane volunteered at a local refugee resettlement agency which had potential relevancy to her work with refugee students. However, her learning at the agency focused on resettlement policies rather than diverse refugee cultures. As a result, she failed to connect this intercultural experience to teaching.

Although most of Diane's experiences were "dead-ends", more recently two of them connected. Inspired by a required diversity workshop, she implemented a global market project on South Korea in her classroom. Still, this project lacked cultural relevance to her students (none of them were from South Korea) and focused on teaching surface elements of culture (e.g., unique landmarks). When asked about exploring deeper culture, Diane responded, "I guess I figured they [students] would get that through osmosis." Despite the superficial nature of the international project, Diane expressed motivation to extend the project to other countries in the future: "I am very interested in teaching children about the rest of the world." In her view, culture is associated with foreign countries and people. Her classroom is essentially "culture-free". To teach about culture she overlooked her own students.

Diane's pre-experience worldview might have shaped her interactions with intercultural experiences throughout her life, as illustrated by this quote: "I guess my view is people are the same... That wasn't the way I was raised... to not be suspicious of people that are different than we are culturally. To see people as people and the same."

Diane was raised to downplay cultural differences and see everyone as the same. Her parents' advice to suppress suspicion of culturally different people implies emerging stereotypes. Moving to New Orleans shortly after *Brown v. Board of Education* might have colored her parents' teachings about diversity and her consequent interpretation of them. In sum, Diane's pre-experience worldview prevented her from noticing deep cultural differences and learning from them.

Jane

During early and middle childhood, Jane was a monolingual speaker from a suburb. As Jane described, "I come from [a predominantly White upper class suburb], a Polish German family, very American, like from one group of people. And, growing up with only white kids in my high school, there was no diversity whatsoever."

Taking French in high school was reported as her initial intercultural experience which jumpstarted two closely connected subsequent intercultural experiences in college: traveling to a French-speaking Quebec and learning Spanish. While traveling to Quebec, she noticed some cultural aspects, but mostly on a surface level. For example, "the [French] language sounds so beautiful," "everyone is eating baguettes," and engaged in

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more touristy activities. Although her reflections on the intercultural experience at that time were somewhat superficial, the positive experience motivated her to travel more and experience more deeply.

In college, Jane taught internationally (Mexico and Wales) and travelled abroad (St. Martin). These international experiences provided more in-depth exposure to host cultures. For example, while teaching in Mexico, Jane developed a deep friendship with a culturally different peer that continues to the present day. Additionally, her desire to communicate with native speakers while backpacking in St. Martin motivated her to improve her French.

When Jane was a teacher candidate, she worked with bilingual students. Her previous curiosity about cultures ignited her interest in diverse students and inspired her to pursue a degree in TESOL. During graduate studies, Jane sought additional diversity training opportunities (e.g., professional conferences on multicultural teaching) to improve the quality of teaching diverse learners.

The most powerful intercultural experience Jane had in college occurred while she was teaching in Wales.

One day I woke up and went to school... The boy was on the 4th story, hanging out of the window, screaming "I want to die... I don't want to go back to my home..." I went home that day and I thought... this little kid has to go back home every day and face them [his parents]... I said to myself, when I go home I want to work with other people who have had the same experience--being unable to go home to a peaceful place. That's when I decided I wanted to work with refugees...

Jane drew a deep emotional connection between the boy who felt unsafe at home and refugee children who leave their homes in search for safety. Upon return from Wales, Jane volunteered in a refugee resettlement agency.

Although Jane wanted to work with refugees, her intercultural worldview was yet to expand. Specifically, teaching adult refugees challenged Jane's pre-experience categorization of people into "races, countries and ethnicities":

Because you're American-brained, you grow up thinking of people as races and countries and ethnicities, like on the census... people don't realize you're ethnocentric, but you just are. It was this wakeup call, looking at 50 people [with different cultural/linguistic backgrounds] in my classroom... It was an eye opening experience. Here I'm still learning...

While Jane represented dominant majority (white, native-born), she was younger than her adult refugee students and described the humbling effects of teaching reading to learners with years of life experience. Jane defined the combination of experiences that shaped her current worldview, “I think everybody has to go through many of those changes in their lives, or you won’t grow.” The experiences prepared her to better teach refugee students, deepen interactions with their families and communities, and actively advocate for refugee children in general.

In summary, Jane’s experiential trajectory had an increasing number of intercultural experiences. More importantly, her ability to notice and reflect pushed her to seek more meaningful immersive cultural experiences, which led to a higher level of intercultural sensitivity (top 5% among 281 teachers).

Participants conclusion

Despite having similar intercultural experiences (e.g., learning foreign languages, teaching refugees), the two teachers had contrasting intercultural sensitivity scores (top and bottom 5%). Analysis of their profiles revealed different trajectories of engaging, learning, and growing from intercultural experiences.

Diane had more intercultural experiences as a child and through high school than Jane, but the number did not increase significantly in college and during her teaching career. Diane’s learning from early experiences primarily reflected surface elements of cultures (e.g., architecture, language, food). Her learning did not deepen over time. In contrast, Jane’s learning from intercultural experiences intensified. Her reflections on later experiences indicated understanding of deeper cultural nuances. Jane began to adopt cultural differences into her behavior during home visit of refugee students and participation in refugee community events (e.g., weddings, festivals). The upward trajectory of Jane’s intercultural development is defined by the increasing motivation and depth of learning.

The two cases illustrate that a person’s pre-experience worldview and motivation might influence how one engages with intercultural transactions. Intercultural sensitivity growth might result from a continuum of transactions between the person and her/his experience (Dewey, 1938). In the following sections, we tease out teachers’ agency and the power of experiences in intercultural transactions.

Findings and discussion

Agency of the person in intercultural experiential transactions

Diane's and Jane's words painted them not as passive participants being shaped by experiences, rather as actively influencing intercultural transactions via pre-experience worldview and motivation.

Pre-experience worldview

Our findings pose that teachers' pre-experience worldviews influence their intercultural development. As suggested by Rodgers (2002), "attitudes that the individual brought to bear on the act of reflection could either open the way to learning or block it" (p. 858). In other words, while an experience may have the same qualities, different participants will only take what is within their worldview's reach.

For example, Jane and Diane volunteered at the same local refugee resettlement agency, but their learning from the experience differed. Jane concluded, "It makes you really realize how big the world is. It was an eye opening experience." In contrast, Diane only learned about immigration policies in the U.S. and Canada. Perhaps their different pre-experience worldviews might account for the vast differences in their intercultural learning from the same experience.

Jane described underlying reasons for having many intercultural experiences: "I love this world... I like to be around people and I like to learn..." Jane's outgoing and curious personality continuously motivated her search for more intercultural experiences, affecting their frequency and mindful internalization. For example, after an impactful experience in Wales, Jane volunteered at the refugee resettlement agency, which inspired her to teach refugee children, the most "life-changing and meaningful" experience to date. Each intercultural encounter altered Jane's worldview and, thus, impacted how much she was able to learn from consequent experiences.

Diane, on the other hand, was raised to deemphasize cultural differences. Her parents conveyed that people from different cultures should be viewed as being the same. The message to "see people as people and the same" may have been well-meaning, but limited Diane's intercultural sensitivity growth. Her pre-experience worldview impacted her ability to notice and reflect on cultural aspects of experiences, resulting in more circumstantial and surface-like encounters.

Our findings align with research on differences among individuals undertaking intercultural experiences (e.g., Coffey, 2013). For example, open-mindedness, flexibility, and cultural empathy are among "multicultural personality traits" that influence international students' openness to diversity (Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsaye, 2012, p. 533). Specifically for teacher candidates, personality traits such as openness and emotionality impact beliefs about diversity to the extent that "these

differences may predict differential levels of effectiveness of diversity education curricula” (Unruh & McCord, 2010, p. 1).

Pre-experience motivation

Our findings suggest that differences in teachers’ motivation for an intercultural experience may influence how much they learn from the intercultural transaction. For example, Diane and Jane worked in the same diverse school district. Diane accepted the offer to work there because she needed a job, unaware of the increasing student diversity. She recalled being overwhelmed in her classroom and unprepared to communicate with refugee students’ families. She left communication with refugee families to administration. Ultimately, Diane asked to teach at a different school in the district, the one with less ESL students. Jane chose to work in the district precisely because of the high number of refugees. When asked if she felt ready for her job, Jane responded, “Yes, because of the [refugee resettlement agency].” With strong motivation, Jane embraced the cultures of her refugee students, designed culturally responsive learning activities, and adapted her behaviors to cultural norms of the families with whom she interacted frequently.

Diane’s and Jane’s motivation for foreign language learning also differed and led to different outcomes. In college, Diane had to take a foreign language and debated whether to continue with French, which she studied before, or to take a new language, German. She recalled, “My boyfriend at the time, his family was German, and they convinced me that the German professors were easier than the French.” Diane’s motivation for language learning did not lead to any related intercultural experiences.

Jane learned Tigrinya, a language spoken in Ethiopia and Eritrea, to connect with her student: “One of my students ... would just push his books off the table. ‘I don’t want to see you anymore’. Ok... I’ll teach you English, but you teach me your language. That’s when he started opening up. So I started learning Tigrinya.” Jane’s motivation for learning language created new opportunities for cross cultural communication beyond the classroom. She became a welcomed guest in Tigrinya community: “And I would go to their house and those big parties, you got to pick it [language] up!”

Our findings are also consistent with the literature on the importance of motivation for intercultural experiences (e.g., Dunne, 2013; Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Strong motivation for communication with different cultures precedes becoming interculturally competent (Martin & Nakayama, 2012). More research is needed to thoroughly explore how types of motivation (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) contribute to depth of intercultural learning and motivation for future intercultural experiences. Given the limited research on intersectionality and motivation for

intercultural experiences, we need to explore how motivation for experience with a particular cultural combinations (e.g., a 20 year old Asian male friend) translates to other intercultural intersections (e.g., an 80 year old Asian female neighbour).

Power of experiences in intercultural experiential transactions

The cases of Diane and Jane suggest that particular qualities (e.g., isolation, immersion, and authentic dialog) empower the experience within an experiential transaction, which is also supported by existing studies (e.g., Dwyer, 2004; Marx & Moss, 2011).

Isolation

Our findings suggest that intercultural encounters that place teachers in conditions of cultural isolation unlock the transformative potential of intercultural experiential transactions. Cultural isolation defines a circumstance in which a person becomes a minority isolated from the larger community by cultural barriers (e.g., being adopted from a different country, working as the only school staff member in one's age group, being the only male student in the program) and may have limited or no communication with members of own culture.

When Jane taught in Wales she acutely felt cultural isolation. "I couldn't talk to my friends; I couldn't talk to my family. I was completely isolated in a way." Being removed from a familiar environment, Jane went through an emotional struggle. "It was horrible going by myself. It was extremely emotional for me." Despite feeling distressed at the time, Jane pointed, "I am glad I went alone, because it made me realize how big the world is and that there is more than just me." The feeling of being isolated from her own culture resulted in intercultural sensitivity growth. A member of the cultural majority at home, Jane experienced a reverse of power in her intercultural communication (Matsumoto, 2010). Representatives of cultural minorities are more motivated to learn from and adopt to the majority's culture (Martin & Nakayama, 2012), sometimes leading to a loss of own cultural identity (Paris, 2012), which explains why Jane learned so much about the majority culture from her experience.

Cultural isolation appears to harnesses transformative potential of an intercultural experiential transaction. At the same time, teachers actively transact with the experience and ultimately craft the learning (positive or negative) that takes place under the conditions of cultural isolation.

Immersion

Our data reveals cultural immersion as another quality that an intercultural experience can use to maximize transformative potential of an intercultural transaction. Cultural immersion defines a “direct, prolonged, in vivo contact” with a different culture (Pope-Davis & Coleman, 1997, p. 232). It entails direct engagement with representatives of another culture and partaking in another way of thinking and existence. Cultural isolation is somewhat determined by physical circumstances of the experience, whereas cultural immersion more deeply relies on the person’s agency.

When Jane traveled to Saint Martin, a Caribbean island, she emphasized the “non-cruise” nature of the experience: “It wasn’t a relaxation like ‘we are on a boat’ kind of trip for me.” Ongoing interactions with the local residents created opportunities for Jane’s cultural immersion and intercultural sensitivity development. As a result, upon return Jane decided to continue improving her French to enhance her communication abilities.

During her travels Diane relied strongly on tour guides and followed the conventional tourist routes. “I remember when we went to Italy, we had guides for most of the time.” When attempting to explore one of the historical sites without a guide, however, she recalled feeling lost. Instead of communicating across cultures, Diane drew upon her Latin to interpret Italian street signs. When asked about the most powerful experience in Italy, Diane focused on the surface culture, “The David in Florence was just the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.” Diane’s trip to Italy yielded less cultural immersion and minimal growth in intercultural sensitivity.

While both were physically immersed into a majority culture, Jane and Diane experienced greatly differing levels of cultural immersion. This example yet again illustrates the active role participants play in intercultural transactions. While the experience can lean into the intercultural transaction with potential for cultural immersion, it is ultimately up to the participants to either reject or embrace it.

Our findings support research on insufficiency of mere physical cultural immersion for intercultural growth (Root & Ngampornchai, 2013). Experiences abroad can enhance some diversity outcomes such as learning historical facts about a country. However, this learning may not connect with any intercultural development (Root & Ngampornchai, 2013). More research is needed to explore how participants actively/passively engage in intercultural transactions during potentially immersive cultural experiences. In addition, we need to extend research on cultural immersion beyond travel abroad to all domestic aspects of intersectionality, “interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies” (Davis, 2008, p. 68).

Authentic dialogue

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Our study suggests that experiences that offer opportunities for authentic intercultural dialogue can bear intercultural sensitivity learning. An authentic intercultural dialogue unfolds when culturally different equals openly and collaboratively reflect on cultural underpinnings of their differences. “Authentic intercultural dialogue is possible only between equals. Any, even the slightest, condescendence may jeopardize it” (Ageyev, 2007). If one person holds perceived power over the other (e.g., a teacher and a principal) the authenticity of cultural dialog is undermined.

Jane’s experience illustrates the opportunity for intercultural discourse with her close friend (i.e., an authentic intercultural dialog partner):

One time, my friend Samara and I, we hashed it out about being from different countries. That’s something that made us closer. What’s the difference between Christianity and Islam, what’s the difference between this and this...? We had this long conversation and it was great! Getting down to the nitty-gritty. Because sometimes you don’t have a chance to have a conversation with a Pakistani person like that and talk about everything.

An authentic cultural dialog can unlock a transformative power of an intercultural experiential transaction. At the same time, participants actively interact with the experience within the transaction and can either engage in this dialog or remain silent, missing the opportunity for own intercultural development.

Existing research highlights the benefits of a dialog partner for guided cultural reflection. For example, Marx and Moss (2011) found that an intercultural guide helped an American student during her teaching experience in the U.K. The British university instructor made the student feel comfortable to continuously discuss perceptions of cultural differences. While the dialog partner guided the participant’s reflections on culture, she was in the position of power (professor vs. student), which could compromise the authentic intercultural dialog. Our study suggests that engaging with an equal power representative of a different culture (e.g., friend) in a safe reflective space could enrich intercultural development. Further research needs to explore how intersections of gender, race, socioeconomic status, exceptionalities, and age impact perceived power and equilibrium within an authentic intercultural dialog and, ultimately, expand the definition of intercultural interaction.

Intercultural experiential continuum

The previously described research gap poses that no single experience explains all intercultural development. The findings discussed above show that, on the one hand, teachers' individual attributes (e.g., pre-experience worldview) and agency (e.g., motivation for experience) actively contribute to experiences they seek (or stumble upon) and how much they learn and grow from each intercultural experiential transaction. On the other hand, qualities of experiences can influence teachers' intercultural development, affecting their future choice and approach toward experiences. Thus, intercultural development results from interconnected contextualized transactions between the persons and intercultural experiences as illustrated in Figure 2. We call this process an *intercultural experiential continuum*, a life-long assembly of interconnected intercultural transactions that are actively mediated by teachers as evolving agents and critical designers- consumers of learning within each intercultural transaction. Each intercultural transaction is highly contextualized within its time and positionality of participants within the particular transactional frame. The time in history and a unique cocktail of power relationship of participant's attributes (e.g., age, race, and SES) with attributes of others involved situate each intercultural transaction within the *intercultural experiential continuum*.

At a particular time (e.g., Time 1 in Figure 1), as shown in examples of Diane and Jane, teachers' agency (personal attributes, pre-experience motivation and worldview) affects learning from and engagement with intercultural experiences within an intercultural transaction. At the same time, not all intercultural experiences are educative. Rather, the *quality* of experiences may in part determine what can be learned. For example, most of Jane's intercultural experiences had more intense cultural isolation, cultural immersion and authentic cultural dialogue than Diane's. As a result of these more effective intercultural transactions, we identified her increased intercultural sensitivity.

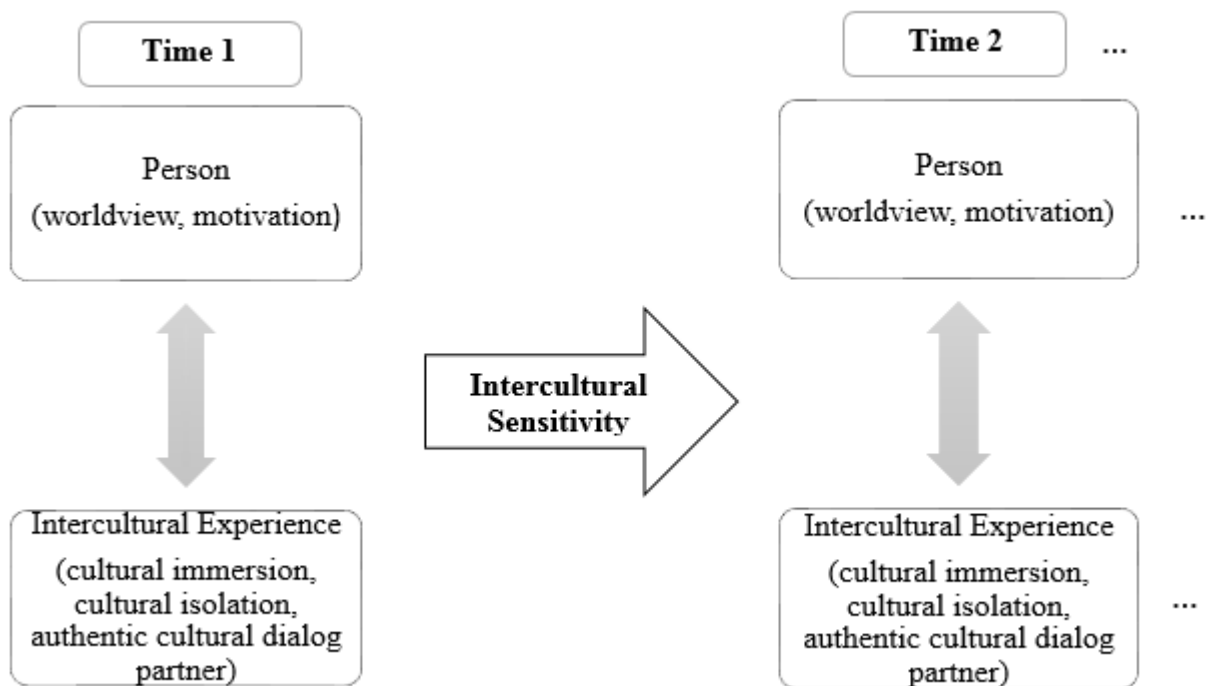


FIGURE 1 Intercultural experiential continuum

The level of intercultural sensitivity gained at Time 1 influences one's future motivation (*motivational continuum*) as well as the quality of intercultural experience at Time 2. For example, Jane was highly motivated to work with refugees based on her experience in Wales. Diane, on the other hand, was reluctant to work with diverse students because of her somewhat surface past intercultural experiences. Further, Jane sought opportunity to learn more about her refugee students' languages and cultures and communicate with them and their families. Diane shunned such opportunities. In the words of Dewey (1938), "any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted" (p. 25). Research is yet to find how a (mis)educative intercultural experience involving a particular cultural intersection (e.g., a Black male Somali refugee student who is Muslim) translates to other intersections in future transactions within the *intercultural experiential continuum* (e.g., a Black male Eritrean refugee student who is Christian).

The intercultural sensitivity development of teachers, then, can be viewed as an ongoing lifelong *intercultural experiential continuum* where each intercultural experience transacts with a person to construct the current intercultural sensitivity learning and

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influence future intercultural transactions. An outcome of each experiential transaction is the labor of the particular attributes of the experience and the particular attributes of the person. In this, qualities of past intercultural experiences by proxy influence the qualities of present and future intercultural experiences as much as the person's past-self by proxy influences the present and future self.

Conclusion

This study explored intercultural development of teachers working with young refugee students in an urban public schools in the Northeastern U.S. Our findings revealed two contrasting developmental “trajectories” of intercultural sensitivity. Despite having multiple similar intercultural experiences, the two early childhood teachers had distinctly different intercultural sensitivity scores (one within the top five percentile and the other within the bottom five percentile of the sample). Further analysis of teachers’ *intercultural experiential continuums* posed that the differences might be attributed to the teachers’ agency in choosing and shaping learning from each experience as well as the qualities of the experiences undertaken.

Applying Dewey’s transactional theory to intercultural development, we conclude that the worldview that shapes teachers’ work with refugee students is a result of a life-long *intercultural experiential continuum* that consists of a myriad of contextualized intercultural transactions between the teacher and her experiences, including intercultural encounters during teacher preparation.

Research implications

This study supports previous research suggesting that not all intercultural experiences are equal (King, Perez, & Shim, 2013). Rather, we found that certain attributes of intercultural experiences increase intercultural sensitivity (e.g., more cultural immersion, engaging in authentic cultural dialog). Most intercultural sensitivity research has focused on the effects of teacher candidates’ stand-alone isolated experiences while in teacher preparation program (e.g., a specific diversity course, specific trip abroad). Our findings suggest that more research should focus on the influence of pre-college intercultural experiences on learning from teacher preparation programs and on increasing our understanding of development of intersectional intercultural sensitivity within teacher candidates’ *intercultural experiential continuums*.

This study suggests that intercultural development research should emphasize the active role teacher candidates play in intercultural experiential transactions. Rather than focusing on a behavioristic approach to experiences that singlehandedly form teachers’ intercultural development, research might be better served if future studies used as the

central focus the person as an agent actively transacting with the experience and therefore dynamically contributing to his/her own developmental continuum. Given the prevalence of research on intercultural experiences narrowly focusing on foreign countries and languages, we need to broaden the definition of culture and look at intersectionality within teacher candidates' *intercultural experiential continuum* profiles.

Implications for teacher education

Our findings suggest that teachers' personal attributes (pre-experience worldview and personal motivation for experiences) contribute to the effectiveness of their transactions with intercultural experiences. Thus, teacher education programs should pay special attention to candidate selection with an emphasis on pre-admission intercultural sensitivity and motivation (or lack thereof) to work with diverse students. Simply providing quality diversity experiences in college is not sufficient since the "recipient" of the experience plays a critical role in the give-and-take of any intercultural encounter. Once admitted to a teacher preparation program, interculturally predisposed-candidates could benefit from 1) guided reconstruction of *intercultural experiential continuums*, 2) immersive intercultural experiences, 3) authentic cultural dialog, and 4) equipping teacher candidates to maximize their agency in post-college experiences across diverse intersections of cultures.

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