

The influence of experiential learning on self perceptions of cultural competence

Thesis

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### **Abstract**

The focus of this research study was to examine Child and Youth Study undergraduates' self perceptions of cultural competence following completion of their most recent practicum placement. Qualitative research methods were used to gain an in-depth understanding of the students' perceptions and eleven students participated through interviews with the researcher. Thematic analysis, as described by Attride-Sterling (2001), was used to explore three global themes that were identified through examination of basic and organizing themes. The three global themes identified indicated that 1) the participants' background and level of experience with diverse cultures influence their self perceptions of cultural competence; 2) coursework and practicum experiences influence the students' self perceptions of cultural competence; and, 3) students expressed motivation to learn more about and interact more with diverse individuals. The study results may be of interest to those involved in professional training programs who actively encourage multicultural experiential learning through a variety of practica. Students indicated an interest in greater diversity through practica, more opportunities for debriefing during practica, and increased opportunities for professional development. Additional research in this area is important in order to better prepare future child and youth professionals for a career in the helping profession. Future investigations may aim to engage a more diverse group of participants as a means to broaden the perspective beyond what is presented in this study.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

North America is becoming increasingly culturally diverse (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2003). In fact, census trend data from Statistics Canada (2010) reveal that the percentage of visible minority and Aboriginal populations in Canada increased from 14% in 1996 to 20% in 2006. The shift in population demographics is a result of increased immigration rates (Sue & Sue, 2003), changes in technology, and global economics (Huer, Saenz & Doan, 2001). As a result, professionals working with children, youth and families are experiencing a higher probability of working with culturally diverse individuals (Huer, Saenz & Doan, 2001; Lazar, 2007; Sue & Sue, 2003; Xu, 2007).

Child and youth workers are professionals who work with children and adolescents in various therapeutic contexts. The Child and Youth Study programs across Canada prepare students for careers in a wide variety of programs and services for children, youth and families (Brock University, 2010; Mount Saint Vincent University, 2010; Ryerson University, 2010; University of Victoria, 2010; Vancouver Island University, 2010). However, the majority of students in North America aspiring to work with children and youth come from white, European-American, middle-class backgrounds (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Davis-McFarland, 2008; Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2005; Lazar, 2007; Meaney, Bohler, Kopf, Hernandez & Scott, 2008). Further, child development research has predominantly focused on white, Euro-American middle class children and families (Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Chang, Jarrah, McConkey, Shukri & Truesdale-Kennedy, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008).

As a result, several researchers have begun to recognize the importance of improving educational programs to encompass multiculturalism and issues of diversity (Banks, 1991;

Bernhard, 1995; Gomez, 1992; Orlikow & Young, 1993) in order to create more culturally competent professionals. Cultural competence refers to the constant and perpetual effort and ability of service providers to optimally support and meet the needs of all children, youth, and families by effectively working within each client's cultural context (Barrera & Kramer, 1997; Davis-McFarland, 2008). Cultural competence is more than simply being culturally aware, or knowledgeable; cultural competence also requires skill, positive interactions, self reflection, empathy and motivation. A culturally competent professional actively undergoes the process of becoming aware of one's own values, biases, preconceptions and limitations; as well as makes an effort to understand others' worldviews through the development and practice of culturally meaningful strategies (Sue & Sue, 2008).

There is evidence that an increase in the amount of time spent in multicultural instruction, enhances students' feelings of preparedness to work with culturally diverse groups (Leighton, 2009). Some research has demonstrated that even one course on multiculturalism may result in increased levels of perceived cultural competence among students (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008; Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000). In addition to coursework, practicum placements are integral to several professional courses in higher education (Ryan, Toohey & Hughes, 1996). Research has shown that regardless of design, practicum is the best way to acquire professional knowledge and competence (Hascher, Cocard & Moser, 2004). In fact, numerous service-learning programs have documented increases in students' empowerment and self perceptions of cultural competence as a result of first hand experiences working with diverse populations (Alexandrowicz, 2001; Flannery & Ward, 1999; Kahan, 1998; Meaney et al., 2008). Experiential learning, which is gaining knowledge through meaningful and practical interactions and events, is theorized to enhance one's appreciation for diversity (Seaman et al., 2009).

Further, Contact theory asserts that meaningful interactions between individuals with differences tend to produce positive changes in attitudes (Allport, 1954). Contact theory has inspired over 50 years of extensive research, using a variety of methods, that range across a breadth of societies, situations and target groups, including ethnicity, race, age, ability, and mental health (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Critics of Contact theory claim that interaction with people of diverse cultures may actually, in fact, increase prejudice among dominant group members (Murphy & Rasch, 2008). As a result, Allport outlined four conditions that need to be present in order for positive change to occur: the participants need to feel that they are of equal status with each other; the participants must be working interdependently towards a common goal; there need to be opportunities for participants to associate and socialize with each other; and, there needs normative support of authorities (Murphy & Rasch, 2008; Seaman et al., 2008 p.211).

Recent research has revealed however, that these conditions act more as an interconnected catalyst to the reduction of intergroup prejudice, rather than as independent factors (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Further, while Pettigrew and Tropp (2002) found that these four conditions typically lead to a greater reduction in prejudice, they also found that these conditions are not *necessary* for a reduction in prejudice. Contact theory has been chosen as the overarching framework for this study, as its extensive research and subsequent findings generate an argument for studying the self perceptions of cultural competence among Child and Youth Study undergraduate students following completion of a practicum placement.

Very little research exists in relation to the daily challenges that early childhood educators and youth care professionals experience with relation to diversity in childrearing practices, cultural conflicts and attempts to match socialization goals (Huibregts, Leseman &

Tavecchio, 2008). Additionally, there is very little information regarding how practicum placements can affect students' self perception of cultural competence. Thus, the researcher investigated and gained an in-depth understanding of a sample of Child and Youth Study undergraduates' self perceptions of cultural competence, following completion of their most recent practicum placement. The researcher conducted interviews lasting up to 45 minutes, using a digital voice recorder, with a sample of 11 Child and Youth Study undergraduate students who had just completed practicum placement. Based on a review of cultural competence literature, 15 open-ended, non-directive questions were developed and adapted by the researcher to investigate the central research question, which asked students to reflect on their cultural encounters or experiences during their practicum placement.

### **Personal Reflection**

*Issues relating to culture and diversity have been of great interest to me and on the forefront of my mind for as long as I can remember. I spent a number of years working with First Nations communities as the only non-Aboriginal staff member. Additionally, I spent five years travelling to over 25 countries and living in South Korea. These experiences, among others, have helped shaped the woman I am today. I genuinely appreciate the diversity of Canada and the richness that everyone has to share. I feel, however, that as a member of the dominant society, I have room to become more attuned to not only other cultures, but to my own culture as well. Everyone has a culture; and, the more time we spend reflecting on and appreciating the diversity and similarities between and among cultures, the better able we are to play a role in social justice.*

*I very much enjoyed the interview process and speaking with the students about cultural competence. I found that these young women had a lot to share and their answers were very*



*honest, humble, and refreshing. Although a couple of the participants seemed a little bit nervous, as though they were being 'tested', they informed me of how much they appreciated being interviewed, rather than surveyed because the interviews allowed for a more personal and valuable experience.*

*I found that my greatest challenge as a researcher was keeping my own biases and preconceptions outside of the interviews. Discussing issues of culture and diversity can be uncomfortable for some people, and I believe that the most important part of my role was to create a safe and supportive environment for the participants to share their stories. I was very much attuned to my body language, facial expressions, and tone throughout the meetings with the participants, so as to not appear judgmental or partial. I ultimately feel that the interviews were more of a conversation and that the participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences with me.*

*Cultural competence is an ongoing, life process. I believe that this experience not only provided valuable insight for this research study, but it helped me grow personally as well. Based on the participants' feedback and reflection, I believe that the interviews also contributed to raising the participants' consciousness about cultural competence, which will help facilitate their journey of becoming culturally competent helping professionals.*

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

Child and youth care professionals are coming into increased contact with individuals with diverse features including race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, and family composition (Huer, Saenz & Doan, 2001; Lazar, 2007; Sue & Sue, 2003; Xu, 2007). In order to encourage these future professionals to strive for cultural competence, educational programs have incorporated culturally based curriculum and diverse practicum settings into student training (Benincasa, 2002; Brinson & Denby, 2008; Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2003). Experiential learning such as practicum placements may provide students the opportunity to have meaningful interactions with children, youth, and families from cultures different from their own (Ryan, Toohey & Hughes, 1996). Contact theory argues that given the conditions of equal status, mutual dependence, association, and with the support of authorities, sustained contact with individuals of diverse cultures can produce positive changes in attitudes toward others (Allport, 1954). However, despite the increase in research relating to cultural competence, much of the focus has been limited to pre-service teachers and therapists. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the self perceptions of cultural competence among Child and Youth Study undergraduate students following completion of a practicum placement.

#### **Contact theory**

Contact theory asserts that meaningful interactions between individuals with differences tend to produce positive changes in attitudes (Allport, 1954). Contact theory was originated in the 1950s in the United States by Gordon Allport during a time when racism and racial tension

were high, when public school systems began moving towards racial integration (Emerson, Kimbro & Yancey, 2002; Murphy & Rasch, 2008), and has since become one of the most extensively researched ideas in psychology (Crisp & Turner, 2009). Allport theorized that racism was a result of irrational beliefs and behaviours; and, if individuals of diverse backgrounds had the opportunity to spend time together then their attitudes, and subsequent behaviour would positively change (Emerson, Kimbro & Yancey, 2002). Specifically, Contact theory emerged from the concern of the attitudes of white people towards African Americans; however, Allport's theory has inspired over 50 years of extensive research, using a variety of methods, that range across a breadth of societies, situations and target groups, including ethnicity, race, age, ability, and mental health (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) performed a meta-analysis of Contact theory research, using 713 independent samples from 515 studies (250,089 individuals from 38 nations) and found that intergroup contact generally does reduce intergroup prejudice. In fact, 94% of the samples in their analysis showed an inverse relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Further, studies with ethnic and racial samples produced similar results of those with other target groups, suggesting that Contact theory (which was originally designed for interracial encounters) can be successfully applied to other groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Additionally, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found that “not only do attitudes toward the immediate participants usually become more favourable, but so do attitudes toward the entire out-group, out-group members in other situations, and even out-groups not involved in the contact” (p.766). This provides substantial evidence that intergroup contact can meaningfully reduce prejudice across a broad range of groups and contexts.

Allport (1954) suggested that prejudice can be reduced through sustained participation in shared experiences. Allport believed that direct interaction with people of diverse backgrounds will improve attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards others because people begin to see themselves as part of a larger group (humankind) while still acknowledging and appreciating the differences between people (Seaman et al., 2008). Given this hypothesis, it is reasonable to consider that the more experience one has interacting with people of diverse cultures, the more likely it is that they will have positive attitudes towards diverse individuals. Emerson, Kimbro and Yancey (2002) empirically tested and demonstrated the hypothesis that those who had previous interracial contact at a younger age were more likely as adults to participate in diverse social groups and have meaningful personal relationships with diverse individuals. Additionally, Ellison and Powers (1994) discovered that the greater interracial contact one has early on in life, the more likely it is that they will have close interracial relationships and friendships as adults. While it is welcome for one to speak favourably of diverse groups or individuals, it is more encouraging to see people forming and sustaining meaningful webs of relationships with individuals from diverse groups (Emerson, Kimbro & Yancey, 2002). These studies further compliment Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) findings of longitudinal studies that have, in fact, consistently demonstrated a reduction in prejudice over time.

Critics of Contact theory claim that interaction with people of diverse cultures may actually increase prejudice among dominant group members (Murphy & Rasch, 2008). As a result, Allport outlined four conditions that need to be present in order for positive change to occur. First, the individuals participating in the interaction need to feel that they are of equal status with the other participants. Second, the individuals must be working interdependently towards a common goal. Third, opportunities need to be present where individuals can associate

and socialize with each other. Finally, these interactions need to be supported and normalized by the existing system (Murphy & Rasch, 2008; Seaman et al., 2008).

The first condition, equal status, implies that participants are not viewed as superior or inferior to one another; however, Murphy and Rasch (2008) point out that establishing status equals can be challenging, depending on the social context of the interaction. For example, even though Child and Youth Study students undergoing practicum placements are expected to abide by the same policies and procedures as the rest of the staff, they are not considered to be 'equal' with the employees, as they do not receive remuneration or other benefits or 'perks' that the staff may receive (e.g., vacation, parking etc.). The second and third conditions require that the participants share common goals and actively work together in defining and achieving those goals (Murphy & Rasch, 2008). Students who undergo practicum are typically expected to aid in furthering the mission and vision of the organization with which they are placed, and normally work closely with their fellow employees toward a common goal, building relationships along the way. The final condition, normative support of authorities, requires that the contact between participants have clear and widespread acceptance of all agencies and groups involved (Murphy & Rasch, 2008). Since practicum placements are institutionalized throughout the university environment, the message that participation is encouraged at all levels is presumably conveyed to the student and placement agency (Murphy & Rasch, 2008).

Recent research has revealed however, that these conditions act more as an interconnected catalyst to the reduction of intergroup prejudice, rather than as independent factors (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Additionally, while Pettigrew and Tropp's (2002) meta-analytic research demonstrated that these four conditions typically lead to a greater reduction in prejudice, they also found that these conditions are not *necessary* for a reduction in prejudice. In

fact, only 19% of the 94% of samples showing an inverse relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice, involved contact situations using Allport's four conditions (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). For example, one study in the meta-analysis found that during apartheid's final days, rural white housewives in South Africa developed more favourable attitudes toward their African domestic workers following close contact. This example clearly violates Allport's key conditions (e.g., equal status, support of authorities, working towards a common goal), and yet still reports a reduction in prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Initially, Allport believed that most contact would *not* reduce prejudice, hence supplementing his theory with positive features of the contact situations in order to maximize the potential for contact to reduce prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analytic research has exhibited that these conditions are not essential for a reduction in prejudice. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) suggest that further research in this area should instead focus on the negative factors that potentially deter contact's reduction of prejudice. This further research is important to fully understanding both the conditions that augment *and* impede the potentially positive effects of contact. One negative factor that has been looked at more recently is intergroup anxiety, which "refers to the feelings of threat and uncertainty that people experience in intergroup contexts" (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, p.767), and emerges from participant concerns of how to act, how others will perceive them, and whether or not they will be accepted. Intergroup anxiety is likely to emerge in an individual who has had little or no previous contact with members of a group and/or when there is a large gap in status (Crisp & Turner, 2009). However, Crisp and Turner (2009) claim that following successful contact, this anxiety is significantly lowered due to the realization that there is nothing to fear from such interactions.

Even though Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) have defined intergroup contact as “actual face-to-face interaction between members of clearly defined groups” (p.754), which was a prerequisite of inclusion in their meta-analysis, Crisp and Turner (2009) performed a study where merely *imagining* contact with others produced positive perceptions of diverse groups. While Crisp and Turner (2009) argue that imaginative thought can be a valuable method for more positive intergroup relations, they do not support individuals using imagined contact as a replacement for actual contact. Rather, they claim that imagined contact can encourage individuals to seek out contact, and reduce anxiety and inhibitions associated with intergroup contact and prejudice to better prepare individuals to engage in intergroup contact with an open mind (Crisp & Turner, 2009). Further research has shown that children and youth had significantly more positive attitudes towards refugees and foreigners (respectively) following reading stories about these groups (Cameron, Rutland, Brown, & Douch, 2006; Liebkind & McAlister, 1999). However, in order for imagined intergroup contact to be successful, Crisp and Turner (2009) suggest that it is necessary to have someone to guide participants through the script, while applying a positive tone.

Given the above findings, Contact theory has been chosen as the overarching framework for this study. Research on Contact theory and subsequent findings generate a convincing argument for studying the self perceptions of cultural competence among Child and Youth Study undergraduate students following completion of a practicum placement. Additionally, even though Contact theory was originally based on racial tension between white people and African Americans, a significant amount of research has confirmed the application of Contact theory to a diverse range of groups. Finally, considering that Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found that 94% of the studies in their meta-analysis showed an inverse relationship between intergroup contact and

prejudice, and only 19% of those used Allport's (1954) four conditions, is encouraging for this study, as practicum placements do not necessarily meet all of Allport's conditions.

### **Population Shift**

North America is becoming more culturally diverse (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2003). In fact, several authors have estimated that the near future will see ethnic minorities as the dominant group in Canada and the United States (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2003). In 2003, people of colour made up over 30% of the U.S. population, 45% of whom were in the public school system (Sue & Sue, 2003). This shift in population demographics is a result of increased immigration rates (Sue & Sue, 2003), changes in technology, and global economics (Huer, Saenz & Doan, 2001). Census trend data from Statistics Canada (2010) reveal that the percentage of visible minority<sup>1</sup> and Aboriginal<sup>2</sup> populations in Canada increased from 14% in 1996 to 20% in 2006; from 5% to 7% in Nova Scotia; and, from 7.3% to 9% in Halifax. Based on these trends, we can expect the percentage of visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples in Canada to be at least 23.5%, 6% in Nova Scotia and 10% in Halifax by 2011 (the date of which the next census data will be released) (Statistics Canada, 2010). Moreover, the percentage of the population whose mother tongue is a non-official language has increased from 16 to 20% (1996 to 2006) in Canada, from 2.7 to 3.8% in Nova Scotia, and from 4 to 5.3% in Halifax (Statistics Canada, 2010). This evidence supports the claim by researchers that cultural diversity in North America is steadily increasing at a higher rate than previous generations.

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<sup>1</sup> The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Statistics Canada, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Aboriginal refers to those persons who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, that is, North American Indian, Metis or Inuit, and/or those who reported being a treaty Indian or registered Indian, as defined by the Indian Act of Canada, and/or those who reported they were members of an Indian Band or First Nation.



As a result of the shift in population demographics, professionals are experiencing a higher probability of working with culturally diverse children and families (Huer, Saenz & Doan, 2001; Lazar, 2007; Sue & Sue, 2003; Xu, 2007), wherein children and families have unique expectations, views, attitudes, communication styles and needs (Davis-McFarland, 2008). Much of the current literature promotes the necessity for cultural competence as a result of the demographic shift in North America. However, Barrera and Kramer (1997) caution that by emphasizing demographic change as the primary motive for professionals becoming culturally competent triggers the assumption that cultural competence is only necessary when the gap between the majority and minority populations narrows or when there is a critical mass<sup>3</sup>. Further, this rationalization suggests that cultural competence is independent from ethically addressing the needs of children and their families (Barrera & Kramer, 1997). Instead, Barrera and Kramer (1997) stress that cultural competence is necessary for understanding the needs and development of *all* children.

### **Cultural Competence**

Cultural Competence refers to the constant and perpetual effort and ability of service providers to optimally support and meet the needs of all children, youth, and families by effectively working within each client's cultural context (Barrera & Kramer, 1997; Davis-McFarland, 2008). Cultural competence is more than simply being culturally aware, or knowledgeable; cultural competence also requires skill, positive interactions, self reflection empathy and motivation. A culturally competent professional actively undergoes the process of becoming aware of one's own values, biases, preconceptions and limitations; as well as makes an effort to understand others' worldviews through the development and practice of culturally

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<sup>3</sup> Research in race relations suggests that the point of critical mass is 20%, wherein the proportion is high enough to have its presence felt and filtered throughout a system or organization (Emerson, Kimbo & Yancey, 2002).

meaningful strategies (Sue & Sue, 2008). Becoming culturally competent is an ongoing, challenging life process; thus the feat is an aspirational one (Meaney et al., 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008). The following describes the multifaceted layers that encompass cultural competence, beginning with a description of culture.

**Culture.** At its core, culture refers to a set of shared values and beliefs that influence social processes and practices of being, feeling and knowing, that both unite and distinguish groups of people (Barrera & Kramer, 1997; Hanson et al., 1998; Marshall, 2000). Our cultural identity influences our behaviour and shapes our values (Davis-McFarland, 2008). Culture is much deeper than surface level characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, language, food, customs and dress. Nonetheless, these aspects of culture are profoundly embedded in deeper meanings and processes that shape a person's beliefs, values and worldviews. Culture needs to be viewed *entirely*, rather than superficially; to consider culture only on the surface is simply to take culture out of context (Barrera & Kramer, 1997).

*Everyone* has a culture (Barrera & Kramer, 1997; Wan, 2006). The ways we understand, think, evaluate and act are deeply rooted in our culture(s) (Barrera & Kramer, 1997; Sue & Sue, 2008). We acquire our cultural identity through our experiences with our family, education, religion, community, environment and media (Davis-McFarland, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008). In turn, our culture shapes our worldviews and how we perceive and interpret other cultures; as a result, we all view our experiences and interactions with others through a 'cultural lens' (Davis-McFarland, 2008; Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2008). However, this process may also cause us to inherit the stereotypes and biases of society, which may be then reinforced by family, peers and the media (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2003). For example, many people from the dominant culture tend to

minimize the differences between themselves and others by acting from within their own cultural paradigm, thus perceiving others to be “just like me” (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008 p.259).

**Cultural Awareness.** Perhaps the first step to understanding cultural competence is becoming attuned to one’s own cultural identity and that our worldviews are shaped by our own cultural lens (O’Connor, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008). Culturally aware individuals understand how their values, assumptions, and biases may affect others, and are comfortable with the differences that exist between themselves and others (Sue & Sue, 2008). When one becomes aware of their own cultural assumptions, values, and practices, they are able to recognize, understand and appreciate culturally diverse values and practices (Barrera & Kramer, 1997; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008; Guralnick, 2008; Marshall, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2003). This results in understanding the historical, political, social, and economic contexts that have shaped the daily oppression, discrimination and racism that minoritized<sup>4</sup> individuals experience (Erwin & Johannes, 2004; Baffour, Teasley & Tyson, 2005).

Cultural awareness affects an individual’s core beliefs, perceptions and reactions, and is often assessed by using racial identity and self-report cultural competencies measures (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000). Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp (2008) conducted a study on the effect of pre-service teachers’ experiences on their cultural responsiveness. They found that pre-service teachers who reflected on their own cultural background helped them to realize the impact that their beliefs and backgrounds had on their teaching practices, and how this consciousness had helped to improve their teaching methods.

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<sup>4</sup> The term ‘minoritized’ is used throughout this paper (rather than ‘minority’) to emphasize that people and groups are not in a position of minority as a result of their culture, race, language or religion etc. Rather, minoritized individuals acquire this position as a consequence of a socio and political historical process of systemic oppression (Burman, Smailes & Chantler, 2004).

**Cultural Knowledge.** Educational program faculty have the opportunity to teach about culture and diversity to a significant number of individuals. Davis-McFarland (2008) describes cultural knowledge as “the process of learning about other cultures and exploring other worldviews” (p. 210). As long as students possess a genuine interest in learning about the beliefs, traditions, values and attitudes of culturally diverse populations, educational programs can contribute to a social shift in attitudes and behaviour (Allard, 2006; Davis-McFarland, 2008; Guralnick, 2008; Johannes & Erwin, 2004). In fact, learning about diverse cultural beliefs, values, traditions and behaviours is a crucial step towards world harmony (Wan, 2006). Harry (2002) and Park and Turnbull (2001) encourage educational programs to fuse multicultural coursework and literature throughout each course, rather than merely offering one or two separate courses on multicultural issues.

Culturally knowledgeable professionals have the skills to effectively engage in culturally sensitive communication, formulate culturally meaningful assessments and to plan non biased, effective plans for clients (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000). Perhaps the most fundamental characteristic of a culturally knowledgeable professional is the ability to assess and evaluate one’s own skills and modify as necessary (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000). Chi-Ying and Bemak (2002) suggest service providers can take steps to becoming culturally knowledgeable, such as: learning about the historical and socio-political background of the individuals with whom they are working; understanding the nature and impact of oppression, discrimination and racism; valuing the importance of family and community; and, promoting social change. A study conducted by Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp (2008) analyzed the experiences of pre-service teachers, and what they perceived to contribute to their increased cultural responsiveness. The results revealed that in addition to cultural encounters (including

internship experiences in diverse communities) and critical reflection, a combination of readings related to issues of race, culture, poverty, and social justice strongly influenced their culturally responsive teaching practices (Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2008).

**Cultural Skill.** Many graduates of educational programs have gained knowledge and awareness of culturally diverse issues and culturally competent techniques, yet do not necessarily possess the knowledge of practical skills to implement into their daily practice (Leighton, 2009). This is where the value of experiential learning comes into play. Cultural skill refers to the ability to utilize unbiased, meaningful strategies within the context of a person's culture (Allard, 2006; Davis-McFarland, 2008; Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2003 & 2008). Professionals who are culturally skilled are aware of their own cultural competence and when potential personal biases can produce a negative impact (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000). Cultural skill is evident when professionals are able to assess issues, such as: a child's level of acculturation, language differences, establishing rapport, and exploration of difference (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000). Cultural skill allows for professionals to assess and meet the diverse needs of their clients, instead of treating everyone the 'same' (Allard, 2006). Cultural skill also includes reflecting on current teaching tools and methods, and assessing whether or not these are culturally biased; and if so, creating and implementing more culturally responsive teaching practices (Chen, Nimmo & Fraser, 2009).

Professionals working with children, for example, can apply cultural skills by ensuring that the children with whom they are working have access to a diverse variety of toys and learning materials that accurately reflect the diversity that they are exposed to on a daily basis (O'Connor, 2005). This would include dolls, figures, and books of a variety of ethnicities,

religions, family compositions, ages, and abilities (e.g., canes, wheelchairs, service dogs etc.) (O'Connor, 2005). Further suggestions for incorporating diversity into programs for children and youth include, but are not limited to: using countries as monthly themes to meaningfully learn about the holidays, traditions, religion(s), and language(s) of a particular country; implementing art, music, and dance projects, using traditional examples from around the world; playing games used by children of similar ages from around the world; and, reading books about diverse family units and marriage customs (Jones, 2005).

**Cultural Encounters.** As Contact theory asserts, meaningful interactions with diverse individuals will result in a deeper learning and in turn, a more positive view of others (Allard, 2006; Davis-McFarland, 2008; DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008). This process seeks to prevent and eradicate stereotyping and prejudice based on surface characteristics (Davis-McFarland, 2008). The goal of cultural encounters is to move away from 'knowing about' to 'knowing' through meaningful, reciprocal relationships (Barrera & Kramer, 1997). Several researchers have suggested that engagement with diverse groups of people is an effective means of decreasing negative attitudes and learning more about how a family's culture influences child learning (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000; Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2005; O'Connor, 2005). In fact, Kidd, Sanchez and Thorp (2005) conducted a study that examined changes in interns' culturally responsive dispositions throughout an early childhood teacher preparation program. They found that meaningful communication with families of diverse cultures positively contributed to the students' understanding of and appreciation for children and families from cultures different from their own, as well as contributed to the cultural responsiveness of their teaching methods. Considering these experiences requires critical reflection and discussion in order to be most effective (Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2008).

**Self Reflection.** Self reflection is the process by which we explore and critically reflect upon our own culturally influenced values, beliefs and behaviours that define who we are and how we view others (Allard, 2006; Barrera & Kramer, 1997; Davis-McFarland, 2008; Dogra, 2001; Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000; Johannes & Erwin, 2004; Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004; Sue & Sue, 2003 & 2008; Vera & Speight, 2003; West-Olatunji, Behar-Horenstein & Rant, 2008). Reflection is a specialized thought process that has been recognized for influencing improvements in the quality of teaching; thus effective educators tend to regularly reflect on their practice and experiences (Landerholm, Gehrie & Hao, 2004). Reflective journaling is a common practice when students undergo practicum, and has been found to be very beneficial for students to express their own cultural values and biases, recognize the impact that their biases may have on cross-cultural relationships, and to identify further areas of professional development (Brinson & Denby, 2008).

Reflexivity and self examination can be a lifelong and sometimes emotional process that helps to identify the multidimensional aspects that connect us to, and separate us from those with whom we interact (Barrera & Kramer, 1997; Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson, 2006; Chen, Nimmo & Fraser, 2009; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Harry, 2002). What makes self reflection so emotional is the potential guilt and shame that individuals from the dominant culture may feel as a result of the historical (and current) oppression by white, Euro-American groups (Sue & Sue, 2008). However, Chang (2007) encourages us to acknowledge, share, discuss and work through these negative reactions and to not view the negative emotions as problems, but rather as a natural process that provides clues for solutions. Kidd, Sanchez and Thorp (2005) found that when their interns reflected on preconceived biases, stereotypes and lack of cultural knowledge with each other, they were able to find solutions and develop new ways of understanding together.

Several authors stress the importance of students also learning about systems of dominance that result in ‘invisible’ privilege that is attached to white, Anglophone heterosexuals (Allard & Santoro, 2008; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000). Many members of the dominant society may not be aware of the privilege they have acquired by merely being a part of this group (Allard & Santoro, 2008). Thus, training programs need to incorporate discussions of “personal life experiences and to reflect on ways in which they may have benefited from an unjust system that privileges some and creates injustice for others” (Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2008 p.317). These discussions will help to facilitate conversations about this ‘invisible’ privilege, in order to increase self awareness and consciousness.

No individual is free from bias. Racism, discrimination and prejudice are all social constructs that are prevalent in our daily experiences; and, we must acknowledge our internalization of these ideologies, whether they be conscious or subconscious (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson, 2006; Davis-McFarland, 2008; Dogra, 2001; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Lim & A’Ole-Boune, 2005; Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004; Strasser & Seplocha, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008). Through understanding and awareness of our own personal and professional limitations, we will be able to effectively work within our professions by doing as little harm as possible (Chen, Nimmo & Fraser, 2009; Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000). Only when we become aware of our biases, can we expel them (Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004; Sue & Sue, 2008).

**Cultural Empathy.** Although individuals from the dominant culture cannot truly empathize with minoritized individuals, they can develop an understanding of how daily experiences are embedded in the sociopolitical system of oppression (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-



Rockwell & Greene, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2008). Practicing cultural empathy will help to facilitate empowerment among oppressed individuals (Johannes & Erwin, 2004). As professionals, we can engage in critical cultural mirroring wherein we genuinely attempt to empathize with the experiences of the children and youth with whom we work; to experience context rather than just content (Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004). Additionally, service providers can practice and demonstrate cultural empathy through recognizing their lack of awareness or knowledge of their clients' culture(s), expressing genuine interest in learning more about their clients' culture(s), and through clarifying the most effective mode of communication (Glockshuber, 2005).

Perhaps the most critical aspect of striving for cultural competence is motivation; without the desire or motivation, becoming skilled in other components of cultural competence is futile and unattainable (Daniel, Roysircar, Abeles & Boyd, 2004; Davis-McFarland, 2008).

Professionals who are motivated to become culturally competent through self awareness, learning, acquiring practical skills, experiencing meaningful interactions with others through contact, undergoing critical self reflection and practicing empathy will be better able to serve the children and families with whom they work. Much of the elements of cultural competence, described above, can be acquired through structured educational programs with a practicum component. This way, we can begin to train and prepare future professionals in becoming culturally competent *before* entering the 'real world'.

### **Educational Training**

Within the past 15 years, several researchers have begun to recognize the importance of improving educational programs to encompass multiculturalism and issues of diversity (Banks, 1991; Bernhard, 1995; Gomez, 1992; Orlikow & Young, 1993). As a result, many 'helping profession' programs have attempted to incorporate multicultural education content into courses

and field experiences (Kea, Trent & Davis, 2002). Training programs that include culturally relevant and accurate content, as well as experiences of diverse populations are the most beneficial to students expecting to work in the helping profession (Benincasa, 2002; Brinson & Denby, 2008; Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2003). That is, studying content and readings on multiculturalism that seek to eradicate stereotyping, and delve deeper into the historical oppression and systemic racism of particular groups in Canada, or more specifically, Nova Scotia (e.g., African Nova Scotians, First Nation and Aboriginal People) will help future child and youth professionals to be more knowledgeable about and sensitive to the issues that their future clients may face on a daily basis. Additionally, to further compliment any readings or course content on issues of diverse cultures, guest speakers from cultural groups of which students are studying, who have first hand experience of the racism and oppression that has been inflicted (e.g., Residential School Survivor) will only enhance such valuable learning opportunities. Boyatzis (1998) and Sue and Sue (2003) caution that these programs need to be bias free and not stereotype or over generalize groups of people, as this will only perpetuate discrimination and oppression. Additionally, Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell and Greene (2000) remind us that these training experiences need to encompass *all* aspects of cultural competence, including raising consciousness, knowledge, and skill through experiential learning.

**Child and Youth Care Programs.** Child and youth workers are professionals who work with children and adolescents in various educational and therapeutic contexts. The Child and Youth Study programs in Canadian universities prepare students for careers in a wide variety of programs and services for children, youth and families, such as: Early Childhood Education, Child Care Administration, Youth Care, Special Needs, Community Services, Child Life, Early

Childhood Intervention, etc. (Brock University, 2010; Mount Saint Vincent University, 2010; Ryerson University, 2010; University of Victoria, 2010; Vancouver Island University, 2010).

The majority of students in North America aspiring to work with children and youth (thus, predictably professionals already working in the field) come from white, European-American, middle-class backgrounds (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Davis-McFarland, 2008; Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2005; Lazar, 2007; Meaney, Bohler, Kopf, Hernandez & Scott, 2008). This phenomenon may lead us to believe that many of these students and professionals have very little experience with culturally diverse children and families; thus, establishing rapport and engagement may prove to be extremely challenging for professionals working with children and youth (Allard, 2006; Meaney et al., 2008).

**Curriculum.** Child development research has predominantly focused on white, Euro-American middle class children and families (Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; McConkey, Truesdale-Kennedy, Chang, Jarrah, & Shukri, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008). Even today, the child development field is greatly influenced by mainstream United States (Gonzalez-Mena, 2007). Further, this research has resulted in the acceptance of universal practice, meaning it can be applied to any culture, group, or country; however, since this research is conducted and interpreted through a cultural lens, it is not universally applicable (Sue & Sue, 2008). More recently, there have been advances in the acknowledgment of research and theory from other cultures in post-secondary education; however, the greater part of child development research, literature and understandings are culturally biased (Gonzalez-Mena, 2007). Additionally, very little research exists in relation to the daily challenges that early childhood educators and youth care professionals experience with relation to diversity in childrearing practices, cultural conflicts and attempts to match socialization goals (Huibregts, Leseman & Tavecchio, 2008).

As a result of the above described culturally biased research (Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; McConkey, Truesdale-Kennedy, Chang, Jarrah, & Shukri, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008), training in early childhood education, psychology and child development has similarly focused on perceived universal norms implemented by white, Euro-American research. These include Western theories of child development, environmental influences, and the role of the family and gender. As such, graduates from such programs have experienced several challenges when applying this knowledge and training to diverse groups (Bernhard, 1995; Boyatzis, 1998; Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005). For example, since these professionals do not proportionally represent the diversity of the larger society, they may not have the knowledge or skills to effectively work with diverse populations and may be uncomfortable even discussing the issues of race or multiculturalism. Thus, professionals working with children and youth may inevitably rely on the dominant culture's values and beliefs to guide their practice (Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005).

Researchers suggest that regardless of background, many graduates of these programs may not be prepared for culturally competent service delivery (Brinson & Denby, 2008; National Centre for Education Statistics, 1999; Phillips, 1998). It is important to note that service providers of all backgrounds have largely been trained in mainstream schools of thought and theory, thus we cannot assume that someone from a minoritized culture will automatically ensure a certain level of cultural competence in practice (Teasley, 2005). Additionally, Kea, Trent and Davis (2002) point out that, "regardless of race or ethnicity, any teacher's lack of preparedness, negative perceptions, and low expectations can contribute to school failure among culturally and linguistically diverse students" (p. 24). Thus, teachers from minoritized populations should not automatically be viewed as culturally competent simply because they belong to a historically dominated group.

Some research has demonstrated that even one course on multiculturalism may result in increased levels of perceived cultural competence among students (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008; Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000). Holcomb-McCoy (2005) found that school counselors who had taken a course in multicultural counseling rated their perceived multicultural knowledge and terminology significantly higher than those who had not taken a course on multicultural counseling. Even though some research has shown little connection between coursework and cultural competence (Brinson & Denby, 2008), there is evidence that an increase in the amount of time spent in multicultural instruction, enhances students' feelings of preparedness to work with culturally diverse groups (Leighton, 2009). Leighton found that students reported higher levels of cultural competence based on the more culturally competent education they received. Crisp and Turner (2009) proposed that imaginative contact with diverse individuals can help prepare participants for a positive contact experience, thereby decreasing prejudice. Further, Crisp and Turner (2009) claim that simply learning about positive interactions with diverse groups and individuals can positively affect intergroup attitudes.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that multicultural coursework alone does not significantly affect multicultural awareness; rather, cultural competence is developed through life experiences, self-reflection, and other lived experiences (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). Further, allowing for only one course about culture neglects to acknowledge the infinite spectrum of diversity, and may result in overgeneralization and stereotyping (Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005). Several programs in the field of child and youth study have required and elective courses in cultural diversity; however, Lim and A'Ole-Boune (2005) emphasize the value in infusing "components of diversity into all courses and field experiences" (p.225). For example, the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria has three major goals to achieve

the mission of the school, all of which are heavily grounded in culturally competent practice, the promotion of social justice, and working effectively with diverse populations (University of Victoria, 2010). Ryan, Toohey, and Hughes (1996) advise, however, that in order for professional programs to be successful, students need to clearly see the connection between theory (coursework) and practice (practica).

**Practicum Training.** In order to better prepare graduates for the workforce, practicum placements are integral to several professional courses in higher education (Ryan, Toohey & Hughes, 1996). Research has shown that regardless of design, practicum is the best way to acquire professional knowledge and competence (Hascher, Cocard & Moser, 2004). Despite the lack of research on practicum in the field of children and youth, there seems to be a plethora of information on practicum and pre-service teachers (Ryan, Toohey & Hughes, 1996), and since the population is consistent between the two disciplines, much of the references will relate to education.

Traditionally, the role of practicum is to link problems and issues experienced to related theory and knowledge gained from coursework (Ryan, Toohey & Hughes, 1996). Through practicum placements, educators expect students to apply their knowledge and skills gained through coursework, in a practical setting, develop further competencies in doing so, and evaluate the process (Ryan, Toohey & Hughes, 1996). Research has shown that students who undergo practicum have a better insight into the workforce, develop job-related skills, and develop interpersonal and social skills. They also have shown improvements in attitudes toward supervision, self confidence, and practical reasoning (Ryan, Toohey & Hughes, 1996). Further, practicum has demonstrated the stimulation, growth and development of skills, allows for insights into new perspectives, and increases motivation to continue studying (Hascher, Cocard

& Moser, 2004). As a result, participants in field-based programs are generally satisfied with their practicum experiences and typically report the practicum component as the most important part of their course (Ryan, Toohey & Hughes, 1996). Hascher, Cocard and Moser (2004) conducted a study with student teachers on learning processes before and after each practicum placement they underwent. They found that students rated their professional skills (lesson planning and implementation, and general teaching skills) and aspects of personality (attitudes towards students, self esteem and well being) significantly higher following each practicum experience.

**Practicum Training and Cultural Competence.** One of the most important components of pre-service training programs is the opportunity to physically experience working with children, youth, and families (Cochran-Smith, 1995). Complimenting Contact theory and cultural encounters, numerous service-learning programs have documented increases in students' empowerment and self perceptions of cultural competence as a result of first hand experiences working with diverse populations (Alexandrowicz, 2001; Flannery & Ward, 1999; Kahan, 1998; Meaney et al., 2008). In fact, Kidd, Sanchez and Thorp (2008) found that internship experiences in diverse communities had a significant effect on pre-service teachers' culturally responsive teaching practices. These experiences consisted of learning from and interacting with children and families, as well as with other professionals. Additionally, these participants reported that their cultural awareness (how their own values and beliefs affect their teaching methods) had been significantly heightened as a result of their internship experiences (Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2008).

Experiential learning, which is gaining knowledge through meaningful and practical interactions and events, is theorized to enhance one's appreciation for diversity (Seaman et al.,

2009). Seaman et al. (2008) found that an adventure based program for ethnically and racially diverse youth in Connecticut actually produced significant changes in participant attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. It is important to note, however, that experiential opportunities were coupled with a focused curriculum and increased the chances of program success, “while experiential activities give participants the freedom to learn in highly personal ways, the absence of a focused curriculum can leave program designers unable to pinpoint the instructional techniques, key concepts, and program elements most responsible for the participants’ learning about diversity” (Seaman et al., 2008 p. 210). In order for students to place their practicum experiences into the appropriate context, they need to have the opportunity to learn, understand and discuss issues of historical oppression and systems of dominance.

Studies have shown that the amount of multicultural client contact is positively correlated to higher levels of self-reported cultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Sodowsky, Taffe, & Gutkin, 1991). For example, Teasley, Baffour, and Tyson (2005) found that length of experience working with culturally diverse populations positively correlates with social workers’ self perceptions of cultural competence. This is further evidence of Contact theory’s claim that the more experience one has interacting with people of diverse cultures, the more likely it is that they will have positive attitudes towards diverse individuals; and further verifies Pettigrew and Tropp’s (2006) longitudinal study findings that contact with diverse individuals consistently demonstrated a reduction in prejudice over time.

As stated earlier, many pre-service professionals have little experience working with diverse cultures, hence practicum placements that incorporate this component of multicultural experiential learning can be extremely valuable (Bell, 2000; Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2008; Lee & Dallman, 2008; Lim & A’Ole-Boune, 2005). This includes placing students in environments



that may be outside their ‘comfort zones’, to allow them to confront and come to terms with their own biases and values so they will be better able to serve the children and families with whom they will work (Lim & A’Ole-Boune, 2005).

Lieberman and Wilson (2005) conducted a study on a physical education practicum and participant perceptions of competently working with children with special needs. The results showed that the participants’ attitudes towards children with special needs were largely influenced by experience and number of courses on inclusion, including practicum experience. Lieberman and Wilson (2005) provided 27 students with a pre- and post practicum survey instrument to determine if a 1-week experience of working with children with special needs and physical activity improved the attitude of the participants toward the possibility of successfully teaching these children. After one week, students reported both a significant increase in competence and improved attitude in working with children with special needs. Lieberman and Wilson (2005) claim that “practicum experiences, when carefully planned and supported, can be an effective way to improve attitudes toward instruction for children with disabilities” (p.151). As a result, Lieberman and Wilson (2005) encourage practicum training programs to follow Allport’s four conditions of Contact theory to ensure that the experience is meaningful for all participants.

In addition to structured curriculum and experiential learning, opportunities should be available for students to debrief following their practicum placement in order to put their experience in context, so as to not confirm or perpetuate stereotypes (DePalma, Santos Rego & Moledo, 2006). DePalma, Santos Rego and Moledo (2006) analyzed a community-based practicum in the United States where university students and children at a Latin American Community Centre worked collaboratively on projects together, and found that several of the

students held misconceptions and some stereotypical beliefs about the children with whom they were working. However, as the projects continued, and given the opportunities to discuss ‘successes and failures’, students were able to openly discuss and dispel any preconceived biases. Many students who are unaware or uninformed of the social injustices that exist in today’s society tend to complete their practicum placements feeling overwhelmed, disillusioned and experience a lack of hope (Vera & Speight, 2003). Thus, experiential learning and practicum requirements need to incorporate reflective thinking and journaling in order to make this learning process significant, relevant and meaningful for students (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson, 2006).

### **Current Study**

Shifting population demographics, specifically in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010) have contributed to the increased probability of child and youth care professionals coming into contact and working closely with culturally diverse children, youth and families (Huer, Saenz & Doan, 2001; Lazar, 2007; Sue & Sue, 2003; Xu, 2007). As a result, Child and Youth Study educational programs across Canada (Brock University, 2010; Mount Saint Vincent University, 2010; Ryerson University, 2010; University of Victoria, 2010; Vancouver Island University, 2010) have incorporated multicultural study and issues of diversity, with the goal of creating more culturally competent professionals (Bernhard, 1995).

There is evidence that an increase in the amount of time spent in multicultural instruction, enhances students’ feelings of preparedness to work with culturally diverse groups (Leighton, 2009). Some research has demonstrated that even one course on multiculturalism may result in increased levels of perceived cultural competence among students (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008; Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000). In addition to coursework, practicum placements are integral to several professional courses in higher education (Ryan, Toohey &

Hughes, 1996). Research has shown that regardless of design, practicum is the best way to acquire professional knowledge and competence (Hascher, Cocard & Moser, 2004). In fact, numerous service-learning programs have documented increases in students' empowerment and self perceptions of cultural competence as a result of first hand experiences working with diverse populations (Alexandrowicz, 2001; Flannery & Ward, 1999; Kahan, 1998; Meaney et al., 2008).

Contact theory further asserts that meaningful interactions between individuals with differences tend to produce positive changes in attitudes (Allport, 1954). Contact theory has inspired over 50 years of extensive research, using a variety of methods, that range across a breadth of societies, situations and target groups, including ethnicity, race, age, ability, and mental health (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Recent research has revealed that even though the four conditions Allport outlined as being integral to Contact theory's success (equality; common goals; opportunities for friendship; and support of authorities), generally lead to a greater reduction in prejudice, these conditions are not *necessary* for a change in attitudes to occur.

There is a considerable amount of research about teacher training programs and in-service learning, including some research on the effect of multicultural teaching. However, there is a significant gap in the literature with regards to the effect of practicum on Child and Youth Study undergraduates. Additionally, there is very little information regarding how practicum placements can affect students' self perception of cultural competence. Thus, this research study attempted to gain an in-depth understanding of Mount Saint Vincent University Child and Youth Study Undergraduates' self perceptions of cultural competence, specifically in relation to their most recently completed practicum placement.

This research utilized qualitative research methods, such as open-ended, non-directive questions to assist the participants in reflective thinking and reporting on their self perceptions of

cultural competence. The interviews investigated the central research question, which asked students to reflect on their cultural encounters or experiences during their practicum placement.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Method**

This research study investigated and gained an in-depth understanding of a sample of Child and Youth Study Undergraduates' self perceptions of cultural competence, following completion of their most recent practicum placement. The researcher conducted interviews up to 45 minutes long, using a digital voice recorder, with a sample of 11 Child and Youth Study undergraduate students.

#### **Participants**

Child and Youth Study undergraduates at Mount Saint Vincent University are required to undergo four practicum placements of 140 hours each. Currently, there are 36 fall, 2010 practicum students enrolled in Mount Saint Vincent University's Child and Youth Study Undergraduate Program. The researcher aimed for a sample of approximately 10 to 12 students to be interviewed following their most recent practicum placement. Eleven students showing interest in participating in the study were interviewed.

All eleven students interviewed were female and registered in the Child and Youth Study Undergraduate Program at Mount Saint Vincent University. Ten of the students ranged in age from 20 to 22 years, while the eleventh was 27. For seven of the students, their recent practicum placement was their second practicum, while for two it was their first, and the other two students had been in their third and fourth placement respectively. At the time of the interviews, six participants had completed two and a half years of post secondary education, four participants had completed between four and four and a half years, and 1 student had completed one and a half years (see Table 1, Participant Demographics for more information). Additionally, nine students self identified as White or Caucasian Canadian, while one student identified as White

Bermudian and one student opted to not answer the question. Finally, five participants expressed an interest in pursuing their career in Education, four in Youth Work, one in Early Intervention, and one in Child Life.

**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>Age</b>	20 - 27 years	21
<b># of Practica Completed</b>	1 - 4	2
<b>Years of Post Secondary Education Completed</b>	1.5 - 4.5	2.5

### **Procedure**

**Recruitment.** First, permission to conduct this research study was sought from the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) at Mount Saint Vincent University. Once the UREB had approved the proposed research, the researcher contacted the Child and Youth Study Student Society executive in order to communicate interest in recruiting students for this study. The researcher attended a student society meeting to introduce the study and also to distribute the informed consent letter and form (Appendix A). The Student Society was asked to announce the recruitment of participants in their communications (meeting agenda, emails) in order to support the recruitment of students who met the criteria. Finally, once students had agreed to participate and be contacted by the researcher, the researcher contacted each individual to establish a mutually agreed upon time and place to meet for an interview.

**Ethical Considerations.** Participants were informed that they may decline to respond to any questions that they are uncomfortable answering, and were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Students' participation in this study was completely voluntary and entailed minimal risk. However, since recounting experiences may trigger feelings of distress,

shame, or guilt, the researcher had, on hand, information about the Mount Saint Vincent University Student Services if they felt the need for further support. The researcher did not encounter such situation and did not need to refer any participant.

Dr. Turner holds a dual role as the Thesis Supervisor and the CHYS Practicum Coordinator. The students recruited for this study had completed the Fall 2010 practicum and received a grade (P/F) as submitted by their placement supervisors. Dr. Turner has an ongoing role as the placement coordinator for subsequent student practica where her role is focused on assigning enrolled students to available and appropriate placement sites. The risk of harm related to placement decisions is minimal. Students were informed in the informed consent letter that Dr. Turner holds a dual role and that the students' decision to participate in the study or not had no impact on subsequent decisions regarding practicum placements.

**Interviews.** The time of each interview varied from approximately 13 to 29 minutes in length; however, the entire meeting that consisted of reviewing informed consent, an introduction, explanation of terms, interview, demographic questionnaire, and conclusion with a brief explanation of the study lasted no longer than 45 minutes. Two interviews were held in a common staff room, eight interviews were held in an empty classroom, and one interview was held at an organizational office. For the most part, each of these interviews took place in a neutral, safe and quiet environment. Before the start of the interview, participants were required to sign an informed consent form that explained that they will be audio-taped, yet do not have to answer any questions they are not comfortable with, and have the right to withdraw at any time, without penalty. Additionally, the informed consent forms included a description of the study purposes, procedures, goals, and the nature of participant involvement. The researcher also explained that field notes will be scanned into digital files, and any paper copies will be shredded

in a secure manner. Digital files and transcripts were stored on the researcher's home, password protected computer, with copies of files saved on the S-drive on the MSVU server. Data for the study will be destroyed five years after completion. The researcher ensured the participants that any names or identifying information will not be used in the results of the study, and that results of the study will be reported as group data, and any quotations used from the interviews will be reported as anonymous. Upon completion of transcribing the interviews, the files on the voice recorder were deleted, and after five years, the secured information about the study and participants will be destroyed.

The researcher then conducted the interview using a conversational style approach, employing a non-formal, non-judgmental tone, so as to encourage the participant to feel comfortable and express their true feelings. The interview questions (Appendix B) aimed to be non-threatening, and instead opened with 'in your experience' and 'in your opinion'. Upon completion of the interview, the researcher asked the participant some basic demographic questions (Appendix C), regarding age, ethnicity, level of education, and how many practicum placements they had completed in order to contextualize the interview data. Finally, the researcher gave the participants an overview of the study and recorded which participants wanted to receive a copy of their transcript once it had been typed in order to review them if they so wished. Four participants expressed interest in reviewing their interview transcript; as such, the researcher emailed these participants a PDF copy for review and any adjustments requested by the participants were made prior to analysis.

**Interview Questions.** Based on a review of cultural competence literature, questions for the interviews were developed and adapted by the researcher. This study used 15 open-ended,



non-directive questions to investigate the central research question, which asked students to reflect on their cultural encounters or experiences during their practicum placement.

### **Data Collection**

A digital voice recorder was used to collect data from the interviews. Participants were given the option to member check the transcripts from their interviews, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the research perspective (Mays & Pope, 2006; Weston et al., 2001).

Additionally, a journal separated into four sections was used for each participant. In the first section, the researcher chronicled any feelings and perceptions of relationships with the participants. This helped the researcher to interpret field notes and to become aware of any personal biases (Bernard, 2000). The second section allowed for reflexive journaling. Reflexivity allowed the researcher to be mindful of personal beliefs throughout the research experience and attempt to be aware of any benefits or downfalls by 'talking back'. This aided the researcher in bracketing personal perspective as separate, with the purpose of digging deeper. The researcher was attuned to key phrases and statements and personal experiences that spoke directly to experiences, biases and attitudes about diversity and cultural competence, and interpreted the meaning of this information as an informed researcher. The third section was related to the research methodology. Methodological notes allowed the researcher to record everything that was working or not working well in relation to the methodology, including interview questions. Finally, descriptive field notes described experiences and observations, from the behaviour of the participants to the environment and atmosphere. These techniques ultimately strengthened the trustworthiness of the research, as well as analyzed the data based on the greatest amount of information possible.

A separate journal was kept as a component of the data management tasks within this research project. This audit trail outlined and tracked every detail of the research, including critical elements of raw data, process notes, and personal communication. This careful documentation served as evidence of every detail of the research, including the process of reaching summative statements and conclusions. All hard copy data including transcripts and open coding attempts were inputted electronically, then securely shredded. It was imperative that any and all information pertaining to this research be recorded and safely stored.

### **Analysis**

The researcher conducted thematic analyses of the textual data, utilizing thematic networks (web-like illustrations – see Figure 1: Thematic Network) that summarized the main themes of the research, using basic, organizing and global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic networks are non-hierarchical, give fluidity to the themes and highlight the interconnectivity throughout the network (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The researcher first coded the material using a coding framework. Next, abstract themes were identified and refined in order to construct thematic networks. The researcher then described and summarized the thematic network(s) (Attride-Stirling, 2001) in order to summarize participants' experiences of diversity, cultural competence, and biases and attitudes. Finally, the researcher interpreted the patterns that emerged from the thematic network(s) in order to explore the major themes, concepts, and patterns that arose in the text (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

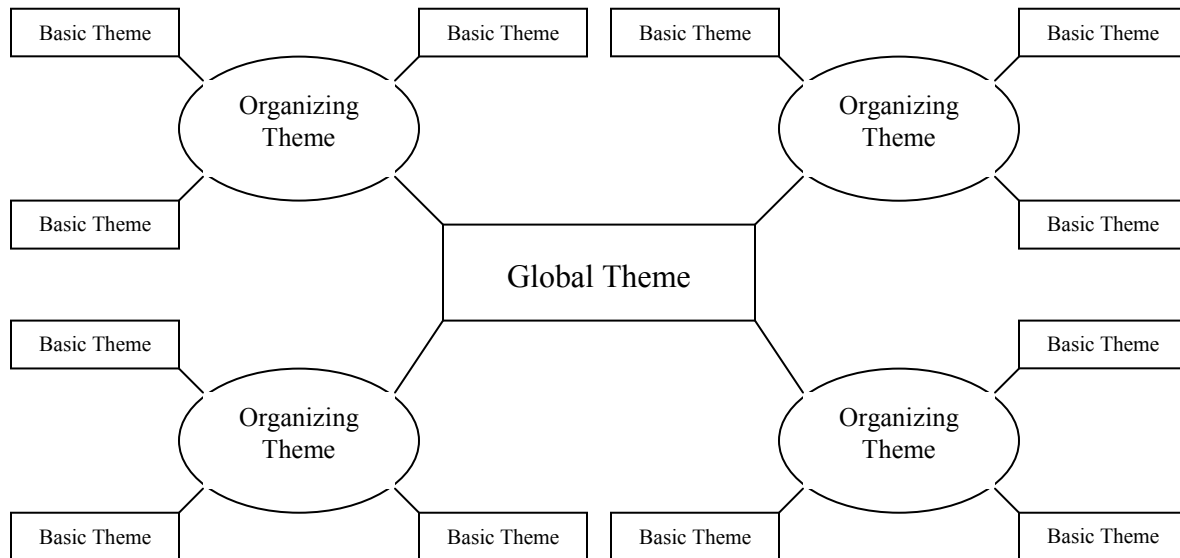
**Basic Themes.** First, a pre-established coding framework was developed by the researcher. Then, the transcripts from the interviews were reviewed to find basic themes, which are simple principles that are characteristic of the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Once there was a collection of basic themes, the researcher classified them into organizing themes.

**Organizing Themes.** The researcher then categorized the basic themes into abstract groups which summarized the main assumptions that underlie a broader theme (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Distinct parts of the participants' experiences were examined to compare the things that belonged together, and that do not belong together. These organizing themes related to the basic themes in order to help answer the questions held in relation to cultural competence among future child and youth care professionals (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Global Themes.** Global themes group sets of organizing themes together to summarize and present an argument or main theme that is supported by the lower level themes of textual data in the transcripts (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The global themes help to tell the story of self perceptions of cultural competence among these future child and youth care professionals. That is, key themes that emerged from the analysis were extracted in order to understand this issue from the perspective of future child and youth care professionals.

Once a thematic network was developed, it served as an illustrative tool in the interpretation of the data. The researcher then explored, described, and summarized the thematic networks in order to interpret patterns (Attride-Stirling, 2001). During the analysis process, the researcher constantly reflected upon the research experience by considering any predispositions about what it means to be culturally competent, as well as personal knowledge about diversity and multicultural child development as resources in coding and analyzing the data obtained from interviews.

**Figure 1: Thematic Network**



*Figure 1. Structure of a thematic network. From Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 1, 385-405.*

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

The purpose of this research study was to gain an in-depth understanding of a sample of Child and Youth Study undergraduates' self perceptions of cultural competence following completion of their most recent practicum placement. The researcher conducted thematic analyses of the textual data that summarized the main themes of the research, using basic, organizing and global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The researcher first coded the material using a pre-established coding framework and once there was a collection of basic themes, the researcher classified them into organizing themes which summarized the main assumptions from the text (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Three global themes emerged as main assumptions from the organizing themes. The researcher discovered that: 1) participants' backgrounds and level of experience with diverse cultures impact their self perceptions of cultural competence; 2) practicum placements and coursework impact participants' self perception of cultural competence; and, 3) participants are motivated to pursue further learning in order to become more culturally competent. These three themes are organized below with descriptions of the organizing themes from the results.

#### **Theme #1**

The first global theme that emerged from the interviews is that participants' background and level of experience impact their self perceptions of cultural competence. The organizing themes that helped develop this global theme are: the participants' childhood growing up; work experience; and, experiences since moving away from 'home' (see Figure 2: Thematic Network #1).

**Childhood/growing up.** The majority of participants disclosed a perceived lack of experience interacting with individuals from cultures different from their own. Almost every participant claimed that growing up in a ‘small town’ did not allow for such experiences. Two participants described their home communities as “the old fashioned family type thing” and “middle class Caucasian Canadian type of [thing]” despite telling the researcher about the number of African Nova Scotians or Asians within their communities.

One participant however, described how she sought out opportunities to interact with diverse individuals despite growing up in a small town. She did so through her role in student council and by raising money to teach children in Africa. Additionally, another participant not only had experience traveling to other countries, she had grown up as a member of a minority group in her home country.

**Work experience.** Similar to the answers above, the majority of the participants had little work experience with individuals from diverse cultures, other than in their practicum placements. One participant recounted when asked about work experience with people of diverse cultures, “it was basically my own culture that I worked with...so I don’t have a lot of experience in work nor at school or anything.” However, three participants described situations where they had specific diverse experiences while working. One participant recounted a situation that she experienced while working as a medical practitioner:

I remember we had someone who was critically ill and failing very quickly and the family was much more concerned about something that was, to me, completely irrelevant...and I was trying to push the fact that we need[ed] to call the doctor immediately...he need[ed] to go to surgery and all they wanted, to me it sounded silly, but they wanted his bed moved in a different direction because he had to face

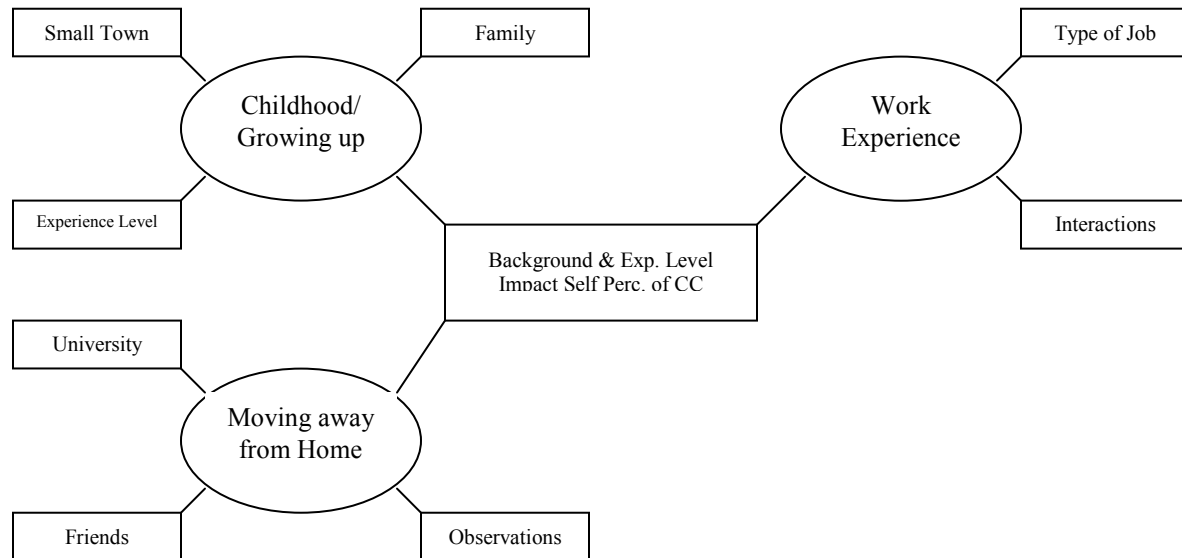
Mecca, I believe. Okay, we'll do that but you need to let me do this first and realizing that to them nothing's gonna happen until this is done. To be in that situation was frustrating but afterwards it was something I really needed to go back and learn more about because I could have done a better job.

Another participant described her experiences working as a tour guide for a university. She revealed that someone from the Middle East was appalled that men and women could both live in the same residence, and one person from China was shocked at how relaxed and lenient the rules were in Canada. This participant expressed the importance of researching cultural beliefs and norms in preparation for such situations. One student told a story about teaching children in the Dominican Republic. She had been informed that she would be teaching at a school; however, what she had perceived a 'school' to be was very different than what she experienced, which was "four posts with a tin roof and a pile of desks with barbed wire around it." She taught English, arts and crafts to a group of children from infancy to 16 years.

**Moving away from home.** Several participants stated that since moving away from 'home' they have had many experiences interacting with people different from themselves, whether it be having a more diverse group of friends, diverse placement or work experiences, the diversity of their school(s), or just by living in Halifax. One participant shared: "when I came to Halifax...I feel like my world changed, like I saw...on the bus especially...there's lots of different people on the bus...everyone's different and I like it. I like that everyone's different."

Another participant spoke about her culturally diverse encounters at her previous post secondary school and described the many cultural events she attended held within the school.

**Figure 2: Thematic Network #1**



*Figure 2. Thematic Network #1. Adapted from Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. Qualitative Research, 1, 385-405.*



**Theme #2**

The second global theme that emerged from the interviews is that practicum placements and coursework impact participants' self perceptions of cultural competence. The organizing themes that helped develop this global theme are: practicum experience; coursework; program; and, career preparation (see Figure 3: Thematic Network #2).

**Practicum Experience.** Referring to their recent practicum placement, five students completed a special needs placement, five students completed their childcare placement and one student worked with youth. Everyone who was interviewed expressed how much they enjoyed their placements; in fact, one participant stated that it was her “all-time favourite part of the program so far.” Five participants spoke directly to how much they appreciated the staff at their placements for their passion, support and dedication. Some participants even expressed an interest in returning to their placements for summer work. However, a couple of the participants described how they felt apprehensive or nervous at first and that their placement experience was more difficult than expected. Even still, these participants stated that their placement gave them the experience they needed to feel more confident.

When the researcher asked the participants to speak to their experiences working with diverse individuals during their placement, the initial accounts were related to visible examples of diversity including the race, colour, or ability of the children or youth. However, some participants further spoke to their experiences with children, youth and/or families with diverse socioeconomic statuses, family composition, gender, language and religion. One participant expressed how “neat [it was] to see how everyone interacted.” Conversely, one participant stated that culturally, there was nothing really out of the ordinary, yet once prompted, spoke to the diversity of ability, family composition, and mental health.

One participant described how her experience going into one child's home was "the most traumatic thing [she'd] ever lived through in [her] life" and later reflected that she learned to figure out where her place was as a professional in order to best help in such a situation. Another participant who had been placed in a predominantly African Nova Scotian school described how the learning environment and events were much different than how she grew up. For example, she described how the children participated in African Drumming, and had a Hip Hop Star as a guest speaker in order to "keep their culture." This participant also described how instead of singing nursery rhymes, the children sang rap songs and how their way of speaking was very different than what she had previously been exposed. Additionally, one participant spoke about the challenges of helping a young child separate her mother tongue from English (spoken at the childcare centre); while, another participant described how at her placement the holidays that every child celebrated at home were reflected and celebrated in the centre. Conversely, one participant implied that the notion of culture was altogether absent when dealing with behavioural issues:

I don't...culture...it didn't matter as much cause they were all pretty much like hands on...like, it didn't matter if you had to like take the child and like guide them to another area so that they didn't hit another child. So, there wasn't really anything specific to culture, at all.

Several participants shared their subsequent feelings about their experiences; for example, a few of the participants reverted back to their experiences growing up and shared how being from a small town did not allow them to be exposed to much diversity. One student placed in a predominantly African Nova Scotian school explained how she did not feel uncomfortable at all

in her placement, due to having such a diverse group of friends since moving to Halifax. This participant further described:

Um, I didn't think I was [culturally competent] until I came to Halifax, like I come from a background that things that like if I'm a white Canadian I should marry a white Canadian or marry a white somebody. Um, and does that like...subtle thing. But when I came to Halifax, um, my first relationship after home was with somebody that wasn't, um, from my ethnic background. So, I feel like my world changed.

Another participant described her experiences as challenging, yet positive. She stated:

I like getting to know different cultures and I think as professionals we have to be open to that and understand our values and beliefs but understand theirs as well...and take into consideration that we now will be working with so many diverse cultures and we have to understand that.

Two students in particular spoke about their uneasiness about working with children with special needs and how important it is to go into these placements with a lot of knowledge and background information. One participant expressed, "How can I work with these children so that I'm giving them the best opportunity that they can have to learn?" Nonetheless, both of these students communicated their increased confidence and comfort level as a result of their placement and learning different strategies. Another participant shared her perceptions of what others might be thinking:

I guess it could be, um, an intimidating thing just because, um, I don't know...just because you're always wondering what they're thinking, kind of, if you only have like one, say African Canadian, so you only have one child in your classroom and

like one family...sometimes you're wondering like 'I hope they don't think that I'm like leaving your child out' or I hope they don't think that I don't pay attention to your child as much as I do the others.

Despite the participants' openness to learning about diverse cultures and working with diverse children and families, there were still personal opinions that arose from their stories. For instance, one participant expressed concern about children resorting to violence, and linked that to the home environment. She stated,

I've never really seen kids that young go to anger and go to violence and you [can] see if they keep on going the way they're going what kind of life they're going to lead because they're not getting any obedience or anything else at home. You can tell that they're kind of running...running their households. So between that...and most of the kids at that place are [living] in poverty...but you have a few that their parents are actually going back to school so you can tell that they have breakfast, they have lunch, they kind of have these things. So, it's a really big difference between kids who are...not as well off as they should be but they're better off than a lot of other kids.

Furthermore, another participant spoke about her experiences in a traditionally stigmatized area of Halifax and described how the children in childcare centres that she had previously been placed in seemed more "altogether" than those in her most recent placement. This participant spoke specifically about a parent-teacher meeting where four out of eighteen parents invited attended:

You could tell that the parents that came...want to know how their kids are doing...they want to get on top of them about doing homework every night but

those are the ones that we had to least worry about. The ones who we wanted to speak to...didn't show up. So, to me it kind of shows the differences in parental priorities...and why certain kids are behind and why some act differently than others, it's because of where they're coming from, the differences between their families or what's going on at home.

Furthermore, two participants shared their perceptions of children's interactions. As one participant stated, "I'm from a small town so we don't have much diversity but...um...it was just really neat to see now everyone interacted, like the kids didn't even, like the kids didn't know, like they all just were all friends, which was nice." Another participant shared,

When I saw kids playing with kids...I've never seen that, coming from a small town...just watching them it just made me happy because they don't care...or they don't know...like they don't see hate like some people do or they don't see judgment like some people.

The participants were asked to describe the impact that their practicum placement had on their personal understanding of cultural competence and the general theme of responses were that the participants felt more open, comfortable and confident. One participant described how she dispelled her assumptions and shared, "I guess it just made me much more interested in realizing that there's so much more out there than...just me." Another student expressed, "I've learned a lot about different backgrounds, different families and it's overwhelming, in a sense, like how different things can be for families and how difficult things can be."

**Coursework.** The researcher asked the participants to describe the coursework that they had completed in relation to culture and diversity and received a wide range of responses. Several students referred to courses they had taken in special needs, cultural perspectives, and

interpersonal communications, while others also referred to issues in early childhood education, global human issues, sociology, and history of childhood in North America. Many participants found the courses about cultural perspectives and communications particularly interesting and helpful in the sense that they learned about cultural norms, body language and gestures, eye contact, touch and how to appropriately and respectfully speak to others. Additionally, several participants described the importance and value of learning about special needs prior to their special needs placement. For instance, one participant described, “it helped us like prepare for when you go into practicum so you know, like you kind of have a background on how you deal with it.” Further, a student described how she appreciated learning about different family compositions as opposed to the nuclear family, including same sex parents, children of divorced parents, and blended families with step siblings.

**Program.** When the participants were asked to describe what aspects of their program most contributed to their preparation to work with culturally diverse children and families, several participants stated that their practicum placement made a significant impact. In fact, one participant stated, “you can read about stuff or you can listen to your professor teach but it’s the real world in the practicum experiences that really makes you aware of things.” Another student described that “you can learn anything from a book but it’s completely different when you actually get out there in this line of work.” Additionally, a participant stated that, “you can learn something in theory but unless you’re applying it, it doesn’t really stick...it doesn’t really have meaning.” This interview actually helped one participant realize just how much she had learned in her last placement. One participant described, “I feel that after this practicum I am a hundred times more competent than I ever was but...there’s always situations that I’m gonna go into and

feel completely lost but that's just kinda life...you're never gonna know everything." One participant further shared:

Definitely my practicums have provided me with more information and made me feel like I have more knowledge about working with um, diverse people than I may have gained like in a classroom. The classroom's definitely a factor, but for me, personally I'm more hands on so I think my practicum was probably the most influential.

Actually, one participant had a perceptive outlook on her practicum placement by suggesting how it is a good way to even find out if one is interested in a particular line of work *before* finishing a four year degree. Finally, another participant honestly maintained,

The more experience I have working with culturally diverse people, like obviously the better for me...I'd say that my practicum placement...helps me build...a more culturally competent view within my practice...I definitely do have more of a basis than I would have previous to my placement.

Upon reflection, several students expressed the importance of both coursework and practicum. One student described how "it's the practicum, the class work, everything has opened...many different things for me. It made me prepared...it made me learn about different cultures." One student who completed a special needs placement articulated:

I would say the school work does play a large role too because you need to know about the disabilities, you need to know about the situations you're gonna be in and you need to know the proper way to work with different cultures. But I also believe that you need to be put into a situation before you can really know what you're

expected of or what to do. So I would say...together they're gonna complete each other but I think that you need both of them to really understand what to do.

Another student shared,

I would just like to say...practicum...plays a huge factor in the Child and Youth Study program...you hear about this stuff and you see videos in class and like we do work... 'what would you do if...' but I think that you really need to be in it to understand...like connecting the two. Like you learn this stuff in class but can you use it in the actual workforce? So, I think the connection really needs to be there cause I don't think we learn all this stuff for no reason...I think [it's] a very good knowledge base to go into the practicum.

The researcher also asked the participants to reflect on the skills that they have developed over their program of study thus far that will help them to prepare for a career working with culturally diverse children and families. Core competencies such as patience, empathy, openness, self awareness, and understanding were all described. Additionally, several participants further spoke to practical skills, such as: listening, asking questions, experimenting with their own style, applying what they have learned, choosing the appropriate method for each child, time management and exercising boundaries.

**Career preparation.** When the participants were asked to describe the experiences during their practicum placement that they feel have helped prepare them for a career working with diverse children, youth and families, the researcher received a wide array of responses. A few of the participants expressed how by just having that hands on experience helps to build their confidence, skill and knowledge each time, before beginning their career. One participant shared, "I feel much more confident because I realize that it is a learning process and you have to start



somewhere.” Additionally, many participants stated the importance of being flexible, as every situation will be different and because working with children can be very unpredictable.

A couple of the participants indicated their recognition and appreciation for the uniqueness of each child. For example, one participant described her trepidation about working with a child who had no speech. After speaking with her supervisor, she started to realize that this child had her own way of communicating and through observation, patience and interaction learned how to confidently and competently communicate with this child. Additionally, another participant described how prior to her placement she had grouped children based on their need. However, during her placement she realized that two children that shared the same condition were “completely separate children with different strengths, different weaknesses, different everything.”

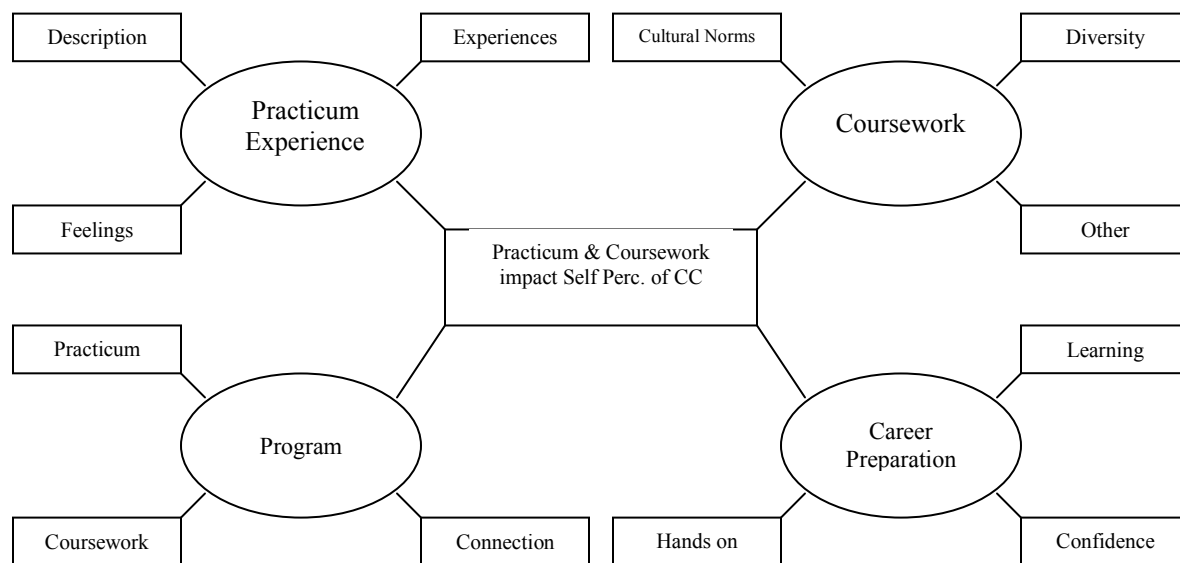
Two participants in particular expressed the importance of looking at the ‘whole child’ when considering behavior, including environment, cultural beliefs and language barriers. For one participant, her placement really “opened [her] eyes about what could be out there” and expressed how crucial routines and structure can be for children. The other participant described how her placement helped her to understand, consider and celebrate all holidays and cultures within the group and the richness of talking about them with the children.

The participants were then asked to reflect on how prepared they feel to work with culturally diverse individuals. Generally, most of the participants described themselves as being open minded, flexible and non judgmental but still having a lot to learn. However, one participant stated that she felt she was really prepared, yet went on to say that “I don’t really look at people any different than I view myself.” Another participant shared, “I wouldn’t say I’m very prepared...not prepared enough to go into a situation and be completely confident”. Nonetheless,

many participants admitted that they feel much more prepared than they did before their practicum placement(s). Another student expressed how she feels that working with diverse children and families will be a little bit easier now that she has some experience. One other student similarly explained that since her practicum experience, she feels much more comfortable as a result of having a basis and background on such issues. Conversely, when asked how prepared one participant felt to work with culturally diverse children, she shared:

I feel prepared because I'm open to learn about it...but I may be a little nervous at the same time...just because it's something that...it's challenging...it's not a comfortable situation at the same time. Um, it's a situation that maybe I haven't been in before.

**Figure 3: Thematic Network #2**



*Figure 3. Thematic Network #2. Adapted from Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. Qualitative Research, 1, 385-405.*

**Theme #3**

The final global theme that emerged from the interviews is that participants are motivated to pursue further learning in order to become more culturally competent. The organizing themes that helped develop this global theme are: motivation and learning; importance of cultural competence; reflection; and, self perceptions of cultural competence (see Figure 4: Thematic Network #3).

**Motivation and Learning.** When asked how motivated they were to learn more about and interact with diverse cultures, the participants unanimously expressed their interest and motivation in learning more. However, one participant did admit that, “it just doesn’t occur to me...like if I’m having to work with diverse families and learn more about them then that’s perfectly fine with me but if I don’t then that’s fine...I just see it like...it’s still a family...it doesn’t matter to me.” Nonetheless, the same participant later reflected, “I wouldn’t want to go in and not know *anything* about it because I would be upset if someone came to me and didn’t know anything.”

When the researcher asked the participants how they would go about learning more, they shared a number of suggestions, including: research through books, articles and internet; learning through workshops, training sessions, lunch and learns, language courses and guest speakers; exposure through participating in societies, community immersion, events, and travel; and, daily interaction with others including asking questions.

**Importance of cultural competence.** Every participant expressed the importance of cultural competency for Child and Youth Professionals, and several students attributed this to the diversity of the population in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Canada. Further, one participant stated, “I think you really need to know how to interact with all different kinds of children because that’s

the last thing you want to do is make a child uncomfortable or make their family uncomfortable.”

Another participant shared, “if you don’t know who your client is, it’s really, really, really easy to judge and misinterpret what you’re supposed to be doing and if we’re supposed to be helping somebody...and helping someone be the best person they can be...judging them and putting them in a whole different category isn’t appropriate.” One participant stated that “being culturally competent is pretty much vital if you’re gonna work with children or families.”

Moreover, another participant shared this thought:

You never know what children you’re going to work with. You can’t predict who’s going to come to your programs or who’s going to be at the place that you work or in the daycare that you work in...and when those children do come, you have to be prepared for it, like you can’t turn somebody away just because you don’t know how to react to them. It’s not their fault that we’re ill-prepared.

One participant articulated the necessity of being culturally competent to work with children and families. Another student described the importance of not only understanding our values and beliefs, but understanding others’ as well. She further explained that since we will now be working with so many diverse cultures, it is imperative to understand that distinction. Another participant stated that “it’s important for people who come into the program to realize that they’re gonna have to work with diverse families at one point or another.”

**Reflection.** When asked if the interview triggered any thought about their perceptions of cultural competence, every participant asserted that it had. One participant shared, “I guess it’s something I don’t usually think a lot about so I’m reflecting back on what I actually do know and have had experience with and how much more I really need to look into.” Another participant expressed how the interview made her realize just how much she learned in her last practicum

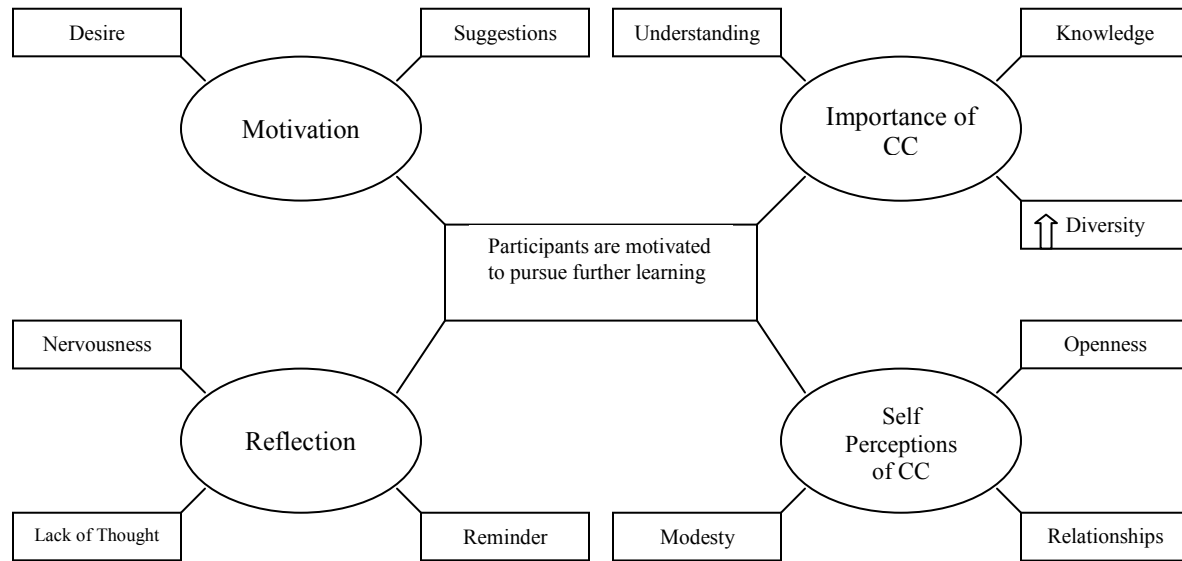
placement. However, one student admitted that she did not have a passion to learn more but would if she had to, if she was working with a family different from her and further expressed, “I’m just realizing that now when I’m answering the questions.”

One participant admitted that before the interview she felt like she knew quite a bit about culture, yet realized that she needed to learn more once she tried to express her thoughts on the topic. Another participant maintained that culture and diversity are topics that she does not think people think about a lot and feels that it is important to be reminded.

**Self perceptions of cultural competence.** Similar to the question asking how prepared the participants feel to work with culturally diverse individuals, when asked how culturally competent they feel they are, the participants were open and direct. Even though two participants answered that they felt quite confident in their level of cultural competence, the majority of participants stated that although they would exercise understanding, respect, and open-mindedness, they still feel they have a lot to learn. Additionally, a couple of participants expressed how much more culturally competent they feel after their most recent practicum placement. Conversely, one participant honestly answered, “I feel like I could learn more. I could definitely learn more about other cultures but until I have to, I feel like I won’t.”

Finally, when the participants were asked to share any further thoughts or concerns, the following comments were shared: “practicum plays a huge factor in the Child and Youth Study program, I would say that it’s great...it opened my eyes.” Another student suggested that “there should be more of a focus within the different placements. Even in different areas, there should be a broader range of placements.”

**Figure 4: Thematic Network #3**



*Figure 4. Thematic Network #3. Adapted from Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. Qualitative Research, 1, 385-405.*

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate and gain a deeper understanding of a group of Child and Youth Study undergraduates' self perception of cultural competence following a recent practicum placement. The participants' overall experience was related to perceived levels of cultural competence. The results of this study revealed that the participants' background and level of experience with diverse cultures, coupled with their coursework and practicum experiences all significantly influence their self perceptions of cultural competence. Furthermore, the results of this study show that all of the participants are motivated to learn more about and interact more with diverse individuals. The participants interviewed for this study had little experience interacting with people from diverse cultures prior to attending post secondary education. The participants revealed that practicum offered them the opportunity to interact with culturally diverse children, youth and families in a meaningful and positive environment. Experiential learning provided the students with an excellent opportunity to develop positive attitudes toward others. The participants admitted to having low perceived levels of cultural competence prior to their placements and recognized after practicum that although they felt more confident, they still had more to learn. The discussion is organized by the three global themes that emerged from the interviews.

**Participants' background and level of experience impact their self perceptions of cultural competence.** The majority of students in North America aspiring to work with children and youth come from white, European-American, middle-class backgrounds (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Davis-McFarland, 2008; Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2005; Lazar, 2007; Meaney, Bohler, Kopf, Hernandez & Scott, 2008), which may lead us to believe that many of these students have

very little experience with culturally diverse children and families (Allard, 2006; Meaney et al., 2008). The sample of eleven students interviewed for this study by and large fit this description. All eleven students were female, in their early twenties and of those who opted to answer the question, self identified as white or Caucasian. Interestingly however, regarding this self identification, the question asked, “What ethnicity do you identify with?” Every participant answered as their race or colour, rather than ethnicity, which refers to one’s ancestral heritage. Additionally, the majority of the participants described how they grew up in a ‘small town’ where they did not have the opportunity to interact with individuals from diverse cultures.

Our culture shapes our worldviews and how we perceive and interpret other cultures; as a result, we all view our experiences and interactions with others through a ‘cultural lens’ (Davis-McFarland, 2008; Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2008). However, this process may also cause us to inherit the stereotypes and biases of society, which may be then reinforced by family, peers and the media (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2003). For example, several participants initially referred to the visible differences of the children and youth with whom they worked when asked about working with diverse individuals during their practicum placement. Although, once prompted they were able to speak to differences in ability, language, religion, family composition and socioeconomic status. Nonetheless, the participants naturally reverted back to reflecting on the children they worked with that were from a racialized group. Further, some assumptions and stereotypes about certain groups of people arose from the text, for example a couple of the participants assumed that children did not see differences and were oblivious to race or colour since they played together so well. Moreover, assumptions related to parents’ socioeconomic status or level of education in relation to their priorities or interest in their child’s education were expressed. Conversely, one



participant implied that the notion of culture was altogether absent when dealing with behavioural issues. This is a common perception, as many people from the dominant culture tend to minimize the differences between themselves and others by acting from within their own cultural paradigm, thus perceiving others to be “just like me” (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008 p.259).

However, since the demographics of these students do not proportionately represent the diversity of the larger society, they may not have the knowledge or skills to effectively work with diverse populations and may be uncomfortable discussing issues of diversity (Lim & A’Ole-Boune, 2005). Almost every participant was humble in their responses and recognized that they still have a lot to learn and experience before feeling overly comfortable or confident working with diverse individuals. The participants appeared to be very self aware in their responses and explained that even though they may not have prior experience, they have been gaining more experience since moving to Halifax and learning through their program and practicum placements.

Contact theory asserts that meaningful interactions between individuals with differences tend to produce positive changes in attitudes (Allport, 1954). Allport (1954) suggested that prejudice can be reduced through sustained participation in shared experiences and that direct interaction with people of diverse backgrounds will improve attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours towards others (Seaman et al., 2008). In their meta-analysis, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found that not only do attitudes toward immediate participants usually become more favourable, but so do attitudes toward diverse individuals in general. The current study provides further support to this claim; as the participants displayed positive attitudes towards the diverse individuals in their placements, as well as culturally diverse groups of people.

Emerson, Kimbro and Yancey (2002) found that those who had previous interracial contact at a younger age were more likely as adults to participate in diverse social groups and have meaningful personal relationships with diverse individuals. This was also evident in the experiences of the participants. One participant who grew up as a member of a minority group in her home country described her experiences and increased motivation for working with culturally diverse individuals. Another participant who had little experience with diverse individuals however, described her close personal relationships and friendships with people from cultures different from her own. While several participants spoke favourably of diverse groups and individuals, it was encouraging to see these participants form and sustain meaningful webs of relationships with individuals from diverse groups (Emerson, Kimbro & Yancey, 2002).

Intergroup anxiety, a negative condition of Contact theory, is likely to emerge in an individual who has had little or no previous contact with members of a group (Crisp & Turner, 2009); it is likely this is what many of the participants experienced during their practicum placements. A few of the participants expressed apprehension and nervousness before going into their placements; yet, later described how their practicum experience had given them increased confidence and comfort and had helped them feel much more prepared to work with diverse children and families. This example is supported by Crisp and Turner's (2009) claim that following successful contact, this anxiety is significantly lowered due to the realization that there is nothing to fear from such interactions.

**Practicum placements and coursework impact participants' self perceptions of cultural competence.** Within the past 15 years, several researchers have begun to recognize the importance of improving educational programs to encompass multiculturalism and issues of diversity (Banks, 1991; Bernhard, 1995; Gomez, 1992; Orlikow & Young, 1993). As a result,

many professional training programs have attempted to incorporate multicultural education content into courses and field experiences (Kea, Trent & Davis, 2002). Training programs that include culturally relevant and accurate content, as well as experiences of diverse populations are the most beneficial to students expecting to work in the helping profession (Benincasa, 2002; Brinson & Denby, 2008; Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2003).

Some research has demonstrated that even one course on multiculturalism may result in increased levels of perceived cultural competence among students (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008; Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell & Greene, 2000). Moreover, there is evidence that an increase in the amount of time spent in multicultural instruction enhances students' feelings of preparedness to work with culturally diverse groups (Leighton, 2009). This evidence was very much supported during the interviews and discussions about how particular courses helped the participants in feeling better prepared to work with diverse individuals. Initially, the researcher planned on using a program of study description as a prompt when asking the participants which courses they had taken in relation to cultural diversity. However, once the participants began sharing a range of responses, the researcher felt that using this prop would only narrow the responses. Not only did the participants discuss courses such as cultural perspectives, special needs, and interpersonal communications; they also included courses in sociology, history, issues in early childhood education, and global human issues. One participant even described how every course had given her something different to reflect upon. Specifically, several students explained how crucial their special needs course was prior to their special needs placements.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that multicultural coursework alone does not significantly affect multicultural awareness. Further, allowing for only one course about culture neglects to acknowledge the infinite spectrum of diversity, and may result in overgeneralization

and stereotyping (Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005). Several of the participants who described what they had learned in their cultural perspectives and interpersonal communications courses referred to cultural norms such as hand gestures, body language, eye contact and other modes of communication. Although these matters are important to discuss, none of the participants referred to deeper issues such as historical oppression or systemic racism. Allowing for issues of culture to be infused into all courses will help to eliminate the occurrence of students reflecting upon only surface characteristics (Harry, 2002; Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005; Park and Turnbull, 2001). Chi-Ying and Bemak (2002) further encourage students to: learn about the historical and socio-political background of the individuals with whom they are working; understand the nature and impact of oppression, discrimination and racism; value the importance of family and community; and, promote social change.

One of the most common similarities from the interviews was the overwhelming magnitude of and appreciation for practicum placements. Every participant expressed the importance of undergoing practicum in order to experience and feel more comfortable working with culturally diverse children, youth and families. Several researchers have claimed that participants in field based programs are generally satisfied with their practicum experiences and typically report the practicum component as the most important part of their course (Ryan, Toohey & Hughes, 1996). Further, numerous service learning programs have documented increases in students' empowerment and self perceptions of cultural competence as a result of first hand experiences working with diverse populations (Alexandrowicz, 2001; Flannery & Ward, 1999; Kahan, 1998; Meaney et al., 2008). The results of this current study strongly support this claim as well as Contact theory. Not only did every participant express how much they enjoyed their placements, coworkers and clients, but almost every participant professed that

their placement gave them the experience they needed to more comfortably and confidently work with children and families from diverse cultures. Several participants further admitted that they feel much more prepared than they did before their placement(s). This is precisely the concept of Contact theory; the more experience one has interacting with diverse individuals, the more comfortable and confident they will be, and the more attitudes will positively shift.

Additionally, reflective journaling is a common practice when students undergo practicum, and has been found to be very beneficial for students to express their own cultural values and biases, recognize the impact that their biases may have on cross-cultural relationships, and to identify further areas of professional development (Brinson & Denby, 2008). The participants in this study were all required to keep a journal, documenting their placement experiences.

Given the above however, almost every participant reflected on the importance and connection of both coursework and practicum. Several researchers have expressed that training programs that include culturally relevant and accurate content, as well as experiences of diverse populations are the most beneficial to students expecting to work in the helping profession (Benincasa, 2002; Brinson & Denby, 2008; Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2003). Moreover, in order for professional programs to be successful, students need to clearly see the connection between theory (coursework) and practice (practica) (Ryan, Toohey, & Hughes, 1996). Referring to the results of this study, many participants expressed the significance of students seeing this connection between theory and practice.

**Participants are motivated to pursue further learning in order to become more culturally competent.** Shifting population demographics, specifically in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010) have contributed to the increased probability of child and youth care professionals coming into contact and working closely with culturally diverse children, youth and families

(Huer, Saenz & Doan, 2001; Lazar, 2007; Sue & Sue, 2003; Xu, 2007). Every participant interviewed recognized and expressed the importance of being culturally competent in the child and youth profession. It is important to note however that almost every participant that expressed the importance of cultural competence attributed this need to the diversity prevalent in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Canada. However, Barrera and Kramer (1997) caution that by emphasizing demographic change as the primary motive for professionals becoming culturally competent triggers the assumption that cultural competence is only necessary when there is a critical mass. Rather, cultural competence is necessary for understanding the needs and development of *all* children.

Not only did all of the participants communicate a need to learn more in order to feel more culturally competent, they all expressed a *desire* to further their understanding. The most critical aspect of cultural competence is motivation, and without this desire, becoming skilled in other components of cultural competence is unattainable (Daniel, Roysircar, Abeles & Boyd, 2004; Davis-McFarland, 2008). In fact, although motivation is not necessarily required for Contact theory to be successful, studies have shown that the more willing participants are to interact with diverse individuals, the more successful the interaction will be (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The participants even shared numerous suggestions as to how they would further their knowledge to become more culturally competent, ranging from research and training programs to immersing themselves in another community and having conversations with diverse individuals. As long as students possess a genuine interest in learning about the beliefs, traditions, values and attitudes of culturally diverse populations, educational programs can contribute to a social shift in attitudes and behaviour (Allard, 2006; Davis-McFarland, 2008; Guralnick, 2008; Johannes & Erwin, 2004).

## **Implications**

No individual is free from bias. Racism, discrimination and prejudice are all social constructs that are prevalent in our daily experiences; and, we must acknowledge our internalization of these ideologies, whether they be conscious or subconscious (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson, 2006; Davis-McFarland, 2008; Dogra, 2001; Gonzalez-Mena, 2007; Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005; Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004; Strasser & Seplocha, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2008). Child and youth workers are professionals who work with children and adolescents in various educational and therapeutic contexts. The child and youth profession cannot be fully realized without a significant level of cultural competence; thus, a need exists to facilitate improved perceptions of cultural competency of child and youth study students through self reflection, and open discussion with others about their experiences. Each potential child and youth worker could benefit from improved confidence in working with culturally diverse children, youth and families.

The implications of this study are primarily focused on those involved in professional training programs – faculty, practicum supervisors, and students. Considering that Contact theory suggests the more time spent with diverse individuals, the more favourably they will be viewed by the participants (Allport, 1954); and, since many pre-service professionals have little experience working with diverse cultures, practicum placements that incorporate this component of multicultural experiential learning can be extremely valuable (Bell, 2000; Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2008; Lee & Dallman, 2008; Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005). Given that opportunity for contact is necessary for a change in attitude, and that many participants did not perceive much cultural diversity in their placements, a broader range of placements could be very beneficial to students. As one participant in particular suggested, placing students in environments that may

be outside their 'comfort zones' will allow them to confront and come to terms with their own biases and values so they will be better able to serve the children and families with whom they will work (Lim & A'Ole-Boune, 2005). For instance, a few participants disclosed their desire to work with culturally diverse populations; thus sought out those opportunities through practicum. Another participant even expressed how valuable her next placement experience will be since she will be traveling outside of her community.

In addition to structured curriculum and experiential learning, opportunities need to be available for students to regularly debrief during their practicum placement in order to put their experience in context, so as to not confirm or perpetuate stereotypes (DePalma, Santos Rego & Moledo, 2006). In addition to reflective journaling and seminars, perhaps there could be a concurrent course to practicum to discuss issues and concerns that students might be encountering during their placements. Chang (2007) encourages students to have the opportunity to acknowledge, share, discuss and work through any negative reactions and to not view them as problems, but rather as a natural process that provides clues for solutions.

Finally, it is important for universities, learning institutions, and professional training programs to discover ways to attract a diverse student population in order to provide a greater insight and experience into the program(s). For instance, the results of this study may have been very different had the demographics of the participants been more heterogeneous (including males, visible diversity, geographical background, socioeconomic status etc.).

Future child and youth professionals must honour their position as cultural mediators by understanding how specific systems interact in the development of their own personal knowledge base and skill development for practice in culturally diverse settings. Culturally competent child



and youth professionals can be a vital resource for others who may struggle with culturally competent practice.

### **Limitations**

Despite the perceived honesty of responses from the participants, the self report nature and responses may reflect participants' desire to appear culturally competent (social desirability) rather than reporting accurate feelings. Not only is self evaluation clouded by personal bias, participants may feel compelled to provide the answer(s) they feel the researcher is seeking rather than what they believe to be true. Hence, the results of this study are limited by the participants' responses. Further, the results of this study must be interpreted in the context of the methodological limitations of the study. Interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of Child and Youth Study undergraduate students. As a result, the small sample bred homogeneity of the group of participants interviewed. As such, this study can only provide the reader with a 'snapshot' overview. Finally, the method of interviews on the topic of self perceptions of cultural competence was not only new to the participants, but new to the researcher as well. As such, the students may have felt 'tested', and the researcher may have missed important cues for further prompting.

Despite these limitations, this study offers valuable insights into the self perceptions of cultural competence among a group of Child and Youth Study undergraduate students. This is an important issue, not only in Western society, but throughout the world, particularly where population shifts have resulted in culturally and ethnically diverse communities, which typically remains an underrepresented topic in current research.

**Future Research**

This study examined participants' self perceptions of cultural competence only. The perception of cultural competence among child and youth study students may be different from the perception of the children, youth and families of whom they serve. Future research should focus on the link or relationship between Child and Youth Study undergraduates' perceived level of cultural competence and the families' perceptions of the students' cultural competence. This would provide a deeper understanding of gaps and similarities in responses related to perceptions of cultural competence, as well as areas for improvement.

Additional research in this area is important and should also include a more heterogeneous group, including males, more culturally diverse participants, and participants who have a variety of backgrounds and experiences in order to gain a broader understanding of how experiential learning affects self perceptions of cultural competence. Further, interviewing participants both prior to and following their practicum placements would provide valuable insight into intergroup anxiety, Contact theory, and changes in attitudes. Additionally, initial interviews may heighten the students' cultural awareness prior to beginning their practicum placement, thereby creating a more meaningful experience.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Invitation & Informed Consent

(Letterhead)

Dear Student,

My name is Amanda Rogers and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts (Child and Youth Study) program at Mount Saint Vincent University. As part of my degree requirements, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Joan Turner and committee members Patricia Monaghan and Felicia Eghan. I am inviting you to participate in my study, *Child and Youth Study Undergraduates' self perceptions of cultural competence*. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how prospective child and youth professionals perceive their cultural competence after their recent practicum placement. By providing your experience as a Child and Youth Study undergraduate student just completing your most recent practicum placement, it is my hope to gain an understanding of Child and Youth Study Undergraduates' self perceptions of cultural competence following practicum.

This study requires participants to complete a demographic questionnaire, and an interview. The interview will be audio recorded and will take up to 45 minutes to complete. You will be asked to sign a form agreeing to the recording of the interview. The results of this study will be presented in group data only, and no individual participants will be identified. Quotes from the interviews may be used in the thesis and in future publications and presentations to illustrate important findings. However, they will not be accompanied by any identifying information.

Your participation is completely voluntary and it entails minimal risk to you. Recounting your experiences as a student undergoing practicum may bring focus to the growing issue of cultural competence, and may provide valuable insight for those who will follow in these footsteps. You may decline to respond to any questions that you may be uncomfortable answering, and are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Dr. Turner holds a dual role in this study, and your decision to participate in the study or not will have no impact on subsequent decisions regarding practicum placements.

Every effort will be made to maintain participants' confidentiality. Although interviews will be audio taped, the researcher will not identify participants by name on the recordings. Tapes and transcripts will be coded using a number system so as to ensure that participant anonymity is maintained. The demographic questionnaires will also remain anonymous, and will be used only as a means of contextualizing data.

All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential and will not influence your grades in your Child and Youth Study Program at MSVU. **This study is not related in any way to your coursework.** Once the transcriptions are completed, you will be contacted and given the opportunity to review your transcript to determine if it reflects your perceptions and to suggest changes if necessary. You have the right to request that sections are deleted from the study. Any changes to the transcripts can be submitted to Amanda Rogers via email.

Results of this study will be published in a Master's level thesis document. In addition, information and/or quotes from this study may be published and/or presented to academic and non-academic audiences via presentations or publication. Only Amanda Rogers and thesis committee members will have access to your transcripts. After completion of this research, a copy of the study will be made available to you upon request, and a copy of the completed thesis will be available at the University Library and/or Child and Youth Study office, Mount Saint Vincent University.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Amanda Rogers, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] or Dr. Joan Turner, 457-6750, [joan.turner@msvu.ca](mailto:joan.turner@msvu.ca). This research activity has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved in the study, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at 457-6350 or via email at [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca).

**By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you have fully read and understand the above information and agree to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your files.**

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**Participant's signature**

**Date**

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**Researcher's signature**

**Date**

*One signed copy to be kept by the researcher, and one signed copy to the participant.*

### **Audio Recording**

Interviews may be recorded using audio recording to assist with the accuracy of your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording:      Yes \_\_\_\_\_      No \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions

To clarify the terms of Cultural Competence and Diversity, I will present the interviewee with the below definitions based on a review of multicultural literature and the context for this study.

### **Cultural competence**

A culturally competent professional has the ability to respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, classes, races, languages, faiths, abilities, family compositions and ethnic backgrounds in a manner that recognizes, affirms and values differences and similarities, and understands others' worldviews through the development and practice of culturally meaningful strategies.

**Diversity** or **Cultural Diversity** refers to any and all of: race, ethnicity, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, and family composition.

1. Please tell me a little bit about your most recent practicum placement?
2. What experiences have you had working with diverse children or families during your practicum placement?
3. How much past experience do you have interacting with people from cultures other than your own?
4. How much past experience do you have working with culturally diverse families or children?
5. Tell me about the course work you have completed related to culture and diversity in Child and Youth Study or other disciplines (the researcher will have CHYS Program of Study sheets available for the participant to review/recall).
6. Which experiences from your most recent practicum placement have provided you with opportunities to prepare you for a career working with culturally diverse children and families? What about previous placements? Please expand.
7. How prepared do you personally feel you are to work with culturally diverse children and families?
8. In your opinion, what impact has this practicum placement had on your personal understanding and acquisition of cultural competence?
9. Describe some of the skills you have developed over your program of study that prepare you to work with culturally diverse children, youth and families?
10. In your opinion, what aspects of your university experience in CHYS have contributed to your preparation for working with children and families of cultures different from your own?



11. How motivated or interested are you in learning more about and/or interacting with diverse cultures? How would you go about doing this?
12. In what ways is cultural competency important for Child and Youth Professionals?
13. Has this interview triggered thought for you about your perception of your cultural competence? Please explain.
14. How culturally competent do you feel you are? Please describe, elaborate ...
15. Please share any further thoughts or concerns about your practicum placement or this research in relation to cultural competence.

**Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire**

Is this your first practicum placement with MSVU's Child and Youth Study undergraduate program?            YES                            NO

If NO, how many practicum placements have you completed?        1            2            3

How many years of university/post secondary education have you completed?

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MALE

FEMALE

How old are you?

What ethnic group do you most identify with?

What career would you like to pursue with this degree?