

Student engagement with difference at a Canadian university

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Abstract: Mutual respect is an essential component of a peaceful society in which everyone is honoured and treated as equals. Using a phenomenological approach, this study examined the experiences of nine post-secondary students in culturally diverse classrooms in an urban Canadian university. Through individual interviews, using phenomenological reduction, findings suggest that participants defined and engaged with cultural diversity in a variety of ways and exhibited various levels of intentionality of engagement and non-engagement with each other. Participants observed differences pertaining to language, culture, ethnicity, skin colour, and religion. From these discussions of difference, participants proposed practical pedagogical practices that might promote cross-cultural competencies, including: active participation, open dialogues, out of the classroom learning, and non-adherence to clocks and desks in cookie cutter order. The study revealed that implementing Freirian critical pedagogy and Cummins' empowerment model in culturally diverse post-secondary classrooms can increase the students' comfort level, which strengthens their ability to learn in their classrooms and from each other.

Keywords: Cultural Diversity, Difference, Engagement, Multicultural Education, Post-Secondary

Introduction

In Canada, educational institutions have been instrumental in implementing policies to address the country's increasingly culturally diverse demographics (Joshee, Peck, Thompson, Chareka, & Sears, 2010). I align with Joshee et al.'s (2010) understanding of cultural diversity, which includes "issues of immigrant integration, cultural identity, racism, religious diversity, and linguistic diversity" (p. 1). When people from diverse cultural backgrounds live, work, and study together, tensions may arise because people may approach societal issues from different perspectives, which can lead to conflict. In Canada, tensions emerging from cultural pluralism have led to the development of a multicultural approach to education. The goal of multicultural education has been to implement diversity policies such as integrating minority groups into Canadian society by respecting their differences, rather than their forced assimilation, and beginning to recognize the rights of Indigenous people (Joshee et al., 2010; Peck, Sears, & Donaldson, 2008). Unfortunately, multicultural policies are not enough impetus for changing engrained behaviours. Appreciation of cultural diversity is a start, but understanding needs to be deepened to address structural and systematic paradigms. To this end, Ghosh and Abdi (2004) asked whether the process of education provides equal access, opportunity, and treatment for all. They questioned whether educators are prepared to respond to the changing demographics of Canada's diverse society. These questions are supported by other researchers (e.g., Agyepong, 2010; Bannerji, 2000; Bennett, 2002; Henry & Tator, 2009) who indicated that despite the aim to integrate diverse peoples and practices into universities, racism persists in educational institutions despite (or perhaps because of) multicultural approaches to educational policy. Banks (2004) argued that an equitable educational environment would include cross-cultural content, including curricula that are representative of various cultures and ethnicities, empowering pedagogical practices that recognize different learning styles, and most urgently the eradication of systemic racism. In this study, I set out to explore how students experience cultural diversity in classrooms at a Canadian university. I asked: what meanings do these students ascribe to their experiences of cultural and racial difference in a post-secondary classroom? How do students' experiences compare with the ways in which cultural diversity is explored in literature on multicultural education?

Exploring Multicultural Education: Deficit and Empowerment Approaches

Historically, there have been two approaches or models that have described cross-cultural interactions: deficit theory and empowerment theory. Cummins (1986) described the deficit theory as seeing cultural groups that differ from mainstream society as needing to change to fit in. Empowerment theory sees all cultural, religious, and language groups as equal and deserving of respect (Cummins, 1986; Moodley, 1995). In deficit theory, students are expected to give up who they are and repress expressions valued in their culture (Au, 1993, 2000; Ball, 2006; Cummins, 1986). However, the deficit approach to inclusion is problematic and has a long history in the Canadian education system. Educational policy and practice implemented the deficit theory by legitimizing a select interpretation of knowledge while excluding a different understanding (Banks, 2001; Henry & Tator, 2009). The history of schooling in Canada included

the enactment of deficit theory through the forceful removal of Indigenous children from their homes to be placed in educational settings, where the goal was to scrub them of their home cultures and replace them with dominant cultural, religious, and language practices (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2008; LaRoque, 2010; Paulsen, 2003). Indigenous young peoples' cultures and languages were seen as deficient and in need of change. Learning is inhibited in environments where students are required to master academic English with no acknowledgment or inclusion of their own cultures (Ball, 1995; Cummins, 1986). While teachers may not be conscious of deficit-based attitudes and practices, these attitudes have consequences on learners' sense of inclusion and wellbeing.

Empowerment Theory

Cummins (1986) defined empowerment theory as both a practice and a theory that promotes equality where non-dominant cultures are valued and respected. Educators who practice the empowerment model are advocates for minority students and do not see differences as deficits in relation to multilingual, racial, religious, and cultural practices (Cummins, 1986; Erickson, 1987). Similarly, Cross (2009) described the abundance model, which problematizes a banking approach to education (Freire, 1972), and suggested that knowledge is built from the group up. In the abundance model, the teacher engages learners in critical dialogues to establish a learning environment that gives space for student agency. Students transfer their understandings into new learning contexts, co-owners and co-creators of their own learning (Cross, 2009). When learners take ownership of the learning process, become aware of their place and privilege, and are given the opportunity to take on issues that matter to them, then transformative learning can happen (Freire, 1972). Transformative learning results in an adjustment in social action that both reflects and empowers learners in the classroom and in society.

Much of the research on education in culturally diverse spaces has been conducted with a focus on in-service and pre-service primary and secondary educators and environments (Hernandez, 2004; Pohan, 1996). However, there is a lack of research on student experiences in diverse post-secondary classrooms. Of the studies that have been conducted in post-secondary institutions, many have focused on the experiences of specific ethnic groups. Hutchison, Quach, and Wiggan's (2009) and Nazzari, McAdams, and Roy (2005) focused on bilingual and intercultural approaches, and called for a transformative perspective to inclusion in post-secondary institutions. Other studies recognized the need for an empowerment model, and they focused on student experiences in English classrooms in other countries such as Kenya (Muchiri, 2002) and South Africa (Shay, Moore, & Cloete, 2002), or as immigrants in North American classrooms (Nagata, 2005; Perez & Wiggan, 2009).

Gay (2003) confirmed that a gap remains between research and theory in multicultural education. On the surface it may seem that diverse ethnic groups in educational settings intermingle harmoniously, but "close physical proximity" (p. 30) does not mean that students and instructors engage in genuine cross-cultural interest and understanding. Instead of isolating multicultural education as a class or unit, Gay (2003) suggested that multicultural inclusion needs to be systematically woven into the core of all curricula, policy, classroom climate, and method of assessment. This study responds to research in the multicultural education that indicates that there is a need for an empowerment approach and genuine inclusion in culturally diverse post-secondary classrooms.

Critical pedagogy is an enactment of empowerment theory, where students are expected to be active participants in the education process. Brazilian educator and critical pedagogy advocate Paulo Freire (1972) argued that those in power, including those in educational systems, maintain and propagate oppressive structures, which the disempowered learn to accept and own as their fate. Because the oppressed may not have the tools or the conscious awareness, they may feel powerless to challenge the status quo. Freire (1972) proposed liberation from oppressive systems through the process of conscientization. Conscientization is possible through dialogue that prompts change to a personal conviction, which then leads to action. Conscientization is not something that can be enforced, but results when the ways in which knowledge is defined and dispersed become transparent. Conscientization leads learners to become active participants in their own emancipation.

Surrounded by Contradictions: Methodological Approaches

I undertook this study as a part of my doctoral dissertation, "*Surrounded By All These Contradictions*": *Every Day Culture Shock In Culturally Diverse Post-Secondary Classrooms*. The study

occurred at Global University (pseudonym), a medium-sized urban Canadian university with full-time and part-time undergraduate and graduate students. This university was chosen as the research setting because 20-23 percent of its student population self-identified as visible or ethnic minorities, with 11 percent of the student population comprised of international students from 60 different countries, and 10 percent of the student population self-identified as Inuit, Métis or Indigenous peoples.

Phenomenology

Eurocentric values and ways of doing things have infused research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Denzin and Giardina (2009, 2010) demanded that qualitative researchers shift their practices in order to capture a vision of social justice, emancipation, human rights, and transformative inquiry, and to challenge unethical research practices. A phenomenological approach can capture a vision of social justice and human rights as it can explore the meaning of a single life experience, as well as detail multiple meanings for individuals that share lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Within this view, a phenomenon is a circumstance or experience that individuals are conscious of and can describe (Cresswell, 2007). The participants in my study all experienced the phenomenon of being a student in a culturally diverse post-secondary classroom. At the time of the study, I was not in a position of power over any of the students since I was not their instructor of the classes they were currently taking. Talking openly about experiences in culturally diverse classes was new to all of us. I engaged the students in individual interviews guided by carefully developed questions such as: How would you describe a culturally diverse classroom? Tell me about your experiences in a culturally diverse class? What are some benefits of learning in a culturally diverse class? Challenges? If you feel comfortable in doing so, how would you describe your ethno-cultural background? The 30- minute to 1-hour interviews were recorded and field notes were taken during the interviews. Interviews were then transcribed and sent back to the participants to confirm accuracy of representation. Data were analyzed through a phenomenological lens. Common themes and divergences from common themes were observed and analyzed.

Participants

For this study, I interviewed nine students: five females and four males (See Table 1). Some participants were recent high school graduates while others were older, had families, and were starting university for the first time in their 30s or 40s. Participants came from both rural and urban backgrounds, and self-identified as visible minorities, Métis, and white. Of the nine participants, three were part of the Education for Success (EFS) program (pseudonym), which provides learners with smaller class sizes in an effort to reach ‘nontraditional’ students that may otherwise not have had the opportunity to get a university degree. The EFS program was intentionally culturally diverse with the goal of preparing leaders and professionals to work in culturally diverse schools and communities.

Table 1: Student Participants

<i>Participant Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Self-Identification</i>	<i>First Language Learned</i>
1. Anjalee	Female	Education	Indian	Hindi
2. Dalia	Female	Education	French Catholic	English
3. Ben	Male	Education (EFS)	White, born in Canada	English
4. Sam	Male	Education (EFS)	Métis	English
5. Tanya	Female	Education (EFS)	Métis	English
6. Abri	Female	English	Canadian, born in South Africa	Zulu, English in school
7. Derek	Male	English	Technically Christian, born in Canada	English
8. Ian	Male	English	Métis	English
9. Suzanne	Female	English	Born in Canada	English

Results and Discussion

Even though the term “difference” was not used in the interview protocol, all participants used the word “different” and its derivatives in the interviews. Participants employed the word “different” as an adjective to describe: people, styles, countries, life experiences, languages, reasoning, sexual orientation, cultural backgrounds, religious backgrounds, accent, understandings, ages, ethnic groups, perspectives, dynamics, behaviours, food, and clothing. In this study, I have explored the ways that participants intentionally engaged with difference at various levels.

Intentionality of Engagement with Differences

Students exhibited diverse levels of intentionality of engagement—purposeful or conscious actions or interactions—with difference, whether in current university classes, social interactions, or in the past (See Table 2). I divided these levels of engagement into three categories: unaware impolite engagement, mutual respect, and intentional hostility. I defined unaware impolite engagement as interactions where participants openly engaged in conversations about cultural diversity, but were unintentionally promoting a deficit approach to diversity. Mutual respect was defined as an instance where participants addressed topics of cultural diversity with an empowerment approach, acknowledging differences and making discursive space for multiple expressions of culture and linguistic, ethnic, and racial identity. Intentional hostility was defined as hateful or intentionally exclusive discursive practices.

I also described instances when participants chose not to engage with issues of diversity, and I created three categories to address these occurrences: unaware non-engagement, polite avoidance, and intentional non-inclusion. I defined unaware non-engagement as a time when participants did not engage in discussions of diversity and were not aware that their non-engagement could have an affect on the class. Sometimes intentionally, participants chose polite non-engagement, which I define as an intentional act of silence because participants may not have wanted to offend others with their responses. Intentional non-inclusion was described as a time where participants purposely excluded themselves from the conversation because they did not appear to know how to engage.

Table 2: Intentionality of Engagement with Differences

<i>Intentionality of Engagement</i>		
<i>Levels of Engagement</i>	<i>Unaware</i>	<i>Aware</i>
<i>Engagement</i>	Unaware impolite engagement	1. Mutual respect 2. Intentional hostility
<i>Non-Engagement</i>	Unaware non-engagement	1. Polite avoidance or 2. Intentional non-inclusion

Unaware Impolite Engagement

Participants described their experiences with impolite engagement, and highlighted that this practice was not always perpetrated intentionally but caused them a great deal of anxiety and discomfort. Ian self-identified as Métis. In our interview, he struggled with how to talk about an example of diversity in his university class. Ian observed what he deemed impolite engagement when he thought professors did not think through some of their in-class comments:

[Profs] don’t censor themselves when they’re talking about something and when there’s someone that’s a visual minority, say they’re talking about colonialism and someone in the class is Aboriginal and so does that affect [the students] personally or not?

Ian expressed his discomfort for being put on the spot as a representative of Indigenous issues when the professor talked about a topic such as colonialism. The professor may have been trying to create the equitable educational environment that Banks (2004) encouraged. This method and delivery did not feel empowering to Ian; he felt awkward.

Ben grew up in a rural setting and self-identified as white; he talked about the comments his father made when he came to the city. Ben described his interactions with his father's reactions to coming to the city: "I can't believe that there's no white people anymore. [My dad] says things like this. And it's not maliciously being said but it's just his observation." Ben sometimes struggled with appropriate etiquette himself and wondered when it was appropriate to speak about racial issues and when it was best to remain silent. He seemed to couch his own discomfort and awkwardness in the words of his father. His father blurted out observations, whereas Ben explored the tensions, wondering about what was appropriate and what was not. In class, he said he often remained silent because he did not know how to engage with issues of difference.

Many of Ben's classmates were Indigenous women. He described an experience where he fell into, what I would call, unaware impolite engagement:

I think I overdid it a few weeks ago.... I've a bad habit of finishing what someone's going to say or answering something. [One of the women]'ll ask a question of the prof and I'll answer it and I remember even in grade school I got scolded for it. And after class now, wait a second what was I thinking? You know smarten up. I haven't apologized to that student but I think I should.

When Ben finally allowed himself to speak in class, he saw his interruption of another student as inappropriate, and later regretted his actions. Because Ben felt that he did not fit into the group as a white male among mostly Indigenous women, he struggled with appropriate participation.

Expressions like Ian's "[Profs] don't censor themselves" and Ben's embarrassment over his father's comment, "I can't believe there's no white people anymore," illustrated the fragile ground where there was fear of saying things that could offend. In the examples illustrated here, the participants noticed incongruence that caused inner turmoil. The aim of inclusivity was to provide a welcoming environment where students of all backgrounds have a voice, but there was uncertainty in how to establish that environment within the post-secondary classroom. Ben did not feel comfortable to fully participate, which confirmed Gay's (2003) argument that "close physical proximity" does not necessarily lead to cross-cultural understanding or interaction. Even systematically weaving cultural diversity into the content does not automatically lead to knowing how to dialogue comfortably or dialogue at all. Ben's class was missing basic tools, instructions, and strategies that students could follow and use to benefit from the rich learning environment that they are a part of.

Mutual respect

Findings showed that the participants made an effort towards inclusivity in their curriculum planning, classroom pedagogy, and course content, which also showed an effort at moving towards engagement with mutual respect. When methods of mutual respect were modeled and practiced, students had the opportunity to learn how to interact appropriately. Dalia—in addition to her university coursework—was completing a practicum in a culturally diverse inner city school. She said "[Diversity]'s not something that you hide at home and not tell anyone about." Dalia suggested that most of her post-secondary experiences showed unaware non-engagement. These experiences contrasted with her practicum's classroom where children appeared free to engage with difference through mutual respect. While her experiences in the post-secondary classroom suggested that diversity needed to be left at home, Dalia noticed that her practicum students were "all about sharing" she said. She reported that students asked questions about nail polish, and about what they did and ate at home. Dalia noticed and appreciated the children's innocence and lack of inhibition when engaging mutual respect:

I think the fact that we can be open about that and they can feel comfortable being open in that situation or that conversation is definitely making [the classroom] more culturally diverse.

Talking about cultural diversity allowed for students to learn from and engage with one another, which was the case in the practicum school, but not in her post-secondary classroom. In her post-secondary classroom, although there was a lot talk about the multicultural inclusion that Gay (2003) encouraged, it did not seem to reach into everyday practice. Whereas in Dalia's practicum setting, inclusivity was put into practice daily, without anyone apparently even talking about it.

Sam suggested that “friendships kind of develop beyond just the confines of the assignment.” Forging of friendships indicated mutual respect. Ian also suggested that classroom environments that promoted dialogue were conducive to friendship building and mutual respect, “the students talk and to get to hear so many different opinions.”

Although Abri found reading the book *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling difficult because of its racist theme, she had the opportunity to engage in her writing assignment. This was evident when she said: “I just wrote about how hard it was for me at times to read the book because it was, you know, there was a lot of racial innuendoes in the book you know. Very derogatory against black people, you know.” Discussing contentious material was important because it suggested that her professor provided opportunities for mutually respectful engagement and used books like *Kim* to set the table for open and honest discussions about diversity. Including content representative of various cultures (Banks, 2004) and, fully integrating students’ personal experiences, sets the table for the possibility of transformative dialogue.

Engagement with mutual respect meant learning to discern subtle distinctions. For example, although Anjalee had not lived in Canada very long, she was sensitive to how language was used in her new Canadian context. She was careful about telling jokes that could be misinterpreted when translated from Hindi into English. A joke that got lost in translation could be offensive in another context.

Anjalee interpreted human rights as the right to maintain traditions from her home country if she pleased, or to change them if she pleased. She expressed this when she said:

So this is the big thing the human right gives us. You can be by your own, by yourself.
No one is going to ask you like you’re supposed to do this. You’re supposed to do that.

At the same time, Anjalee realized that inclusivity in her new home country required sensitivity in how she spoke to avoid offending someone. For Anjalee, freedom of speech did not mean saying whatever you wanted, but being careful to take the feelings of other people into account: “Care about the other person’s feeling. Don’t hurt them. Before you speak you just think before you speak what you’re going to say.” In participants’ responses, mutual respect went beyond verbal interaction and also included sensitivity to different customs and values. Students were learning the tools to see all cultural groups as equal and deserving of respect, essential to the empowerment model that Cummins (1986) and Moodley (1995) promoted.

Another example of mutual respect was evident when Ian demonstrated sensitivity about arranging group projects outside of class time. He noted:

Like my family, we are super busy. We don’t have to eat together. That’s not a necessary thing so I don’t have to be home at a certain time or I don’t have to go home. Whereas some cultures eating together is very important I think.

Although eating together as a family was not a priority for Ian, he recognized that arranging a time to get together with other students was sometimes a challenge because mealtimes needed to be honoured. Ian’s attitude was similar to Anjalee’s, in that he was cognizant of other culture’s priorities, and therefore, saw it as necessary to honour those differences, even though they were not his own priorities.

Intentional Hostility

Contrary to acquired mutual respect that led to harmonious relationships, intentional hostility disrupted participants’ sense of inclusion and safety. Participants described outright racial hostility directed towards them or others with the intent to exclude or cause harm. Tanya spoke of her personal experience with intentional hostility to her own difference, an extreme example of deficit thinking (Cummins, 1986). She described feeling ostracized when, as a child, she brought bannock to school:

If I had bannock for lunch and that wasn’t my main diet at home but it was a treat my Mom would make me and if I took it to school, there would be like snickers and stuff. I’m not saying that racism doesn’t exist.

She measured her words carefully when she talked about racism, and it was noteworthy that Tanya talked about racism in present tense, even though the experience she related was of her childhood. Her

stance in leaning over the table and whispering as she talked about racism also indicated that although she was talking about a childhood experience, her experiences of racism were not only in the past. Other students' intentional hostility toward who Tanya was, and how her mother's act of kindness was a source of pain within her classroom caused her a great deal of hurt. The small classes in the EFS program that Tanya was a part of, the class content, and professors that invited dialogue provided a space for her to talk about instances of intentional hostility. Tanya was slowly testing the environment to see if she could be safe to be herself by metaphorically bringing bannock to her university class and publically indentifying as Metis. In an environment that recognized the rights of the Indigenous people (Joshee et al., 2010; Peck, Sears, & Donaldson, 2008) she was learning to embrace, albeit very tentatively, her heritage.

Unaware Non-Engagement

Participants expressed some uncertainty in knowing how to engage with others who were different from them. Because participants were uncertain how to proceed in a moment of sharing or disjuncture, they disengaged when engagement may have been beneficial. Ben reflected, "I've kept my mouth shut 95% of the time and just listened. I'm a white male in my 40s and feel like I'm responsible for like 95% of the world's problems." Listening instead of rushing to speak was a conscious decision on Ben's part, but he was not completely aware of the effect it had on the whole class. Ben did not seem to begrudge anyone in his class for occupying time and space in discussions. Ben reflected:

Human rights is [where] everyone has a voice and the right to have a voice like truly to be able to, male, female, child, senior, whatever colour or country that you have a voice. You can write and say what you want.

Ben admitted that he did not want to take up too much space in his classroom, and that, "I also didn't want to sound like a jerk." There could be a variety of reasons why Ben chose to listen instead of participate, including: his personal conviction to right a wrong of the past; or he was waiting to be invited into the conversation. Ben described the benefit of learning how to listen in a culturally diverse class. He said, "If there is something I've sort of grasped in the last five or six years it's the real value of that [listening]." Ben's act of listening may have come from internal introspection. He continued, "You know, I will say things or voice my opinion but often I just I regret it because I feel that I've quashed their voice[s]." Although Ben's polite non-engaged classroom behaviour may have been to be respectful of his classmates, his personal censorship and lack of engagement in classroom discussions might have prevented new cross-cultural understandings from taking place.

Polite Avoidance

Although participants were open to dialoguing about ideological differences, the data suggested that they did not always know how to engage with cultural, racial, linguistic and religious difference for fear of saying the wrong thing and sounding oppressive. Dalia illustrated this dichotomy where she saw polite avoidance in her university classroom: "You don't ask people, so what's your background...just in case you do offend them." Dalia may have welcomed conversations about food, clothing, and cultural differences in her university classroom, but she felt awkward about asking questions of her classmates. She was afraid of offending someone, which led to polite avoidance.

Intentional Non-Inclusion

Participants talked about being excluded for reasons that were out of their control. Tanya expressed intentional non-inclusion when she expressed her experiences growing up Métis:

You weren't Native enough to play with the Native kids but you weren't white enough to really be with the white kids so you were really just in the middle there and it was awkward I thought at times.

Tanya expressed feeling excluded from being part of the "inside" group. Intentional non-inclusion may have been the result of learned behaviour at home, school, or in society. Intentional non-inclusion

differed from unaware impolite engagement because, although ignorance may at times cause hurt feelings, the intent did not appear to be intentionally harmful. In this study, participants did not mention examples in their current university classes where they felt intentionally excluded perhaps because they did not feel free to talk openly about it for fear of reprisal.

Summary and Conclusion

Overall, the participants engaged with differences in their university classrooms in ways that addressed their situated cultural, racial, religious and linguistic identity positioning. Findings also showed that students exhibited different levels of intentionality of engagement and non-engagement. However, participants did not always seem to be cognizant of the reasons for their engagement. When participants practiced mutual respect, they expressed the most satisfaction, but they often seemed to stumble upon mutual respect without careful planning to get there. The extent to which participants were engaged or not was part of the stumbling process of getting to mutual respect; this was true whether or not participants were aware of their levels of engagement. Although some university classes specifically addressed cross-cultural communication and course content was intentionally centered on cultural diversity, there did not seem to be one recipe for mutual respect that everyone could follow. This finding suggests that a context-based approach to mutual respect might be worth investigating further.

Participants' suggestions for cross-cultural competencies in the university milieu resulted in concrete recommendations. They were disempowered by direct instructive lectures, where teachers singularly possessed the knowledge and passed it on to passive students, who were required to express the teacher's knowledge in the teacher's prescribed form. Students preferred those activities that resembled Freire's (1972) empowering strategy where students were invited to dialogue and participate in classroom decisions. Participants suggested that the ideal university environment was a place where human rights were honoured, where students actively participated in their educational journey and took ownership and responsibility for their learning. My study echoes what multicultural education scholars like Banks (2004), Henry and Tator (2009), and Gay (2003) found regarding the disparity between inclusive theory and exclusionary practice. Post-secondary education needs just as much attention as the K-12 demographic in terms of moving towards an environment where mutual respect is honoured and valued and where the empowerment model is consistently implemented.

Equitable education practices need to be integrated more effectively in post-secondary classrooms. Although cross-cultural education policies have been put into place, their implementation is still lagging, as evidenced in this study. The study showed that students appreciated when professors fashioned their course content with diversity at the fore. However, students often felt that their lived experiences were inconsequential to the post-secondary learning environment. Although the empowerment model is desired, it is clear that more work needs to be done to address inclusive pedagogical practices at the post-secondary level. To improve student experiences in post-secondary institutions, it is imperative to work towards inclusive strategies that encourage transformative learning.

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