

**Scaffolding
work-integrated
learning excursions**

**Enhancing intercultural
competence, equity
and inclusion**

Edited by

Adri du Toit, Neal T Petersen & Iman C Chahine

NWU Self-Directed Learning Series
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**Scaffolding
work-integrated
learning excursions:
Enhancing intercultural
competence, equity
and inclusion**



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NWU Self-Directed Learning Series
Volume 15

Scaffolding work-integrated learning excursions: Enhancing intercultural competence, equity and inclusion

EDITORS
Adri du Toit,
Neal Petersen and
Iman C Chahine



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The publisher (AOSIS) endorses the South African 'National Scholarly Book Publishers Forum Best Practice for Peer-Review of Scholarly Books'. The book proposal form was evaluated by our Social Sciences, Humanities, Education and Business Management editorial board. The manuscript underwent an evaluation to compare the level of originality with other published works and was subjected to rigorous two-step peer review before publication by two technical expert reviewers who did not include the volume editor and were independent of the volume editor, with the identities of the reviewers not revealed to the editor(s) or author(s). The reviewers were independent of the publisher, editor(s) and author(s). The publisher shared feedback on the similarity report and the reviewers' inputs with the manuscript's editor(s) or author(s) to improve the manuscript. Where the reviewers recommended revision and improvements, the editor(s) or author(s) responded adequately to such recommendations. The reviewers commented positively on the scholarly merits of the manuscript and recommended that the book be published.

Research justification

In South Africa, work-integrated learning (WIL) excursions have become a prominent part of preparing university students to thrive in life and work. Higher education institutions aim to ensure equitable and inclusive practices by refining these excursions to align student preparation more closely to outcomes such as the need for continuous curriculum reform, focusing on active learning and a pedagogy of play and emphasising the importance of self-directed learning and its contribution to learning in the 21st century. The 2023 work-integrated learning excursions at the North-West University in South Africa were evidence of renewed efforts to focus particularly on and meet the University Capacity Development Grant's (UCDG) aim of equipping 'its graduates to address contextualised challenges of twenty-first-century society'. These excursions aimed to afford first-year students, opportunities to develop and expand their epistemological access, preparing them for intercultural citizenship, improving intercultural communication and fostering a sense of responsibility and belonging.

This book reports on how the excursions in 2023 were constructed and implemented – or scaffolded – to develop intercultural sensitivity and a sense of belonging in first-year students. Based on a foundation of self-directed learning as a core learning ability, the book contributes insights into how the excursions developed and fostered students' feelings of belonging, inclusivity and equity. In addition, it reports on the crucial development of intercultural sensitivity – vital both globally and in the South African context – as a critical aim of the book. All of these aspects contribute to and add novel insights to the scholarship on self-directed learning in work-integrated learning and how it prepares students for the world of work and beyond.

This is the third AOSIS book exploring and reporting on self-directed learning in work-integrated learning: the previous being *Innovative curriculum design: Bridging the theory-practice divide in work-integrated learning to foster Self-Directed Learning* (Petersen et al. 2023) and *Self-Directed Learning in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic: Research on the affordances of online virtual excursions* (De Beer et al. 2022). The research in this book consists of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The following chapters are based on a PhD thesis and a previous publication, and the necessary acknowledgement is provided within the chapter: 'Cultural agility: Equipping higher education institution students for diversity and inclusion through work-integrated learning excursions' by Corlia Twine and Johan Botha and 'Using virtual excursions to foster intercultural competence of undergraduate health care students' by Jessica Pool, Yolande Heymans, Rhea Koch and Gontse G Mokwatsi.

The target audience is scholars in the field of SDL and WIL within education and health care education.

This book complies with the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) standards for original content and contains more than 50% previously unpublished work, and no part thereof was plagiarised. All ethical standards were observed during the research in line with approval granted by the North-West University (NWU) Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee and the NWU Registrar/Gatekeeper.

Adri du Toit, Research Unit Self-Directed Learning, Faculty of Education, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa.

Neal Petersen, Research Unit Self-Directed Learning, Faculty of Education, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa.

Iman C Chahine, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education, University of Massachusetts, Lowell, MA, USA; Research Unit Self-Directed Learning, Faculty of Education, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa.

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Notes on contributors

Adri du Toit

Research Unit Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: dutoit.adri@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3354-6830>

Adri du Toit is a researcher with education at heart. She is uniquely positioned to explore entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education as part of teacher education and has been doing that for more than a decade. Du Toit's interests and expertise in curriculum design, teacher education programmes and particularly Technology Education and Consumer Studies Education have been woven together into an interesting and innovative tapestry that contributes practical insights for improving and expanding learning in these areas. She has published widely on these aspects, served on numerous committees and presented on various occasions based on her expertise in these aspects. Du Toit is an associate professor and has supervised several postgraduate students to completion. Currently, Du Toit serves as the president of the South African Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (SAAFECS). She endeavours to support and engage the organisation's members and educators in the field in the academic and research environment. She enjoys collaborating with researchers from across the globe, particularly, yet not exclusively, with academics who share the challenges and delights of developing education on the African continent.

Ann Haley MacKenzie^{a,b}

^aDepartment of Teaching, Curriculum, and Educational Inquiry,
College of Education, Health, and Society, Miami University,
Oxford, OH, United States of America
^bResearch Unit of Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: mackenah@miamioh.edu
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5954-3961>

Ann Haley MacKenzie is an associate professor of Science Education at Miami University (Oxford, Ohio). MacKenzie is an award-winning educator and researcher. She earned her doctoral degree (PhD) in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Cincinnati and her bachelor's degree (BA) in Biology and Biology Education at Purdue University. She was the editor of *The American Biology Teacher* and is currently the editor of *The Science Teacher*. MacKenzie is an extraordinary professor at North-West University,

Potchefstroom, South Africa, in the Research Unit of Self-Directed Learning and worked with the University of Johannesburg in the Science and Mathematics department. She currently serves on the Advisory Alumni Board for the College of Sciences at Purdue University, Indiana, United States of America (USA). Her areas of research focus on self-directed learning (SDL), the perceptions of teachers in engaging learners who experience chronic trauma, the use of AI by pre-service teachers in creating innovative inquiry-based lessons and exemplary teaching practices. MacKenzie is involved in research focusing on the indigenous Myaamia people for whom her university is named.

Annah Ndlovu Nkomo

Research Focus Area Community-Based Educational Research (COMBER),
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Vanderbijlpark, South Africa
Email: annah.nkomo@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3562-5436>

Annah Ndlovu Nkomo is a dynamic postdoctoral research fellow at North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa, in the Research Focus Area Community-Based Educational Research (COMBER). Nkomo showcases expertise in research methodology (precisely body mapping and photo-voice), data analysis and scholarly writing. With a research focus on inclusive education, cultural diversity and positive teacher-learner relations, she has presented mould-breaking research at international conferences. As a part-time lecturer, she has successfully taught and mentored diverse groups of students, achieving remarkable distinctions. Nkomo's commitment extends to various ongoing research projects and contributing book chapters in various academic publications emphasising inclusive classroom practices, cultural awareness and research methodology. She also brings a wealth of experience to her multifaceted role in academia stemming from her rich history as a visionary school principal, teacher and educational leader.

Annerie Kruger

School of Psycho-Social Education,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Vanderbijlpark, South Africa
Email: annerie.kruger@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9633-0175>

Annerie Kruger is a lecturer in Movement Education at the Faculty of Education, North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa. Kruger has worked in the field of teacher education over the past 15 years. She is a member of South African Physical Education Association (SAPEA). Her subject speciality is physical education, and her research interest focuses on online or distance physical education teacher education. She is working towards obtaining her

PhD in Movement Education, provisionally titled: 'A "best-practice" model for Physical Education teacher training in distance education mode'. Kruger was engaged in the training programme for work-integrated learning aimed at first-year students, encompassing both those attending physical contact sessions and those pursuing their education remotely. Her expressed interest in the work-integrated learning (WIL) programme is to gain involvement in forthcoming research and planning initiatives.

Corlia Twine

Education and Human Rights in Diversity Research Unit (Edu-HRight),
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: corlia.twine@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0329-453X>

Corlia Twine is a lecturer in the School of Psycho-Social Education within the Faculty of Education at North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. Twine earned her PhD in 2018, specialising in Learner Support, marking the onset of a career marked by a profound commitment to education. Her passion for education goes beyond the classroom. She is a member of the Education and Human Rights in Diversity (Edu-HRight) Research Unit. Her academic journey has led her to develop and contribute to the body of knowledge, with a strong emphasis on the themes of aggression and violence, cultural agility and the creation of inclusive student cultures imbued with a human rights perspective. Twine's work has made an impact, as evidenced by her numerous publications in international and national journals. Her expertise extends to contributing to book chapters in AOSIS publications and collaborating on various research projects. In addition to her research contributions, Twine is known for her active involvement in the supervision of postgraduate students, guiding and nurturing the next generation of scholars. She is also enthusiastic about forging new international collaborations, as she is currently engaged in a project focused on inclusive and intercultural education.

Gontse G Mokwatsi

Hypertension in Africa Research Team (HART),
School of Applied Health Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences,
North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: gontse.mokwatsi@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6203-3965>

Gontse G Mokwatsi is a researcher in the Hypertension in Africa Research Team (HART) in the Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. Within HART, Mokwatsi's main research focus is the early development of hypertension and blood pressure monitoring for the control of hypertension. She is also a senior lecturer within the Department of Physiology with teaching and learning responsibilities at

first, third and Honours (Hons) year levels. She also has an interest in student development and support to assist first students to transition into university life (academically and socially). Fulfilling this role, Mokwatsi is part of a first-year WIL project, which uses online excursions for students to focus on self-development, leadership, problem-solving and professional identity. She has published articles (as first or co-author) in international peer-reviewed journals and is also a supervisor for postgraduate students (Hons, MSc and PhD).

Gordon Keabetswe Sekano

Research Unit Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Mahikeng, South Africa
Email: gordon.sekano@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6232-3695>

Gordon Keabetswe Sekano is a senior lecturer in Mathematics at the Faculty of Education, North-West University, Mahikeng, South Africa. Sekano has worked in the field of teacher education for the past seven years. He completed his PhD in Mathematics Education, and his main research focuses on integrating technology in teaching and learning, teacher professional development, cooperative learning and SDL. He is also an executive member of the UNESCO Chair on Multimodal Learning and Open Educational Resources (MLOERs). He has published on national and international levels, and he acts as a postgraduate student supervisor.

Hendrik du Plessis

School of Commerce and Social Studies in Education,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: hendrik.duplessis@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9380-5769>

Hendrik du Plessis is a dedicated educator who has a real passion for teaching. During his studies, Du Plessis immersed himself in various teaching methodologies, emphasising inclusive and interactive learning environments. He embarked on his teaching journey as an Accounting and Business Studies teacher in 2001 in South Africa and continued his teaching career in 2002 in the United Kingdom, where he obtained his Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) through the University of East London, London, United Kingdom. His commitment to fostering a nurturing and engaging classroom environment became evident as he tailored lessons to cater to diverse learning styles, ensuring every learner felt valued.

Du Plessis acted as a mentor to the newly qualified teachers. As a Sixth Form tutor, he guided his learners towards their Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applications. When he returned to South Africa in 2013, he started lecturing at the North-West University, Potchefstroom.

As part of community service, he led workshops for Grade 7 learners at a local rural school with a focus on social entrepreneurship. Du Plessis presented a paper on the structure of teaching at the Bulgarian Comparative Education Society (BCES) conference in 2022 and is part of the Entrepreneurship for Employment and Education Task Team at the faculty.

Iman C Chahine^{a,b}

^aDepartment of Curriculum and Instruction,
School of Education, University of Massachusetts,
Lowell, Massachusetts, United States of America

^bResearch Unit Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: iman_chahine@uml.edu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7066-3625>

Iman C Chahine holds a PhD in Mathematics Education and a postmaster's degree in Quantitative Research Methods. Chahine's research centres on ethnomathematics and indigenous mathematics knowledge systems in diverse geographic regions. She also specialises in composite index development and validation as well as measuring country-specific policy-driven constructs. As a two-time Fulbright US Scholar (2019–2020 and 2021–2022), Chahine collaborated with scholars from North-West University (NWU) and Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in South Africa on a research partnership titled Project ethnomathematics: Pedagogy, place and power for sustainable South Africa. She has been commissioned by several international organisations such as USAID (Morocco, 2020–2021), UNESCO (Qatar, 2014–2015), World Bank (Kuwait, 2017; Morocco, 2022), UNICEF (Rwanda, 2020–2021; China, 2022; Nigeria, 2023), UNDP (Saudi Arabia 2020–2022) and International Organisation for Migration (Iraq, 2020) to critically appraise the quality of education systems worldwide. Chahine is a professor at the University of Massachusetts (UMass), Lowell, USA, an appointed extraordinary professor at NWU, Potchefstroom, South Africa and a C-rated researcher at the National Research Foundation (NRF) in South Africa. She serves as the co-editor of the *Journal of Mathematics and Culture*, treasurer for the International Study Group on Ethnomathematics and the director of awards at the Eastern Educational Research Association.

Jessica Pool

Centre for Health Professions Education (CHPE),
Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

Email: jessica.pool@nwu.ac.za

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6839-4419>

Jessica Pool is the director of the Centre for Health Professions Education (CHPE) in the Faculty of Health Sciences. In her role as director, Pool is responsible for the coordination and implementation of initiatives including

the development of a scholarly approach to teaching and learning (SoTL), enabling discipline- and subject-based teaching-focused communities of practice, promoting research-led teaching development workshops and promoting knowledge production and knowledge sharing about university teaching and learning. Pool has completed her PhD in Education, and her research interests include curriculum development, implementation and evaluation. More recently, her research focus has shifted to the development of academics as university teachers. Her publications include book chapters, refereed journal articles, non-refereed journal articles and book reviews. She is actively involved as a reviewer for conference abstracts and proceedings, as well as serving as a keynote speaker. Additionally, she is the chief editor of the book titled *Scholarly approach to student success in higher education*.

Johan Botha

Education and Human Rights in Diversity Research Unit (Edu-HRight),
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: johan.botha@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1811-0908>

Johan Botha is the research director of the Education and Human Rights in Diversity Research Unit (Edu-HRight), Faculty of Education, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. Botha is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education, School of Psycho-Social Education at the North-West University, South Africa. He holds academic and professional qualifications that include a Higher Diploma in Education (HDE) diploma, a Further Diploma in Education (FDE) diploma (Gifted Education), a BED Honours degree (cum laude) and an MEd degree (cum laude) from the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. He received the Chancellor's Award for the best MEd (cum laude) in the Faculty of Education and Nursing at the Rand Afrikaans University (University of Johannesburg) in 2004. Botha holds a PhD in Psychology of Education. In 2008, VDM Verlag Publishers, Saarbrücken, Germany, published his book, *The experiences of SA secondary school male educators own aggression*. He has contributed several chapters and articles to books and accredited scientific journals both in South Africa and abroad. Botha is a frequent presenter at national and international conferences, and his papers have been published in peer-reviewed conference proceedings. Botha's research field is education, psychology of education, well-being, flourishing and mental health, with a special interest in behavioural difficulties such as aggression, violence and discipline in diverse educational contexts (schools and higher education institutions). He has also been actively involved in postgraduate programme development and student supervision and has successfully supervised various MA and PhD students.

Mmankoko Ziphorah Ramorola

School of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Mahikeng, South Africa
Email: 45032394@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4746-7049>

Mmankoko Ziphorah Ramorola is a research professor at the Faculty of Education, North-West University, Mahikeng, South Africa. Ramorola's main research foci are computer-integrated education, e-learning and open distance learning. She is currently involved in a project that focuses on teacher pedagogic content knowledge in mathematics, surveying and transportation engineering (MSTE) subjects. She acts as a supervisor for postgraduate students and has published at national and international levels.

Neal Petersen

Research Unit Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: neal.petersen@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4415-2853>

Neal Petersen holds a PhD and is an associate professor of Life Sciences Education in the School of Mathematics, Science and Technology in the Faculty of Education, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. Petersen is a member of the Research Unit Self-Directed Learning at the same faculty. His main research focus is engaging pedagogies and contextualised learning, including indigenous knowledge in science education, first-year students' experience during WIL educational excursions, cooperative learning and teacher professional development in science education. He was the principal investigator of a project on using engaging pedagogies in science education, including the infusion of arts in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education moving towards science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics (STEAM) education. He has published on national and international levels, and he also supervised postgraduate students to completion and is currently supervising more postgraduate students.

Pateka Pamella Jama

Research Focus Area Community-Based Educational Research (COMBER),
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: pateka.jama@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7643-4038>

Pateka Pamella Jama holds a PhD in Inclusive Education and is a lecturer in Learner Support at the School of Psycho-Social Education at North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. Jama teaches learner support modules to undergraduate and postgraduate students. Jama was

supervising Honours, MA and PhD students during the time of contributing to this publication. Jama is involved in a South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA), Re-imagining community education post-COVID-19: Mobilising youth as community assets to reduce the educational divide in a South African township. This project aims to capacitate the youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) with different skills. She has published work focused on learner and teacher support and has presented at reputable conferences such as COMBER, Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) and Education Association of South Africa (EASA). Her research interests include learner support and inclusive education.

Rachel Rirhandzu Mayimele

Research Focus Area Community-Based Educational Research (COMBER),
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Vanderbijlpark, South Africa
Email: rachel.mayimele@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6783-8954>

Rachel Rirhandzu Mayimele is a lecturer teaching early childhood development (ECD) modules at the School of Psycho-Social Education at North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa. Mayimele's experience includes 23 years of teaching in basic education and eight years as a higher education lecturer. She supervised Honours, MA and PhD students in the School of Psycho-Social Education. Furthermore, Mayimele is also registered with the South African Council of Educators (SACE) and Health Profession Council of South Africa (HPCSA) as a psychologist and the South African Board for People Practice (SABPP) as a human resource practitioner. Her research interests are in learner support, inclusive education and resilience. She was awarded the best community award (Central University of Technology 2012), and in 2020, she received the Teaching Excellence Award at North-West University. She also obtained a Women as Leaders programme certificate from the Gordon Institute of Business Science (University of Pretoria). Her values as a professional are to maintain her integrity and respect other people's cultures and values.

Rhea Koch

Centre for Health Professions Education (CHPE),
Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: rhea.koch@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2398-9475>

Rhea Koch obtained her BA Hons in Psychology and her MA in Sociology in 2001. After working in the private sector for many years, Koch has returned to the academic world and recently obtained her PhD in Health Science Education. In 2021, Koch was appointed as an academic developer

at North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa, for a three-year project to decolonise health sciences curricula, which is managed by the Centre for Health Professions Education and funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP). She has a keen interest in instructional design and collaborative online learning.

Yolande Heymans

Centre for Health Professions Education (CHPE),
Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa
Email: yolande.heyman@nwu.ac.za
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4459-2266>

Yolande Heymans is a professor in the Centre for Health Professions Education, Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. Heymans' main research focus is on health professions education in the higher education context, with specific reference to the scholarship of teaching and learning, enhancing student engagement and interprofessional collaborative learning. She also has a keen interest in large-class teaching and online learning. Heymans' accolades include the National Teachers Awards for Excellence in Secondary Teaching (2010), the HB and MJ Thom Award for contribution to education (2011), the Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research (FAIMER) fellowship (2019–2020) and the Open Educational Research Fellowship (2021–2022). Heymans acts as a supervisor for postgraduate students in the field of health professions education, and her recent publications include a book chapter titled 'The potential of scholarship of teaching and learning research towards transformative pedagogies in higher education: An approach to ethical mindedness'.

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Abbreviations and acronyms, figures and tables appearing in the text and notes

List of abbreviations and acronyms

ANOVA	analysis of variance
AR	augmented reality
ARNA	Action Research Network of the Americas
BCES	Bulgarian Comparative Education Society
BEd	Bachelor of Education degree
CII	confidence in intercultural interaction
CNII	comfort in navigating intercultural interactions
COMBER	Community-Based Educational Research
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EAll	empathy and attentiveness to intercultural interactions
EASA	Education Association of South Africa
ECD	early childhood development
EER	excursion exit reflection
EFA	exploratory factor analysis
ELQ	entrepreneurial learning questionnaire
FDE	further diploma in education
FP	Foundation Phase
FPS	Foundation Phase student teacher
FQ	facilitators' questionnaire
FSTs	first-year student teachers
HDE	higher diploma in education
HEI	higher education institution(s)
HPCSA	Health Profession Council of South Africa
IC	intercultural competence
ICC	intercultural communication competence
IDC	intercultural development continuum
IS	intercultural sensitivity
ISS	intercultural sensitivity scale I

LF	lecturer facilitators
LMS	learning management system
MC	Mahikeng campus of the North-West University
MSTE	mathematics, surveying and transportation engineering
NDC	National Development Commission
NEET	not in employment, education or training
NWU	North-West University
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OEQ	open-ended question
OEQs	open-ended questions
PC	Potchefstroom campus of the North-West University
PGCE	postgraduate certificate of education
PST	pre-service student teacher
QTS	qualified teacher status
RII	Receptivity to Intercultural Interactions
RP	reflective portfolios
S.P.E.C.I.A.L.	learning environments that are Socially interactive, have Purpose, are Enjoyable, inspire Curiosity, encourage Iteration and foster Active engagement and Learner autonomy
SA	South Africa
SAAFECS	South African Association of Family and Consumer Sciences
SAASTA	South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement
SABPP	South African Board for People Practice
SACE	South African Council of Educators
SAPEA	South African Physical Education Association
SDL	self-directed learning
SF	student facilitators
SPO	stereotyped perception of the other
SPPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
STEAM	science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UCDG	University Capacity Development Grant
UCDP	University Capacity Development Programme
UDL	Unit for Distance Learning

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAf	Universities South Africa
VC	Vanderbijlpark campus of the North-West University
VE	virtual excursion
VER	virtual excursion student's reflections
VR	video recordings
WIL	work-integrated learning
ZPD	zone of proximal development

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Foreword

Josef de Beer

Research Unit Self-Directed Learning,
North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

This book represents scholarly work on the affordances of excursions, underpinned by self-directed learning principles, for student teachers and health care students. It is a privilege for me to write the foreword, as I, together with Prof. Sarah Gravett, then the Executive Dean of Education, arranged the first cycle of excursions for first-year student teachers at the University of Johannesburg in 2007. Sixteen years later, a substantive body of literature on pre-service teacher education excursions has been produced. In 2016, the North-West University also started to implement excursions for their first-year education students. The need for these excursions stems from the fact that student teachers often start their pre-service teacher education with a very naïve understanding of the complexity of the teaching profession. Lortie (1975) coined the term ‘apprenticeship of observation’, and this construct explains the lack of understanding that student teachers hold of the teaching profession. For 12 years or more, student teachers were learners in schools themselves, and they have observed many teachers – very often not very good role models. The familiarity with the teaching context misguides student teachers in terms of their own knowledge base and skills as a teacher. The first-year student excursion provides a learning opportunity to address this apprenticeship of observation and provides the student teacher with a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of teaching (De Beer, Van der Walt & Bunt 2020). Research shows that the excursion provides a different learning environment for student teachers’ personal and professional development; it assists in improving student-lecturer relationships; it assists students to learn how to negotiate rules of interaction in culturally diverse groupings; the excursion provides a platform for student teachers to develop sensitivity for cultural diversity; it exposes student teachers to different semiotic tools for teaching and learning and the excursion assists the student teacher in envisaging a professional trajectory (De Beer, Petersen & Dunbar-Krige 2012:97). Other studies have shown that the excursion creates awareness of the value of engaging pedagogies and a pedagogy of play and also provide a learning space to develop reflection skills and distinctive

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characteristics of a self-directed learner and becoming more reflective practitioners (Petersen, De Beer & Mentz 2020).

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic had a great impact on teaching and learning at higher education institutions. These face-to-face excursions were no longer possible during the pandemic, and the North-West University (NWU) had to reinvent itself. It reimaged these excursions and offered student teachers online virtual excursions embedded in problem-based and cooperative learning principles (De Beer et al. 2022). Utilising an online Zoom platform, student teachers engaged in breakaway groups with an ill-structured problem, and in a cooperative learning fashion, they proposed workable solutions to the problem. There was a practically significant difference of medium effect between pre-test and post-test data, showing the affordances of such virtual online excursions for self-directed learning (Petersen, Mentz & De Beer 2022).

The ten chapters in this scholarly book, the fourth in the NWU Self-Directed Series on work-integrated excursions, delve deeper into issues of diversity and inclusivity and explore how excursions can scaffold learning in these areas. International research shows that newly qualified teachers often do not feel well prepared to deal with diversity and inclusivity in the classroom (Essex, Alexiadou & Zwozdiak-Myers 2019). Newly qualified teachers often hold conservative and conventional views of inclusion, and these naïve understandings shape their pedagogical interventions (Essex et al. 2019). It is against this background that this book should be welcomed, as it provides insight into immersion pedagogies such as the first-year student excursion, in providing student teachers with the knowledge and skills to deal with diversity and issues of inclusion in the classroom.

In Chapter 1, Twine and Botha investigate cultural agility and the role of excursions in promoting an understanding of diversity and inclusion among student teachers. In Chapter 2, Chahine explores the affordances of immersion pedagogies in developing intercultural sensitivity. Chapter 3 sheds light on the first-year students' enculturation into higher education. Petersen explores how the excursion could foster a sense of belonging in student teachers. An outcome of the excursion is to develop skills as reflective practitioners, and in Chapter 4, McKenzie studies the challenges that student teachers face based on their reflective thinking. Sekano and Ramorola explore first-year student teachers' confidence in using intercultural communication in work-integrated learning excursions in Chapter 5. The focus in Chapter 6 shifts to Foundation Phase student teachers, and Jama and Mayimele explore how excursions could scaffold learning to accommodate diversity. In Chapter 7, Du Toit and Du Plessis investigate student teachers' perceptions of diversity and inclusivity as

constructs in relation to entrepreneurial learning. Du Toit and Kruger highlight how facilitators are co-constructors of equity and inclusion in online excursions in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 has a unique focus, as Nkomo explores the lived experiences of a teacher educator in promoting inclusive classroom practices. Whereas the first nine chapters focus on student teachers, in Chapter 10, Pool et al. highlight the affordances of excursions to foster intercultural competence among health care students.

This book represents a powerful act of scholarly interrogation into excursions as immersion pedagogy, where student teachers are required to not only learn to *think* like teachers but also to *act* like teachers (Darling-Hammond 2006) when it comes to issues of diversity and inclusion. The book shows how student teachers and health care students, while engaging in the excursion activities, must reflect on their own biases and beliefs. As Tillema (2000:586) stated, '[...] immersion into the realms of practice would have a realistic and adaptive effect upon reconstruction of initial beliefs'. A leitmotif throughout the book is how the excursion could replace naïve beliefs with more nuanced views, and how this could assist the student teacher in developing pedagogical strategies to deal with issues of diversity and inclusion.

Introduction

Adri du Toit

Research Unit Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

In general terms, work-integrated learning (WIL) can be described as 'curricular-based, relevant, and authentic work-focused activities' that often include external partnerships (Zegwaard & Pretti 2023:4). According to Dean, Eady and Yanamandram (2020:1), WIL offers students opportunities to 'gain real-world experiences, transferable skills and build professional networks'. Although work placement models for WIL – where students learn in practice at the workplace rather than at the university – seem prevalent in literature and practice, other models (not work-placement-based) are increasingly developed, reported and utilised. Various models are employed based on the availability of resources, the changing circumstances, and the evolving requirements of institutions and employers (Zegwaard & Pretti 2023). Universities are, for example, increasingly using variations of virtual, simulated and industry-based activities, as authentic as possible, with or without credit-bearing content, to attain WIL outcomes in some of their programmes (Dean et al. 2020). Regardless of the differences in models and outcomes, ongoing research to improve, develop and align WIL programmes with their intended goals – essentially linking learning and the 'real world of work' to better equip students for their future careers – is not negotiable.

The current book reports on non-work-placement-based WIL (learning *from* practice) as part of students' preparation at a South African tertiary institution, the North-West University (NWU). The extensive longitudinal research study that this publication forms part of was funded by a University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG) from the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). This is one of the main reasons why the WIL excursion research was extended, including students from other NWU faculties, such as the Faculty of Health Sciences. University programmes in both Educational Sciences and Health Sciences lead to people-centred professions, implying that intercultural sensitivity is pivotal in both faculties. Nine chapters report on the Faculty of Education's WIL programme for first-year student teachers in their first semester

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of study. In contrast, one chapter reports on the Faculty of Health Science's WIL programme for their first-year students. At this onset stage of their qualifications, these students still have limited tertiary preparation for their careers, and it is not considered an ideal time to use work-placement-based WIL (learning *in practice*). As first-year students from both faculties are required to complete credit-bearing WIL activities officially, a non-work placement model is used for this first (introductory) part of their tertiary qualification's overall WIL programme. The Faculties of Education and Health Sciences refer to this set of planned activities for first-year students as 'WIL excursions'.

Providing some rationale for the activities proposed for and used in the NWU WIL excursions, Jagals (2020) explains that these WIL excursions could:

[H]elp students make connections between theory and practice and to understand the subjects they study as part of their curricula, [*by providing*] a structure within which to reinforce employability skills and philosophical frameworks to examine more significant issues about work, community and self. (pp. 87–88)

Affirming that WIL does not always have to take place at the workplace (or physical school, in the case of the student teachers' preparation and clinics or hospitals for health sciences students' preparation), Nel, Marais and Dieker (2020) reiterate that simulations, case-based analysis and video analysis, with students at the centre of the learning process, offer learning *from practice* (as opposed to learning *in practice*) opportunities. The same authors note that such simulations provide more equitable opportunities for all students to learn, as they are exposed to the same situations and expected to participate in the learning process under the guidance of the WIL facilitators.

The NWU Faculties of Education and Health Sciences WIL excursions were developed to bridge, or at least ameliorate, the theory-practice divide between students' qualifications and what happens in practice in South African schools or health institutions (De Beer 2023; Du Toit & Petersen 2023). The excursions are offered in face-to-face and/or online or virtual formats and continue to be adapted annually. Attendance of an excursion in the first semester of teacher students' first year is compulsory because the programme is credit-bearing. The programme has been developed and refined using design-based research since 2016, with several nuanced foci woven into the more extensive programme to enhance the students' preparation for their future careers in South Africa (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). The current book reports on one of these nuanced foci; scaffolding WIL excursions towards realising the South African vision for intercultural competence, equity and inclusion. Therefore, although the WIL excursions

include a much broader array of learning and development opportunities (Du Toit & Petersen 2023), this book narrowly focuses and reports on research that investigates aspects of inclusion, equity and intercultural competence to contribute to creating a sense of belonging for students at the NWU, as well as prepare them for their future career as teachers or health care practitioners.

In Chapter 1, Twine and Botha describe theories underpinning the concept of ‘cultural agility’ and explore how this combination of competencies contributes to fostering diversity and inclusion in educational settings when integrated into WIL excursions.

In Chapter 2, Chahine reports an in-depth and comprehensive quantitative case study which explored and examined the intercultural sensitivity of 1248 first-year NWU student teachers after their immersion in the 2023 WIL excursion programme. Chahine employed various scales and theoretical frameworks to underpin and buttress this qualitative investigation and underscored the importance of including intercultural sensitivity in teacher education programmes in South Africa.

In Chapter 3, Petersen explores and reports how the WIL excursions contributed to fostering first-year student teachers’ sense of belonging at the start of their tertiary education at the NWU. Overcoming some barriers to their sense of belonging will create greater inclusivity and better prepare these student teachers for South African classrooms that reflect the country’s rich and diverse population.

In Chapter 4, MacKenzie explores the reflective thinking of WIL excursion student participants. She identifies the challenges faced by student teachers and recommends ways to overcome them. She identifies physical, intellectual, professional, and emotional challenges and explains how each of these could be explored when students make their thinking visible through a reflective ‘connect-extend-challenge’.

In Chapter 5, Sekano and Ramorola explore and report on first-year student teachers’ confidence in using intercultural communication during the WIL excursions. Intercultural communication competence is a critical professional attribute which future teachers must develop, and determining the state of first-year teacher students’ confidence regarding this attribute provides a solid starting point for subsequent investigations into how it could be bolstered in the teacher preparation qualifications offered at NWU.

In Chapter 6, Pateka and Jama report on a particular population included in the Faculty of Education’s first-year WIL excursion attendees: Foundation Phase student teachers. These students are being prepared to lay the foundation of all the subsequent years of learners’ education and play a

critical role in valuing and accommodating diversity in the first four years of formal schooling in South Africa. The authors report how the experiential learning embedded in the WIL excursions capacitated foundation phase student teachers to embrace the diversity that characterises South African society, which they will encounter in their classrooms one day.

In Chapter 7, from another narrowly focussed investigation, Du Toit and Du Plessis convey how students in the WIL excursions perceived diversity and inclusivity as part of entrepreneurial learning. Entrepreneurial learning is being rolled out across large South African school curriculum sections and, therefore, must be included in teacher preparation programmes. Based on their findings, entrepreneurial learning has clear potential to contribute to inclusivity and acknowledgement of diversity.

In Chapter 8, Du Toit and Kruger shift the spotlight from students in the WIL excursions to report on the roles of the excursion facilitators. They describe facilitators' critical roles as co-creators of equity and inclusivity, particularly in online WIL excursions. Including facilitators' voices in the research added to their own sense of inclusivity as NWU Faculty of Education members and provided valuable insights for scaffolding meaningful virtual WIL excursions.

In Chapter 9, Pool et al. report insights gained from a WIL excursion conducted with health care students in the NWU Faculty of Health Sciences. The study also adhered to the nuanced focus of fostering intercultural competence as part of health care students' WIL. It explains how they utilised a virtual approach to realise that aim.

In Chapter 10, Nkomo describes the lived experiences of a teacher educator who promotes inclusive classroom practices by embracing cultural diversity in education. She foregrounds cultural diversity as an essential attribute of humanness for future teachers. She explains the requirements for interconnectedness against the Ubuntu philosophy, underscoring its critical contribution to education in the multicultural South African landscape.

Yet, despite making headway in investigating and reporting various ways to buttress inclusivity and diversity and overcome challenges to cultural sensitivity in education, there is still much to explore. Several studies reported in this book provide a starting point for further research. More longitudinal and inter-faculty studies must explore the long-term impact of interventions, activities and policies aimed at intercultural competence and inclusivity. Longitudinal evidence can be used to enhance the value of the type of strategies suggested in this book or show how to improve and refine them.

Only one chapter focusses on the critical role of educators (lecturers and/or facilitators) in instilling intercultural competence in students' preparation for the world of work. Student experiences rely on the preparation and commitment of university educators or well-prepared facilitators, who also bring much of their own lived experiences and (sometimes) baggage to the table. Professional development for university educators and/or facilitators is essential and will have to be designed meticulously. This is a relatively under-explored field of research which could significantly impact the effectiveness of WIL programmes and should be kept in mind for future research investigations.

The current chapters only briefly address equity, which differs from equality in that it involves principles of impartiality and fairness in the distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges. In South Africa, the lack of equity in education has been a longstanding issue that urgently requires attention in educational research across the continent. Future research could focus on equity-related educational initiatives within WIL excursions or examine interventions aimed at promoting educational equity by addressing various forms of systemic discrimination.

Chapter 1

Cultural agility: Equipping higher education institution students for diversity and inclusion through work-integrated learning excursions¹

Corlia Twine

Education and Human Rights in Diversity Research Unit (Edu-HRight),
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

Johan Botha

Education and Human Rights in Diversity Research Unit (Edu-HRight),
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

1. This chapter represents a substantial reworking (more than 50%) of Twine, C 2019, Doctor of Philosophy in Learner Support, entitled 'University House Committee members' depictions of residence traditions: A learning and cultural agility programme', with Prof. AJ Botha as supervisor, North-West University, Potchefstroom campus, <https://v-des-dev-lnx1.nwu.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10394/33190/Twine_C.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1>.

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■ Abstract

Unlike some of the other chapters that report on empirical studies, this chapter seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of theories that underpin a concept so readers can have a solid foundation for its practical application. It examines the concept of 'cultural agility' and its value in the context of higher education institutions (HEIs). Drawing on existing literature and theoretical frameworks, the chapter explores the key competencies that comprise cultural agility. Emphasising the need to foster diversity and inclusion in the educational and future world of work settings, the authors argue for the integration of cultural agility into work-integrated learning (WIL) excursions as a progressive approach in programme development. It offers valuable insights and ideas on how cultural agility can be effectively integrated into WIL excursions. These excursions proactively prepare students for a diverse and inclusive future, equipping them with the tools necessary to navigate cultural complexities effectively. This chapter thus contributes to the ongoing dialogue on cultural competence, diversity and inclusion in education. It provides a resource for educators, programme developers and policymakers seeking to create a more inclusive educational environment and foster cultural agility among students, ultimately preparing them for an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

■ Introduction

In the 21st century, cultural agility is an indispensable competency. According to Caligiuri (2012:4), it 'is the meta-competency that enables professionals to perform successfully in cross-cultural situations'. As the world becomes more diverse and interconnected, employers are increasingly looking for people who can work effectively with people from different cultures and have the ability to adapt to new and unfamiliar situations. Consequently, Mukerjee (2014:56) argues that 'cultural agility is likely to be a competency that will be sought after and reflected in the recruitment, training and development processes'. Employers look to higher education institutions not only to provide their students with theoretical knowledge but also to equip them with the necessary skills and attitudes to apply in the workplace as employees and in the world of work (Govender & Wait 2017). Work-integrated learning (WIL) offers a vehicle that can prepare students for diverse workplaces and their capacity to apply theoretical knowledge to practical execution (Freudenberg, Brimble & Vyvyan 2010).

According to the South African Council on Higher Education (2011:6), the objective of WIL is to enhance the probability of employment by increasing students' work readiness or employability. Govender and Wait (2017) list the developmental skills that WIL enables students to acquire. The skills students gain encompass various areas such as communication, interpersonal relations, technological proficiency, digital literacy, writing, time management, teamwork, leadership, career development and practical application of theoretical knowledge. Additionally, students become more aware of workplace culture, meet workplace expectations, develop personal attributes, adapt to the evolving job market, enhance their employment prospects, strategise their careers, cultivate interactive skills and build a professional network. We pay particular attention to some of the developmental skills listed above that are directly linked with the construct of cultural agility and the competencies that this construct offers.

Cultural agility can help individuals develop the adaptability needed to thrive in diverse and unpredictable environments (Caligiuri 2021; Mukerjee 2014). It can also help individuals become better problem solvers by exposing them to different ways of thinking and approaching challenges. This can lead to more innovative solutions (Caligiuri 2021). Moreover, cultural agility facilitates the cultivation of more robust connections with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. It empowers individuals to engage in effective communication, see the merits of very different viewpoints and foster mutual respect (Caligiuri 2021).

Although cultural agility is a construct that is currently highly valued in the corporate domain, but not yet as much in HEIs, WIL excursions or curricula *per se*, we advocate the inclusion of this construct and the competencies it offers. By integrating it into the development, design and implementation of WIL excursions, individuals can become culturally agile. Future employees are more likely to thrive in environments where they can evaluate various behaviours, attitudes and values, navigate unfamiliar cultural norms and effectively respond in cross-cultural situations (Caligiuri 2012). This ability is essential in our diverse society.

In this conceptual chapter, we aim to provide a detailed understanding of the key components of cultural agility and the competencies it entails, to provide a strong rationale for including the development of cultural agility in WIL excursions. Doing so will aid the development of students on a tertiary level and enhance their preparation for life and work after graduation. Those who have a culturally agile mindset can become better leaders because they have the ability to understand, appreciate and adapt to different cultural norms, values and behaviours (Caligiuri 2012).

■ Conceptualisation

The rationale behind a conceptual chapter is not only to link constructs across various disciplines, offering insights at multiple levels but also to 'broaden the scope of our thinking' (Gilson & Goldberg 2015:128). According to Jaakkola (2020), a conceptual chapter introduces new constructs and explains why elements of a process lead to a specific outcome. This chapter provides an overview of the concept of 'cultural agility' as a novel construct within the field of higher education institutions and advocates the importance of including it in WIL excursions.

■ Understanding cultural agility

According to Benhalim and Howard (2024:10), cultural agility refers to an individual's mindset and capacity to 'accurately perceive and respond effectively across a range of nuanced cultural experiences and situations'. It is reflected in the individual's skills, abilities, motivation and experiences and is crucial for successful interaction in diverse or cross-cultural contexts. Apart from a mindset, cultural agility is also regarded as a set of skills that one needs to practise in order to become a culturally agile individual (Caligiuri 2012). According to Caligiuri (2021), cultural agility is not an end-achievement but rather a continuous developmental process.

The development of cultural agility entails more than just training in diversity and multicultural and cross-cultural contexts; it also includes 'the ability to communicate and build relationships by responding to cultural ambiguity and making adjustments rapidly and under control' (Randall 2011:3). Caligiuri (2012:27) supports this view, adding that cultural agility enables an individual to work 'quickly, comfortably and effectively in different cultures and with people from different cultures'. Individuals who are culturally agile can accurately interpret cross-cultural or multicultural contexts. They understand how to adjust to cultural differences and exhibit suitable behaviour within the context of the organisation, group or society (e.g., a human rights perspective) or how to integrate the cultural perspectives of another group with their own or another's to create a new perspective (Caligiuri 2012). According to Caligiuri (2012), cultural agility results from the integration of an individual's skills, abilities, motivation and experience. It is important to note that individuals are not born with cultural agility competencies. This mix of knowledge, skills, values, abilities and other characteristics is shaped and refined over time in a multicultural work environment and can be similarly developed in educational contexts.

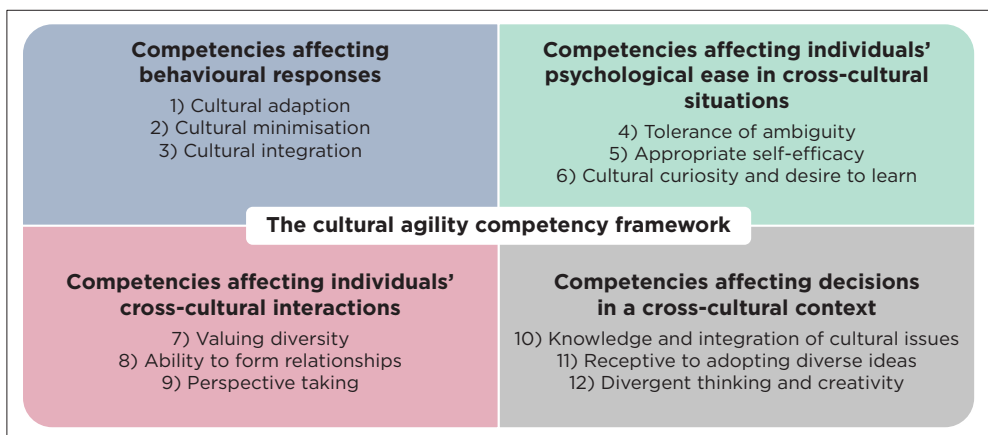
No matter what job title or role individuals have in a work environment where different cultures are involved, 'culturally agile professionals are able to accurately read the cross-cultural or multicultural situations, assess the

different behaviors, attitudes and values; and respond successfully within the cross-cultural context' (Caligiuri 2012:5).

Caligiuri (2012) presents a framework for cultural agility that includes 12 essential cross-cultural competencies. She identifies the first three as unique competencies that influence behavioural responses, leading to success when properly utilised. The remaining nine competencies function more intuitively, encompassing those that impact psychological comfort in cross-cultural situations, those that influence cross-cultural interactions and those that affect decision-making in a cross-cultural context (Caligiuri 2012). The same author also observes that these competencies can enhance students' leadership skills and overall competencies, enabling them to gain diverse perspectives that facilitate effective collaboration within culturally diverse groups and contribute positively to society. Figure 1.1 and subsequent discussions illustrate and describe the competency framework that we adopted and used in order to further conceptualise this construct.

■ Competencies affecting behavioural responses

To achieve success within cross-cultural contexts, leveraging three key responses – (1) cultural adaption, (2) cultural minimisation and (3) cultural integration – is essential for culturally agile individuals to effectively navigate these contexts (Figure 1.1). Cultural adaptation involves adjusting one's behaviour to align with the norms of a specific cultural setting (Younis & Mohamed 2022). According to Caligiuri (2012),



Source: Adapted from Caligiuri, P 2012, *Cultural agility: Building a pipeline of successful global professionals*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, p. 25.

FIGURE 1.1: The cultural agility competency framework.

choosing this response enables individuals to conform to the norms and values of other cultures. Caligiuri (2012) contrasts this with cultural minimisation, where individuals replace their own cultural norms with those of another cultural group. Cultural integration occurs when individuals blend their own cultural characteristics with the beliefs, practices and rituals of another group (Caligiuri 2012; Younis & Mohamed 2022), fostering the development of new norms and behaviours that are acceptable to all involved cultures.

■ **Competencies affecting individuals' psychological ease in cross-cultural situations**

The following three competencies are crucial for individuals' psychological comfort in cross-cultural settings: (4) tolerance of ambiguity, (5) appropriate self-efficacy and (6) cultural curiosity and desire to learn (Figure 1.1). Tolerance of ambiguity involves feeling at ease despite uncertainty in specific situations. Individuals with this competency manage cross-cultural encounters without experiencing anxiety or stress (Caligiuri 2012). It also fosters an open-minded approach towards diverse cultures, facilitating effective engagement and support (Hummel 2023, see Chapter 2). Appropriate self-efficacy refers to individuals' confidence in their own skills and abilities to succeed in cross-cultural environments. Cultural curiosity reflects a proactive interest in learning about other cultures to enhance understanding.

■ **Competencies affecting individuals' cross-cultural interactions**

According to Caligiuri (2012), culturally agile individuals excel in learning from diverse cultural environments. This achievement implies that cultural agility emerges when individuals immerse themselves in diverse cultural contexts, actively build relationships with people from different cultures and adopt their perspectives. The competencies influencing individuals' engagement in diverse cultural interactions include: (7) valuing diversity, (8) relationship-building ability and (9) perspective taking (Figure 1.1). Valuing diversity enables culturally agile individuals to feel comfortable and less inhibited in diverse cultural settings (Caligiuri 2012). Caligiuri (2012) notes that the ability to form relationships allows individuals to naturally connect with others and seize opportunities for connection. Perspective taking involves the ability to 'see situations from multiple perspectives and reassign meaning to behaviors' (Caligiuri 2012:54). This competency enhances individuals' capacity to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives without passing judgement (Caligiuri 2012).

■ Competencies affecting decisions in a cross-cultural context

The competency of understanding and integrating cultural issues (Figure 1.1, 10) involves an individual's awareness and factual knowledge of global and national issues, along with an understanding of how both their own organisation and others operate under local and international political and historical influences (Caligiuri 2012). Culturally agile individuals demonstrate receptiveness to adopting diverse ideas and exploring various solutions, approaches, practices and methods (Figure 1.1, 11) (Caligiuri 2012). The final competency, divergent thinking and creativity (Figure 1.1, 12) enable culturally agile individuals to generate multiple solutions or approaches for specific situations (Caligiuri 2012). According to Caligiuri (2021), this competency allows individuals to offer diverse solutions to cultural issues by drawing on a range of innovative perspectives, fostering resourcefulness and creativity. Incorporating the competencies as illustrated in Figure 1.1 and described in subsequent discussions into WIL excursions could be a valuable means of bridging the gap between theory and practice, making it a logical choice for inclusion in students' preparation for life and work after graduation. While integrating these competencies into WIL excursions is a logical step towards bridging the theory-practice gap, it is not a simple endeavour. Addressing the significance of cultural agility competence requires careful planning and structured efforts to counter the numerous barriers that can arise.

■ Significance of and barriers to cultural agility competence

Cultural competence is the ability to interact effectively and respectfully with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (De Guzman et al. 2016). Whether one is a pre-service teacher or a future leader in business, health care or any other field, cultural competence is a crucial skill to possess. Promoting diversity and inclusion is vital to creating a more equitable environment for all. However, the problem is that students at higher education institutions do not necessarily receive the necessary education and training to effectively promote diversity and inclusion in their future work settings. As Caligiuri (2012) argues, another possible barrier to creating culturally agile professionals is the belief that individuals cannot acquire cross-cultural competencies if they have limited exposure to other cultures. This perspective suggests that students might feel unable to gain the skills of a culturally agile professional in environments with only two or three distinct cultures. However, Caligiuri (2012) refutes this view as overly simplistic. Conversely, another barrier is overestimating one's own cultural competence (Caligiuri 2012). Some may mistakenly believe they

are culturally agile simply by recognising cultural similarities or differences between cultures. However, cultural agility involves more than passive observation; it requires active engagement, exploration, understanding and appropriate responses. Lastly, Caligiuri (2012) describes the barrier of assuming that modern communication technologies, such as the Internet and smartphones, transcend cultural differences, highlighting the misconception that these technologies universally bridge cross-cultural gaps. Some may assume that technology usage is culture-free. However, this is a myth (Caligiuri 2021). Nowadays, where technology plays such a big role in our everyday lives and occupations, this presumption leads to an over-dependence on technology to address cultural barriers to collaboration and communication (Caligiuri 2012).

To address and overcome these barriers, it is important for higher education institutions to prioritise equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to promote diversity and inclusion. One approach could be to offer WIL excursions and programmes that include opportunities where students can learn about and engage with diverse populations. The knowledge, skills and attitudes that are acquired during WIL should allow students to gain a deeper understanding of different cultures, perspectives and lived experiences, which, in turn, will help them develop empathy and cultural competence. Using the cultural agility competency framework to guide the process of developing and adapting skills that foster cultural awareness may assist in eliminating the stigmas attached to and misconceptions about other cultures.

■ Cultural agility to promote diversity and inclusion

Promoting diversity and inclusion in any workplace environment is crucial. 'Diversity' according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press 2021) encompasses a variety of distinctions such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion and disability, among others. Diversity in terms of culture or society is much more complex. Roux and Becker (2018:30), who view diversity as variety within society, argue that diversity refers to 'diverse meanings, positions and understandings of the relation between "self" and "other" in a plural society'. In their opinion, it is 'not only important to acknowledge diversity and differences but also crucial to reflect continually on how we engage with diversity and difference' (Roux & Becker 2018:31). It is critical to understand that acknowledgement of diversity on its own cannot lead to meaningful improvement in an environment. Inclusion is equally important. Inclusion refers to the creation of an environment in which differences (diversity) are valued and respected, thereby ensuring that every individual experiences a sense of belonging

and feels welcomed, appreciated and empowered (Ferdman 2013; Randel et al. 2018). An inclusive culture is more than just acknowledging or embracing diversity or tolerating differences (Burch 2018; Rens 2018). According to Pillay and McLellan (2010:21), the terms 'diversity' or 'being different' (difference) can be 'used to create a mask of inclusion'. Fostering a more fair, successful and harmonious society or organisation requires an effective combination of diversity and inclusion.

Therefore, cultural agility and its competencies should be included in tertiary education WIL excursion programmes to allow students to develop cultural agility competencies before they enter the world of work. This would enable them to contribute to the well-being of all individuals in the work environment (Hummel 2023).

■ Cultural agility and cultural intelligence

Earley (2002:271) describes the concept of cultural intelligence, also known as cultural quotient, as 'a person's capability to adapt as she interacts with others from different cultural regions'. According to Caligiuri (2023), both cultural intelligence and cultural agility, placed in a positive linear relationship, describe individual-level responses to being in cross-cultural contexts. There are, however, important differences between the two concepts. Caligiuri (2023) argues that cultural intelligence lays the foundation for understanding and interacting with diverse cultures, while cultural agility, as a multi-faceted approach, builds upon that foundation by highlighting the importance of adaptability, responsiveness and flexibility in navigating an ever-changing, multicultural world. The combination of the two constructs creates a more comprehensive approach to understanding and increasing work effectiveness for individuals to succeed in a culturally diverse environment (Caligiuri 2023), highlighting the need for their joint inclusion in the career preparation of students in tertiary education.

■ Programme development in the case of work-integrated learning excursions

Programmes for WIL excursions are developed for educational and training purposes. Therefore, we view excursions and educational programmes here in general terms as the same in order to propose the integration of cultural agility during the planning and development of a programme.

For the purpose of explaining how cultural agility as a construct can be integrated into an excursion, we deem it important to briefly discuss the formulation of the developmental process based on the practice-orientated theory of Dickoff, James and Wiedenbach (1968). This practice-orientated approach to programme development helps to explain how this construct

can be implemented within an excursion, based on previous programme development (Twine 2019). Not only can this theory assist developers in the development process, but it can also provide guidance to facilitate programme design, development, implementation and the evaluation process. The theory suggests that six elements should be considered: the (1) agent, (2) recipients, (3) context, (4) dynamics, (5) procedure and (6) terminus (Dickoff et al. 1968).

The following questions are important and should guide excursion developers in building a conceptual framework for a programme (questions adopted by Dickoff et al. 1968):

- Who facilitates the activities in the programme? (Agent or facilitator)
- Who are the recipients of the activities in the programme? (Recipients)
- In what context do the activities of the programme occur? (Context)
- What interactions, challenges and findings were visible? (Dynamics)
- What is the guiding procedure of the programme? (Procedures)
- What is the end product or outcome of the programme? (Terminus)

Each of the six elements referred to in these questions is explained in this section:

1. The *agent*, according to Dickoff et al. (1968), is the individual who actively guides the implementation of the programme by performing activities while aligning them with the programme's objectives. In the context of university WIL excursions, the agent (facilitator) could be an academic (lecturer or excursion committee member) at a specific faculty who plays a pivotal role in planning, coordinating and developing the programme. Facilitation in this context emphasises the process of how activities are conducted rather than the activities themselves (Hunter, Bailey & Taylor 2017). Specific characteristics and roles include leadership, referee and neutral roles (Bens 2005; Vidal 2006). For instance, in excursions integrating cultural agility, leadership requires the agent to maintain focus among participants, stimulate constructive communication and offer support to introverted or less engaged participants. This role also promotes team building to foster interactive and dynamic participation (Vidal 2006).

A second role the agent needs to adopt is that of a referee. As a referee, the agent moderates group discussions and activities to ensure balanced participation and mitigate dominance or conflict (Bens 2005). Moreover, the agent upholds fairness and respect for diversity, intervening if conflicts arise among participants.

In the neutral role (Bens 2005; Vidal 2006), the agent adopts a pragmatic approach, considering issues objectively and encouraging continuous feedback from participants (see Chapter 8). This feedback

includes evaluating each session and the overall programme. In the context of cultural agility, maintaining impartiality during discussions and focusing on the process are critical for the agent.

2. A *recipient* is viewed as an individual who receives the implemented programme activities (Dickoff et al. 1968). So, the recipients of a WIL excursion programme are typically students enrolled at a higher education institution (for a specific degree), for example, students enrolled for a Bachelor of Education degree who are regarded as pre-service teachers and participating in a WIL excursion programme.
3. The *context* refers to the environment or setting in which the activities occur (Dickoff et al. 1968; Moskowitz 2005). The context of the excursion programme is the physical (face-to-face or virtually online) or learning environment in which the programme will be implemented for a given period. This environment should be a safe learning space and thus free from any hazards that could disrupt learning or hinder effective training (see Chapters 4 and 7).
4. *Dynamics* in the context of programme development refer to the driving forces that empower programme recipients to achieve success (Dickoff et al. 1968). It is important to consider the learning dynamics, especially given the diversity among recipients (WIL excursion students). Therefore, the learning approach should be tailored to their needs and aligned with effective learning methods. The most suitable learning approach in the case of integrating cultural agility within a programme is arguably *experiential learning* and the *power source dynamic* (Twine 2019).

Experiential learning can be regarded as underpinning cultural agility, as it takes the view that one learns from one's day-to-day experiences with other people. Experiential learning involves the creation of knowledge through the transformation of firsthand experience: 'Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience' (Kolb 1984:41). Experiential learning can play a part in the holistic development of pre-service students, merging their 'experience, perception, cognition, and behaviour' (McCarthy 2010:131). While WIL and experiential learning share common elements, WIL can be viewed as a specialised category within experiential learning, concentrating on the integration of work experiences into educational programmes. Experiential learning, in contrast, encompasses a wider array of activities and contexts, extending to areas that may not necessarily involve formal work placements. However, both concepts underscore the significance of hands-on learning, self-reflection and applying knowledge in real-world settings. Developers of excursion programmes can use the four modes of learning in the experiential learning approach as proposed by Kolb (1984), which include concrete experience (feeling), reflective observation (watching), abstract

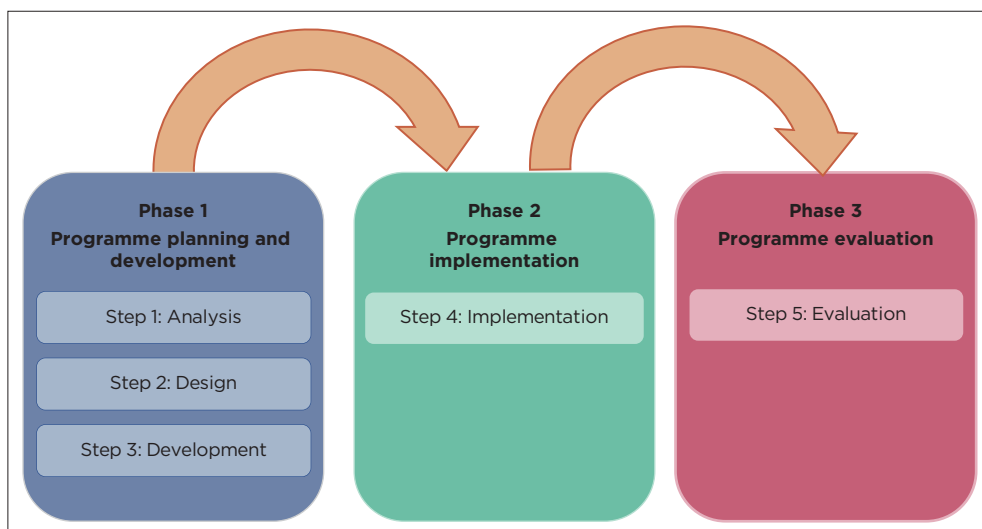
conceptualisation (thinking) and active experimentation (doing). These modes are not detailed here as they lie beyond the scope of this chapter.

The *power source dynamic* in the case of integrating cultural agility within an excursion programme is psychological in nature. According to Dickoff et al. (1968), programme dynamics involve various potential power sources, including chemical, physical, biological and psychological factors. The choice of power source depends on the activities and outcomes of the excursion programme. When integrating constructs like cultural agility into an excursion programme, dynamics often utilise psychological inputs associated with leadership, motivation, goal orientation and drive (Dickoff et al. 1968). This aligns with the competencies of cultural agility (see Figure 1.1), which also involve psychological attributes such as open-mindedness, adaptability, self-efficacy, perspective-taking and creativity.

5. *Procedure* refers to the systematic process used to direct the actions and activities during programme implementation (Dickoff et al. 1968). It includes the development, implementation, programme evaluation, programme content, session learning objectives and programme outcomes (Dickoff et al. 1968). Developers of excursion programmes are advised to make use of the ADDIE model (see Figure 1.2), as it offers a systematic approach to programme development (Shelton & Saltsman 2008) and is generic so it can be applied to different instructional systems. The ADDIE model comprises a five-step process: analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation (Molenda 2003). These steps are integral to the three phases of programme design and development (Figure 1.2):

- Phase 1: Programme planning and development
- Phase 2: Programme implementation
- Phase 3: Programme evaluation.

6. Finally, the *terminus* is considered the endpoint, serving as the final element and concluding activity in the process (Dickoff et al. 1968). In the case of a WIL excursion programme, the terminus might be the phase where all courses, assessments and instructional materials are finalised, and the excursion programme is ready for delivery to the programme participants (students). It is the culmination of the programme development process, indicating that the programme is fully developed and prepared for its intended purpose. Therefore, upon completing an excursion programme enriched with cultural agility, participants (students) should have acquired essential knowledge, competencies and skills to embody cultural agility. In practical terms, they should be capable of applying their acquired knowledge, skills and values to initiate transformative change as agents of change (see Chapter 2).



Source: Twine, C 2019, 'University house committee members' depictions of residence traditions: A learning and cultural agility programme', PhD thesis, North-West University, Potchefstroom, viewed 14 July 2023. <https://repository.nwu.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10394/33190/Twine_C.pdf>

FIGURE 1.2: Phases and steps underscoring the programme development procedure.

■ Integrating cultural agility in a work-integrated learning excursion programme

When it comes to what should be included in a cross-cultural training programme, Caligiuri (2012) suggests four learning goals. Pouchak (2019) also include these learning goals in programme development. These goals are described in this section.

■ Learning Goal 1: Build a framework for how cultures differ

Where cultural agility is to be developed, the programme or work session should start with explaining general cultural differences – a cultural framework (Caligiuri 2012). This framework provides the individual participants with a structure or perspective for understanding and analysing cultural differences. In the case of WIL excursion programmes, students would be able to 'sort and store the future information they acquire about cultures' (Caligiuri 2012:121). The Cultural Agility Climate Index or the Cultural Agility Self-Assessment instrument (Caligiuri 2012; Lundby & Caligiuri 2013) can be used, as they both allow participants to self-assess the current state of their development or mindset of cultural agility. These tools can be used at the beginning of a WIL excursion programme session for self-awareness purposes or to identify differences, which the programme can usually use as a point of departure. It is, however, important to consider the context when one is building a framework of how cultures differ.

For example, in the case of pre-service teachers participating in a WIL excursion programme, the framework takes account of students' prior learning in diverse school contexts and environments.

■ **Learning Goal 2: Gain culture-specific knowledge**

This learning goal should provide students with an understanding of 'how cultural dimensions in a given context could affect the outcome of their work' (Caligiuri 2012:122). As an activity during a WIL excursion programme, facilitators may consider posing questions for students to ponder and reflect on to determine the factors that may affect how professional credibility is established in a given culture (Caligiuri 2012). These questions can typically be based on topics such as (verbal and non-verbal) communication style, language proficiency, educational background and qualifications, dress code and appearance, etiquette and social norms, relationships, time orientation and hierarchical structures. If one understands potential cultural influences, one should be able to offer the most appropriate response (also see Chapter 2). When this learning goal is selected for a WIL excursion programme, students should be taught about cultural differences in the context in which they will be expected to work. For example, for student teachers, this context will entail diverse learners in their future classrooms, as well as diverse teaching staff in schools.

■ **Learning Goal 3: Learn methods for cross-cultural discovery**

This learning goal creates an opportunity to accurately read contextual cues, which is 'exactly what culturally agile professionals are able to do' (Caligiuri 2012:125). The only difference is that the methods taught will enable the students to change, reframe and reinterpret cues depending on the cultural context in which they find themselves. Caligiuri (2012) argues that although personality and culture-specific knowledge can accelerate the process, discovering the nuances of an unfamiliar culture boils down to one thing, namely repeated interaction and observation of people. A discovery method of learning offers students the opportunity to develop the ability to know *how* to observe in order to accurately read specific situations. A possible activity for a WIL excursion programme is Caligiuri's activity 'Do you see what I see?', which is based on possible observations to make when one enters an unfamiliar culture. These observations are typically constructed and based on the topics listed under Learning Goal 2 and may be contextualised for the working environment of the specific WIL excursion student (whether education, law, health care or other).

■ Learning Goal 4: Understand the cross-cultural adjustment process

By adopting this goal within a WIL excursion programme, facilitators aim to develop student cultural intelligence. By understanding the process of cross-cultural adjustment, students will realise that it is not only about adapting one's behaviour but also taking account of the emotional level and psychological aspects surrounding cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri 2012; Caligiuri et al. 2019). According to Caligiuri (2012), experiencing feelings of slight psychological discomfort in the case of the adjustment process is normal, and once individuals recognise this, they are able to see these feelings as aids to emotional regulation.

Table 1.1 presents a possible guideline developed by the authors of the current chapter on how cultural agility sessions could be arranged within a WIL excursion programme. The four learning goals previously described inform these sessions.

TABLE 1.1: A learning and cultural agility programme.

Becoming culturally agile		
Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
Question: Cultural what?	Competencies of a culturally agile individual	Being culturally agile in your future workplace
Session objectives:	Session objectives:	Session objectives:
By the end of this session, you should:	By the end of this session, you should be able to:	By the end of this session, you should be able to:
• Be aware of the power of cultural differences • Be aware of cultural agility • Understand the nature of cultural agility.	• Identify and understand the competencies of a culturally agile individual • Recognise the behaviour of a culturally agile individual.	• Reflect on being culturally agile in your future workplace • Understand the importance of portraying culturally agile behaviour in the workplace.
Activity 1: Introduction	Activity 1: Competencies of a culturally agile individual	Activity 1: How to be agile in the workplace
• Ice-breaking activity		
Activity 2: Scenarios	Activity 2: Culturally agile leaders or agents	Activity 2: 'Let us apply' it to the 'workplace'
Activity 3: Becoming aware of cultural agility	Activity 3: 'Do you see what I see?'	-
Session evaluation (reflection and feedback) – Session 1	Session evaluation (reflection and feedback) – Session 2	Session evaluation (reflection and feedback) – Session 3

Source: Adapted from Twine, C 2019, 'University house committee members' depictions of residence traditions: A learning and cultural agility programme', PhD thesis, North-West University, Potchefstroom, viewed 14 July 2023. <https://repository.nwu.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10394/33190/Twine_C.pdf>

■ Focusing on work-integrated learning excursions for pre-service teachers and their future classroom environments

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, WIL serves as a vehicle to enhance students' preparation for the workplace. Students have the opportunity to develop practical experience through WIL by completing a programme or excursion that contributes to their specific qualifications. In the context of a degree in education, looking at pre-service teachers' WIL excursion programmes and the inclusion of cultural agility and its competencies, we argue that creating a culturally agile teacher holds the following classroom benefits for their future classrooms and/or teaching careers.

Future teachers will be able to foster an *inclusive learning environment* in which learners from different backgrounds feel welcomed, valued and appreciated. This will contribute to a sense of belonging (see Chapter 3), enhance learner engagement and ensure active student participation during teaching and learning (see Chapter 8). Hummel (2023) agrees, saying that teachers are tasked with the responsibility of enhancing their professional cross-cultural competency skills strategically, with the aim of fostering a sense of belonging within the classroom. Teachers who are culturally agile and have that mindset will have an *increased sense of empathy with and understanding* of their learners' perspectives, experiences and challenges. This can assist them to tailor their teaching methods and strategies to provide academic support in various subjects to meet the individual needs of their learners. *Improved communication* between the teacher and the learners within the classroom will also be evident. Culturally agile teachers are able to communicate with learners, taking account of their different communication styles, identify non-verbal cues and convey information more clearly to reduce misunderstandings (see Chapter 5). In the multicultural context of South African schools, cultural misunderstandings or clashes may occur. Teachers who are culturally agile will be able to address and *resolve conflict effectively while also promoting respectful dialogue and mutual understanding* among learners (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, culturally agile teachers will be able to introduce and facilitate discussions on different topics within the classroom, mindful always of diverse perspectives and worldviews. This will *encourage critical and creative thinking* among the learners, which could, in turn, lead to multifaceted and informed learners.

Teachers should practise cultural agility as a mindset every day. If they do so, the teacher's mindset can potentially influence their learners to become aware of cultural differences and contribute to promoting diversity and inclusion in the classroom (Mittelmeier, Rienties & Tempelaar 2018).

This can ultimately have a long-lasting impact that extends beyond the classroom context in contributing to a more inclusive society.

■ Conclusion

As indicated in this chapter, the mindset of cultural agility in education is fairly new. Cultural agility has primarily found application in business management, particularly among international executives and managerial staff (Caligiuri 2021). Its development requires individual cultivation and practice. Moreover, its further enhancement, application across diverse multicultural contexts and recognition as a fundamental competency are crucial steps towards fostering diversity and inclusion (Caligiuri 2012). According to the National Association of College Employers in America (in Caligiuri 2023), current university students self-rate their cross-cultural competencies as their lowest exit competency when they leave university. It is very possible that the same situation exists in other countries, including South Africa. Thus, Caligiuri argues that much work needs to be accomplished in universities with students in their role as prospective employees. We support the following view expressed by Caligiuri (2023):

By better understanding the complementary roles of cultural agility and CQ [*cultural quotient referring to cultural intelligence*], universities can craft programs that will better address development more effectively. Awareness of the way in which cultures differ could, at minimum, help build CQ while awareness of one's competencies and a road map for how to build them could help develop cultural agility. Both parts – cultural awareness and cultural competencies – are needed in any development program. (p. 70)

We advocate that cultural agility and the competencies it offers be integrated into developing, designing and implementing a WIL excursion programme to equip students to promote diversity and inclusion. Acquiring cultural agility is a critical competency for future teacher development, as it is essential for fostering culturally responsive classrooms, enhancing cross-cultural understanding and preparing educators to engage effectively with diverse student populations. By embracing cultural agility in teacher training, we can better equip educators to create inclusive, equitable learning environments that empower all learners to succeed, regardless of their backgrounds.

The following future research directions can contribute to the conceptual ideas presented in this chapter aimed at providing a deeper understanding of the impact, effectiveness and best practices related to cultural agility in WIL programmes. These directions include: *Longitudinal impact assessment* where long-term studies assesses the impact of cultural agility integration on students' academic and professional development; *comparative analysis*

of the outcomes of WIL programmes that incorporate cultural agility competencies and those that do not; *faculty development* where faculty lecturers and instructors have the opportunity to train and develop cultural agility competencies needed to foster cultural awareness and inclusivity within their student classes and contact sessions; study of the efficacy of *experiential learning models* within WIL programmes for building cultural agility; development and validation of *assessment tools* to measure the cultural agility of WIL programme participants; *examination of the barriers and challenges* institutions face in implementing cultural agility in WIL programmes and identifying best practices for overcoming these obstacles, consideration of institutional and programme-specific factors and *curriculum development* where cultural agility is investigated within the current curricula, which can be adapted across different disciplines and institutions.

These research directions can help to advance the conceptual ideas on the integration of cultural agility into WIL programmes in higher education. They can thus contribute to the evidence base supporting the value and effectiveness of cultural agility in preparing students for a diverse and interconnected world.

Variations in intercultural sensitivity of pre-service teachers after immersion in a work-integrated excursion

Iman C Chahine^{a,b}

^aDepartment of Curriculum and Instruction,
School of Education, University of Massachusetts,
Lowell, MA, USA

^bResearch Unit Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

We, the people of South Africa, have journeyed far since the long lines of our first democratic election on 27 April 1994, when we elected a government for us all [...] We have created a home where everybody feels free yet bounded to others, where everyone embraces their full potential [...] We have received the mixed legacy of inequalities in opportunity and in where we have lived, but we have agreed to change our narrative of conquest, oppression, and resistance. (p. 11)

We say to one another: I cannot be without you, without you this South African community is an incomplete community, without one single person, without one single group, without the region or the continent, we are not the best that we can be. (p. 19)

(South African National Development Commission [NDC] 2012)

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■ Abstract

This quantitative exploratory case study examined the intercultural sensitivity (IS) of 1248 South African pre-service teachers enrolled in 2023 in the Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme across North-West University's (NWU) three campuses after their immersion in a work-integrated learning (WIL) excursion. The study investigated the effects of WIL excursions on the IS of participating pre-service teachers, employing a case study design to gather rich and contextual data from a single case – the first-year South African pre-service teachers. The primary objective of the study was to explore and understand the variations in IS among these pre-service teachers following their WIL experience. Principled by the intercultural development continuum theoretical framework, the study reflects on NWU pre-service teachers' responses *vis-à-vis* their current attitudes and behaviours towards cultural diversity and gauges their IS as measured by the intercultural sensitivity scale during the WIL excursion. Three methods of data analysis were employed to examine variations in the IS of pre-service teachers before and after the excursions: reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis and one-way analysis of variance. The results of the study suggested that while the excursions did not lead to significant changes in overall IS scores, certain factors such as gender, age, campus location and home language did influence pre-service teachers' responses to specific statements related to IS dimensions. These results highlight the complex interplay of various factors in shaping pre-service teachers' perceptions and interactions in intercultural contexts.

■ Introduction²

Similar to the rest of the countries in the sub-Saharan African region, South Africa is focused on comprehensive internal transformation, aiming to establish a virtuous cycle of confidence, economic growth and increased opportunities for building an inclusive and robust society geared towards elevating the country's global economic standing. The South African government developed a long-term policy framework outlining the country's vision to achieve key national goals by 2030. This National

2. Parts of this section are based on the author's published work: Chahine, IC & Awad, A 2023, 'Demystifying intercultural constructs in a South African context: Virtual excursions as exemplars of curriculum innovations', in N Petersen, A du Toit, E Mentz & RJ Balfour (eds.), *Innovative curriculum design: Bridging the theory-practice divide in work-integrated learning to foster self-directed learning*, NWU Self-Directed Learning Series, vol. 12, AOSIS Books, Cape Town, pp. 173–195. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2023.BK426.08>

Development Plan (NDP) delineates South Africa's vision to address various socio-economic challenges and guide the country's development efforts by emphasising the importance of nation-building, realising constitutional values, implementing redress, promoting economic and social inclusion and cohesion, active citizenship and crafting a social coalition (National Development Commission [NDC] 2012).

At its core, the vision is the birthchild of South Africa's historical struggles, aspirations for unity and equality and the collective efforts of its people to overcome challenges and shape a better future (NDC 2012). The vision is deeply rooted in the country's complex history, including the fight against apartheid and the journey towards democracy (Levy et al. 2021). It is also influenced by global trends, sustainable development goals and the desire to create a society that values diversity, inclusivity and socio-economic progress (United Nations 2023). However, despite the significant progress that South Africa has made since the end of apartheid in 1994, the country still faces substantial challenges related to divisions and inequalities. While integration has occurred in certain areas, many disparities persist (International Monetary Fund 2020).

In light of South Africa's 2030 vision, which capitalises on social equity and improved quality of life for all citizens, intercultural sensitivity (IS) acts as a guiding principle to establish a society of greater equity, where opportunities are not determined by factors like ethnicity, gender, language and culture. It enables South Africans to move beyond historical divisions and work collaboratively towards a harmonious and prosperous future (NDC 2012). By establishing a capacity for strong IS, South Africa can create an environment where all South Africans are empowered to contribute their talents, ideas and perspectives, leading to a more inclusive, equitable and vibrant society.

Intercultural sensitivity, which includes the abilities, attitudes and behaviours necessary for effective communication with individuals from different backgrounds, is more than just knowing the correct gesture or saying the right phrase in the target language in a particular sociolinguistic context (Chahine & Awad 2023, Hu 2011). Rather, IS also demands critical cultural awareness, which involves dispelling and transcending negative stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and racism by analysing the fundamental power dynamics of representation (Altan 2018). As such, competence in IS is an essential requirement in an increasingly interconnected world, where interacting with people of divergent cultural backgrounds is becoming the norm.

Intercultural sensitivity, along with its synonyms across various disciplines, is not a novel concept. Kramsch (2013), a pioneer of the intercultural approach, advocates for a cultural 'third place' (Zhang, Tsang &

Lahlou 2023), where culture is seen as an interpersonal process of understanding otherness while remaining aware of one's own values and perspectives. Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) notes that recent scholarship on intercultural competence (IC) frequently references several key models: The process model of IC (Deardorff 2006, see Chapter 9), the integrated model of intercultural communicative competence (Arasaratnam 2006, see Chapter 5), the intercultural competencies dimensions model (Fantini 2009), the IC model (Byram 2012) and the developmental model of IS (Bennett 1986). A new trend in the field is the growing global and national recognition of the importance of IS and competence in the professional training and development of pre-service teachers. The purpose of the study reported in this chapter was to examine the effects of an intensive work-integrated learning (WIL) excursion, underpinned by self-directed learning (SDL) principles on first-year pre-service teachers' IS at one university in South Africa. The ultimate long-term goal of the excursion experience is to help pre-service teachers recognise 'the self' and 'the other' as socially constructed, dispelling myths and stereotypes in the process. Principled by Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (2017) where disparities between the perceived versus actual IS are interrogated, the current study aimed at triangulating evidence to describe the participants' manifestation of critical cultural sensitivity, shedding light on the distinctive variations in their self-reported perceptions. The projected goal of the study was to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the self-directed WIL excursions in facilitating first-year pre-service teachers' development of critical IS and awareness prior to assuming teaching careers in South African classrooms.

■ Intercultural communication competence, intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is a critical aspect of effective communication across diverse cultures. Intercultural communication competence refers to the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and engage appropriately in various cultural contexts (Bennett & Bennett 2004). Intercultural communication competence involves understanding and interacting with cultures different from one's own, encompassing values, attitudes, behaviours and more (Portalla & Chen 2010, Wiseman 2002). Sercu (2005) defines ICC as the willingness to engage with foreign cultures, self-awareness, seeing oneself from an external perspective, understanding others' viewpoints, coping with uncertainty, acting as a cultural mediator, evaluating others' perspectives, utilising cultural learning skills and comprehending that individuals are more than their collective identities.

In essence, it demands culturally sensitive knowledge and the ability to employ specific skills to comprehend and appreciate diverse cultures. This recognition of ICC's importance is evident in both education and business sectors where WIL approaches are prevalent. Employers and educators emphasise preparing individuals to function well in multicultural environments (Sercu 2005). Similarly, the education sector focuses on employing work-integrated, self-directed techniques to train student teachers for the global and diverse workplace (Deardorff 2006).

Approaches to ICC research have been diverse. Early studies explored social network approaches, uncertain reduction theory expansions and identity-negotiation perspectives (Gudykunst 1993; Kim 1991; Ting-Toomey 1993). To illustrate, Chen and Starosta's (1998b) approach encompasses three dimensions: affective (IS), cognitive (intercultural awareness) and behavioural (intercultural adroitness). Subsequent work led to an instrument for assessing IS (Chen & Starosta 2000), focusing on emotional willingness to acknowledge, appreciate and accept cultural differences.

Broadly, IC refers to the ability to effectively interact, communicate and collaborate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. It involves understanding, appreciating and adapting to the perspectives, values, behaviours and communication styles of individuals or groups with different cultural norms and experiences (Chen & Starosta 1996). Therefore, I argue that IC goes beyond mere tolerance; it involves actively seeking to bridge cultural gaps, building relationships and promoting harmonious interactions. There are key components of IC that have been highlighted in the relevant literature (Arasaratnam 2015; Arasaratnam-Smith 2017; Bradford, Allen & Beisser 2000; Chen & Hu 2023; Deardorff 2006, 2016; Fantini 2009, 2020; Foronda 2020; Orsini-Jones & Lee 2018; Rathje 2007; Spitzberg & Changnon 2009).

The extensive literature affirms that IC extends beyond language proficiency, encompassing meta-communicative competences and a broad range of knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for enhancing a student's performance in intercultural interactions.

Conceivably, IS and IC are closely related concepts that both revolve around effectively navigating and interacting with diverse cultures (Altan 2018). They involve understanding, valuing and adapting to cultural differences while promoting positive relationships and effective communication. While they share similarities, they focus on slightly different aspects of intercultural interactions. Chahine and Awad (2023) examined commonalities and distinct elements that set IS and IC apart. For example, these authors argued that IS refers to the awareness and recognition of cultural differences, along with an appreciation for the perspectives and values of individuals from different cultures. It involves acknowledging that

people from various backgrounds may have different ways of thinking, behaving and communicating, and that these differences are valid and meaningful. Intercultural sensitivity emphasises empathy, respect and open-mindedness when interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Chahine and Awad further affirmed that individuals with high IS are attuned to nuances in communication and behaviour that can be influenced by culture. They are conscious of potential misunderstandings and actively seek to bridge cultural gaps. Intercultural sensitivity serves as the foundation for developing IC.

On the other hand, IC builds upon IS and encompasses a broader set of skills and behaviours (Chahine & Awad 2023). It involves the ability to effectively interact, communicate and collaborate with people from different cultures while adapting one's behaviour and communication style to ensure productive interactions. Intercultural competence is an active skill set that allows individuals to navigate cultural differences while minimising misunderstandings and conflicts. Therefore, IC can be perceived as encompassing cultural awareness but goes beyond it to include practical abilities such as effective communication, conflict resolution and adaptability. It involves being able to adjust behaviours and communication styles based on the specific cultural context, understanding and managing one's biases and actively seeking to learn about and engage with diverse cultures (Chen & Starosta 1998a).

In summary, IS serves as the foundational awareness and appreciation of cultural differences, while IC builds upon that foundation to include practical skills and behaviours for effective intercultural interactions. Both concepts are essential for fostering inclusivity, mutual understanding and productive collaboration in culturally diverse settings, such as workplaces, educational institutions and societies at large. Extensive literature constantly reminds us that IS, a crucial aspect of effective IC, goes beyond mere gestures and language use. It involves critical cultural awareness that dismantles negative stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and racism by examining underlying power dynamics (Banaji, Fiske & Massey 2021; Grigoryev, Berry & Zabrodskaia 2021). Therefore, developing both IS and IC is crucial for creating environments where people from different backgrounds can interact harmoniously and work together towards common goals.

■ Intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence: Significance for South Africa

Intercultural sensitivity and IC are essential in diverse and globalised societies, workplaces and international contexts (Chahine & Awad 2023). The changing global landscape necessitates IS and competence to

navigate diversity, ensure equitable education and promote harmonious coexistence (UNESCO 2005). Developing IC requires self-awareness, education, exposure to different cultures and ongoing practice (Arasaratnam-Smith 2017). It is a valuable skill for individuals, organisations and societies as a whole, as it contributes to effective communication, collaboration and the creation of inclusive environments where people from all backgrounds can thrive. Arguably then fostering IC becomes vital not only for the workplace but also for broader societal harmony.

In a country such as South Africa, with its rich cultural heritage and history, IC is particularly crucial. It helps to bridge the gaps between different racial and ethnic groups, fostering understanding, empathy and unity. Therefore, with South Africa's diverse workforce and multiethnic populace, developing intercultural understanding and sensitivity is essential for peaceful coexistence and successful interactions among various cultures (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel 2009).

The need for strengthening IS is particularly evident in South African classrooms, where the challenge of accommodating diverse learners and promoting equal educational opportunities is prominent. In an increasingly interconnected world, the ability to interact with diverse cultures is becoming the norm. Therefore, recognising the value of individual differences as enriching rather than problematic is crucial, particularly for novice teachers. Given South Africa's commitment to human rights, equality and non-racialism (NDC 2012), it is imperative that the education system prepares teachers to address learner diversity and equips pre-service teachers with skills to navigate global challenges.

South African educational institutions are responding to this demand by introducing innovative curricula to foster IC, support SDL and promote a culture of acceptance and tolerance in their teacher preparation programmes (Petersen et al. 2023). Various models have been proposed to understand IC, emphasising the need for teachers to possess IS and IC in order to facilitate inclusive and equitable instructions for all learners. Work-integrated learning is one model that has shown the potential to realise the promise of a sustainable, socially just and equitable classroom environment (Fleming, McLachlan & Pretti 2018).

■ The role of intercultural interactions in work-integrated learning excursions

Intercultural interactions play a crucial role in WIL excursions, enhancing the educational and professional experiences of participants (Eady 2021). For pre-service teachers, such excursions can provide opportunities to engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering a deeper

understanding of different perspectives and enriching the overall learning process. There are some key roles that intercultural interactions can play in WIL excursions as part of teacher preparation programmes. For example, intercultural interactions have the potential to expose pre-service teachers to different cultural norms, practices and communication styles (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009). This exposure helps them develop cultural sensitivity, enabling them to navigate cross-cultural situations with respect and awareness. Additionally, engaging with individuals from different cultural backgrounds hones pre-service teachers' communication skills (Zhang & Lutge 2023). They learn to adapt their communication styles, actively listen and effectively convey their messages, even in culturally diverse settings. Other benefits include critical thinking and perspective-taking (Sobkowiak 2016), conflict resolution and problem-solving (Singh 2020), awareness of bias and stereotypes (Grigoryev et al. 2021) and personal growth and self-reflection (Tomita 2012). Overall, intercultural interactions enhance the educational value of WIL excursions by creating immersive learning environments that prepare pre-service teachers for the complexities of their diverse and interconnected world. By nurturing IC and IS, these interactions contribute to pre-service teachers' future professional success and personal development. Most importantly, exposure to intercultural interactions prompts pre-service teachers to engage in reflective practice. They consider their own cultural biases, strengths and areas for growth, fostering a continuous commitment to self-improvement.

This chapter is based on the expectation that by integrating interculturally sensitive interactions into WIL excursions, pre-service teachers are more likely positioned to develop the skills, perspectives and attitudes necessary for effective teaching in diverse and inclusive classrooms. It is envisaged that these experiences lay the foundation for creating culturally responsive and equitable educational environments that support the academic success and well-being of all learners. However, while combining WIL excursions with IS can yield several positive outcomes such as fostering a more inclusive and culturally aware teacher workforce, preparing teachers to excel in diverse environments and contributing positively to the South African and global society, it is crucial to recognise that the actual impact of WIL excursions on cultural sensitivity may not always meet initial expectations. Various factors, such as the quality of the excursion, the level of preparation and support provided and the individual teacher's engagement can influence the outcomes. Therefore, while the combination of WIL excursions and IS holds promise, it is essential to critically assess and continuously improve these programmes to ensure they achieve the desired impact on cultural sensitivity and teacher preparedness.

Therefore, to maximise the benefits of combining WIL excursions and IS, it is necessary to establish certain prerequisites. Specifically, the contribution of excursions to the development of cultural sensitivity could be more pronounced if pre-service teachers are afforded extensive pre-excursion training opportunities on intercultural awareness, communication strategies and cultural norms (Chahine 2019, see Chapter 10). Additionally, facilitating discussions and open dialogues during the excursion can encourage pre-service teachers to reflect on their interactions, challenges and learnings. Furthermore, post-excursion reflections support pre-service teachers as they process their experiences, identify lessons learned and consider how these experiences can be applied in their professional journey. Finally, integrating IS training into the curriculum or professional development programmes can support ongoing learning and growth of teachers in their teacher preparation and beyond.

■ **Significance of work-integrated learning excursions to achieve South Africa 2030 vision**

■ **The experience of North-West University in teacher preparation**

Work-integrated learning excursions, as practical experiences that particularly focus on preparing pre-service teachers, can play a significant role in contributing to South Africa's 2030 vision, which aims to achieve a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable society (NDC 2012). The WIL excursion experiences that the North-West University (NWU) afforded for its first-year pre-service teachers across three faculties and three campuses align with and contribute to this vision. This alignment has been achieved through the following:

1. *Skills development and employability*: Work-integrated learning excursions at NWU provide pre-service teachers with hands-on experiences that bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application (Petersen et al. 2023). Reducing the gap between theoretical and experiential learning aligns with the goal of South Africa's 2030 vision of developing a skilled and capable workforce that contributes to economic growth and innovation (NDC 2012). By exposing pre-service teachers to real-world challenges and opportunities, these excursions can enhance their employability and readiness for the job market.
2. *Inclusivity and transformation*: The 2030 vision emphasises inclusivity, social cohesion and the promotion of equal opportunities for all

South Africans. Work-integrated learning excursions contribute by providing diverse groups of pre-service teachers with exposure to various global challenges through simulated games, professions and cultural contexts (Bunt, De Beer & Petersen 2022). This exposure helps break down barriers and create a more inclusive society where individuals from different backgrounds have equal access to education and career opportunities.

3. *Global competitiveness*: To achieve its vision, South Africa aims to be globally competitive and innovative. North-West University WIL excursions incorporate cutting-edge practices and emerging technologies that contribute to building a competitive workforce. Pre-service teachers are exposed to on-the-job challenges and practices during these excursions that could help them be better prepared to drive economic development and technological advancements (Chahine & Awad 2023).
4. *Cultural exchange and intercultural understanding*: South Africa's diversity is one of its strengths. Work-integrated learning excursions at NWU were designed to foster intercultural interactions and understanding (Chahine & Awad 2023), thus contributing to the 2030 vision's goal of promoting social cohesion and a sense of shared national identity (NDC 2012). By exposing pre-service teachers to different ethnic groups and perspectives, these excursions contribute to breaking down stereotypes, promoting empathy and creating a more united society.
5. *Community engagement and social impact*: The 2030 vision places a strong emphasis on community development and social impact (NDC 2012). Such an emphasis is showcased in WIL excursions at NWU, which purposefully include components of community engagement and service learning that provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to contribute their skills and knowledge to address local challenges, thereby fostering positive change and advancing the well-being of their immediate communities (De Beer 2023).
6. *Research and innovation*: North-West University's WIL excursions can also align with the 2030 vision's emphasis on research and innovation. Pre-service teachers and staff who engage in these excursions can apply their theoretical knowledge to real-world problems, potentially leading to innovative solutions that address pressing societal issues (Du Toit & Petersen 2023).
7. *Environmental sustainability*: The vision also highlights the importance of sustainable development (NDC 2012). To this end, WIL excursions included experiences related to environmental conservation, sustainable practices and responsible resource management. Such a focus contributes to the country's commitment to environmental sustainability.

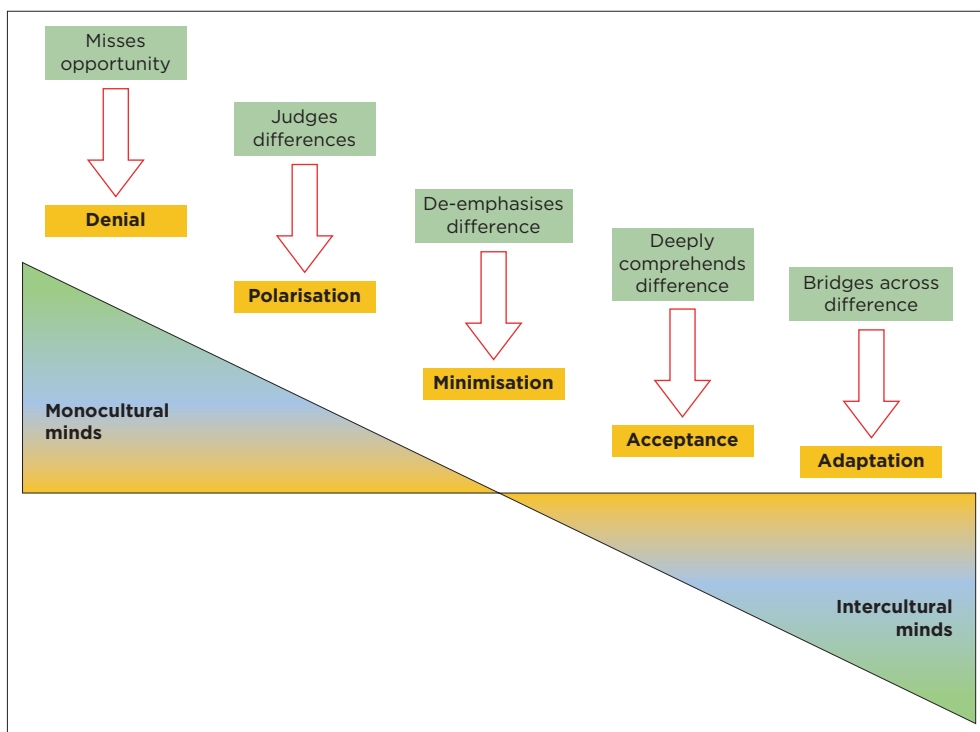
By integrating WIL excursions into the teacher preparation experience and aligning them with South Africa's 2030 vision, NWU is well poised to prepare pre-service teachers to become active contributors to the nation's growth, development and transformation. These excursions have the potential to nurture well-rounded future teachers who are not only equipped with knowledge and skills but are also socially responsible and culturally aware citizens (Chahine & Awad 2023).

■ Theoretical framework

This study is principled by the intercultural development continuum (IDC) theoretical framework that describes and assesses an individual's or a group's orientation and ability to engage effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. It was developed by Milton Bennett (1986) and is widely used in the field of intercultural communication and cultural competence training.

The IDC proposes that individuals develop their IC and understanding by progressing through a series of five distinct stages, where each stage is characterised by different attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in relation to cultural diversity (see Figure 2.1).

Bennett (1986) explains that the *denial* stage is characteristic of individuals or groups who are often unaware of cultural differences or may not recognise their significance. People in this stage may hold the belief that their own culture is the only 'right' way and tend to ignore or downplay cultural diversity (Stahl & Maznevski 2021). At the *polarisation* stage, individuals might start to become aware of cultural differences, but they often view these differences as threats. They may react defensively to cultural challenges and might exhibit ethnocentrism, where their own culture is seen as superior. Moving towards the *minimisation* stage, individuals start recognising cultural differences, but they try to minimise them by focusing on commonalities (Figure 2.1). They might believe that 'we're all the same', regardless of cultural background and may downplay the significance of cultural diversity. Individuals do not recognise and appreciate cultural differences until they reach the *acceptance* stage. They appreciate that diverse perspectives enrich interactions and contribute to mutual learning. They are open to learning about other cultures and may actively seek out intercultural experiences. Bennett's (1986) IDC framework affirms that the highest stage of the continuum is the *adaptation* stage, which involves individuals who have developed a high degree of IC. They can adapt their behaviour and communication styles to effectively interact with people from various cultural backgrounds (Figure 2.1). They are capable of seeing issues from multiple perspectives and can navigate complex cross-cultural situations with ease.



Source: Developed by the author and depicted from Bennett, MJ 1986, 'A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 179-196. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(86\)90005-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(86)90005-2)

FIGURE 2.1: Author's depiction of Bennett's (1986) intercultural development continuum.

It is important to note that the progression of the different stages of the IDC is not linear, and individuals may move back and forth between stages based on their experiences and contexts. In the current study, the IDC was employed as a framework to interpret and reflect on NWU pre-service teachers' responses *vis-à-vis* their current attitudes and behaviours towards cultural diversity and to gauge their IS as measured by the intercultural sensitivity scale (ISS) during the WIL excursion.

■ Methodology

The study employed a quantitative exploratory case study design aimed at exploring and understanding the effects of WIL excursions on participating pre-service teachers' IS. Yin (2018) asserts that case study designs involve delving into the intricacies of a single case or a small number of cases to generate hypotheses, gather rich and contextual data and develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The primary goal is to generate insights and hypotheses that can guide future research. It serves as a starting point for further investigation, theory-building and testing (Stake 2005).

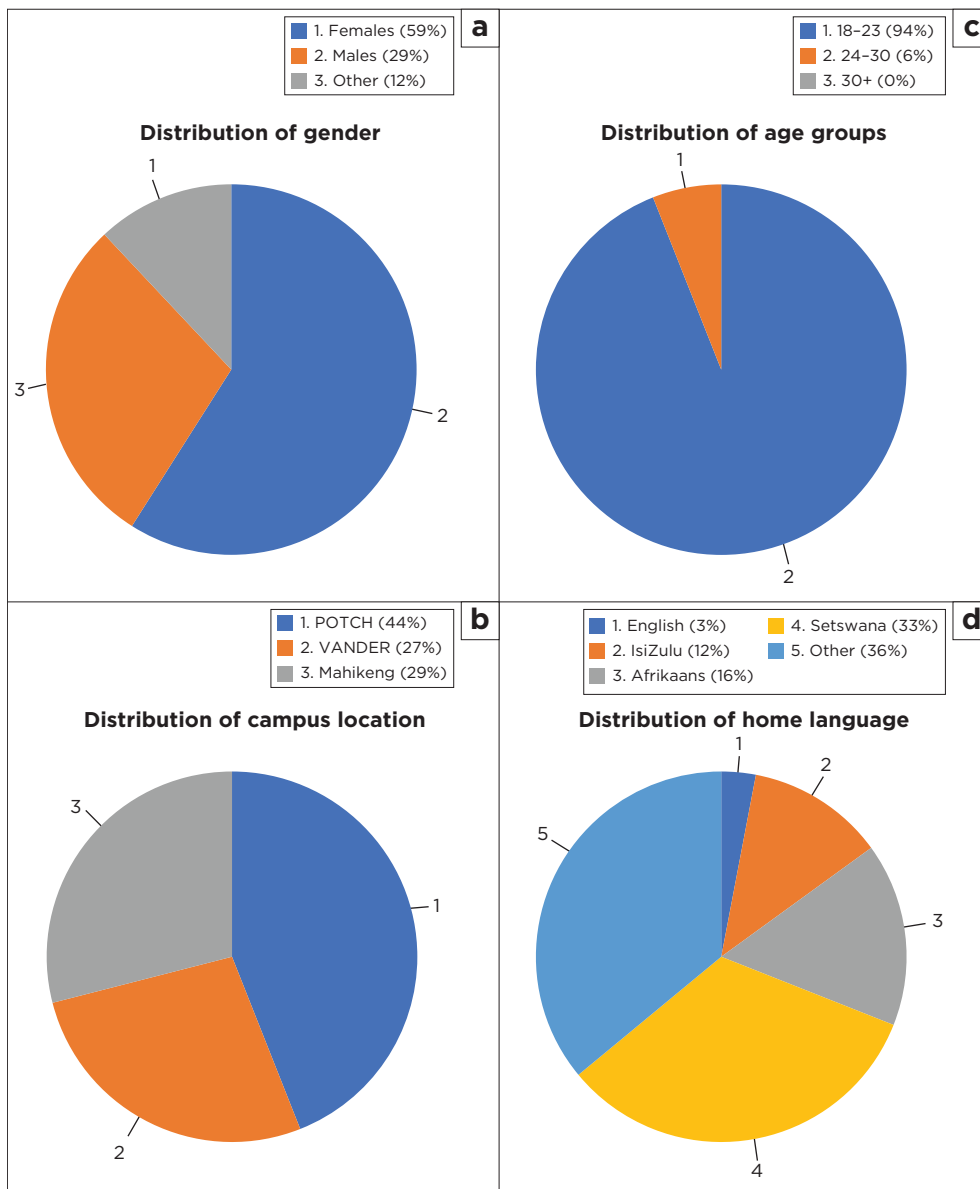
■ Population and sample

The study sample that the current chapter reports on comprised 1248 pre-service teachers from a total of 3376 enrolled in 2023 as first-year pre-service teachers in the Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme across NWU's three campuses: Potchefstroom (PC), Vanderbijlpark (VC) and Mahikeng (MC). The pre-service teachers who provided consent to be in the study participated in one of the excursion experiences that were conducted either virtually or in person. Figure 2.2 shows the distribution of the sample across four demographic variables: gender, age group, campus location and home language.

As shown in Figure 2.2 and with regard to gender composition, the 'FEMALE' category had the highest representation, with 59.0% of the total sample. With respect to age group, the majority of participants fell within the '18-23' age group, accounting for approximately 93.7% of the total sample. Across campus locations, 'POTCH' (Potchefstroom) campus had the highest representation, with 44.5% of the total sample, 'MAHIKENG' campus had the second-highest representation at 28.6% and the 'VANDER' (Vanderbijlpark) campus follows with 26.9% of the total sample. Furthermore, the primary home language distribution of participants fell in the 'OTHER' category, followed by 'SETSWANA' home language with 32.7% of the total sample, 'AFRIKAANS' constituted 16.7%, 'ISIZULU' accounted for 11.8% and 'ENGLISH' home language had the lowest representation, with 3.0% of the total sample.

■ Data collection methods

The ISS developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) was used to measure the IS level of pre-service teachers before and after their WIL excursions. The ISS is widely used in intercultural communication research and educational contexts to measure the extent to which an individual is open and responsive to cultural diversity (Chahine & Awad 2023). The scale is used to gauge an individual's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours when interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. It consists of 24-question items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. The scale captures the degree of agreement or alignment with statements that reflect different aspects of IS. These 24 items are typically grouped under five major dimensions as follows: *interaction engagement* (seven questions), *respect for cultural differences* (six questions), *interaction confidence* (five questions), *interaction enjoyment* (three questions) and *interaction attentiveness* (three questions). Responses to the items are averaged for each dimension, providing scores that reflect the individual's level IS in each dimension. Higher scores indicate greater IS in that



Source: Developed by the author.

FIGURE 2.2: Overall sample demographics.

specific dimension. The current study employed the ISS to develop participating pre-service teachers' overall IS profile and to identify areas for potential development, which can strengthen future implementations of the WIL excursions.

Reverse coding, also known as reverse scoring or reverse transformation, was employed to manage response bias and ensure the validity of

survey questions. Using this statistical technique, the scoring direction of certain items in a questionnaire was reversed to counteract response tendencies, response sets or acquiescence bias that might occur because of the way questions are phrased. Responses to positively worded items are scored higher as agreement increases (e.g. 1 for 'Strongly disagree' and 5 for 'Strongly agree'). In reverse coding, the scoring direction of negatively worded items is flipped. Responses to negatively worded items are scored in the opposite direction (e.g. 1 for 'Strongly agree' and 5 for 'strongly disagree'). In the ISS, items including 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20 and 22 were reverse-coded in preparation for data analysis (Fritz, Möllenberg & Chen 2000).

■ Data analysis and results

Three methods of data analysis were employed to examine variations in the IS of pre-service teachers before and after the excursions: reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The collected data were analysed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0 for Windows.

■ Reliability analysis

To affirm the internal consistency of ISS, Cronbach's alpha was used as the primary measure. A Cronbach alpha of 0.82 was found, which indicated a relatively good level of internal consistency in the ISS (Taber 2018). This in turn suggested that the 24 items in the ISS are reliable and consistently measure the underlying concept of IS.

■ Exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis with maximum likelihood extraction and varimax rotation was run to capture the significant underlying patterns in the data with a reduced number of factors (refer to Table 2.1). Factors with higher variance explained are considered more influential in understanding pre-service teachers' perceptions of IS. Five factors with Eigen-values greater than 1 (Kaiser's normalisation criterion) were extracted as significant. The retained factors contributed to a substantial cumulative percentage of variance (34.27%) and represented fundamental dimensions that described the IS profile of participating pre-service teachers.

To discern the strength and direction of the relationship between each question item and each factor, factor loadings were examined. A higher absolute value of loading in the rotated factor matrix indicates a stronger association between the item and the factor and thus contributes to the underlying patterns in the ISS. As a result, five dimensions emerged, which represented the following themes: (1) Confidence in intercultural

TABLE 2.1: Exploratory factor analysis extraction of factors with Eigen-values.

Factor	Initial Eigen-values			Extraction sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	5.334	22.226	22.226	4.724	19.682	19.682
2	2.183	9.095	31.322	1.488	6.202	25.884
3	1.759	7.329	38.650	1.140	4.752	30.636
4	1.165	4.855	43.506	0.437	1.823	32.458
5	1.038	4.326	47.831	0.434	1.810	34.268

Source: Developed by the author.

interaction (CII), (2) receptivity to intercultural interactions (RII), (3) comfort in navigating intercultural interactions (CNII), (4) empathy and attentiveness to intercultural interactions (EAI) and (5) stereotyped perception of the other (SPO). A listing of the major dimensions underlying ISS, the corresponding test items and factor loading from EFA are reported in Table 2.2.

■ Analysis of variance

Analysis of variance was used to compare means of IS and the five underlying dimensions across different demographic groups to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between them. After discerning that ANOVA assumptions are met, several iterations of ANOVA were conducted: Firstly, the overall mean scores of participants' responses on the ISS were compared before and after the excursion experiences. Secondly, to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of scores of ISS on each of the five dimensions of IS: CII, RII, EAI, CNII and SPO. Thirdly, post hoc tests using Bonferroni corrections were conducted where statistically significant differences between groups were noted. The aim was to identify specific differences or relationships with respect to the various categories of demographic indicators (see Figure 2.2).

Overall, there were no statistically significant differences in the mean scores of ISS on the pre- and post-tests. This result indicates the excursions had no significant effect on the participants' perception of IS.

For gender, statistical differences were only noted on Q5 ('I always know what to say when interacting with people from different ethnic groups') ($p < 0.001$) with males scoring higher than females. This result suggests that males have a higher proclivity than females towards engaging in interculturally sensitive communications and interactions.

When comparing the pre- and post-ISS scores with respect to age groups, there was a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.007 < 0.05$) only on Q.16 ('I respect the ways people from different ethnic groups behave'), where more agreement was noted by the 24–30 age group than the 18–23 age group.

With respect to campus location, there were statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) on several ISS question items (see Table 2.3).

TABLE 2.2: Exploratory factor analysis thematic dimensions and factor loadings.

Thematic dimensions	ISS item		Factor loadings	Overall mean score PRE	Overall mean score POST
Confidence in intercultural interaction (CII)	Q3	I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different ethnic groups	0.542	3.46	3.44
	Q4	I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	0.589		
	Q5	I always know what to say when interacting with people from different ethnic groups	0.644		
	Q6	I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different ethnic groups	0.672		
	Q10	I feel confident when interacting with people from different ethnic groups	0.589		
Receptivity to intercultural interactions (RII)	Q1	I enjoy interacting with people from different ethnic groups	0.440	4.26	4.24
	Q7	I do not like to be with people from different ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	0.532		
	Q8	I respect the values of people from different ethnic groups	0.387		
	Q9	I get upset easily when interacting with people from different ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	0.514		
	Q16	I respect the ways people from different ethnic groups behave	0.379		
	Q18	I would not accept the opinions of people from different ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	0.432		
	Q20	I think my ethnic group is better than other ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	0.417		
Empathy and attentiveness to intercultural interactions (EAI)	Q11	I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally distinct counterpart	0.310	3.72	3.78
	Q13	I am open-minded to people from different ethnic groups	0.435		
	Q14	I am very observant when interacting with people from different ethnic groups	0.477		
	Q17	I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different ethnic groups	0.445		
	Q19	I am sensitive to my culturally distinct counterpart's subtle meaning during our interaction	0.228		
	Q21	I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction	0.438		
	Q23	I often show my culturally distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues	0.449		
	Q24	I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally distinct counterpart and me	0.475		
Comfort in navigating intercultural interactions (CNII)	Q12	I often get discouraged when I am with people from different ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	0.621	4	4
	Q15	I often feel useless when interacting with people from different ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	0.583		
Stereotyped perception of the other (SPO)	Q2	I think people from other ethnic groups are narrow-minded (REVERSE CODED)	0.519	3.65	3.60
	Q22	I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally distinct persons (REVERSE CODED)	0.334		

Source: Author's own creation developed from the adopted ISS by Chen, GM & Starosta, WJ 2000, 'The development and validation of the intercultural sensitivity scale', *Human Communication*, vol. 3, pp. 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t61546-000>.

Key: ISS, Intercultural sensitivity scale.

TABLE 2.3: Analysis of variance results comparing intercultural sensitivity scale means across campus locations.

ANOVA output						
Analysis per question item		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Q1	Between groups	5.627	2	2.814	4.388	0.013
	Within groups	798.839	1246	0.641		
	Total	804.466	1248			
Q2	Between groups	32.587	2	16.294	15.788	< 0.001
	Within groups	1285.931	1246	1.032		
	Total	1318.519	1248			
Q3	Between groups	5.179	2	2.589	3.756	0.024
	Within groups	858.881	1246	0.689		
	Total	864.059	1248			
Q4	Between groups	15.227	2	7.613	6.275	0.002
	Within groups	1511.777	1246	1.213		
	Total	1527.004	1248			
Q5	Between groups	7.769	2	3.884	4.635	0.010
	Within groups	1044.206	1246	0.838		
	Total	1051.974	1248			
Q7	Between groups	7.293	2	3.647	5.620	0.004
	Within groups	808.450	1246	0.649		
	Total	815.744	1248			
Q12	Between groups	8.947	2	4.474	5.726	0.003
	Within groups	973.464	1246	0.781		
	Total	982.412	1248			
Q15	Between groups	6.149	2	3.075	3.833	0.022
	Within groups	999.521	1246	0.802		
	Total	1005.670	1248			
Q17	Between groups	5.921	2	2.961	4.995	0.007
	Within groups	738.577	1246	0.593		
	Total	744.498	1248			
Q18	Between groups	7.081	2	3.540	4.900	0.008
	Within groups	900.327	1246	0.723		
	Total	907.408	1248			
Q19	Between groups	5.326	2	2.663	3.407	0.033
	Within groups	973.889	1246	0.782		
	Total	979.215	1248			
Q20	Between groups	12.170	2	6.085	6.950	< 0.001
	Within groups	1090.913	1246	0.876		
	Total	1103.082	1248			
Q22	Between groups	10.165	2	5.083	4.994	0.007
	Within groups	1268.022	1246	1.018		
	Total	1278.187	1248			
Q24	Between groups	5.688	2	2.844	4.625	0.010
	Within groups	766.195	1246	0.615		
	Total	771.883	1248			

Key: ANOVA, analysis of variance.

Source: Developed by the author.

Specifically, multiple comparisons using post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences between participants from the Potchefstroom and Mahikeng campuses on Q2 ($p < 0.001$), Q4 ($p = 0.003$), Q12 ($p = 0.004$), Q18 ($p = 0.005$), Q19 ($p = 0.039$), Q22 ($p = 0.005$) and Q24 ($p = 0.008$). The highest mean differences between Potchefstroom and Mahikeng were recorded in Q2 ('I think people from other ethnic groups are narrow-minded'), where participants from the Potchefstroom campus scored higher than their counterparts at Mahikeng. Because this item was reverse coded, a higher score indicates disagreement. Therefore, this finding can be interpreted to mean that participants from the Potchefstroom campus disagree more than Mahikeng participants on the statement that other ethnic groups are narrow-minded.

With regard to home language, there were statistically significant differences noted across the different language categories for the question items indicated in Table 2.4.

TABLE 2.4: Intercultural sensitivity scale question items with significance and mean differences across home language categories with interpretation.

ISS question item	p	Highest mean difference between home languages	Interpretation
Q1: I enjoy interacting with people from different ethnic groups	< 0.001	English-Afrikaans = 0.427	'English' more in agreement than 'Afrikaans'
Q2: I think people from other ethnic groups are narrow-minded (REVERSE CODED)	< 0.001	Other-Afrikaans = 0.674	'Other' more disagreement than 'Afrikaans'
Q3: I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different ethnic groups	< 0.001	Other-Afrikaans = 0.319	'Other' more agreement than 'Afrikaans'
Q4: I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	0.008	Setswana-Afrikaans = 0.327	'Setswana' more disagreement than 'Afrikaans'
Q5: I always know what to say when interacting with people from different ethnic groups	0.001	Other-Afrikaans = 0.307	'Other' more agreement than 'Afrikaans'
Q7: I don't like to be with people from different ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	0.004	IsiZulu-Afrikaans = 0.287	'IsiZulu' more disagreement than 'Afrikaans'
Q9: I get upset easily when interacting with people from different ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	0.001	English-Afrikaans = 0.289	'English' more disagreement than 'Afrikaans'
Q14: I am very observant when interacting with people from different ethnic groups	< 0.001	English-Afrikaans = 0.297	'English' more agreement than 'Afrikaans'
Q15: I often feel useless when interacting with people from different ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	< 0.001	Other-Afrikaans = 0.438	'Other' more disagreement than 'Afrikaans'

Table 2.4 continues on the next page→

TABLE 2.4 (cont.): Intercultural sensitivity scale question items with significance and mean differences across home language categories with interpretation.

Q17: I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different ethnic groups	< 0.001	IsiZulu-Afrikaans = 0.488	'IsiZulu' more agreement than 'Afrikaans'
Q18: I would not accept the opinions of people from different ethnic groups (REVERSE CODED)	< 0.001	IsiZulu-Afrikaans = 0.329	'IsiZulu' more disagreement than 'Afrikaans'
Q22: I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally distinct persons (REVERSE CODED)	< 0.001	English-IsiZulu = 0.581	'English' more disagreement than 'IsiZulu'
Q24: I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally distinct counterpart and me	< 0.001	Other-Afrikaans = 0.398	'Other' more agreement than 'Afrikaans'

Source: Author's own creation developed from the adopted ISS by Chen, GM & Starosta, WJ 2000, 'The development and validation of the intercultural sensitivity scale', *Human Communication*, vol. 3, pp. 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t61546-000>. Key: ISS, Intercultural sensitivity scale.

Furthermore, comparing the mean scores of participants' responses across the five ISS dimensions revealed statistically significant differences only on the CII dimension ($p = 0.015 < 0.05$), particularly for gender, where males scored significantly higher than females. This in turn suggests that male pre-service teachers have higher confidence compared to female pre-service teachers in engaging in intercultural interactions.

With respect to *campus location*, there was evidence of statistically significant differences in the means scores of three ISS dimensions: CNII, RII and SPO. The highest mean difference (0.29) was noted between Potchefstroom and Mahikeng campus students with the former scoring significantly higher than the latter on SPO. This result reveals that participants from the Potchefstroom campus showed higher SPO than their counterparts from the Mahikeng campus.

For *home language*, evidence of statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) emerged on four out of the five dimensions of ISS (CNII, RII, SPO and EAll). The highest significant differences were noted between the mean scores of participants who reported English as their home language and those of IsiZulu (0.56) with English home language scoring higher than IsiZulu on SPO.

In summary, the study found that while the excursions did not lead to significant changes in overall IS scores, certain factors such as gender, age, campus location and home language did influence pre-service teachers' responses to specific statements related to IS dimensions. These results suggest the complex interplay of various factors in shaping pre-service teachers' perceptions and interactions in intercultural contexts.

■ Discussion of results using the intercultural development continuum framework

Reflecting on the study results using Bennett's (1986) IDC provided valuable insights into NWU pre-service teachers' IS and their ability to navigate and adapt to different cultural contexts. The IDC is a theoretical framework that assesses and describes individuals' stages of intercultural development, ranging from ethnocentrism (minimisation) to ethnorelativism (integration and adaptation) (Bennett & Bennett 2004, see Figure 2.2). Upon juxtaposing the main results of the study across the five different stages of the IDC, it was possible to determine the IS profile of the NWUs 2023 cohort of first-year pre-service teachers by ascertaining where the majority falls on the continuum. To interpret IS and its associated five factors that were extracted in the current study (CII, receptivity, empathy and attentiveness, comfort and stereotyped perception), across the stages of IDC, several hypothetical connections were made.

■ Confidence in intercultural interaction

- *denial stage*: At this stage, pre-service teachers might lack awareness of the significance of intercultural interactions. They may not recognise the need for specific skills or attitudes to navigate cultural differences effectively. Low to minimal levels indicate a lack of confidence because of limited awareness of the importance of intercultural interactions.
- *polarisation stage*: Pre-service teachers might rely on defensive mechanisms to protect their own cultural identity. Their lack of confidence could be because of their defensive stance towards intercultural interactions.
- *minimisation stage*: Pre-service teachers at this stage could recognise the existence of cultural differences but may downplay their significance. They might focus more on universal values and commonalities. While they acknowledge cultural differences, their confidence might still be limited as they might underestimate the complexity of intercultural interactions.
- *acceptance stage*: Here, pre-service teachers are becoming more open and accepting, and their CIIs increase although there might still be room for growth.
- *adaptation and integration stage*: At this stage, pre-service teachers are skilled at adapting their communication and behaviours to different cultural contexts. They have a strong awareness of their own cultural assumptions and biases and possess a deep appreciation for cultural diversity, which enables them to effortlessly switch between cultural contexts while maintaining their own cultural identity.

■ Receptivity to intercultural interactions

- *Denial stage*: Pre-service teachers at the denial stage might lack receptivity to intercultural interactions. They might not acknowledge the importance of cultural differences or the need for effective cross-cultural communication.
- *Polarisation stage*: Where pre-service teachers might show resistance or discomfort towards engaging with individuals from different cultures. They may be hesitant to forge new perspectives.
- *Minimisation stage*: Pre-service teachers at this stage could exhibit a basic level of receptivity, but they might still downplay the significance of cultural differences.

■ Empathy and attentiveness to intercultural interactions

- *Acceptance stage*: At this stage, pre-service teachers start demonstrating higher levels of empathy and attentiveness. They are becoming more open to understanding others' cultural perspectives although there might still be challenges in fully connecting across cultures.
- *Adaptation and integration stage*: In the adaptation stage, pre-service teachers are likely to excel in empathy and attentiveness. They actively seek to understand the nuances of different cultures and are adept at adjusting their communication and behaviours accordingly. A higher level of adaptation and integration exemplifies a deep level of empathy and attentiveness, where pre-service teachers can truly connect with others from diverse backgrounds, appreciating their experiences and viewpoints.

■ Comfort in navigating intercultural interactions

- *Acceptance stage*: Pre-service teachers at this stage may experience a growing comfort level in navigating intercultural interactions. They are becoming more at ease with the idea of engaging with diverse individuals.
- *Adaptation stage*: Those in the adaptation stage are likely to feel very comfortable in navigating intercultural interactions. They can navigate unfamiliar cultural contexts with ease and grace.
- *Integration stage*: Individuals in the integration stage have a high degree of comfort in intercultural interactions. They feel at home in diverse settings and can seamlessly move between different cultural environments.

■ Stereotyped perception of the other

- *Denial stage*: Stereotyped perception might be more prevalent in the denial stage, where pre-service teachers might lack awareness about their biases and stereotypes.
- *Polarisation stage*: Here, pre-service teachers could have rigid and negative stereotypes about other cultures, contributing to their resistance to intercultural interactions.
- *Minimisation stage*: While pre-service teachers in the minimisation stage might be less prone to stereotyping, they might still simplify or overlook cultural differences.
- *Acceptance to integration stages*: As pre-service teachers progress towards higher stages, they are more likely to shed stereotypes and develop a nuanced understanding of other cultures, recognising the complexity of human experiences.

To gain a deeper understanding of the study results, three criteria were employed: progression, distribution and barriers. Overall, results also showed a slight *progression* from lower to higher stages of IS as evidenced by mean scores of pre-service teachers before and after excursions; however, this progression was not significant. This result highlights the potential of engaging pre-service teachers in purposeful excursions to enhance their willingness to engage with other cultures and build their capacity to adapt to unfamiliar situations.

With respect to the *distribution* of pre-service teachers' ISS profiles per demographic variable, it was evident that male pre-service teachers exhibited a higher level of CII than female pre-service teachers, which could mean that male pre-service teachers tend to show more acceptance and thus are more receptive to intercultural association. Furthermore, pre-service teachers from the Potchefstroom campus showed higher SPO than students from the Mahikeng campus, which might position the IS profile of Potchefstroom pre-service teachers at the denial stage. The same interpretation can apply to pre-service teachers who reported English as their home language and who had higher SPO mean scores compared to their isiZulu counterparts.

In terms of *barriers*, it is worth mentioning that because of the complex nature of the IS construct, numerous factors can hinder participants' progression along the continuum. These could be personal, societal or contextual barriers that could be addressed when identified. In particular, it is worth noting that the study had restrictions that might have hindered a thorough investigation of the effectiveness of WIL excursions, the exploration of cultural factors that influence intercultural development and the assessment of the long-term sustainability of increased IC. For example,

a short excursion might not be sufficient to show significant changes in IS because of several factors related to the complexity of developing IC and the limitations of short-duration training programmes. Some reasons why a brief two- or three-day excursion may not lead to substantial changes in IS include:

1. *Complex nature of IS*: Intercultural sensitivity involves developing a deep understanding of cultural differences, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours (Arasaratnam-Smith 2017; Deardorff 2016). This process takes time and involves self-reflection, cognitive restructuring and behavioural adjustments. A two- or three-day excursion may not provide enough time for participants to truly internalise and apply these concepts effectively.
2. *Limited exposure and practice*: Developing IS requires exposure to diverse perspectives and repeated practice of intercultural interactions (Chahine & Awad 2023). A two- or three-day excursion experience may only provide a limited number of scenarios and interactions, which might not be enough for pre-service teachers to fully grasp the complexity of cross-cultural dynamics.
3. *Cognitive and behavioural change*: Intercultural sensitivity involves not only changing cognitive perceptions but also adapting behaviours and communication styles (Altan 2018). Because behaviour change takes time and consistent effort, a short excursion might raise awareness, but sustained practice and reinforcement are needed to see meaningful changes in behaviour.
4. *Overcoming pre-existing beliefs*: It is the assumption of this study that while pre-service teachers might join the excursion experience with pre-existing cultural biases and assumptions, challenging and reshaping these beliefs require more than just brief training. Deep-seated attitudes take time to address and change.
5. *Long-term engagement*: Arasaratnam (2015) argues that sustainable IS growth often requires ongoing engagement, reflection and learning. Therefore, although a short excursion could spark interest and curiosity, continuous learning and exposure are necessary for long-term development.
6. *Individual differences*: Pre-service teachers vary in their readiness to change and their baseline levels of IS. It is clear that some individuals might need more time and exposure than others to show significant changes.
7. *Evaluation timeframe*: Two or three days might be insufficient to measure the lasting impact of the training. Changes in attitudes and behaviours might not manifest immediately but could develop over an extended period.
8. *Lack of follow-up*: After a short excursion, participating pre-service teachers might not have the opportunities they need for continued practice, feedback or support to reinforce the learning and make lasting changes.

9. *Depth of topics covered*: IS encompasses a wide range of topics including cultural awareness, communication, empathy, conflict resolution and more (Bennett 1986). While the excursions incorporated several inquiry-based problem-solving experiences that are inspired by global challenges, covering these topics comprehensively in just a short period can be challenging.

This study is mindful of the fact that to effectively foster IS, longer-term programmes that include ongoing engagement, real-world practice, reflective exercises and opportunities for feedback are more likely to lead to meaningful and lasting changes. While short training courses can create awareness and introduce concepts, they are often just a starting point on a journey towards becoming interculturally competent.

■ Considerations for further research

As cultures are brought closer together by advancements in communication and transportation, strong IC has become essential for effective interaction and collaboration. This is especially relevant in South Africa, a nation celebrated for its diversity with numerous languages and ethnic groups coexisting. Inspired by South Africa 2030 vision with the call for a more interconnected nation, cultivating IS in diverse contexts remains crucial for promoting effective communication, cultural understanding and harmonious interactions among South African people.

While research on IS has made great strides in the past few decades, further research in the field of IS and competence can delve into various dimensions and aspects to deepen our understanding and improve practical applications, particularly in the context of teacher preparation programmes in South Africa. Some considerations for further research could include:

1. *Cultural contexts and diversity*: Explore how ISS operates across different cultural contexts, considering nuances and variations among ethnic groups. Investigate how ICC might differ when communicating with collectivist vs. individualist cultures, high-context vs. low-context cultures and cultures with varying power distance or uncertainty avoidance.
2. *Exploration of cultural context in SDL*: Future research should delve into how cultural context influences SDL processes. Investigating how different cultural backgrounds affect individuals' motivation, learning strategies and outcomes in SDL environments can provide valuable insights. Researchers could compare the SDL experiences of individuals from diverse cultures, analysing the impact of cultural values, norms and communication styles on their learning autonomy and IS.

3. *Intersectionality*: Study how intersecting identities, such as race, gender, religion and socio-economic status, influence IS. Examine whether individuals with multiple marginalised identities face unique challenges in developing and practising IS.
4. *Digital communication*: Investigate the role of IS in digital communication platforms, including social media, online collaboration tools and virtual environments. For example, how do South African pre-service teachers navigate cultural differences and build competence in the digital sphere?
5. *Measurement and assessment*: Develop more refined qualitative and quantitative instruments for measuring IS and ICC, including both self-assessment tools and observer-based evaluations. Investigate the reliability and validity of existing ICC measurement tools across diverse contexts.
6. *Longitudinal studies*: Conduct longitudinal studies to assess how ICC evolves over time and with varying experiences. For example, how does ICC develop through education, work, travel and exposure to diverse cultures?
7. *Cross-cultural communication challenges*: Identify specific challenges in intercultural communication that individuals and organisations commonly face. Investigate how ICC strategies can mitigate these challenges and promote positive outcomes.
8. *Cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence*: Explore the relationship between ICC, cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence. For example, how do these competencies intersect and contribute to effective intercultural interactions?
9. *Ethical considerations*: Investigate ethical considerations in intercultural communication, such as the potential for cultural appropriation, stereotypes and cultural insensitivity. For example, how can ICC help individuals navigate these complexities?
10. *Global citizenship education*: Examine the integration of ICC into global citizenship education curricula. For example, how can educational institutions foster not only cultural awareness but also meaningful engagement with global issues?
11. *Impact of media and pop culture*: Investigate how media, popular culture and mass communication shape individuals' perceptions of other cultures and impact their ICC development.

These considerations offer a starting point for researchers interested in advancing our understanding of IS and competence as well as its applications in various contexts. Further research in these areas can contribute to more effective cross-cultural interactions, improved intercultural training programmes and a deeper appreciation of the complexities of global communication.

■ Conclusion

In conclusion, there are important issues raised in IS literature that are worth stressing for teacher education programmes in South Africa. Firstly, in higher education, it is crucial that faculties of education intentionally address the development of IS for pre-service teachers, staff and academics who mentor pre-service teachers by incorporating it into the curriculum. Secondly, there is a need to further study the role of cognitive complexity in ICC and the role of critical thinking in designing excursion activities that support IS (Gudykunst & Kim 2003). Thirdly, schools of education need to prioritise preparation related to IS development and the ways to assess pre-service teachers' readiness to guide the acquisition of IS skills by their future learners. Fourthly, there is a need to identify explicit applications of ISS in addressing grand challenges, such as peace-building efforts, issues of power and poverty, and bridging the gaps between communities among others so that IS moves beyond theoretical and abstract discourses. Fifthly, the focus on addressing the holistic development of IS in pre-service teacher education must include attention to mindfulness, emotional resilience morals and self-evolution (Magolda, Meszaros & Creamer 2010). Sixthly, the conversation about better ways of understanding and measuring IS, equitable and inclusive teacher preparation approaches and teaching interventions such as excursions, community engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration must continue. As the conversation progresses, it must be inclusive of diverse perspectives so as to fulfil South Africa's broader vision of IS, that of South Africans living together peaceably and with a sense of interconnectedness, striving for a future that embodies the values of ubuntu and reflects the dreams of a nation united.

Breaking barriers: Educational excursions fostering first-year student teachers' sense of belonging

Neal Petersen

Research Unit Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

■ Abstract

A sense of belonging is a deep and subjective connection with social groups, physical places and individual and collective experiences. It is a fundamental human need that predicts numerous mental, physical, social, economic and behavioural outcomes. According to data from Universities South Africa (USAf), 75% of first-year students can be considered first-generation students, who often encounter barriers such as financial restrictions, language, isolation and social and cultural differences. These barriers may increase the likelihood of dropping out and lower retention rates. To mitigate these barriers for first-year students, USAf recommends innovative and student-centred learning spaces. Educational excursions, as presented by the North-West University (NWU), are student-centred and

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may alleviate some of these barriers for first-year student teachers. This chapter attempts to answer the following research question: How did educational excursions assist in overcoming the barriers preventing a sense of belonging in a diverse group of first-year student teachers? To find answers to this question, a qualitative research design within an interpretive paradigm was employed to report on the experiences of first-year student teachers. Open-ended questionnaires (OEs) and reflection portfolios (RP) were used as data sources. Social constructivism underpins the research, and the four components of the integrated framework for understanding, assessing and fostering belonging were used as a heuristic to analyse the data. If the four components (competencies for belonging, opportunities to belong, motivations to belong and perceptions of belonging) are met, it creates a space to foster belonging. The data indicate that scaffolding the student-centred educational excursions within the student teachers' zone of proximal development helped to overcome the barriers, leading to the development of the four components in the framework. Assisting in overcoming these barriers may consequently make student teachers feel more welcome with a sense of belonging as NWU Faculty of Education student teachers.

■ Introduction

According to recent student engagement data, most South African students, like some of their international peers, are financially stressed, hungry and experiencing social and cultural clashes, feelings of isolation, language barriers and discrimination (Strydom, Kuh & Loots 2017). 'By designing more student-centred institutions, South African universities can help to ease some of the stresses currently facing students and boost their success' (Universities South Africa [USAf] 2018b:4). In the current study, these challenges pointed out by USAf were regarded as barriers that negatively influence first-year student teachers' sense of belonging. Universities South Africa is an umbrella body representative of the 26 public universities in South Africa.

Professor Francois Strydom, as the leader of a USAf task team, proposed ways to enhance South African universities. He contends that in our capacity as academic institutions, we may be unable to eliminate the issues with the educational system or the financial stresses our students experience. However, he stresses that universities still have some control over how teaching and learning take place, how first-year students are guided through the experience, how tutorials are run and how students receive academic guidance (USAf 2018a). The North-West University (NWU), with its dream to 'be an internationally recognised university in Africa, distinguished for engaged scholarship, social responsiveness, and

an ethic of care', is in a good position to respond to Strydom's call (USAf 2018a) because of its goal to excel in cutting-edge research and teaching methods as well as its dream of social responsiveness (NWU 2023).

To live up to the promise of the NWU dream, faculties are obliged to develop programmes that prepare students for the challenges they may face in their prospective professions. Although no university can prepare its graduates for all eventualities that their future professions may hold, they can deliver students with the necessary agency to take on challenges and to come up with innovative ideas to find solutions to the challenges of the 21st century in their future careers and life in general (USAf 2018a).

In order to fulfil the university's dream, the NWU Faculty of Education introduced educational excursions for first-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) students to foster their sense of belonging in a culturally diverse and inclusive environment, therefore aligning with USAf's vision to provide innovative teaching and learning opportunities. The educational excursions are scaffolded towards realising the South African vision for intercultural competence, equity and inclusion. This chapter presents research that was guided by the question: How did educational excursions assist in overcoming the barriers preventing a sense of belonging in a diverse group of first-year student teachers?

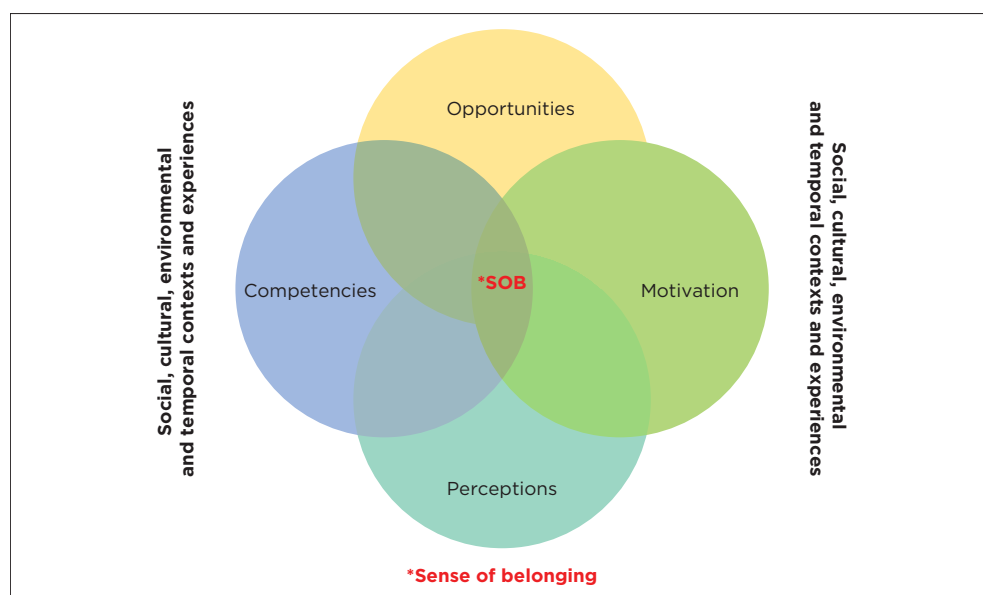
■ A sense of belonging and social connectedness

Belonging is considered to be at the centre of Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs, coming after fulfilling basic psychological and safety needs, but before feelings of esteem and self-actualisation. To meet the need for belonging, positive emotional connections must occur within a stable environment. Belonging is strongly linked to overall health and well-being, as well as cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes (Walton & Brady 2021). Leary, Jongman-Sereno and Diebels (2014) contend that social anxiety occurs when a person has doubts about whether they will create the kind of impressions they want to make on other people. The fear of creating a negative impression poses a threat to one's sense of acceptance and belonging.

Franklin and Tranter (2021:57) allude to the fact that belongingness is also influenced by individual differences as well as 'cultural, spatial, temporal, and generational factors and contexts'. This connection can be either positive and dynamic or negative. Hurem, Rowan and Grootenboer (2021) argue that social connectedness is essential for students to adapt and feel a sense of overall social well-being. To remain relevant, people must be responsive or adapt to the challenges of an ever-changing world (Allen 2020; Allen et al. 2021). If first-year student teachers cannot adapt

to their new learning environment, it could adversely affect their sense of belonging, academic performance or even their decision to drop out (Pedler, Willis & Nieuwoudt 2022). Factors such as engaging in extracurricular activities, experiencing peer acceptance, being cognitively scaffolded and feeling accepted by their lecturers affect student success, as measured by their graduation rate. Therefore, interactions between students and their lecturers outside of the classroom can be crucial to their sense of belonging (Strydom et al. 2017).

There is a common consensus that belonging is a basic human right (Hurem et al. 2021) and that everyone seeks to fulfil their need for belonging (Allen et al. 2021). Allen et al. (2021:87) describe a sense of belonging as ‘the subjective feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences’. The same authors define belonging as ‘a dynamic feeling and experience that emerges from four interrelated components that arise from and are supported by the systems in which individuals reside’. These four components are: (1) ‘competencies for belonging (skills and abilities), (2) opportunities to belong (enablers, removal or reduction of barriers), (3) motivations to belong (inner drive) and (4) perceptions of belonging (cognitions, attributions and feedback mechanisms)’ (p. 91). Allen et al. conceptualise their understanding of belonging as an integrative framework (Figure 3.1) for understanding,



Source: Reconstruction of the work of Allen, KA, Kern, M, Rozek, C, McInerney, D & Slavich, G 2021, 'Belonging: A review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research', *Australian Journal of Psychology*, vol. 73, no. 1, p. 92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883409>.

FIGURE 3.1: An integrative framework for understanding, assessing and fostering belonging.

assessing and fostering belonging. The four components influence each other in a dynamic social system over the life span of a person as they move ‘through different social, environmental, and temporal contexts and experiences’ (pp. 91–92). The findings and discussions in this chapter use Allen et al.’s (2021) framework, underpinned by social constructivist ideas, as a heuristic to assist in the data analysis.

Creating conducive learning and social environments for students to feel welcome is crucial for university teachers. Before university teachers can design and develop programmes to create an inviting environment, it is also important for them to understand the barriers their clients (first-year students) may face.

■ **Realities encountered by first-year students in South African universities: Exploring barriers to fostering a sense of belonging**

The paragraphs highlight the barriers that most first-year students encounter while studying at South African universities. Although the current study focused on first-year BEd students, they are also part of the larger first-year student population studied by USAf (2018a, 2018b). Subsequent discussions outline the barriers that prevent students from feeling a sense of belonging towards realising a vision for intercultural competence, equity and inclusion.

■ **Physical and technological needs of contact students**

The majority of South African contact (on-campus) students, like many international students, experience financial stress and food insecurity (USAf 2018b). Students also face issues with electricity, inadequate housing and functional study areas (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2020). The DHET states that many students are confronted with obstacles regarding technology, including network connectivity, insufficient data, not having appropriate devices for studying and not having adequate knowledge and skills to optimally make use of devices and new study platforms; also, many students do not know how to type. Because of these barriers, many first-year students drop out of university because some feel that they do not experience a sense of belonging to the larger academic community (Sithaldeen et al. 2022).

A significant number of students think they cannot afford to take part in campus-based academic and social events (USAf 2018b). According to

Fernández, Ryan and Begeny (2023), social status and students' sense of belonging are positively correlated. In practice, this means that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be excluded from social activities at university because they lack financial resources, may experience feelings of alienation or isolation and consequently experience difficulties in belonging (Fernández et al. 2023). Franklin and Tranter (2021:57) describe this feeling as loneliness that is 'associated with unmet belongingness needs'. This feeling of not belonging prevents the students from forming strong bonds with other students (Fernández et al. 2023).

The scope of the research reported in this chapter was not intended to overcome these physical and technological barriers. As a university with a strong ethic of care, the NWU offers support to students who are in need throughout the year. This includes social services such as providing a meal per day and health care services and counselling services for those who require it. All these services are provided free of charge (NWU 2023). The NWU's educational excursions, on the other hand, gave first-year student teachers a chance to interact and connect with their peers in a setting where all physical needs are equally and freely provided for without the need for additional financial contributions, creating a level playing field and safe environment for fostering a sense of belonging in all first-year students.

■ Students' experiences of the diverse nature of the university environment

The student population at South African universities is increasingly diversified and reflects a wide range of backgrounds as more students from all demographic and socio-economic groups have access to universities (Xulu-Gama & Hadebe 2022). Universities must be responsive in terms of curriculum re-design to make the curriculum more relevant to all, while individual students need to deal with coping in a culturally diverse university environment with English as the predominant language of teaching and learning (DHET 2020; Maniram & Maistry 2018).

Though students have access to universities, epistemological access still eludes many of them (Maniram & Maistry 2018). Morrow (2009:36–38) coined the term 'epistemological access' referring to 'disciplinary knowledge and the ways of knowing within a discipline'. Epistemological access is the degree to which the curriculum content is accessible to everyone, allowing them to relate to it, understand it, personalise it and ultimately incorporate it in a manner that benefits the field and society as a whole. The NWU excursion is designed to increase equal access to knowledge by providing a safe and low-risk learning environment for novice learning outside the

confines of lecture halls. As student teachers on the excursion are exposed to worldviews that differ from their own, unfamiliar cultural customs and social justice issues, they are placed in a zone of discomfort (drawing them out of their comfort zones) (De Beer & Petersen 2022).

Besides epistemological access, Olonisakin and Idemudia (2022:56) describe the division of South African society along racial lines, which makes 'social integration difficult to achieve in the nation', and according to them, the nation still has a very low level of interracial trust and contact. Social inequality is particularly noticeable among marginalised groups, the majority of whom are black and impoverished (Matgetla 2020). Addressing diversity and inequality barriers is important because it will most likely impact students' academic achievement if they feel unhappy and unwelcome (Strydom et al. 2017). Clifton and Taff (2022:128) found that 'social exclusion was the most commonly occurring barrier to marginalized students feeling like they belong in campus communities'. Conversely, Strydom et al. mention that students who have pleasant and constructive interactions with students from other backgrounds perceive the campus environment as being more supportive and perform better academically, experience success and improve their motivation. The NWU excursion programme intends to mitigate this risk, using small, diverse cooperative learning (CL) groups where student teachers can interact, reflect and learn from each other.

Xulu-Gama and Hadebe (2022) highlight that language barriers also pose a significant challenge to black students, primarily because English is often not their first language. This issue is, however, not a racial one but rather a linguistic one. In South Africa, where there are 12 official languages, most first-year students do not have English as their first language but are required to use it as the medium of instruction and learning at universities (USAf 2018a). This was also the case for the NWU's face-to-face excursions. Having to conduct their studies in English, which is not their home language, moves students out of their comfort zones, and they find it challenging to adapt to university life and cope academically (De Beer et al. 2022).

This chapter examines how (first-generation) first-year student teachers develop an understanding of dealing with issues of inequality, diversity and language through educational excursions, reducing negative impacts on their sense of belonging.

■ First-generation students

A significant percentage (75%) of students in South African institutions are first-generation students, that is, students who are the first in their families to pursue higher education (USAf 2018a). Bell and Santamaría (2018 in

Forsyth et al. 2022:308) contemplated that some first-generation students can be regarded as those whose 'parents and grandparents were historically excluded from higher education for reasons associated with racial, ethnic, socio-economic and/or linguistic diversity'. The USAf study (2018a) indicated that first-generation students are from a variety of ethnical, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Pedler et al. (2022) describe how first-year students whose parents also attended university have a higher sense of belonging compared to first-generation students. These first-generation students are more likely to face academic challenges and experience difficulties in their studies at university (Strydom et al. 2017; USAf 2018a).

To increase the success and retention rates of first-generation students, universities must take innovative measures and provide proper orientation programmes and support. According to the USAf study (2018a), universities should make it easier for first-year students, especially those who are first-generation, to overcome the barriers they face. This can be achieved by connecting students with supportive resources, getting them involved in clubs, building support systems and offering first-year experience programmes (Strydom et al. 2017), such as educational excursions, as reported in this chapter. The subsequent section provides more information on how these barriers can be minimised to help students feel more included and welcomed.

■ Universities South Africa recommendations to address the barriers that may hamper a sense of belonging

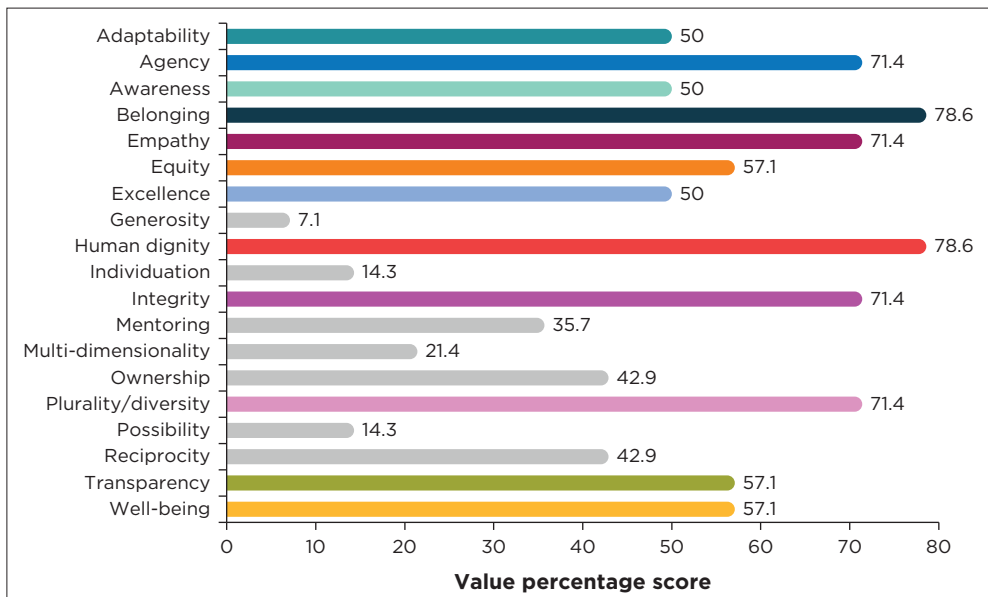
Addressing the aforementioned barriers and effectively resolving them is a challenging undertaking. In response, the USAf established a task team to conduct research and to recommend ways in which universities can overcome barriers and create an inclusive and enabling environment to help the diverse student population succeed in their studies. The primary recommendation by the task team was that institutions must be redesigned to prioritise holistic student development and adopt a student-centred approach. Such transformation will enable universities to focus on the needs of their students and help them become successful in their academic pursuits (Strydom et al. 2017; USAf 2018b).

Universities that prioritise student-centredness should focus on student agency and well-being as their primary objectives. The task team identified 19 values that all universities should possess (Figure 3.2), with 'belonging' and 'human dignity' being the two values with the highest scores, at 78.6%. 'Well-being' emerged as another crucial value, scoring

57.1% (USAf 2022, Figure 3.2). A summary of the definitions of each of these values follows:

- *Belonging*: Student-centred universities foster social cohesion and interconnection while maintaining the uniqueness of individuals. They create a welcoming atmosphere and nurture the essence of the African phrase *Motho ke Motho ka Batho Babang* [a person is a person because of other people] (also see Chapter 10 – Ubuntu).
- *Human dignity*: In student-centred universities, the human dignity of every individual is valued and respected. Dehumanising practices are condemned and removed, and all forms of stereotyping are opposed. The worth of each individual is recognised, and opportunities to develop their full potential are created.
- *Well-being*: A student-centred higher education system prioritises the well-being of all individuals by establishing integrated structures and programmes that promote personal welfare and mitigate stereotypes and stigmatisation (USAf 2022).

Belonging, well-being and human dignity are crucial for achieving intercultural competence, equity and inclusion. They can impact each other and lead to a more fulfilling life for all members of society. However, their absence can cause social exclusion and discrimination and adversely affect both well-being and human dignity (Robinson 2023).



Source: Reconstruction of the work of Universities South Africa 2022, *Reshaping universities to create a student-centred higher education system in South Africa*, p. 13, viewed 02 October 2023. <<http://www.usaf.ac.za>>

FIGURE 3.2: Prioritisation of values by Universities in South Africa.

■ North-West University Faculty of Education's efforts to ameliorate the barriers that may hamper a sense of belonging

The NWU Faculty of Education prioritises student and employee well-being by creating a welcoming environment that fosters belonging (NWU 2023). Educational excursions for first-year BEd students, based on self-directed learning (SDL) principles, offer a student-centred approach that bridges theory and practice. These excursions help overcome barriers and promote belonging among diverse student teachers (De Beer & Petersen 2022).

In the Faculty of Education's excursions, students are taken out of their comfort zones because they come from different campuses and many diverse backgrounds (De Beer, Petersen & Van Vuuren 2020). During these face-to-face excursions, students share living quarters, including dorm rooms and dining rooms, and collaborate in small, diverse groups of five, which were assigned by the facilitators. Through various engaging pedagogies like problem-based learning (PBL), CL, simulations, game-based learning and case-based learning, the excursion seeks to foster a sense of belonging among diverse student teachers (De Beer & Petersen 2022). More information on the design principles of these educational excursions can be found in three AOSIS book publications De Beer et al. (2020, 2022) and Petersen et al. (2023a) (see the full citations in the reference list). The purpose of the current study was to explore the way these design principles were scaffolded in addressing the four components of the integrated framework of Allen et al. (2021, Figure 3.1).

■ Theoretical framework

Social constructivism, utilised in various contexts like educational settings such as excursions, serves as the theoretical framework for this study (De Beer et al. 2020). Belonging, rooted in social psychology and acknowledged by Cena, Burns and Wilson (2021:818), is aligned with a social-constructivist approach and highlights how individuals' awareness of belonging is not arbitrary but influenced by social contexts and interactions. This theory posits that students shape their comprehension of the world through experiences, dialogue and cross-cultural interactions (Vygotsky 1978).

According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, learning is primarily a social process that takes place first on a social plane (inter-psychological plane), after which it is internalised (the intra-psychological plane). Therefore, contact with individuals who possess greater skills can influence

one's thinking and behaviour. Vygotsky (1978) argues that an individual first internalises group experiences through social interaction (inter-psychological plane) before making them their own (intra-psychological plane):

A feeling of belonging therefore relates to how students perceive themselves within a context i.e. how they might or might not fit into the institutional culture of their specific university campus, and to the broader context of higher education. (Sithaldeen et al. 2022:70)

Vygotsky referred to the space in which development takes place between the inter- and intra-psychological space as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). First-year student teachers learned in a scaffolded environment during face-to-face excursions using pedagogies such as play, CL, PBL and reflection. This created an enabling environment where they could construct new knowledge, reflect both as a group and individually and identify their areas of growth, contributing to fostering a sense of belonging and self-directedness.

■ Methodology

■ Paradigm

The current study, within a social constructivist framework, used interpretivism as a paradigm. Ryan (2018:9) contends that the concept of interpretivism as a paradigm 'assumes that truth and knowledge are subjective because of differences in our culture and life experiences'. In the same vein, Berryman (2019) argues that social interactions, shared consciousness, language and other factors are essential for the interpretive discovery of facts. Berryman (2019:273) is also of the opinion that asking 'how and why' research questions in order to interpret the data will assist in getting a deep understanding of the phenomena under study, specifically in this case, fostering a sense of belonging. Pervin and Mokhtar (2022:421) comment that 'it is important to understand who is interpreting, why they are interpreting and how they are interpreting'. The present study analysed data from an educational excursion to determine whether it contributed to student teachers' sense of belonging. The author has been involved in excursions since 2016 and was the main presenter of the 2023 face-to-face excursion and is aware of the potential biases qualitative research holds. While it is impossible to eliminate bias in qualitative research, there are strategies to minimise it. In the current study, the researcher carefully avoided focusing solely on data that would answer the intended research question, but analysed all data, even if it did not appear to be relevant at first and reported it honestly. Co-researchers reviewed the findings. Additionally, the author interpreted the data and presented it using a thick description, as suggested by Creswell (2014).

■ Research design

The present study followed a basic qualitative research design. It aligns well with an interpretive paradigm because it can result in an in-depth understanding of the participants under study, constructing reality through contact with their social environments (Creswell 2014). A basic qualitative research study, rooted in social constructivism in education, can reveal the efficiency of teaching-learning strategies, methods and practices (Merriam 2009:23). Merriam contends that qualitative research studies aim to gain an understanding of (1) ‘how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences’. The meaning that an individual creates relates to how they interpret their own experiences and the world around them. This basic qualitative research focused on how the researcher used the first-hand experiences (Creswell 2014) of first-year BEd students to answer the research question: How did educational excursions assist in overcoming the barriers preventing a sense of belonging in a diverse group of first-year student teachers?

■ Population and sampling

The NWU consists of three campuses, namely the Mahikeng campus (MC), Potchefstroom campus (PC) and Vanderbijlpark campus (VC), each with a distinct identity. Despite South Africa’s 29 years of democracy, the campuses’ identities are often influenced by their previous racial demographics and histories (Petersen, Mentz & De Beer 2022). Table 3.1 depicts the racial demographics for all the contact first-year BEd students registered in 2023 at the NWU. In a South African context, the term *African* refers to individuals of indigenous African descent, while *white* denotes those of European descent. *Coloured* describes a mixed-race ethnic group with diverse ancestries, including African, European and Asian. *Asian* pertains to individuals of Indian descent (Seekings 2010).

TABLE 3.1: The 2023 Faculty of Education Bachelor of Education first-year first-time enrolment numbers and demographics.

Campus	Contact mode of delivery				
	Racial demographics				Contact total
	African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	
Mahikeng	618	3	-	1	622
Potchefstroom	628	78	3	286	995
Vanderbijlpark	597	11	3	31	642
Total	1,843	92	6	318	2,259

Source: North-West University (NWU) 2023, *NWU values and value-driven behaviours*, viewed 05 September 2023.
<<https://services.nwu.ac.za/nwuway>>

Besides the racial diversity depicted in Table 3.1, the language profiles are also different on the campuses. Although all 12 official languages are represented to some extent, English, Sesotho, Setswana and Afrikaans dominate (NWU 2023). Additionally, social diversity indicators such as socio-economic status, gender and cultural and religious practices differ among the students. Despite these differences, the contact (on campus) student teachers need to live and study together harmoniously to ensure a positive university experience and feel welcomed. All first-year contact student teachers are required to attend one of the face-to-face excursions, and this group of students formed the population of the study. The total number of registered first-year student teachers was $n = 2,259$. From this population, $n = 2,311$ students provided informed consent and comprised the sample of the study reported in this chapter.

■ Data-gathering instruments and analysis

In this chapter, we present the findings of the study that used OEQ and RP to gather data on students' experiences during six educational excursions. We purposefully sampled both instruments to ensure they were representative of all three campuses. Additionally, because of the large number of completed instruments, we used random sampling to choose a sample of 110 OEQs and 110 RPs. The selected sample was inclusive of all three campuses, and both instruments were transcribed and analysed. This chapter reports on data from Questions 4 (the drumming activity), 6 (bonfire dialogues), 10 (Rainbow Nation concert), 11 (characteristics of a super teacher), 13 (general end of the excursion questions) and 14 (intercultural competence, equity and inclusion) of the RP, describing students' experiences. Some of these questions have sub-questions, e.g. Question 13.1. These numbers of particular questions and sub-questions are referred to in the discussion of the findings.

Qualitative coding is assigning a word or phrase to represent an attribute in data. This enables researchers to analyse complex data systematically. A deductive approach was used to understand the experiences of first-year student teachers. Specifically, the study aimed to understand the experiences of a diverse group of first-year student teachers on how an educational excursion helped them overcome barriers to fostering a sense of belonging. To provide a detailed description of the student teachers' experiences with their sense of belonging, thick descriptions were provided (Creswell 2014).

■ Ethical matters

The research conducted at the NWU Faculty of Education followed all ethical standards. Ethical clearance was obtained from the EDU-REC

committee with the ethics number NWU-01013-21-A2. Additionally, the approval of the NWU Gatekeeper was obtained to conduct research with students from this institution, with the gatekeeper permission number NWU-GK-21-065. In the larger investigation, 2,311 student teachers gave informed consent and participated voluntarily. All participants in the study reported in the current chapter consented to participate.

■ Findings and discussion

The data were analysed using Allen et al.’s (2021) integrative framework for understanding, assessing and fostering belonging (Figure 3.1). The first two columns of Table 3.2 and Tables 3.4–3.6 include direct quotes from Allen et al.’s work to identify the components and provide a brief description of each. The last columns of the same tables summarise how each of the four components was developed during the face-to-face educational excursion programme using SDL design principles. The extent to which the four components of the framework are developed may be a good indicator of how well a sense of belonging can be cultivated and how successfully the barriers described in subsequent discussions can be addressed. Whenever direct quotes are included in the discussion, the participant (student teachers), the date (May 2023) and the data-collection tool (OEQ or RP) are used as identifiers. Subsequent discussions will introduce tables (Table 3.2 and Table 3.4–Table 3.6) for each component before discussing the findings.

TABLE 3.2: Alignment of the educational excursion’s design principles with the component of the integrative framework: Competencies for belonging.

Component 1 Allen et al. (2021:92–96)	Short description Allen et al. (2021:92–96)	Design principles of the educational excursion to enable the development of this component
‘Competencies for belonging skills and abilities- (subjective and objective) needed to connect and experience belonging’	‘Social skills include being aware of oneself and others, emotion and behavioural regulation, verbal and nonverbal communication, acknowledgement and alignment with social norms, and active listening’ ‘Cultural skills include understanding one’s heritage, mindful acknowledgement of place, and alignment with relevant values’	Students worked in diverse cooperative groups of five when they performed excursion activities. They were in constant verbal communication and were able to observe each other’s body language. All activities were designed for student teachers to listen to each other’s backgrounds and cultural practices and learn from each other’s differences while also thinking about their own uniqueness. Students were encouraged (during plenary sessions) not to be judgemental but to respect and embrace diversity. ‘Other’ meant ‘different’ and not wrong.

Source: Columns 1 and 2 from Allen, KA, Kern, M, Rozek, C, McInerney, D & Slavich, G 2021, ‘Belonging: A review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research’, *Australian Journal of Psychology*, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 92–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883409> and Column 3 author’s own creation.

■ Competencies for belonging

Based on the data, the educational excursion assisted in fostering the competencies for belonging (skills and abilities) as detailed in the subsequent discussion. One of the questions (14.1) in the RP states: *How do you feel about interacting with people from different ethnic groups?* This question in the RP sought to understand students' own awareness of who they are in relation to others, linking to the social skill of 'being aware of oneself and others' of component one of the framework. From the responses ($n = 110$), 102 students gave positive responses, which signifies that they valued interacting with others, two other responses may be regarded as negative and six did not give a response (Table 3.3).

This trend of positive experiences is also visible in responses to Question 7 of the OEQ: What are your experiences of the NWU, and do you see yourself as an NWU student or a Potchefstroom or Mahikeng or Vanderbijlpark campus student? This OEQ question aimed to explore students' understanding of their own cultural heritage at a specific campus in relation to the overall experience of the culture of the university (including all three campuses). This is relevant because, although the NWU strives to be a unitary institution, the historical backgrounds and cultures of the three campuses remain predominantly the same as before the merger (Petersen et al. 2022). It also links to the 'cultural skills' of this component (competencies for belonging) of the framework (Table 3.2).

It is worth noting that the positive responses from students from all three campuses are almost identical. As evidence of this finding, three verbatim quotes are provided:

Student from VC: 'I felt fully South African and had a moment where I said to myself: if this is what diversity looks like, this is unity.' (Student teacher, May 2023, OEQ)

Student from PC: 'The whole excursion was a great experience as a student who wishes to be a teacher in the coming years. Interacting with people from different ethnic groups made me realise that it is okay to know how to communicate and socialise with different groups. I also learnt a lot of things about how they do things: I have learned how other cultures sing and dance and it helped me with accommodating other cultures if ever I come across them. Also, in my workplace.' (Student teacher, May 2023, OEQ)

Student from MC: 'It feels good because we know different things, it is an advantage that we can be able to teach ourselves different things and know how one lives they are lives. I gained new information about culture, language, and traditions. We learned a lot from one another in addition to listening to their story, now different in communication. It is really fun to communicate with others and share information and it improves socialising.' (Student teacher, May 2023, OEQ)

TABLE 3.3: Responses from Question 14.1 (RP): How do you feel about interacting with people from different ethnic groups?

Words describing their feelings	No. of responses	Words describing their feelings	No. of responses
good	21	appreciated	1
happy	11	challenging	1
learn	8	comfortable	1
excited	6	accommodating	1
great	6	confident	1
enjoyed	4	truthful	1
communicate	3	delightful	1
amazing	3	diversity	1
fun	3	educated	1
proud	3	engaged	1
understanding	3	fascinated	1
embrace	2	welcomed	1
interesting	2	unified	1
socialise	2	honoured	1
open-minded	2	included	1
shy	2	listening	1
respectful	2	motivated	1
no response	6	uncomfortable	2
sensitivity	2	-	-
TOTAL		-	110

Source: Developed by the author based on data collected during the 2023 NWU WIL excursion.

In their 2021 study, Allen et al. argue that creating an enabling environment can help most people develop social, emotional and cultural skills, which can lead to better connections and understanding of our own heritage and that of others. This relates to the value of human dignity that should be evident at all universities (Figure 3.2; USAf 2022). The provided quotes suggest that effective communication, both verbal and non-verbal, took place between students during the excursion. During the excursions, the main focus was on the students and their learning experience, which aligns with USAf’s objective of creating student-centred learning environments (USAf 2022). This approach provided a secure and supportive space for student teachers to share knowledge and learn about each other’s cultures within their ZPD (Vygotsky 1978). In this regard, the author argues that the excursion helped to realise a vision for intercultural competence, equity and inclusion.

During the educational excursion, the students expressed positive feelings, which may be an indication that the presenters, facilitators and group members created a safe and comfortable learning environment. Although a few students initially felt out of their comfort zones, they later enjoyed the experience and made new friends. For example, one student said ‘[a]t first it was challenging and awkward but when we got to work

together it became really fun and I saw that it was a good thing. I also made new friends' (Student teacher, May 2023, RP). As per Allen et al. (2021), social, emotional and cultural competencies are interconnected and contribute to a sense of belonging, which could potentially have assisted NWU first-year student teachers to be in a better position to deal with diversity-related issues (one of the barriers).

■ Opportunities to belonging

Having social competencies alone, as described in the findings reported in the section 'competencies for belonging', is not enough to cultivate a sense of belonging. Opportunities to utilise these competencies are necessary, or else such skills become meaningless. To address this issue, excursion activities provided ample spaces (as shown in the last column of Table 3.4) for students to build social capital. Social capital refers to the benefits individuals derive from their social interactions within their communities, and it reflects their potential to foster a sense of belonging through the relationships formed from these opportunities (Demir 2021). According to Allen et al. (2021), there are two types of social capital: bonding social capital, which strengthens existing relationships, and bridging social capital,

TABLE 3.4: Alignment of the educational excursion's design principles with the component of the integrative framework: Opportunities to belong.

Component 2 Allen et al. (2021:92-96)	Short description Allen et al. (2021:92-96)	Design principles of the educational excursion to enable the development of this component
'Opportunities to belong (enablers, removal/reduction of barriers)'	'The availability of groups, people, places, times, and spaces that enable belonging to occur (building social capital within a community, but also between communities). The ability to connect with others is useless if opportunities to connect are lacking.'	Designing an enabling space to build social capital – diverse students together in one physical place, and sharing living, learning - and eating spaces together Sharing bus transport to and from the excursion venue Movie night: 'Lean on Me' focuses on a newly appointed principal's dedication to improving a decaying school. Watching the movie in a relaxed atmosphere, shared experience of what good teaching entails Group roles – everyone had a task – an opportunity to contribute and not feel left out The excursions also included free time for students to associate with whomever they wanted to, allowing freedom of association Using whichever language was easiest in their group discussions was allowed, but to be inclusive, reporting back was done in English

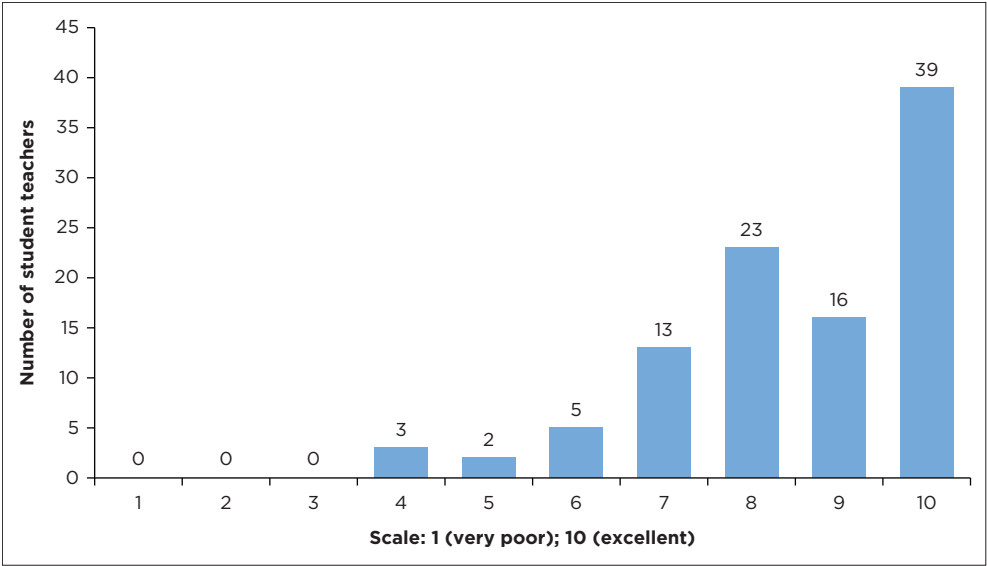
Source: Columns 1 and 2 from Allen, KA, Kern, M, Rozek, C, McInerney, D & Slavich, G 2021, 'Belonging: A review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research', *Australian Journal of Psychology*, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 92-96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883409> and Column 3 author's own creation.

which involves forming new connections outside of one’s current social and cultural spheres.

The findings from the research reported in this chapter led to the conclusion that the educational excursion presented numerous chances to foster a sense of belonging among students. In Question 13.1 of the RP, student teachers were tasked with rating the excursion on a scale of 1-10, where 1 represented very poor and 10 represented excellent. The results are depicted in the histogram of Figure 3.3. Out of the 110 possible responses, nine (8%) did not respond, none rated the excursion between 1 and 3 and 10 (9%) rated the excursion between 4 and 6. The majority of the sampled students, 91 (83%), rated the excursion between 7 (arguably good) and 10 (excellent). This finding suggests that the excursion successfully created a setting in which students could engage and contemplate one another. This conclusion is further supported by the overwhelmingly positive comments from students on the first question of the OEQ: *What were your overall experiences of participating in the virtual, online excursion?* Here are two of their comments:

‘I experienced diversity at the utmost level. it was my first time being a very large group of people who were very much different from me in terms of language, culture and places where we come from.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, RP)

‘I experienced the problems that we are having in our country and also what values can I use to stop those problems example littering.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, RP)



Source: Developed by the author based on data collected during the 2023 NWU WIL excursion.

FIGURE 3.3: Histogram depicting the overall experience of the educational excursion.

Allen et al. (2021:92) propose that belonging emerges from opportunities, defining it as ‘the availability of groups, people, places, times, and spaces that enable belonging to occur’. They suggest that belonging arises from opportunities. Consequently, the chapter’s author argues that programme designers and presenters succeeded in giving students ample opportunities to feel like they belong – a critical element of the framework. Subsequently, this might have resulted in the growth of social capital, which could have been advantageous in promoting a feeling of belonging.

Additionally, the fact that students were free to interact with anyone during leisure time, mealtime and sleep time also created opportunities to foster bonding with each other. On the other hand, the audience at the Rainbow concert, which was diverse in terms of culture and language, could have contributed to ‘bridging social capital’ by bringing people of different backgrounds together. Furthermore, the diverse groups in which students had to collaborate throughout the excursion could have also enhanced bridging social capital (Table 3.4). Universities South Africa (2018b) recommends that universities should prioritise innovative measures and provide proper orientation and assistance to make the acculturation of first-year students easier.

Coming from diverse backgrounds, students attempting to learn from each other will surely expose some stereotypes, which were also found in previous excursions (De Beer et al. 2020, 2022). One student in the 2023 excursion said the following:

‘I engaged with the person, and she told me that she does eat pap [stiff maize-meal porridge eaten as a starch]. I was surprised because I always thought white people don’t eat pap.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, RP)

Another comment also has relevance:

‘During the excursion, I saw that the Afrikaners [*sic*] don’t understand other people’s cultures – they think when we are black, we speak the same language.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, RP)

The excursion programme can act as a catalyst for student teachers to recognise their own stereotyping. According to Allen et al. (2021), individual differences and context play central roles in our understanding of belonging motivation, actively seeking similarities and commonalities. Encounters during conversations leading to biased or stereotyping remarks can help all those involved to recognise their own biases, leading to student teachers knowing and understanding each other’s practices better and recognising similarities. Understanding each other better can lead to higher motivation, as students may feel the need to learn more about a particular culture or language, which is a sign of self-motivation and also a characteristic of a self-directed learner (Petersen, De Beer & Mentz 2020).

■ Motivations to belonging

Although the entire educational excursion programme strived towards creating opportunities to belong, there were some individual activities in the excursion programme that may have contributed more to this component of the framework, namely ‘motivations to belong’ (Table 3.5). Question 4.1 of the RP asked: *How did this (drumming) activity make you feel as a South African? Why?* From the sample ($n = 110$), 107 responses were positive that the drumming activity made them feel ‘South African’, that is, that they belong as citizens of this country, and three students did not answer the question. The next quotes have relevance in this regard:

‘It [the drumming activity] shows South African culture, and everyone who played played as a unit, which made me feel united with fellow South Africans.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, RP)

‘Yes, this activity, its rhythms, and beats made me connect with my emotions, and it lifted my mood; I also experienced a sense of release and catharsis [*cleansing*] when rhythm and movement are combined.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, RP)

Based on the responses from Question 11.2 of the RP (*What were the highlight(s) or aspects that you enjoyed or appreciated, and why?*), it seems that many students had positive experiences during the rainbow concert (Table 3.5). During the excursions, students often referred to the concert as their favourite event. This implies that the concert offered a valuable chance for the students to learn, introspect and feel included, thereby building social bonds and inclusion. This is further substantiated by the following quotes:

‘[A_t] the Rainbow Nation concert, we were taught about other cultures and their beliefs. Also, we had a chance to engage in what they believed in.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, RP)

TABLE 3.5: Alignment of the educational excursion’s design principles with the component of the integrative framework: Motivations to belong.

Component 3 Allen et al. (2021:92–96)	Short description Allen et al. (2021:92–96)	Design principles of the educational excursion to enable the development of this component
‘Motivations to belong (inner drive)’	‘A need or desire to connect with others. Belonging motivation refers to the fundamental need for people to be accepted, belong, and seek social interactions and connections.’	The drumming activity to create an opportunity to connect through music
	‘In social situations, people who are motivated to belong will actively seek similarities and things in common with others. Similarly, a person might be motivated to connect with a place, their culture or ethnic background, or other belonging contributors.’	The ‘Rainbow Concert’: students were grouped according to their home language and/or culture to portray something that makes their group’s (culture or language) special. This activity provided an opportunity to feel proud of their heritage but to also embrace and celebrate differences.

Source: Columns 1 and 2 from Allen, KA, Kern, M, Rozek, C, McInerney, D & Slavich, G 2021, ‘Belonging: A review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research’, *Australian Journal of Psychology*, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 92–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883409> and Column 3 author’s own creation.

‘The Rainbow Concert made me feel welcome and included. It was very enjoyable.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, RP)

Students enthusiastically praised the Rainbow Concert and drumming session, suggesting that these activities effectively provided spaces for a sense of belonging. For some, these activities instilled pride in their South African identity. The events not only fostered pride in South African identity but also created a shared cultural and linguistic experience during the group performances, leading to a strong sense of unity with lively singing and dancing. A student teacher expressed, ‘And seeing other cultures dancing and singing was a sort of connecting all the cultures of South Africa’ (Student teacher, May 2023, OEQ). The synchronised drumming, led by the drumming leader, ensured a shared rhythm, aligning with the assertion of Güsewell, Gay-Balmaz and Imseng (2022:3) that ‘there is evidence that synchronization among people can influence their subsequent positive social feelings toward one another’ showing the power of music to bring people together across cultures. Güsewell et al.’s argument in their 2022 study aligns with Allen et al.’s argument, emphasising the desire and necessity of individuals to form social connections, be accepted, belong and engage in social interactions.

The Rainbow Concert also provided an opportunity for student teachers to contemplate their own cultural experiences in comparison to those of other cultures. One of the student teacher expresses profound reflections on different cultures, highlighting their value and deserving of respect:

‘The biggest “culture shock” (if I can say it like that) was with my own culture and that most of us “Afrikaners” have forgotten our culture. The other [cultural groups] were very encouraging, were all of the black cultures and were very enthusiastic and supportive towards the other cultures, including the “Afrikaner” and this gives me hope for the future of South Africa.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, OEQ)

The students’ evident delight indicates that the excursion emphasised the ideals of well-being and human dignity and served as an inspiration to accept diversity via constructive self-critique as a South African (USAf 2022).

The argument put forward about Allen et al.’s (2021) framework is that opportunities to motivate can provide an environment that promotes belonging. As the evidence suggests that motivation to belong was developed in the present study, it may be indicative that a sense of belonging was fostered among these student teachers. If student teachers feel that they belong as NWU students, they may be better at navigating the barriers they encounter on a daily basis.

■ Perceptions of belonging

The author has been a presenter and developer of the educational excursion programmes at the NWU since 2016 and, therefore, is cognisant that first-year student teachers may have negative perceptions about equality and diversity matters. These negative perceptions are possibly influenced by previous experiences that could impact students' sense of belonging (Petersen et al. 2020). However, such perceptions can also foster a desire to connect with others (meaning, to foster belonging). To address perceptions of belonging, possible approaches can be to (1) reframe cognitive negative social interactions, (2) normalise feelings of not belonging and (3) alter the extent to which the events are internalised (Allen et al. 2021). These approaches guided the analysis of data for the last component of the framework, which focused on 'perceptions of belonging' (Table 3.6).

Cognitive reframing means replacing negative thoughts with more positive and hopeful ones (Sharma et al. 2023). After analysing the OEQ data, it was found that some student teachers were initially uncomfortable when working with unfamiliar peers. However, as they continued to work together in groups, their perspective changed from feeling uneasy to finding comfort and enjoyment. It is thus clear that their negative feelings were replaced by enjoyable ones, in line with what Sharma et al. (2023) suggest. The following two statements clearly show how student teachers' emotions shifted from anxiety and unease about working with others

TABLE 3.6: Alignment of the educational excursion's design principles with the component of the integrative framework: Perceptions of belonging.

Component 4 Allen et al. (2021:92-96)	Short description Allen et al. (2021:92-96)	Design principles of the educational excursion to enable the development of this component
'Perceptions of belonging (cognitions, attributions, and feedback mechanisms)'	'The fourth component we suggest is <i>perceptions of belonging</i> : a person's subjective feelings and cognitions concerning their experiences. A person may have skills related to connecting, opportunities to belong, and be motivated, yet still report great dissatisfaction. Either consciously or subconsciously, most human beings evaluate whether they belong or fit in with those around them.'	During the excursion, there were plenty of chances to reflect within a small cooperative group, during feedback in the plenary sessions, and individually when completing the reflection portfolios These opportunities allowed for reflection on and from students' subjective worldviews and comparisons with the worldviews of others, all towards the common goal of becoming good teachers The excursion prompted student teachers to reflect on the implications the excursion experiences held to prepare them as future teachers

Source: Columns 1 and 2 from Allen, KA, Kern, M, Rozek, C, McInerney, D & Slavich, G 2021, 'Belonging: A review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research', *Australian Journal of Psychology*, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 92-96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883409> and Column 3 author's own creation.

(based on their ethnicity and campus) to more positive emotions about working collaboratively:

'At first, I was a bit anxious to be mixed with students from other campuses but during the time we were given activities to work together, I became more relaxed and comfortable around them. At first, we didn't "connect," but after working together, we all became very close.' (Student teacher, May 2023, OEQ)

'It was fun, but at first I was scared because I was the only one from the Mahikeng campus in the group, but I ended up feeling free – it was like I had known them for a very long time.' (Student teacher, May 2023, OEQ)

Normalising feelings of not belonging is to acknowledge that it is common and normal for people to sometimes feel excluded, alone, out of place or not belonging (Allen et al. 2021). Question 11.3 in the RP requires students to explain what was problematic during the excursion. While some students mentioned trivial issues such as accommodation, food and interrupted electrical supply, others reflected on their personal experiences. For instance, one student made a thoughtful remark in this regard: 'Socialising. I found it hard because people were mostly talking to their campus friends' (Student teacher, May 2023, RP). The student teacher may have felt uncomfortable for several reasons, such as being excluded by group members or because of a language barrier. During the plenary sessions, the presenters acknowledged that as non-native English speakers themselves, it was okay for students to feel uneasy while speaking English. Alternatively, the student may have been from a different campus or did not feel comfortable in a diverse group. Throughout the feedback sessions, the presenters emphasised that the emotion of 'feeling left out' is a normal experience. The presenters encouraged students to reflect on the root cause of their emotions and view it as an opportunity for personal growth (also see Chapter 8). By identifying areas for personal growth, first-year student teachers can recognise opportunities to work on those areas of development independently, which may help them ease into their first year as student teachers. A study by Sithaldeen et al. (2022) found that students may experience hesitation in seeking help because of a lack of belonging, which can make it challenging for them to cope. The excursion presenters actively sought to minimise such hesitation by repeatedly explaining that feelings of not belonging are normal. By creating a safe space and reassuring students that it is permissible to make mistakes, the excursion can be seen as pursuing the values of belonging, well-being and human dignity (USAf 2022).

Altering the extent to which the events that caused the feeling are internal versus external to the individual. Allen et al. (2021:94) and Gerace (2020) explain the process of changing one's perception of events by considering whether these events are mostly caused by one's own actions, thoughts or characteristics (internal factors) or whether they are influenced by external

factors, such as circumstances, other people's actions or situational factors (external factors). Whether a factor is internal or external, the activities and the numerous opportunities for group and individual reflections during the excursion served the purpose of probing students to think about the underlying causes of possible problems they experience. As a result of deep and honest reflection, they might have realised that the cause of a problem is internal, like having low self-esteem or that the cause is deeply rooted in the environment they grew up in (external) (Gerace 2020).

A common trend emerged in the RP and OEQ: individual student teachers who experienced difficulties working in small groups often attributed those difficulties to their own inadequacies, such as language barriers or shyness to work in diverse groups. The remarks of the following students underline this finding:

'Fear of approaching others, more especially the new faces. It is because of the lack of confidence and also overthinking of the judgments I'll come across.' (Student teacher, May 2023, RP)

'Lack of confidence. In the future, I will make sure that I lead.' (Student teacher, May 2023, OEQ)

The student teachers who made these comments will most probably find the underlying causes internally as part of their personality traits. Because it is internal, they can take ownership to autonomously work on these areas of development, which may assist them in being successful in their studies and future careers.

The following comments indicate that their causes may have complex underlying factors with its roots externally:

'I got to learn more about different cultures, some I did not know that we have such cultures in South Africa. Honestly, I got to overcome my fear of interacting with people, and as of now, I am able to socialise with different people.' (Student teacher, May 2023, OEQ)

'Many people create harsh stereotypes that I found to be untrue this allowed me to ignore the stereotypes and learn who the person is not based on their culture.' (Student teacher, May 2023, OEQ)

Many students may think that the problem of feeling isolated or excluded, lack of understanding of people from other cultures, etc. is caused by internal factors, without realising that this feeling is quite common among South Africans living in a diverse environment. Olonisakin and Idemudia (2022) argue that South Africa is still divided along racial lines, which makes it hard to achieve social integration in the country. To address this issue and improve the excursion programme's effectiveness in developing first-year students' sense of belonging, the organisers of the excursion programme should perhaps rethink some of its design principles. They should create opportunities for students to reflect on whether the problem lies within themselves or is

because of external factors and encourage students to think critically about ways to deal with it. At the same time, the excursion programme should help student teachers understand the bigger picture of how South Africans deal with complex issues like diversity, which have external roots. They should realise that they can play a critical role as future teachers by becoming inclusive practitioners who address diversity in their classrooms as part of a broader societal problem in South Africa. In terms of students' sense of belonging, they should understand that most diversity issues are historical (according to Olonisakin & Idemudia 2022) and require a holistic approach to address this 'elephant-in-the-room' (dealing with diversity issues). It is critical to raise student teachers' awareness of dealing with diversity issues, given the complexity of South African society and the teaching profession, as this barrier hinders the development of a sense of belonging.

■ Conclusion

In this chapter, the author attempted to show how the 2023 NWU educational excursions played a role in assisting to overcome the barriers preventing a sense of belonging in a diverse group of first-year student teachers. The data were analysed using Allen et al.'s (2021) Integrated Framework for understanding, assessing and fostering belonging. The findings showed that the four components of the framework were positively influenced by the student-centred face-to-face education excursions that were scaffolded within the student teachers' ZPD. In line with Allen et al. (2021), experiences from the dynamic interaction between the components might have led to fostering a sense of belonging. Possessing these abilities can help first-year BEd students overcome the barriers they encounter as diverse first-year students, feel welcome and develop a sense of belonging as NWU students. Additionally, the educational excursions supported the values of belonging, well-being and human dignity that USAf (2022) believes all South African universities should uphold.

As a university in South Africa, the NWU still has a long way to go in creating student-centred learning environments. Various role players need to conduct more research, as a one-size-fits-all approach will not yield desirable results. Allen et al. (2021) provide some pointers for further research, including the need for multilevel research on belonging rather than 'siloe'd' research. Researchers at the NWU Faculty of Education can, therefore, extend similar investigations to span not only excursions but the larger teacher preparation programmes. Research into belonging should also develop a more robust understanding of existing literature, as there are significant gaps between research and practice in this context. Additionally, consideration should be given to the optimal means of measuring belonging.

Determining challenges pre-service teachers face per their reflective thinking after a face-to-face excursion

Ann Haley MacKenzie^{a,b}

^aDepartment of Teaching, Curriculum, and Educational Inquiry,
College of Education, Health, and Society, Miami University,
Oxford, OH, United States of America

^bResearch Unit of Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

■ Abstract

Pre-service teachers face many challenges as they embark on their learning journey to becoming in-service teachers. These challenges are the focus of this chapter through the reflections written at the end of a face-to-face work-integrated learning excursion at North-West University in South Africa. The reflections were based on a ‘making thinking visible’ strategy entitled, *connect-extend-challenge*. There is a paucity of research on the effectiveness of ‘making thinking visible’ strategies. This qualitative study attempted to determine what information can be gleaned from one of these strategies. The primary research question

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guiding this chapter focused on what themes emerged from the reflections using this making thinking visible strategy. This study analysed 300 randomly selected reflections written at the end of the excursion by the pre-service teachers. Four main categories of challenges for these pre-service teachers were identified, including emotional, physical, intellectual and professional and interactional qualities. The emotional qualities of teaching are of the utmost concern of the pre-service teachers especially in the area of trauma-informed teaching. These findings provide valuable information for teacher preparation programmes. The findings offer faculty information regarding the thinking of these pre-service teachers and the challenges of teaching they perceive as being the most salient to address during their preparation while studying at the university.

■ Introduction

When teachers gaze upon their classroom of learners, how do they know what their learners are thinking? Sure, the teachers can observe the non-verbal behaviours of the learners. Do the learners have furrowed brows? Are they gazing out the window? Are their heads down on the desk? Are they staring intently at the teacher? What do these behaviours mean in terms of the thinking of the learners behind the teaching occurring at that precise moment or throughout the lesson?

Teachers often think that just because they have ‘covered’ the material, then the learners have taken that information and processed it into their long-term memory. Nothing is further from the truth. Learners must be actively engaged with the material, and the teacher must provide opportunities for the students to ‘uncover’ the content through experiences (Duckworth 2006). But, how does this process of ‘uncovering’ the material happen? How do teachers come to know what their learners are thinking throughout the learning experience? One method of revealing what learners are thinking is through perusing the learner’s self-reflection. This chapter focuses on the reflections of first-year pre-service teachers as a result of their being involved in an intensive three-day, face-to-face excursion in the scenic Magalies Mountains in Hekpoort, South Africa. The pre-service teachers’ reflective thinking was made visible through a strategy that informed the facilitators of the excursion of what the pre-service teachers were thinking at the end of the excursion with regard to the teaching process and the challenges they still believed they faced after the excursion and in their futures as in-service teachers.

■ Making learners' thinking visible

Making learners' thinking visible is a powerful method of formative assessment to afford the teacher information as to what is puzzling to the learners, how the aspects of the educational experiences are impacting the thinking of the learners and a powerful way to address where the learners are in the journey to grasp the lesson(s) being taught (Ritchhart & Church 2020). Many teachers use didactic methods to impart knowledge to the learners and never ascertain what, if any, of the lesson has impacted the learners' way of knowing. As teachers, we do not often take the time to see and interpret exactly what our learners are thinking. We rarely provide the opportunity for the learners to think about their own thinking. By doing so, classrooms are often a place of a one-way conversation between the teacher talking and the learners who are supposedly listening and learning. We want to avoid our pre-service teachers thinking that such an approach is what 'teaching' entails.

Using 'making thinking visible' strategies as a regular part of the classroom routine gives the teacher a vital portrait of the learners' grasp of the material. Making thinking visible strategies arose from the work of Ron Ritchhart and his colleagues (Ritchhart, Church & Morrison 2011). These strategies have been used worldwide by teachers and learners and were initially piloted in Australia with great success. They have since been used in thousands of schools and infused into the repertoire of teachers and their learners in a powerful manner. Ritchhart himself states the difference he has witnessed with the implementation of *Making thinking visible*: 'We have seen this for ourselves, witnessing a new paradigm of schooling emerge within the context of engaged, purposeful learning' (Ritchhart & Church 2020:5).

At the beginning of a professional development session provided for teachers on the role of thinking in the classroom, many teachers were perplexed when asked questions, like 'What place does thinking have in your teaching?' or 'What evidence do you have that your students are actually thinking?' These questions are just some of the ones many teachers never think of as they go about their practice of teaching. Teaching can often be categorised as 'teacher talk' that may or may not resonate with the learners, especially if the material being delivered does not relate to the learners' everyday lives, cultures and interests. Bruner (1986:127) states that 'if the teacher wishes to close down the process of wondering by flat declarations of fixed factuality, he or she can do so'. However, he goes on to state that teachers are also in a position to drive inquiry and wonder within the classroom. Driving purpose and context behind the learners'

thinking are vital in order to capture exactly where they are in gaining skills, learning key concepts and synthesising key aspects of the 'educational conversation' the teacher and learners are engaged in during the school day. This is the type of teaching-learning strategy we want to prepare future teachers for.

What is meant by an 'educational conversation'? A classroom needs to be filled with the teacher and learners embarking on a journey of discovery and the unexpected tributaries that take the conversation into unknown territory. When a learner poses a question in a science classroom, such as 'Is it the brain or eye that sees?', then the conversation shifts to one where the learners are captivated by where the educational conversation is going. Learners offer ideas, the teacher poses questions and the learners offer additional thoughts as does the teacher. The journey is in full play at this point as the teacher and the learners are engrossed in the topic being discussed as part of the learning process. No longer is the classroom a sterile place, instead it is pulsating with energy, possibilities and vibrancy (MacKenzie 2013).

In the United States, the 1970s was the dawn of researchers focusing on the complexities of teaching and learning where retention and deep understanding should be the key to the educational process versus merely memorising the information and only possibly retaining the knowledge (Bruner 1973; Gardner 1983). Even today, so many classrooms around the world are filled with the teacher telling and the students practising whatever has been relayed to them with no attention paid to true understanding. The focus is on completion and accuracy versus a deep, thoughtful analysis of what content is being shared between the teacher and the learners. The same issue has been reported in South African schools, and our pre-service teachers must be prepared to avoid this pitfall (Mulaudzi, Du Toit & Golightly 2023).

Also, the sense of wonder is absent in so many classrooms (Hadzigeorgiou 2013). As humans, wonder and curiosity are essential traits that we are born with. Wonder affords the learners the chance to explore ideas, play with these ideas and operationalise the knowledge being shared between learners and the teacher (Hadzigeorgiou 2013). As learners advance to the next grade level, teachers focus less on the place of wonder and more on being a deliverer of content (Bruner 1973; Gardner 1983; MacKenzie 2013).

Teachers must foster wonder and promote curiosity, creativity and problem-solving skills at all grade levels by modelling it themselves. If teachers pose questions they are wondering about within the topic or even in the world, at large, it sets the stage for the learners to realise curiosity has an important place throughout their educational and life's journey. Three of the hallmark skills employers are looking for in the 21st

century are curiosity, creativity and problem-solving (Wilhelm 2002). Children are born curious and creative as well as being natural problem solvers. It is through school that curiosity and creativity are doused. Helping learners maintain and increase their curiosity is paramount to the mission of teaching all grade levels. Making thinking visible strategies help foster curiosity, showcase how curiosity is present in the learners' thinking and is a way to help curiosity come alive in the classroom as well as affording learners to problem-solve and be creative (Ritchhart et al. 2011). Therefore, it makes sense to utilise similar strategies when preparing future teachers for their profession.

■ Types of making thinking visible strategies

Ritchhart and his colleagues (Ritchhart & Church 2020; Ritchhart et al. 2011) offer many different types of strategies that make thinking visible for both the teacher and the learners in the classroom. Pre-service teachers are able to self-reflect on these strategies implemented in the classroom, making thinking visible being one of these strategies. Pre-service and contracted teachers should reflect on how their teaching strategies are building understanding in the classroom in order to discover which strategies are effective. The choice of which strategy to use depends upon the content and processes being explored throughout a lesson, a group of lessons or a unit.

One strategy is called *CSI: Colour, symbol, image* (Ritchhart et al. 2011). This particular strategy is excellent for showcasing the big ideas expounded during a lesson in a visual manner and would be effective across all age groups, including pre-service teachers, teachers and other education professionals. This strategy can be used individually with learners or with them working in teams or pairs. The learners summarise a key concept or idea in the form of a colour, a symbol (like a stop sign) and an image depicting the big idea being studied. *Colour, symbol, image* fosters creative thinking within the learners and gets them thinking in a visual way, which is often uncommon as part of a teaching routine. *Colour, symbol, image* fosters metaphorical thinking and develops comprehension (Ritchhart et al. 2011).

Another powerful strategy is called *Red light, yellow light* (Ritchhart et al. 2011). The metaphor of a traffic light guides this strategy. Learners are often given a reading to examine (alone, in pairs or as a team) and examine the messages provided. Red light statements are identified by learners as being those that stop and make them think of their reliability, become sceptical and think critically about these sentences. Yellow light statements cause students to pause and consider whether they should be sceptical about any possible biases or factual basis behind the statements. Green light

statements are ones the learners do not question or appear to be accurate. The *Red light, yellow light* strategy fosters sceptical thinking, which is sorely needed in the world we live in today. Our learners and teachers must be critical thinkers as they take in information from social media, the Internet and even information gained from artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT and others. Learners do not often question what they read. They accept the reading as truth. This powerful strategy provides them with the opportunity to challenge viewpoints through detailed reasoning and intellectual prowess, which are also critical skills that pre-service teachers must develop.

Finally, the strategy used for this chapter was *connect-extend-challenge* (Ritchhart et al. 2011). This powerful strategy addresses the imperative need for learners (or, in the current study: teacher students-as-learners) to apply what they have been exposed to during the lessons. In so many classrooms, learners are never asked to do anything with what they have been exposed to except to ‘spit it back’ to the teacher, either verbally or in an assessment. This ‘spit it back’ method does not afford learners an opportunity to work through the material in a deep, thoughtful, comprehensible manner. During the *connect-extend-challenge* strategy, the learners are asked to connect how the content of the lesson or activity relates to what they already know. They then move to extend their thinking by stating what new ideas broadened their thinking in new and alternative directions. Finally, the learners describe challenges coming to mind regarding the lesson or activity that they just engaged in during instruction. This technique allows learners to piece together tiny amounts of information into a cohesive pattern of thought. Envision a quilt, which is a blanket sewn together using small pieces of fabric, that takes shapes after each piece is sewn into the quilt often making an elaborate pattern. *Connect-extend-challenge* affords the learners and pre-service teachers to construct a quilt of their knowledge by thinking visibly about how the new information connects to what they already know, how the lesson or experience extends and broadens their thinking about the topic and provides them with the opportunity to offer ways their thinking is being challenged.

■ Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to uncover the thinking of first-year pre-service teachers at one South African university about their experiences while participating in a work-integrated learning (WIL) excursion. The thinking routine used was *connect-extend-challenge* to reveal the thinking regarding the participants’ biases and stereotyping, self-doubt and balancing idealism and realism. By analysing the written reflections, the participants’ concerns surfaced in a way that would not have emerged

using a basic reflection format, such as ‘What did you gain from participating in this excursion?’ The reflections emanating from this making thinking visible strategy afforded the participants the opportunity to share their insecurities, wonderings and questions that arose from the activities experienced during the excursion. The findings from the study informed excursion facilitators about the (deeper) challenges pre-service teachers were still struggling with after the excursion, which could be incorporated into subsequent professional development opportunities for these students as part of their formal teaching qualification. To attain the study purpose, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How can the thinking of first-year pre-service teachers be described through the use of a *making thinking visible* strategy entitled *connect-extend-challenge*?
2. *What themes emerged from this making thinking visible* strategy using qualitative methods?
3. How did these themes align with the goals and mission of the WIL excursion?

■ The excursion as study context

The excursion brought together first-year pre-service teachers from the three campuses of North-West University (NWU) in South Africa. The purpose of the excursion was to ‘inspire, train and engage with them on what it means to excel in the career of being a teacher’ (NWU 2021:1). A total of 3,700 first-year students participated in either face-to-face or virtual (online) excursions. Although other chapters of this book report on virtual excursions (see Chapters 5, 7 and 8), the current chapter only reports on face-to-face excursions. Within the face-to-face excursions, approximately 360 students (in total from the three campuses) were placed in each of the six excursions. The students were teamed in a heterogeneous manner so as to allow them to interact with others, by gender, culture and from mixed campuses with five members to a team. The prescribed construction of these mixed teams contributed to the scaffolding of the WIL excursions of these pre-service teachers to align with realising the South African vision for intercultural competence, equity and inclusion. In particular, this chapter reports on how and what participating pre-service teachers were thinking regarding their biases and stereotyping, self-doubt and balancing idealism and realism.

The demographics of the participants attending the face-to-face excursions included 1,843 African, 92 Coloured, six Asian and 318 white students for a total of 2259 first-year pre-service teachers. These participants are from the three NWU campuses, which are Mahikeng,

Potchefstroom and Vanderbijlpark (also see Chapter 3). The data set used for the current chapter did not have the participants state which campus they attended. Twelve languages were represented during the excursions with the primary ones being English, Sesotho, Setswana and Afrikaans. The reflections used for analysis in this study were all written in English. All the participants who wrote their reflections had given informed consent.

The excursion focused on the theme of empowering the pre-service teachers to become ‘super teachers’ when they enter the profession and throughout their teaching careers through the lens of preparing these pre-service teachers to embrace the multicultural classrooms of their future (NWU 2021). Activities during the excursion included simulations, analysis of teaching situations, analysis of school-wide issues, pedagogy of play and involvement in cultural events including drumming, singing and dancing.

The excursion provided the pre-service teachers with opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the demands required of the teaching profession (NWU 2021). The pre-service teachers were surrounded by others from different cultures, races, gender identities, sexual orientations, languages and other identities. Some of the identities were apparent, while others were not. Nevertheless, the participants spent time with their team members and learned about others’ cultures, as well as the cultural differences existing on the three campuses (also see Chapters 2 and 3). These pre-service teachers were also exposed to a variety of pedagogical strategies differing from ones they may have experienced in their own schooling experiences, which provided them opportunities to contemplate just what is meant by being or becoming a ‘super teacher’. The pre-service teachers also modelled preferred approaches to facilitating learning in South African classrooms (Du Toit & Petersen 2023).

■ Research method

The methods used in the preparation of this chapter were based on grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998), which is a powerful mechanism used for conducting qualitative research. Grounded theory is an inductive approach whereby researchers can take a set of data, analyse it and derive themes from the data set, thereby setting up a theoretical framework. The data set included 654 reflections from the pre-service teachers captured on the last day of each of two of the face-to-face excursions. The reflections were constructed using the *connect-extend-challenge* making thinking visible routine in a paper format (Ritchhart et al. 2011). After each written reflection was numbered, a random sample of 300 written reflections was selected for analysis using a random number generator. No identifying

information of participants was included in the reflections, so the data were anonymous. Each of the 300 reflections was carefully read, analysed and coded enabling major themes to emerge from the data set. Once the major themes emerged, sub-themes were created to deepen the meanings behind the thoughts and ideas put forth by the pre-service teachers in their reflections so as to provide a theoretical explanation of their thinking regarding several aspects that will be critical in their future as teachers.

The reflections centred around the thinking routine called *connect-extend-challenge* proposed by Ritchhart et al. (2011). This thinking routine involved three components. The pre-service teachers were to reflect on how they connected what they already knew about teaching with the ideas and experiences during the excursion as the first prompt. The second phase of this thinking routine involved having the pre-service teachers extend what they now knew about teaching as a result of the many meaningful activities throughout the excursion. They were to consider how their thinking was pushed into new directions about being a teacher. Finally, the third facet of this thinking routine asked the participants to think about the challenges they were reflecting upon as a result of the excursion regarding the teaching profession. They were also prompted to discuss what wonderings or puzzles they now had about being a teacher.

This strategy was selected because of the power of its ability to allow the students to make meaning of the excursion within their thinking and to make that thinking apparent. The students were provided the opportunity to play with their thinking in a meaningful manner so as to showcase it throughout their reflections. They were given the chance to analyse what they had experienced and learned and expand it into challenges they left the excursion with about the teaching profession and what it means to becoming and being a 'super teacher', especially with regard to addressing biases and stereotyping, self-doubt and balancing idealism and realism.

■ Research analysis

Throughout the inductive analysis process, it quickly became apparent the participants were somewhat confused by the first part of the strategy, which asked them to connect what they already knew about teaching with the ideas imparted during the excursion as part of the reflection. The majority of the reflections focused on the activities of the excursion versus connecting what they already knew about teaching with the excursion events. As a result, this part of the reflection yielded no meaningful themes, and no further analysis was carried out on the *Connect* aspect of the strategy.

Subsequently, the second portion of the reflection on how the excursion *extended* the pre-service teachers' thinking was examined and key themes began to emerge but needed additional analysis. Because of time constraints, these themes will be elucidated in an additional paper or chapter elsewhere.

Finally, the *challenges* facing these pre-service teachers were used as the basis of this chapter. Through deep analysis, several key themes and sub-themes emerged among the participants' responses. The experience of the excursion provoked many lines of thinking among the pre-service teachers ranging from the positives of being (or becoming) a teacher to tensions of the profession, to self-doubt and provided far more questions to be posed about the teaching process as a result of the excursion. The reflections explicitly scaffold the work-integrated excursions of these pre-service teachers to align with realising the South African vision for intercultural competence, equity and inclusion.

■ Common themes focusing on the challenges of teaching shared by the pre-service teachers

Reading, coding and analysing the 300 reflections for the challenges the pre-service teachers faced as a result of the insights they gained after what they experienced throughout the excursion was a daunting but illuminating task. This analytical process provided rich insight into the thinking and even trepidations of the pre-service teachers as a result of their experiences in the WIL excursion. Their thinking was made visible in a meaningful manner as part of their reflections, and many of their challenges were written in the form of questions rather than statements. The students became aware of these challenges after having been exposed to expansive views that were presented during the excursion, making them more aware of their needs to be prepared for a challenging and complex profession, in highly diverse contexts (Shulman 1986). Their awareness of challenges can be construed as them identifying their shortcomings or areas they still need to develop in their journey towards becoming (super) teachers. Through the structured critical reflection provided in the *connect-extend-challenge* activity, these pre-service teachers were able to 'realise their shortcomings and biases' and other teaching challenges and 'hopefully [*they will be able to*] convert them into personal and professional learning goals that are core to SDL [*self-directed learning*]' (Kruger & Mdakane 2023:103). In turn, SDL is needed to support these pre-service teachers to 'gain knowledge and skills to face the challenges they will experience in practice' (p. 113) within one day. As a result, the reflections from the WIL excursion align with the national policy of creating a teaching workforce

able to address equity, equitable teaching methods and exemplary teaching practices.

The pre-service teachers left the excursion with many wonderings about what lay ahead of them in their teacher preparation programme and as early career teachers. These wonderings were divided into four key themes: emotional quality, physical quality, intellectual quality and professional and interaction quality of being a teacher and the act of teaching. Table 4.1 provides the breakdown of the percentage of reflections focusing on each of these themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Three identifiers are included in subsequent discussions, when quotations are presented as evidence. That is: student, data source and date. They represent PST = pre-service student teacher; EER = excursion exit reflection and May 2023, as all excursions took place then.

■ The emotional quality of being a teacher

The first and most frequent theme emerging was termed the ‘emotional side’ of be(come)ing a teacher (Table 4.1). This theme involves the myriad of emotions involved in the teaching process, such as feeling, loving, nurturing, caring, patience, building rapport and others (Figure 4.1). Teaching has long been considered one of the caring professions, and these reflections demonstrated that exact interpretation by the pre-service teachers while participating in the excursion. The emotional side of being a teacher surfaced early as the reflections were being analysed. The pre-service teachers questioned if they have the emotional stability to be a teacher given how complex teaching is as a profession. They wondered how teachers handle so many issues they face on a daily basis. Pre-service teacher number 5 (PST-5) captured the emotional side of teaching in an eloquent manner by stating in their EER:

‘A question I have is how do they do it? I mean being a teacher is more than teaching, you’re not only a teacher to those learners – you’re their parent as well, [and] you have to care, love, nurture and protect them while teaching them in the process.’ (PST-5, EER, May 2023)

TABLE 4.1: Percentage of reflections focusing on challenges the pre-service teachers still face after the excursion.

Major theme of the challenges	Percentage of responses from a random sample
Emotional quality	42%
Physical quality	13%
Intellectual quality	37%
Professional and interaction quality	7%
Not completed	1%

Source: Developed by the author from themes that emerged from the collected data.



Source: Developed by the author from themes that emerged from the collected data.

FIGURE 4.1: Emotional qualities' sub-themes.

These are wise words from a first-year student just beginning to explore the world of teaching. The excursion brought this thinking to bear for this student and many others in their reflections. Throughout the world, teachers are asking this question. More and more demands are placed on teachers to be psychologists, social workers, therapists, caregivers, parents and many other roles, in addition to being a teacher (Lundy & Farmer 2017). The importance of preparing student teachers for creating safe learning spaces in their future classrooms as part of teachers' emotional qualities (see also Chapter 8), therefore, must not be overlooked. Pre-service student teacher-501 similarly wonders '[...] if I will be emotionally available for them [future learners]' (EER, May 2023).

The excursion definitely impacted the thinking of the pre-service teachers in celebrating the many identities they will have to accept and embrace from their future learners. Pre-service student teacher-116 wrote 'I have learnt how to treat empathy, embrace homosexuality in the classroom and how I am going to work with my colleagues at work' (EER, May 2023); however, PST-188 countered with 'How do teachers deal with homophobia in schools?' (EER, May 2023). Even though these two participants were engaged in the HIV-simulation game (Havenga & Du Toit 2022:139), they took different meanings from this simulation and how to handle sexual orientation as one of the many identities of their future learners.

Being patient is another emotion-related hallmark of teaching. Teachers must be patient with each learner, the entire classroom of learners and with themselves. Pre-service student teacher-321 wrote:

‘The fact that I am impatient with myself. How will I be able to help my learners and motivate them to have patience in themselves and their studies because if you have patience and do everything you think you can’t do, you will actually do it and have trust in yourself and finally get it right?’ (PST-321, EER, May 2023)

In fact, the value of patience was a vital facet of the Stoic philosophy, which believed that patience is the ability to accept difficult situations without being consumed by negative emotions (Holiday 2014). What do universities that prepare future teachers do to develop this Stoic virtue of patience, address how to have patience and provide guidance in accomplishing patience in their teaching practice? Teacher preparation programmes must address this dispositional issue, as it is evident from the findings that it is still a challenge for student teachers.

Dedication to their learners is also a key emotional side of being a teacher. Pre-service student teacher-386 wrote, ‘I have to wrap my head around the idea that I will have to take responsibility for learners for about eight hours per day, five days a week’ (EER, May 2023). This dedication to the learners can be exasperating, exhausting and extremely rewarding. But, what if this dedication transcends into befriending students? Pre-service student teacher-251 stated:

‘Not being friends with your learners? Shouldn’t a teacher build positive and friendly relationships with their students? I thought that being friends or building a positive relationship with learners would make them feel free and encourage them to freely answer and ask questions in class.’ (PST-251, EER, May 2023)

Pre-service student teacher-251 posed good questions, as novice teachers can error by being too friendly with their learners, especially if they are close in age. Likewise, building rapport with the learners is the hallmark of a ‘super teacher’. Knowing their students allows teachers to pose intriguing questions that pull their learners into the learning activities. The issue comes in when the teacher befriends the learners as if the teacher is their peer. When this happens, classroom management issues can arise as the students see the teacher as one of them and can take advantage of the teacher. Inclusion and equity are paramount in this circumstance, but the line should not be crossed. Teachers can be friendly but not friends (Wormeli 2013).

Building rapport with their learners leads to the teacher caring for the learners’ well-being, especially when childhood trauma is suspected. Nicholson (2021) describes the trauma existing in South African adolescents in secondary schools. Trauma is defined as incidents that thwart the safety and emotional health of the child. Emotional and physical abuse, neglect, incarcerated parents, poverty, drug abuse and instability in the child’s life can be defined as trauma and are an integral part of the child’s intellectual and emotional development that is often thwarted because of the presence

of these traumatic experiences. As PST-433 wrote, 'How must I approach a student [learner] when I see they are going through a rough time?' (EER, May 2023). Oftentimes, trauma is at the root of many discipline issues and can manifest itself in a multitude of ways in the classroom.

Working with learners who need to be disciplined was a frequent underlying challenge a large percentage of the pre-service teachers wrote about in their reflections. What should they do (as teachers) if they get hit by a learner? What to do if they believe a learner needs special care? What if they have a learner who needs to be loved and parented? These sorts of questions permeated throughout the majority of the reflections. Many discipline issues arise from learners being exposed to trauma on some level. Pre-service and contracted teachers must understand how trauma can affect the learners in their classroom, and what responsibilities they have to ensure that this trauma affects learners' education and well-being as little as possible. Adding information on trauma and its effects on the WIL excursion will help create trauma-informed future teachers who will be able to assist these learners better than non-trauma-informed teachers. The WIL excursion provided students with the opportunity to become more inclusive, equitable teachers, which is a starting point for knowing how to interact with children impacted by trauma.

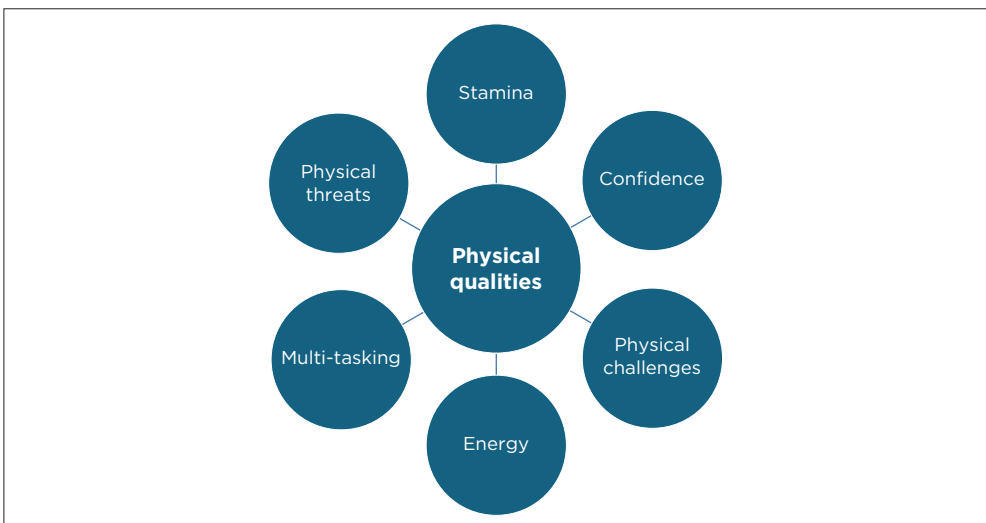
The concerns expressed by the pre-service teachers at the end of the excursion point to the necessity of ensuring they are given poignant information and strategies when working with children experiencing trauma. By doing so, these pedagogical strategies may help ameliorate some of these pre-service teachers' fears of working with learners who deal with trauma on a daily or occasional basis. If a learner's home life is chaotic, the learner will come to school and either 'freeze', 'flee' or 'fight' when a trigger occurs to them. Triggers such as name-calling, being berated by the teacher or other nefarious provocations can propel a traumatised student into a freefall of possible discipline issues. One pre-service teacher in the WIL excursion reflection noted that they still believe in corporal punishment and wondered how to handle discipline issues without it. This particular pre-service teacher, along with all the others, must realise that corporal punishment is a violent event and traumatic in and of itself. Using corporal punishment will only deepen the emotional wounds of the offending learner and is illegal in South African schools. Yet, the same topic reappears annually in the WIL excursions, which may be because of these student teachers' apprenticeship of observation (De Beer, Van der Walt & Bunt 2020). Pre-service teachers should be reminded of these facts as part of their preparation programme to contribute to rooting out this issue in schools. The importance of preparing student teachers for creating safe learning spaces in their future classrooms as part of teachers' emotional qualities (also see Chapter 8), therefore, must not be overlooked.

■ The physical quality of being a teacher

The second theme regarding the physical side of being a teacher (Table 4.1) was prevalent within the student teachers' reflections far more than predicted. This theme encompasses many sides of the teaching profession but primarily surfaced as threats to the teacher, other learners and the classroom of learners as a whole (Figure 4.2). The other aspect of the physicality of being a teacher that emerged from the student teachers' reflections were certain traits, such as the stamina required, dealing with physical challenges and handling physical threats. Some of the student comments in their reflections may seem trivial but are real challenges for numerous of these pre-service teachers, such as what PST-37 wrote:

'To shout [...] as it is the most basic [*quality*] of being a teacher! For it is difficult as I am the [*shiest*] person born. That is the biggest challenge I will face.' (PST-37, EER, May 2023)

Somehow, this particular pre-service teacher sees shouting as the most basic quality of being a teacher and as their biggest hurdle to being a teacher; however, throughout the excursion, nothing was ever mentioned about shouting being part of the 'super teacher' demeanour in the classroom. Most likely, PST-37 experienced shouting from their primary and secondary level teachers and sees it as being essential in their future teaching repertoire. 'There are ways in which being a student is like serving an apprenticeship in teaching; students have protracted face-to-face and



Source: Developed by the author from themes that emerged from the collected data.

FIGURE 4.2: Physical qualities' sub-themes.

consequential interactions with established teachers' (Lortie 1975:61). Pre-service teachers have already spent thousands of hours as school children observing and interacting with their teachers. The observations from this apprenticeship are likely responsible for many of the preconceptions that PSTs, along with the general public, have about teaching. This particular pre-service teacher might have seen their own teachers shouting as a form of classroom management and thus perceives this quality as necessary in a 'super teacher' (Petersen, Mentz & De Beer 2022).

Multi-tasking, being punctual, speaking confidently, time management and the hard work of being a teacher were all included in student reflections denoting the physical side of being a teacher because of the energy expended to address these challenges. Having a strong work ethic was also included in this theme. Pre-service student teacher-590 said 'I find it difficult to multitask and speak confidently in public. Being a teacher comes with a lot of work and responsibilities' (EER, May 2023) and PST-101 admitted that 'Being a teacher you have to be punctual. It is challenging for me because I'm used to being late but I need to be punctual because I see it is very important' (EER, May 2023).

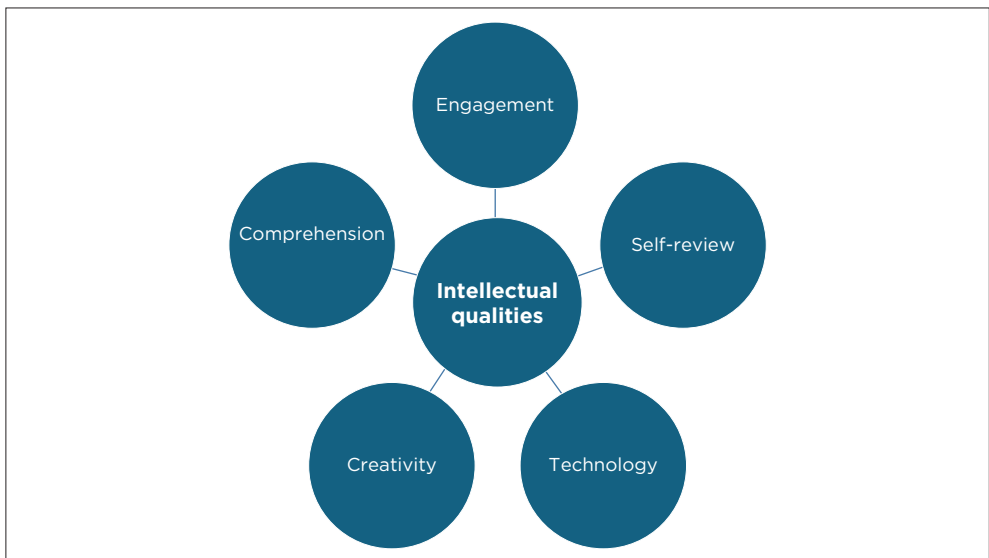
When considering how they will have to face classroom management issues in their future career, PST-116 stated 'I am asking myself how am I going to work with learners that doesn't have respect. How my classroom will behave' and PST-401 wrote about a huge obstacle for them by writing, '[t]he thing that is still challenging for me is how to discipline or punish them when they do things that aren't allowed, or what I am supposed to do if a learner attacks me physically' (EER, May 2023). Other pre-service teachers wrote similar concerns with 'How to respond or react when a learner hits you in class?'; 'How to make your class behave' (PST-381, EER, May 2023) and, even further, 'I am still being challenged by the face of an aggressive child towards a teacher [*sic*]. What happens if a learner fights a teacher and doesn't want to stop?' (PST-123, EER, May 2023). These fears of physical acts towards the teacher and other learners surfaced in 16 of the reflections and demonstrate just how challenging this quality of being a teacher can be once these pre-service teachers reach the 'real world' of teaching. Indicating how widespread this challenge is, in a separate survey conducted by Texas A&M University, a majority of students reported that training to prepare for school violence would be important and 26% of those students reported that they did not feel prepared to confront these situations (McCaleb, Andersen & Hueston 2008:6). Perhaps from both of these sets of findings and results, we can conclude that pre-service teachers should have some level of exposure to training regarding classroom management and school safety.

■ The intellectual quality of being a teacher

The intellectual quality of being a teacher (Table 4.1) surfaced most frequently in the form of questions in student reflections, such as ‘How do teachers know what will interest their learners?’ (PST-298); ‘How do they know which activities will be memorable but also fun for the learners?’ (EER, May 2023); ‘What do they do when they have a learner that understands theory more than practicals [*sic*]?’ (PST-298, EER, May 2023) (Figure 4.3). The decision of how to structure lessons is a major intellectual one made by teachers and therefore is imperative in teacher preparation. These decisions include, but are not limited to, deciding how teachers will align their teaching with the curriculum or how they will make the curriculum come alive for their learners so the lessons will be memorable. In line with this, PST-604 stated:

‘The part of how to teach – the content to the learners and teaching the same content in different ways to help them understand how? What if I don’t have enough resources?’ (PST-604, EER, May 2023)

One of the key concepts of the excursion was to show the students how to teach using a shoestring approach when money for resources and materials is scarce. The HIV simulation game the students participated in was one example of a shoestring experience the students could transfer to their future teaching repertoire. One of the many important goals of the excursion was to involve the pre-service teachers in meaningful learning experiences that they can use in an inclusive, equitable manner (Du Toit & Petersen 2023:5, 10, 18).



Source: Developed by the author from themes that emerged from the collected data.

FIGURE 4.3: Intellectual qualities’ sub-themes.

Yet, PST-231 shares the concern of many pre-service teachers, which they will face when they begin teaching and stated:

'Not all children come from the same background, and it will be challenging to have to deal with different students in one classroom, and they all need to learn the same things in different ways.' (PST-231, EER, May 2023)

Because the participants attending these excursions were first-year students in the first semester of their four-year degree, it was expected that they would not know all the content or pedagogical approaches required in subject-specific teaching. Still, the students' responses indicate their awareness that the intellectual qualities needed by teachers are still a challenge to them.

As PST-231 discovered from the WIL excursion, classrooms are multicultural places. In one United States classroom, a chemistry teacher had 20 ethnicities, nine languages and different ability levels (MacKenzie, pers. obs., Cincinnati, OH, 2022). Similar diverse classroom setups are experienced in South African schools. The intellectual nature of being a 'super teacher' is captured eloquently by this pre-service teacher in their reflection when they wrote 'Engaging with culturally-distinct persons can be rewarding and challenging. Also, participating in cultural events and activities and learning about the cultural backgrounds of other students' (PST-224, EER, May 2023) is a process learned over time and the excursion provided a valuable entry point into cultural awareness for these pre-service teachers. In one of the WIL excursion activities, the 'Rainbow Concert', which was part of a whole cultural evening, the students portrayed something special about their culture or language grouping. While they were usually working in diverse groups of five individuals in all the other activities, here they were grouped according to culture or language groups. The rationale behind the activity was not only to make students feel proud of who they are but also to embrace our diversity (see Chapter 3). Recognising the need to participate in cultural events and attend activities sponsored by various cultures requires teachers to be attuned to the commonalities of all people. Pre-service student teacher-149 summarises this intellectual activity of teaching by reflecting, '[...] finding a comfortable ground or way to help every diverse learner to interact with other learners of different cultures, races, and religions' (EER, May 2023). This particular reflection provides strong evidence of the student seeing the importance of inclusivity, social justice and embracing diversity within their future classrooms.

When Shulman (1986) stated that teaching is the most complex profession, he was telling the truth. How do teachers meet the needs of their learners when so many differences exist? Teachers make thousands of intellectual decisions a day regarding their students, administrators'

demands, parental concerns, the content and the special needs of many of their learners. This fact showcases just how complex and multi-faceted the act of teaching is within a multicultural lens. These reasons contributed to the overall aim of the NWU WIL excursions being 'to sensitise students to the complexities of their future careers' (Du Toit & Petersen 2023:2) and the renewed efforts to include intercultural sensitivity (see Chapter 2) or cultural agility (see Chapter 1) as part of teacher preparation in the WIL excursions in 2023. The thousands of decisions made by teachers are often cited in educational books but should be seen more metaphorically than literally because of the intricacy involved throughout the teaching process. These decisions can be planned or done spontaneously depending on the needs of the learners, the curriculum and the many other moving parts of being a teacher. Intellectually, the pre-service teachers see 'the challenges that face teachers is that not all learners participate in the awareness of culture, social, environmental, and economic values' (PST-23, EER, May 2023). Teachers must negotiate all of these arenas throughout their teaching, preparing lessons, seeking appropriate strategies to enact the lessons and evaluating the learners by making their thinking visible. Teacher preparation should, therefore, devote ample time to focusing on helping their students work with effective strategies to be prepared to address the numerous identities held by their future learners in a manner that focuses on the strengths of each learner. Teacher preparation programmes must also ensure their students have the mindset to provide an equitable and inclusive environment for their future learners. The pre-service teachers must gain a sense of self-efficacy during their preparation to address these vital areas that were the bedrock of the WIL excursion.

Reflective thinking also surfaced as an intellectual quality in the reflections of the pre-service teachers. As PST-438 stated, '*[it is important h]ow they [teachers] review the effectiveness of their teaching strategies*' (EER, May 2023). Schon (1983) described the divergent activities of professionals, such as architects, engineers and psychiatrists, and depicted the activities of these professionals as a 'reflective conversation' with the immediate problem situation. Schon (1983:62) stated 'reflection-in-action [...] is central to the art through which practitioners sometimes cope with troublesome "divergent" situations of practice', and that much reflection-in-action 'hinges on the experience of surprise, intuitive performance leads to surprises, pleasing and promising or unwanted, we may respond by reflecting-in-action' (p. 56). The NWU WIL excursions provided ample opportunities for the student teachers to reflect on the vital purposes of inclusivity, pedagogical methods and cultural sensitivity through conversations between the students, between the students and faculty and by writing their reflective thoughts on this evaluation form using the *connect-extend-challenge* strategy that elicited reflective thinking.

In addition, the pre-service teachers wondered how they would 'adapt the different teaching strategies with different learners who are difficult' (PST-269), which goes back to the issue of the management of the students so that teaching and learning can take place effectively. Lessons that are engaging are relevant to the learners' lives and afford the learners agency in deciding what content to explore all serve as leverage for the teacher to have fewer management issues (Ritchhart & Church 2020). Classroom and learner management is an intellectual quality because the teacher must constantly be thinking and reflecting on what the students are doing, thinking and performing during classroom time. If the teacher is not engaging in this intellectual activity, then issues can arise within the classroom that must be addressed in an immediate manner.

One pre-service teacher (PST-501) was particularly concerned '[...] about being able to make enough efforts for my learners to excel in everything they do'. If asked, teachers do want their learners to excel. Teachers want to ensure their learners succeed regardless of the subject matter, in developing their interpersonal skills, enhancing their emotional intelligence and creating lifelong learners (Ritchhart et al. 2011). But, what happens with our classrooms where heterogeneity is present, which was the hallmark of the WIL excursion with its emphasis on inclusivity, diversity and teaching strategies focusing on equity? Pre-service student teacher 281 wrote:

'What challenges me here is that if I give learners who are doing well with their grades, what about learners who are slow or who have learning barriers or difficulties? Because some might feel down or might withdraw because they know that they can't make it to the top. It would be difficult to encourage them.' (PST-281, EER, May 2023)

Pre-service student teacher-281 raised the importance of teachers being able to handle the challenging activity of differentiating lessons for their diverse students. In some cases, a teacher might have three different lesson plans for one activity depending on the levels of learners in their classroom, which demonstrates the intellectual diversity that permeates every classroom. Being able to differentiate with language, learning differences and learning modalities is a skill that even veteran teachers continue to struggle with. It requires a keen knowledge of the content, the misconceptions learners might hold regarding particular content and the ways in which the learners can be reached in an educational way that fosters long-term memory (Driver, Squires & Rushworth 1983).

Pre-service student teacher-149 sees technology as a challenge in the decisions a teacher must make by reflecting 'how to be technologically innovative in a class that is not technologically advanced, so that every learner individually experiences the innovative activity' (EER, May 2023). Technology is also an equality issue because not all learners have access to technology or the internet. Learners and teachers in privileged schools

may have a 1 : 1 ratio of technology for students, but schools that are underfunded or are in areas of high poverty may not have access. Unequal access to technology in educational contexts is a major barrier to learning in South Africa (Isaacs 2020). As a result, this inequality is vital to be addressed in teacher preparation programmes for dealing with diversity and endeavouring to be inclusive. This lack of access creates a major problem with the technological world we live in today. Learners with limited or no technological access are automatically behind and will lack the necessary skills to gain meaningful employment where technology is the cornerstone of the industry. Teacher preparation in the WIL excursion stressed the importance of providing an equal, socially just, inclusive environment where the learners have agency with their learning experiences in an intellectual manner:

‘The one thing I find challenging is how I am going to implement all the other ideas I got from camp [the WIL excursion] into my classroom one day because I am not very creative but it is something I am willing to work on.’ (PST-368, EER, May 2023)

This pre-service teacher, like the others, needs to have their creativity reawakened as stated earlier in the chapter. Universities preparing teachers need to provide room in the curriculum for the pre-service teachers to flex their intellectual and creative muscles through the requirement of creating innovative learning opportunities for their future learners. Universities need to get their students engaged in professional teaching societies and provide resources and educational experiences that pre-service teachers can use to create engaging lessons for their future learners. The WIL excursions are one step in the right direction but will not be effective in this endeavour as a stand-alone effort.

■ The professional growth and interactional qualities of being a teacher

This theme encompasses aspects related to the teacher’s experiences and observations about the administrative structure, interactions with colleagues and the overall work environment within the school setting pre-service teachers expect to encounter in their future careers (Table 4.1). It highlights pre-service teachers’ thoughts on teamwork (with their colleagues and administration), communication, leadership and any challenges or positive aspects they might encounter in their professional journey (Figure 4.4).

The pre-service teachers view collegiality, collaboration with school administrators and teamwork with staff as a puzzle they contemplate regarding their futures. As PST-438 wrote, ‘How the superiors [management members] of the school get to help the teachers overcome



Source: Developed by the author from themes that emerged from the collected data.

FIGURE 4.4: Professional growth and interactional qualities' sub-themes.

the challenges they face within the education department' (EER, May 2023) and 'How I am going to work with my colleagues is unknown to me' (PST-116, EER, May 2023). Pre-service student teacher-8 wrote, 'Why do we as teachers sometimes not cooperate and work together [*rather*] than being jealous of each other's success and awards or achievements?' (EER, May 2023). Collegiality is a hallmark of a well-functioning school, and these pre-service teachers already know it. They just do not know how it will happen once they are teaching. Is collegiality something that can be taught? Is it natural for teachers to be envious of other award-winning teachers and what can administrators do to celebrate all the members of their faculty?

Developing a collaborative mindset should be an aspect of all teacher preparation programmes and can be addressed by using methods of SDL. It can be explored further for its possible unpacking in future implementations of the WIL excursion in the NWU BEd teacher qualification.

Six other randomly sampled pre-service teachers were concerned about procuring a teaching job and making enough salary to live and support their families. In America, for example, the low starting salaries of teachers are an issue when you consider how vital their influence is for those they teach. In South Africa, teachers' starting salaries are comparable to those in other fields; therefore, these pre-service teachers need their concerns

about starting salaries addressed. The average salary of a first-year teacher in South Africa is approximately ZAR185,000 per year (Payscale 2023).

Pre-service student teacher-458 wonders how to conduct parent meetings and how to interact with them as a professional. Three other pre-service teachers posed a similar concern with thoughts around why parents blame the teacher when the student misbehaves, why parents are not more interested in their child's education and what they can do, as teachers, to interact with and involve more parents when they become teachers. Learners come from a variety of households, with different religious, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (see Chapter 3). Both pre-service and in-service teachers will need to recognise this and be able to counsel parents or guardians in an appropriate manner about their child's education. However, some learners will also come from a background of trauma, sometimes coming from the home environment. Teachers will need to understand and adequately counsel, support and uplift learners with these backgrounds. Preparing future 'super teachers' for interactions with parents aligns with the diverse parent population the teachers work with for the betterment of their learners. The WIL excursion provides opportunities for the pre-service teachers to consider how they will be inclusive with all parents and learners as well as afford agency to the parents in their advocacy for their child; however, the teacher preparation programmes need to be transparent throughout the degree programme to provide their students with the toolset to address working with parents.

Professional development, as reflected upon by the pre-service teachers, is needed in professions such as medicine, law and education because of the ever-changing landscape of these fields (NEA 2023). Teaching requires professional growth because of the copious amount of research constantly emerging in the field of education, such as trauma-informed pedagogy, social-emotional learning and critical race theory (NEA 2023). The changing landscape of working with families and communities in an effective manner is also an area needed for professional development along with changes in policies given by governmental agencies that impact practising teachers' pedagogical processes and licensure (NEA 2023). Finally, the constantly evolving changes required of teachers as they practice their profession, such as switching to online teaching during a national emergency, changing teaching assignments and administrative policy changes directly impacting teachers, their pedagogy and their students (NEA 2023). Effective teacher professional development includes the following: 'supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support, offers feedback and reflection, and is of sustained duration' (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner 2017:v-vi).

■ Conclusion

This chapter focused on making the thinking of the pre-service teachers attending the NWU WIL excursion visible when it comes to the challenges they believe they face in becoming teachers. The making thinking visible strategy called '*connect-extend-challenge*' was chosen as the framework for their final reflections because of its ability to have the students address what challenges they face as first-year students and the preparation they seek during their professional qualification programme at NWU.

The pre-service teachers' reflections were written in a thoughtful manner and provided a plethora of data to analyse. As a result, the challenges raised by them involved emotional, physical, mental and professional qualities of the teaching profession. The biggest concern raised by the pre-service teachers centred around classroom management and discipline. What do they do if a student hits them? Why cannot they use corporal punishment? What if I am too shy to manage a classroom? How do I deal with lazy learners? What do I do if I want to date a learner and why cannot I? These and other questions surfaced along with other poignant ones that addressed the goals of the WIL excursion. The students' reflections demonstrated that the pre-service teachers came to understand the many identities a future teacher must have, the multicultural nature of classrooms of today and how best to negotiate them in a fair manner. Their understanding of the need for creative, curious and problem-solving teachers was also achieved as a result of the excursion, according to the reflections completed by the participating pre-service teachers. Even when they questioned their own creativity, they left the excursion believing they could find everyday, inexpensive resources to make their teaching come alive and diverge from the didactic model found in many schools.

Finally, as with any inquiry, the pre-service teachers did leave the excursion with more questions about the profession of teaching than they arrived with at the beginning. These questions can guide the pre-service teachers to identify their learning needs and for their preparation programmes to provide them with the opportunity to formulate professional growth points aligned with the goals of SDL. These questions posed by the pre-service teachers point to their investment in the excursion and the many experiences it provided. Teaching is a complex act, requiring the teacher to play many different roles. In addition, there are preconceived notions about the act of teaching gained before and during the apprenticeship of observation that are difficult to let go. If the pre-service teachers left feeling as if they had all the answers to this complex act we call teaching, then surely the excursion would not be the success it was for them.

In the words of Nelson Mandela:

‘Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.’ (Lynch 2019)

Education is a game changer for all involved. We need teachers who are dedicated to their learners, their own professional development, their school, their community and the families of their learners. We need teachers who are able to teach learners from all socio-economic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Teachers should be trauma informed so that learners can feel supported in the school environment. By doing so, endless possibilities exist for all involved in the educational venture. The WIL excursions are endeavouring to increasingly contribute to supplying these demands for pre-service teachers in a way that affords agency in being inclusive teachers to a diverse array of learners with multiple identities.

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Students' confidence in using intercultural communication in work-integrated learning excursions

Gordon Keabetswe Sekano

Research Unit Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Mahikeng, South Africa

Mmankoko Ziphorah Ramorola

School of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Mahikeng, South Africa

■ Abstract

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is a professional attribute that requires confidence for effective and appropriate communication between diverse cultures. First-year student teachers (FSTs) entering university from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds often face the challenge of adapting to the intricate and language-diverse tertiary education environment. This transition requires them to develop confidence not only in their academic abilities but also in their communication skills, enabling them to engage effectively in various

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cultural contexts. Recognising this, universities can facilitate ICC by incorporating immersive experiences such as work-integrated learning excursions, which provide practical opportunities to interact with peers and professionals from diverse cultures, ultimately empowering students to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication with assurance. Excursions create a welcoming and safe social environment where these students feel appreciated, can share their feelings, express their creativity, voice their opinions, raise challenges and direct their learning, especially in a heterogenous institution of higher learning such as North-West University (NWU). Taking this perspective into account, the study examined the ICC of FSTs enrolled at the Faculty of Education at NWU, alongside their attitude towards diverse cultures. A qualitative content analysis was used to mine data from participating students' responses sourced from a questionnaire with open-ended questions and reflective portfolios. These were supplemented by non-participant observations and analysing video recordings to determine behavioural patterns. The findings show that students experienced verbal and non-verbal interactions, which sometimes lead to frustrations and false assumptions about other cultures. Furthermore, the findings indicate that students faced challenges when engaging in intercultural communications. The most notable findings are that FSTs appreciated and valued diverse cultures were motivated to engage with diversity, recognised the importance of embracing diversity and treated individuals from different cultures with respect and kindness.

■ Introduction

The importance of developing confidence in intercultural communication cannot be overstated. Developing cultural competence is an essential component of preparing first-year student teachers (FSTs) for success in the global workforce (Miño & Gibson 2020). Wang and Han (2020) perceive cultural nuances and non-verbal cues as essential components of intercultural communication. Accordingly, FSTs who lack an understanding of cultural nuances and nonverbal cues may struggle to communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, a lack of understanding of cultural nuances and non-verbal signals contributes to misunderstandings, misinterpretations and negative perceptions resulting in cultural biases, stereotypes or even inadvertently offending others using inappropriate or impolite gestures (Ntuli 2012, see Chapter 2).

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is a professional attribute that needs to be developed in higher education institutions (HEIs) to support effective and appropriate communication between

diverse cultures. The need for developing such competence is underscored by the rise of globalisation, which has heightened cultural, linguistic, ethnic and social diversity, consequently amplifying intercultural encounters among citizens (Banks & Diem 2008). Given global demand, where individuals are frequently required to interact with people from diverse backgrounds, both in local and international contexts, ICC can be developed through cultural immersion, reflection and feedback (Arasaratnam, Baresjee & Dembek 2010; Spitzberg & Chagnon 2009). Participation in the globalised world requires certain competencies to interact with people of diverse cultures. Hence, the ability to communicate and interact appropriately with individuals from diverse cultures, as an integral part of 21st-century learning skills (Kivunja 2015), holds particularly true for HEIs, especially in developing countries like South Africa, known for their rich cultural diversity and multilingualism.

Developing FSTs' ICC is a complex and challenging process, especially in a culturally heterogeneous environment like most universities in South Africa. In this chapter, we argue that HEIs must adapt to develop intercultural communication skills for FSTs to prepare them for the teaching profession characterised by diverse cultures and the challenges associated with that. In this study, FSTs are used interchangeably with the term 'students' to refer to the participants. Our argument concurs with Taljaard (2018) who attests to HEIs grappling with the issue of adequately preparing students for the challenging and diverse circumstances that present themselves in 21st-century schools. We must acknowledge the insights of Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005), who state:

[7]here is a high demand for developing student teachers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work successfully with an increasingly diverse student population, particularly those whose cultural, racial, language, sexual orientation, and ethnic backgrounds are different from the teachers' backgrounds. (p. 57)

The introduction of first-year student excursions at the North-West University (NWU) Faculty of Education in 2016 marked the beginning of a transformative educational journey designed to broaden students' horizons and enhance their learning experiences, as self-directed learning (SDL) students who learn about topics of interest (Robinson & Persky 2020:292). These excursions, initially conducted face-to-face, allowed students to step outside the confines of the classroom and immerse themselves in real-world contexts, providing invaluable opportunities for practical learning and intercultural exposure. However, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in subsequent years forced the Faculty of Education to adapt and reimagine its approach to excursions during 2020. The need to protect students' health and adhere to safety protocols required a shift away from traditional face-to-face excursions. In response, the faculty turned to innovative alternatives, such as synchronous virtual

excursions, including simulations and other methods based on technology, to continue to provide enriching educational experiences (Du Toit & Petersen 2023:5). Despite these adaptations, the core need for excursions remains as relevant as ever. The importance of exposing students to diverse environments, cultures and real-world challenges to foster their personal and academic growth as SDL remains a fundamental principle in education because it empowers the FSTs to take ownership of their learning process, enhancing their ability to navigate cultural complexities independently (Petersen, De Beer & Mentz 2020). While the methods have evolved, the underlying goal of enhancing students' understanding of the world and their ability to apply classroom knowledge in practical settings remains constant (De Beer et al. 2022).

Our participation in previous work-integrated learning (WIL) excursions brought to our attention the high number of FSTs who experience intercultural communication challenges. For example, some students struggled to convey their ideas or instructions effectively in a language that was not their native tongue, which hindered their ability to communicate with clarity and precision. Another common intercultural communication issue encountered during the excursions was cultural misunderstandings. Some students inadvertently offended or misinterpreted the actions and behaviours of individuals from other cultures because of a lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity. For example, a student might not have understood the importance of certain customs or gestures, leading to unintentional disrespect or discomfort in intercultural interactions (Sebotsa, Petersen & Speight Vaughn 2020). These misunderstandings highlighted the need for improved intercultural competence among students to navigate such situations effectively. We, therefore, found it imperative to explore the confidence of FSTs in intercultural communication during imminent WIL excursions. We needed to investigate theories and models to address this gap in the literature, given the extensive body of scholarly work on ICC, but the apparent scarcity of literature specific to its application within the context of WIL excursions. Scholars such as Doolan et al. (2019), as well as Martin and Rees (2019), have described WIL as a popular approach to higher education in recent years that offers students the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, gain practical experience and develop essential skills for their future careers. Work-integrated learning excursion in our context is a two-day programme designed to prepare FSTs for diverse classrooms and the complexities of 21st-century education during their Bachelor of Education (BE) qualifications. Similarly, Petersen et al. (2020) confirm that participation in WIL excursions or other similar programmes allows students to gain first-hand experience with different cultures and develop their intercultural sensitivity and competence.

To develop the ICC of FSTs, the current study, therefore, explored how WIL excursions can contribute to this goal.

In the context of this chapter, WIL excursions resemble a platform where FSTs may learn, cooperate, interact, communicate and become aware of different cultures. The focus of the study was to explore how WIL excursions can help develop FSTs' confidence in their ICC. The use of WIL excursions to develop confidence in intercultural communication is an under-researched area in the field of education. This aligns with Arasaratnam and Doerfel's (2005:137) argument that '[...] intercultural communication competence is an area of study that is becoming more relevant, yet to be developed in the increasingly multicultural communities we live in'. Few studies have attempted to address the importance of intercultural competence in educational settings (Darvin & Norton 2015; Gao, Wang & Sun 2016) and ICC (Arasaratnam & Banerjee 2011). Published studies, however, fall short of filling the gap in ICC among FSTs from diverse cultures, which the current study sought to address. The intention was that well-equipped students with intercultural communication skills would be able to navigate and handle cultural differences thoughtfully during the rest of their tertiary studies as self-directed learners and in their future careers as well.

Given the significance of ICC, it is crucial to prepare FSTs to teach in an inclusive environment that tackles challenges concerning diverse populations and to direct the students to reflect critically on their worldviews and perceptions of the many realities in which they live. The degree to which students perceive intercultural communication entirely depends on the beliefs they hold about respect for diverse cultures and their own confidence in this regard. Therefore, the primary research question of this study was: How did the WIL excursions contribute to the development of FSTs' confidence in ICC?

First-year student teachers with deficiencies in these aspects may result in them struggling to navigate intercultural interactions effectively, thus hindering effective communication and relationship building and creating negative perceptions of cultural biases and stereotypes (Wang & Han 2020). The researchers in the current study argue that effective intercultural communication will be a struggle without understanding cultural nuances and non-verbal cues. The current study adopted the theory of ICC by Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) as a framework to interrogate the complexities of ICC in the context of WIL excursions. Studies such as that of Wang (2018) and Zhang (2017) have confirmed a relationship between confidence in intercultural communication skills and ICC. In this way, we explored how WIL excursions as part of the BEd teacher preparation programme could support the development of FSTs' confidence in intercultural communication.

■ Theoretical framework: Intercultural communication competence

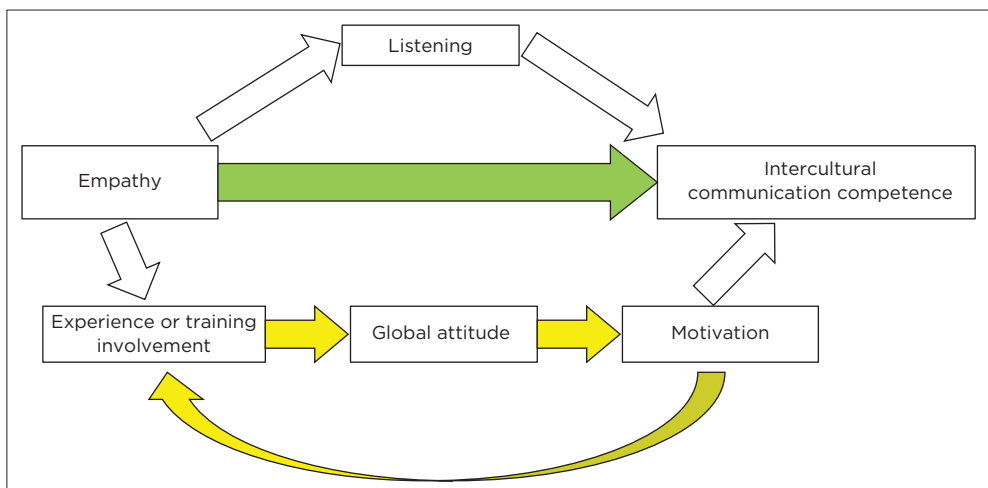
Intercultural communication competence suggests that communication competence in intercultural contexts involves knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable individuals to adapt their communication behaviours appropriately to different cultural contexts (Spitzberg & Chagnon 2009). Intercultural communication competence refers to the abilities and competencies of the speaker to achieve effective and appropriate communication in a culturally diverse society (Chen & Starosta 1996). These authors identified three competencies of ICC, namely intercultural sensitivity that deals with affective processes, intercultural awareness that focuses on cognitive processes and intercultural agility (see Chapter 1) that relates to behavioural processes (Chen & Starosta 1996). According to Byram (2020), ICC is comprised of key competencies such as sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence. These competencies contribute to an individual's skills and attitudes to communicate and interact with other people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Lázár et al. 2007). The crux of Arasaratnam's ICC framework (2006) lies in intercultural sensitivity that involves both cognitive and affective dimensions, including knowledge, empathy, tolerance for ambiguity and openness to different perspectives (Bennett 1986). Intercultural sensitivity means 'the ability to recognise and appreciate cultural differences and to adjust one's communication behaviour accordingly' (Chen & Starosta 1998).

In practice, developing ICC is crucial for fostering effective and harmonious communication in a culturally diverse society, helping individuals build their confidence to engage with people from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds in a respectful and understanding manner (Deardorff 2006; Ilie 2019). This confidence helps reduce nervousness and improves how people communicate. As a result, it leads to more meaningful and mutually beneficial cross-cultural relationships, which are essential in our increasingly interconnected global community (Ilie 2019).

Arasaratnam (2006) developed an integrated ICC model (see Figure 5.1) based on the premise that ICC should be studied from the perspective of the 'other', as opposed to self-reported perceptions of one's own ICC, to incorporate multiple cultural competencies. The model consists of five variables (Figure 5.1). The first variable is experience, which refers to prior exposure to and/or training in intercultural communication (Arasaratnam et al. 2010). Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) define experience in terms of several dimensions, such as close personal relationships with people from other cultures. The second variable is

listening, which relates to the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process (Arasaratnam et al. 2010). The third variable is a positive attitude towards other cultures, which refers to a positive, nonethnocentric disposition towards people from other cultures. A positive attitude towards people of other cultures leads to motivation to communicate with such people, which in turn leads to more experience in intercultural communication and contributes to ICC (Arasaratnam 2006). In Figure 5.1, this variable is shown as 'global attitude'. The fourth variable is motivation, which speaks of the desire to participate in intercultural interactions to understand and learn about other cultures. The last variable is empathy, which focuses on the ability to relate to one another at cognitive as well as emotional levels (Arasaratnam et al. 2010; Figure 5.1). Empathy contributes to positive attitudes towards people of other cultures (Arasaratnam 2006). The ability to empathise allows a person to listen well, which, in turn, contributes to being perceived as a competent intercultural communicator.

Given the variables in the framework, Arasaratnam's (2006) hypothesises that experience alone is not sufficient for one to exhibit competent intercultural behaviour and that empathy plays a key role in this process. Therefore, the ICC model depicts empathy and experience as exogenous variables and identifies listening (i.e. being able to receive and interpret messages in the communication process), motivation (i.e. interacting with people of other cultures) and a positive attitude towards people of other cultures as mediating variables that lead to ICC as an



Source: Adapted from Arasaratnam, LA 2006, 'Further testing of a new model of intercultural communication competence', *Communication Research Reports*, vol. 23, no. 2, p. 97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824090600668923>

FIGURE 5.1: The integrated model of intercultural communication competence.

endogenous variable (Arasaratnam et al. 2010; Figure 5.1). The model predicts several interconnected variables that collectively influence an individual's ability to communicate effectively in intercultural contexts. Firstly, there is a cyclical relationship between experience, global attitude and motivation (indicated in yellow). The rationale for this cyclical relationship is that those who have experience with and exposure to intercultural communication are likely to be more positively orientated towards people from other cultures and those motivated to seek intercultural interactions, which in turn contributes to more experience in intercultural communications. Secondly, a direct relationship between empathy and ICC (shown in green) is based on the reasoning that an empathetic individual, regardless of prior experience with intercultural communication, would still be able to communicate effectively and appropriately simply by being able to identify with the other person on a cognitive and emotional level. Thirdly, the four variables of empathy, listening, global attitude and motivation influence each other and work in synergy to help individuals become more competent and effective communicators in culturally diverse contexts. For instance, empathy and a positive global attitude can boost motivation to engage in intercultural interactions. Additionally, listening actively and attentively to people from various cultural backgrounds can foster empathy by promoting understanding, reducing biases and building cultural sensitivity.

For FSTs, developing confidence in using intercultural communication during WIL excursions is essential. These excursions often involve interactions with diverse student populations, making it crucial to adapt to the varying cultural contexts encountered in educational settings. Building confidence in intercultural communication ensures that student teachers can effectively connect with students from different backgrounds, appreciate diverse teaching methods and understand the cultural nuances they will encounter in their future classrooms. As self-directed learners, building confidence in intercultural communication also helps in establishing positive and inclusive learning environments, fostering better engagement and promoting cross-cultural understanding, which are key aspects of successful teaching. Ultimately, this confidence in intercultural communication not only benefits the student teachers but also greatly enhances their ability to provide high-quality education and support to their future learners.

■ Research methodology

This section includes a discussion of the research process and research design that guided this study and the methods used in its implementation.

■ Research paradigm

In the current study, a qualitative approach and an interpretive paradigm were used to explore how WIL excursions contribute to the development of FSTs' confidence in ICC. Interpretivists are of the view that '[...] reality and knowledge are constructed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and practice' (Tracy 2020:51). Access to reality is mainly through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. Qualitative studies are often rooted in social constructivist and interpretivist research (Creswell 2014). For the purpose of the current study, the qualitative interpretive research paradigm aligned with the research question that guided the investigation: 'How did the WIL excursions contribute to the development of FSTs' confidence in intercultural communication competence?' These views informed the hermeneutical approach followed in our deductive analysis of the responses of FSTs.

■ Context of the study

The WIL excursions in the context of this study was a two-day programme designed to prepare the FSTs for diverse classrooms and the complexities of 21st-century education during their BEd qualifications were conducted at NWU in 2023. North-West University is a public university with three campuses: Mahikeng, Potchefstroom and Vanderbiljpark and hosts approximately 54,207 students per year (NWU 2023). The Faculty of Education, one of eight faculties at the university, provides teaching qualifications for aspiring student teachers and also extends its offerings to in-service teachers through additional programmes. Because of the practical nature of the qualification, FSTs have to undergo WIL in which theory and workplace practice are merged. To prepare these students' understanding of the complexity of the teaching profession before they implement their training in schools, the Faculty of Education embarked on an innovative and interventional educational excursion journey (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). Two sets of excursions were organised successfully in 2023, with the first taking place virtually from 02-04 of May 2023, to cater to students from the unit for distance learning (UDL) at NWU, as in-person attendance was difficult for these students. The second set was conducted in a face-to-face format to accommodate full-time students. First-year student teachers attending the face-to-face (field trip-like) excursions were accompanied by facilitators and spent three days away from the formal university environment in a youth centre in the Magaliesberg mountains to live and learn together. Given that the participants were self-directed learners, their lecturers' role shifted from a teacher to that of a facilitator of learning who offered procedural guidance rather than content transmitters

(Knowles 1975). This format followed the description by Taljaard (2018), who noted:

[T]he excursions, as they occur in an environment other than the traditional classroom setup, primarily allow students to affective learning and engage in cognitive learning, allowing them to change ideas and preconceptions through close interaction and continuous participation. (p. iv)

In the view of Taljaard (2018), such excursions create a safe space for students to experiment with new pedagogies and for them to get to know their lecturers (who act as excursion facilitators) in a more relaxed environment. Self-directed learning authors like Robinson and Persky (2020:292) refer to this space as an 'experiential setting' where the SDL skills should be introduced and developed in the didactic portion of the curriculum. This setting allows students to develop skills over time. Given this, the excursion further reinforces what students have learnt while also introducing new elements that challenge their expectations and add to their knowledge.

The students in this study were characterised by coming from diverse backgrounds in terms of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, language and culture. During the excursion, students FSTs challenge, confront and disrupt misconceptions, untruths and stereotypes that lead to structural inequalities and discrimination, based on race, social class, gender and other social and human differences (Batchelor & Mahomed 2021). The same authors continue to explain that a sincere effort is made to create a welcoming and safe social environment where students feel appreciated, can share their feelings, express their creativity and voice their own opinions (p. 278). We have already outlined the significance of ICC in the subsequent discussions, particularly that it is (1) an area of study that is becoming more relevant; (2) an underresearched area in the field of education and (3) well-equipped students with intercultural communication skills will navigate and handle cultural differences cautiously. The excursions reported in this study were purposefully designed to develop intercultural skills and a sense of belonging for FSTs to contribute to sensitising them to the complexity of the teaching profession (Du Toit & Petersen 2023; also see Chapter 3).

■ Research design

The current qualitative study involved a content analysis design to explore how WIL excursions helped to develop FSTs' confidence in their intercultural communication skills. Data collection consisted mainly of five open-ended questions (OEQs) that addressed the students' experiences of their relationships with people of other cultures, listening skills, positive attitudes towards other cultures, motivation to interact with people from other cultures and empathy towards other cultures (see Figure 5.1). We believe

that OEQs would allow participants the possibility to demonstrate their thoughts more willingly than highly controlled closed-ended questions. This willingness is particularly important because we aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of how FSTs interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Creswell 2014). The perspectives of FSTs shed light on aspects that were deemed important for the current investigation.

■ Research ethics considerations

Throughout the research process, we adhered to the national and institutional ethics guidelines and policies. Ethical clearance from EDU-REC at NWU and permission from the NWU Gatekeeper were secured for obtaining data from NWU students. Before completing the WIL excursion activities an independent person invited the students to participate in the academic study in which some of the answers provided in the activities will be used while keeping their names anonymous. The purpose of the study was explained to the students, and they were informed that while the completion and submission of the WIL activity documents were compulsory, participation in the research study was completely voluntary. Students were assured that their choice to have their responses included or excluded from the study would not influence the results of the excursion. Because the activities were part of the excursion, no compensation was awarded for participation. Furthermore, to maintain the privacy of participants and the confidentiality of the data, the identities of students were concealed during data analysis and coding, using three identifiers. That is an anonymised student number, the instrument used in obtaining the evidence and the date of data collection.

■ Sampling and data collection

The population of this study consisted of all FSTs ($n = 2,704$) comprising of both contact students ($n = 2,259$) and UDL students ($n = 445$) who participated in the WIL 2023 excursions, which were mandatory and required their participation in all scheduled activities. However, not all students were expected to participate in the data collection process. Consequently, this chapter exclusively used data from FSTs who willingly gave their informed consent ($n = 2311$).

Virtual excursion data were obtained from the digital reflections of UDL students who consented to participate ($n = 94$), as well as the video recordings (VR) of the virtual WIL excursions. The VRs provided us with a visual record of student interactions, while the students' reflections provided insight into the participants' interactions during the

virtual excursions. Data from students in the face-to-face excursions who consented to participate ($n = 2,217$) were collected from paper-based questionnaires with OEQs and a reflective portfolio (RP) that the students completed during the excursions. However, a random sampling technique selected 280 participants to complete the questionnaire on the last day of the excursion. Although the questionnaire included several other questions to contribute to learning activities, for the current study, only the following questions contributed to the data that this chapter reports on:

1. How did students experience personal relationships with fellow students from diverse cultures?
2. To what extent did the students demonstrate their listening skills within a culturally diverse environment?
3. What are the students' attitudes towards the cultures of other students?
4. What motivates students to interact with fellow students from diverse cultures during excursions?
5. How does empathy influence students' abilities to be competent intercultural communicators?

In a similar manner, questions exclusively from Activities 6 and 13 were chosen for inclusion in the RP. This selection was made based on their relevance to ICC, as they delve into various aspects of individuals' attitudes, experiences and perceptions related to interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Data collected from all instruments were transcribed in preparation for data analysis.

■ Data analysis

The current study adopted a content analysis approach (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2018). Because of the complexity of the data, the analysis was conducted collaboratively using ATLAS.ti™ (version 23) computer analysis software. In the first stage, we analysed a sample of responses and identified codes related to ICC. We then discussed and revised the codes to establish a preliminary coding scheme. Ambiguous codes were discussed and revised, and then a final coding scheme was adopted and applied. The categories that were identified from the data were: respect, adaptability, acceptance, assumptions, frustrations, communication barriers, language barriers, stereotyping, discrimination, building meaningful connections, verbal and non-verbal interaction, communication skills and strategies, active listening and engagement, cultural diversity and inclusivity, cultural curiosity and personal growth and cultural sensitivity and awareness. The themes were predetermined to align with the five questions that were drawn from the questionnaire that were selected for analysis in the current investigation.

□ Trustworthiness

A three-stage coding process was carried out as guided by De Vos et al. (2011) to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. The researchers worked towards content validity and dependability through the triangulation of data (Burke Johnson & Christensen 2017). We looked for consistencies and different perspectives from the data generated in the four methods of data collection, as well as from both face-to-face and virtual excursions.

■ Findings and discussion

All five variables depicted in Figure 5.1 of Arasaratnam's (2006) integrated model of ICC were pursued as codes and found in data obtained from student participants. Using the data from the four instruments (the questionnaire with OEQs, RP, VR and virtual excursion student's reflections [VER]), we draw attention to the findings that emerged in relation to the five themes linked to experience, listening skills, attitudes, motivation and empathy. Three of the five identifiers, namely student, data source (OEQs, RP, VR and VER) and date, are included when quotations are presented as evidence.

■ Theme 1: Student experience of personal relationships with students from other cultures

The participating students acknowledged that they experienced challenges and opportunities in their personal relationships with diverse students during the excursions. These included aspects of verbal (language) and non-verbal interactions, frustrations and false assumptions about students from other cultures as challenges. Generally, participants reflected on instances where they witnessed or caught themselves making judgements about the cultural background of others. For instance, one participant said:

'I had an unexamined belief that participants who resigned during discussions lacked valuable information.' (S127, OEQ, May 2023)

Furthermore, other participants indicated that their initial judgements were proven wrong when they made assumptions about specific ethnic groups. On the same note, some participants observed how other students were making assumptions about particular ethnic groups:

'I witnessed a participant making assumptions about another person's dietary choices based on their ethnic background.' (S145, RP, May 2023)

Another participant shared a similar assumption of cultural bias or had misconceptions about other cultures:

'I noticed some participants assuming that individuals of a certain ethnic background would have a natural talent for a specific artistic activity.' (S127, VR, May 2023)

Other participants explained that they were frustrated when they did not get something right. Several other participants shared similar sentiments. These frustrations stemmed from various factors, including cultural differences, misunderstandings and conflicts:

'There were instances when misinterpretations occurred due to differences in cultural norms and values.' (S118, VR, May 2023)

'Sometimes, it was challenging to navigate cultural differences and understand the perspectives of others.' (S95, OEQ, May 2023)

'When it comes to [culture A], I have been thinking that they are the same. Only to find out that they are not the same, some are not bullies like others.' (S42, OEQ, May 2023)

These data confirm the literature on the lack of understanding that contributes to misinterpretations and the creation of negative perceptions of cultural biases and stereotypes (Ntuli 2012; Wang & Han 2020). To attest to experiences of personal relationships with other cultures, the observation data revealed issues relating to verbal and non-verbal interactions. This was evident from the greetings from the students. Some students greeted each other with warmth and enthusiasm, using phrases such as 'Hey, how are you?' or 'Nice to see you!' while others greeted each other in a less personal manner, with a simple nod or wave, which may not have conveyed as much warmth or interest. This offers insights into the dynamics of personal interactions and how they vary among students from different cultural backgrounds (Arasaratnam et al. 2010). The varying ways in which students greet each other – some with warmth and enthusiasm, while others with a simple nod or wave – reflect differences in cultural communication styles. These differences in verbal and non-verbal interactions can impact how students perceive and experience personal relationships with peers from other cultures (Spitzberg & Chagnon 2009). For example, students who are accustomed to warmer and more effusive greetings may find it challenging to connect with those who use more reserved forms of greeting. This finding was corroborated by the findings in some of the RPs in which the participants reported that they experienced communication barriers that hindered personal relationships in their heterogeneous groups. One particular student, for instance, mentioned that they were grouped with students from other campuses and cultures that meant whose languages were different, which was a challenge. The diverse grouping, according to this participant, negatively affected the group's effectiveness:

'[It was a challenge to] get activities done due to lack of communication skills.' (S209, OEQ, May 2023)

Additionally, the language barrier caused a delay in the group's progress. This was also noted in the VR when other participants mentioned:

'It can sometimes be difficult to try to convey a message in a language that you don't normally use.' (S173, OEQ, May 2023)

'[*Students who are not proficient in English*] require additional time during group discussions to formulate their sentences accurately and express themselves effectively.' (S152, VR, May 2023)

Another participant also wrote the following in their VER:

'[We] occasionally experienced language barriers that required us to type our thoughts more slowly to ensure clarity.' (S16, VER, May 2023)

Despite the various challenges, one student, however, suggested measures their group members used to alleviate the language challenges and explained:

'We employed strategies such as using translation tools, providing written summaries and encouraging patience and clarification to ensure inclusive and meaningful participation.' (S173, OEQ, May 2023)

Other participants explained that they use English when communicating so that they accommodate and understand each other. The issue of the language barrier left participants frustrated in most instances. One of the participants explained the frustration:

'I admit, there were moments when I got frustrated because I couldn't express myself as fluently as I wanted. But it also motivated me to work harder on my language skills to communicate more effectively in diverse settings.' (S249, RP, May 2023)

This finding, indicating that language was a communication barrier, aligns with literature (Arasaratnam et al. 2010; Spitzberg & Cupach 1984), which emphasises the importance of effective communication skills for building close personal relationships with individuals from diverse cultures. Arasaratnam's (2006) illustration of intercultural communication tends to exhibit a favourable orientation towards individuals from diverse cultures. This orientation, in turn, motivates participants to seek intercultural interactions (Arasaratnam et al. 2010) actively, fostering a positive feedback loop by enhancing their experience and proficiency in intercultural communications, which will contribute to future teacher preparation for their profession. The WIL excursion provided an opportunity for FSTs to confront and navigate language barriers and intercultural challenges, ultimately encouraging some to take proactive steps to enhance their intercultural communication skills (Wang 2018; Zhang 2017) and, in turn, their confidence in building close personal relationships with individuals from diverse cultures. It is evident from the findings that some students experienced a lack of confidence in their ability to navigate communication barriers in heterogeneous groups. The findings emphasise the need for effective communication skills to foster positive relationships and dispel misconceptions, underscoring that confidence in intercultural

communication may have been missing in some instances. Therefore, the refinement of WIL excursions is necessary to strengthen the development of effective intercultural communication skills and cultural awareness among student teachers, ultimately building their confidence in personal relationships with individuals from different cultures.

■ Theme 2: Enhancing listening skills for effective intercultural communication in students

Although the participants were affected by linguistic differences (Theme 1), the responses of the participants also shed light on the challenges they faced when engaging in listening skills as part of intercultural communication. For example, one participant encountered a cultural context gap, and this was mentioned in the following:

'Sometimes, what was said had a different meaning in their culture, and I had to learn to ask for clarification to avoid misunderstanding, and this required a lot of effort and patience in my listening.' (S100, RP, May 2023)

The VRs of the virtual excursions also provided evidence that listening to different languages was a significant challenge to many participants. A participant shared:

'Understanding accents and regional dialects was tough. I often had to ask people to repeat themselves, which made me feel like I wasn't listening well.' (S09, VR, May 2023)

From our observations, it became evident that students sharing similar cultural and racial backgrounds naturally formed more cohesive groups and communicated more seamlessly. This suggests that their confidence in intercultural communication may have been higher because of the common cultural and linguistic context, leading to smoother interactions. However, it is essential to note that the quoted passage does not explicitly mention the confidence levels of these students. Realising the importance of effective intercultural communication in overcoming challenges, participants acknowledged the need to learn more about ICC. Nevertheless, the challenges faced by students in developing listening skills during WIL excursions may have contributed to building their confidence over time. The development of these skills prepares student teachers to thrive in diverse educational settings and foster meaningful cross-cultural relationships, suggesting that confidence is an essential component of their success.

The finding indicates that, in groupings with diverse students, students may have initially lacked confidence in their listening skills because of frequent challenges in effective communication. Language barriers, cultural misunderstandings and varying communication norms presented obstacles

to interaction. However, as the literature suggests, students who actively listened, sought clarification and displayed patience emerged as more successful communicators in these challenging situations (Arasaratnam et al. 2010). Therefore, while some students might have faced initial confidence issues in their listening skills, the observations suggest that, through experience and active listening, their confidence in intercultural communication may have increased over time. This observation underscores the importance of enhancing students' listening skills for effective intercultural communication, suggesting a potential growth in confidence in this area (Ilie 2019).

The reflections of students after the virtual excursion also highlighted the significance of enhancing listening skills for effective intercultural communication. In virtual interactions, listening may be more significant, as participants often cannot see each other and therefore do not have visual cues to support interpretation (De Beer et al. 2022). Realising the importance of active listening in overcoming challenges, participants acknowledged the need to learn more about ICC. Some of the participants illustrated their recognition of the importance of active listening and promoting understanding. For example, a participant explained how they facilitated the exchange of diverse perspectives and promoted an environment of mutual respect and active listening within their small group:

'In our group, we made a conscious effort to create a welcoming atmosphere where everyone felt comfortable sharing their thoughts. We started each discussion by acknowledging our diverse backgrounds and perspectives, which set a positive tone. When someone spoke, we actively listened and asked follow-up questions to better understand their point of view. It created a space where we all felt valued and respected.' (S238, VER, May 2023)

The findings suggest that students' confidence in their listening skills and their ability to facilitate effective intercultural communication may have increased. Students who actively chose to listen to each other created an environment that allowed every group member to communicate freely. Additionally, other participants highlighted their efforts to foster an environment conducive to improving listening skills and emphasised the importance of creating a safe space for the open sharing of perspectives. These actions led to enriching discussions and positive outcomes, indicating that students were confident in their capacity to create such an environment and facilitate effective communication (Wang & Han 2020).

Notwithstanding Ntuli's (2012) thoughts of impolite gestures as a sign of misunderstanding the data together with the analyses from the VRs showed that some of the students used appropriate eye contact to signal engagement in the conversation as well as indicated that they were listening to the speaker. Additionally, other students used open body language, such as uncrossed arms, which suggested that they were open to hearing other perspectives, in

other words, to listen for understanding. These findings on students' listening skills resemble two sides of a coin. One side of the coin shows how students' confidence in their listening skills may have been affected by linguistic differences, as they could not understand and interpret conversations effectively. However, on the other side of the coin, it is evident that some students recognised the importance of active listening, mutual respect and creating a safe space for open expression. This recognition suggests that their confidence in intercultural communication skills may have increased as they appreciated the significance of these elements in effective communication. This finding aligns with studies (Deardorff 2006; Lázár et al. 2007) on the importance of creating inclusive spaces that foster respect and appreciation for cultural diversity, which is supported by interaction involvement, particularly listening skills. Arasaratnam et al. (2010) and (Lázár et al. 2007) argue that engagement portrays cognitive and behavioural engagement in a conversation.

■ Theme 3: Exploring students' attitudes towards other cultures and their impact on intercultural communication

The responses of the participants revealed a spectrum of attitudes towards other cultures (Lázár et al. 2007; Spitzberg & Chagnon 2009). Some students exhibited positive attitudes characterised by curiosity, openness and genuine interest in learning about diverse cultures. These attitudes suggest that these students may have had an increased level of confidence in their ability to engage with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, as they displayed an eagerness to learn and connect. For instance, one participant stated:

'I was excited to interact with students from different cultures and I was eager to learn about their traditions and perspectives.' (S105, OEQ, May 2023)

A fellow student highlighted the impact of a positive attitude, saying:

'I realised that having confidence in my ability to adapt and learn from other cultures positively influenced my intercultural interactions because it allowed me to approach these group activities with a sense of respect and a genuine desire to learn from my peers.' (S118, RP, May 2023)

As evident in the literature, students with positive attitudes engaged actively with their peers from diverse backgrounds, asked questions and sought to understand cultural nuances, indicating that they were confident to learn from and interact with peers from other cultures (Arasaratnam et al. 2010). This led to more effective and meaningful intercultural exchanges, as was noted by one participant:

'Approaching discussions with an open mind allowed us to connect on a deeper level, resulting in more enriching conversations.' (S55, VER, May 2023)

In contrast, students with negative or apprehensive attitudes initially struggled with intercultural communication, indicative of them being less confident in this regard. However, as they participated actively in discussions and interacted with their peers, their attitudes began to change and their confidence seemed to increase. Batchelor and Mahomed (2021) support this transformation, suggesting that direct contact with individuals from different cultures can help break down stereotypes and misconceptions, which can positively shape intercultural experiences. For instance, a participant noted:

'I had some doubts at first, but as I got to know my fellow students, I realised that we had more in common than I thought.' (S89, OEQ, May 2023)

The finding emphasises the critical role of attitudes in shaping intercultural communication experiences. Although initial attitudes may vary, active participation and exposure to diverse cultures can lead to positive shifts in perceptions and more effective intercultural communication (Spitzberg & Chagnon 2009). Creating a supportive and inclusive environment within the WIL excursions, as evidenced by the responses of the participants, was essential to fostering positive attitudes and promoting productive intercultural exchanges (Deardorff 2006; Lázár et al. 2007), which buttressed students' confidence in managing these exchanges.

The following quotes from OEQs additionally indicate the participants' positive attitude towards other cultures:

'One of the most valuable aspects of our intercultural interactions is the friendships I have formed with students from different parts of the world. I've not only learned about their cultures but also gained lifelong friends.' (S264, OEQ, May 2023)

'I learned that working with other people from other cultures and others who use different languages, and how to treat others who use different languages and how to treat others and my positive attitude towards them [*developed*] as they did.' (S416, OEQ, May 2023)

It is evident from the foregoing quotations that participants appreciated the richness and significance that diverse cultures brought to the WIL excursion environments and that this learning contributed to their confidence in interactions with others. Most participants showed the need to challenge stereotypes and biases and approach people from different cultures to their own with an open mind and a positive attitude to foster understanding and effective intercultural communication, echoing findings by Chen and Starosta (1998). For example, a participant mentioned:

'[W]e actively sought to understand each other's backgrounds and experiences.' (S216, VER, May 2023)

Other participants in the current study emphasised intercultural sensitivity, which Arasaratnam (2006) reports to be essential to counteract stereotypes.

The recognition of the importance of intercultural sensitivity underscores the significance of having an open and empathetic attitude towards individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Arasaratnam et al. 2010). When exploring students' attitudes towards other cultures and their impact on intercultural communication, it becomes evident that intercultural sensitivity plays a vital role in breaking down preconceived notions and fostering understanding. In turn, being more culturally sensitive supports positive attitudes and improved confidence. During the WIL excursions, students had opportunities to put this into practice, and their growing intercultural sensitivity, coupled with the development of confidence in their ICC, allowed them to engage with peers from various cultures in a more informed, respectful and meaningful manner. This transformation in attitude and skills is a testament to the profound impact of experiential learning and practical exposure in shaping confident and culturally aware future teachers.

The responses of the participants underscore the importance of having a positive attitude towards other cultures and embracing cultural diversity in the context of intercultural communication. This is highly relevant to FSTs and in WIL excursions, where developing ICC is essential to help prepare them for their future careers as educators. It has been shown in Figure 5.1 that a positive attitude towards other cultures leads to motivation to communicate with people of diverse cultures (Arasaratnam 2006), and such increased motivation supports confidence. Embracing cultural diversity enhances ICC (Spitzberg & Chagnon 2009). Including these principles in the preparation of student teachers in WIL excursions helped students navigate intercultural interactions more successfully by ensuring that they are not only academically prepared but also equipped with the right attitudes and skills to engage positively and confidently with diverse students and colleagues, creating a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment.

■ Theme 4: Understanding students' motivation for active participation in intercultural interactions

Participants' responses indicate that many student teachers had a genuine curiosity about other cultures and a desire to learn from their peers, suggesting an increased level of confidence in actively pursuing and participating in intercultural interactions. Many participants expressed a genuine curiosity about other cultures and a desire to learn from their peers. One participant said:

'I was eager to discover new perspectives and traditions, and this curiosity motivated me to actively participate in discussions.' (S124, OEQ, May 2023)

The finding underscores the diverse motivations driving students to participate actively in intercultural interactions during WIL excursions.

These motivations align with literature that highlights the importance of positive attitudes and curiosity in fostering intercultural communication (Arasaratnam 2006; Wang & Han 2020). Active participation in intercultural interactions not only enriches students' cultural awareness but also contributes to their personal development and communication competence (Spitzberg & Chagnon 2009). This prepares them for the globalised world, where effective communication across cultures is an essential skill. It was evident from the VER and RPs that participants demonstrated the motivation and desire to build meaningful connections with individuals from diverse cultures:

'I am motivated to engage in intercultural interactions because I believe that building meaningful connections with people of different cultures enriches my teaching practice and promotes a sense of inclusivity in the classroom.' (S29, VER, May 2023)

'I am motivated to engage in intercultural interactions because I want to broaden my horizons and gain a deeper understanding of the world we live in.' (S62, RP, May 2023)

Participants expressed a genuine interest in collaborative learning and that it motivated them to interact with different cultural groups, even when not sharing the same physical space and when participating in the WIL excursions in an online environment. This motivation and interest in collaborative learning may indicate some confidence in engaging with diverse peers and using virtual spaces for learning and interaction. This notion confirms the ideas of SDL where students take ownership of their learning process (Petersen et al. 2020). The virtual space also provided participants with opportunities to have fun as they learned (Robinson & Persky 2020), which served as motivation for some students' career choices towards becoming a teacher, through the content and structure of the WIL excursion programme:

'Despite being physically separated, the collaboration between students from different campuses of NWU nurtured a supportive and inclusive community, where we could rely on one another for guidance, encouragement, and motivation.' (S161, OEQ, May 2023)

'I enjoyed the excursion because it was just motivation, I needed to make sure I was satisfied with my choice of study. I learned a lot from my peers.' (S59, VR, May 2023)

Another participant explained how they found the collaboration between students from different NWU campuses to be a source of inspiration and motivation in the face-to-face excursions, by stating:

'[...] witnessing the dedication and passion of my peers [*from different campuses*] encouraged me to strive for excellence and persevere in my academic pursuits.' (S189, OEQ, May 2023)

The finding showed that there was evidence of collaboration between different cultures, encouragement and motivation to learn from other cultures, and this could imply increased confidence in intercultural communication, as they actively participated and sought opportunities for learning and engagement across cultures. The finding further revealed that students are motivated to engage and build connections with diverse cultures, to gain insight into their complex and diverse world. This finding resonates with Spitzberg and Chagnon (2009), who emphasise the importance of building meaningful relationships and connections as a catalyst for intercultural competence. Students' motivations reflected their recognition of the transformative power of intercultural interactions in fostering genuine connections and promoting a sense of belonging among diverse individuals. Students' active involvement in intercultural interactions stems from their intrinsic motivation to learn, grow and develop as individuals and future teachers (Arasaratnam 2006), which also implies that students may have developed more confidence in their ability to participate in intercultural communication effectively. Intrinsic motivation will provide students with the tools to independently pursue knowledge and experiences that contribute to their ICC (Arasaratnam et al. 2010). This was seen as a strength of the 2023 student-teacher cohort in the WIL excursions and should contribute a firm foundation for subsequent intercultural relationship building in the rest of their BEd qualification, suggesting that their confidence in this area was evident and potentially increased.

■ Theme 5: Exploring empathy as a key factor in students' intercultural communication

Many participants noted that empathy played a central role in their ability to understand and relate to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Their awareness of empathy's importance in seeing the world through different perspectives implies some or even increased, confidence in their intercultural communication skills. The acknowledgement of empathy as a valuable tool for relating to diverse peers indicates that students had confidence in their ability to employ empathetic understanding in their interactions (Arasaratnam et al. 2010). Therefore, confidence in intercultural communication skills seems to be evident in this context. Some of their thoughts included:

'Empathy was like a bridge that helped me connect with others' experiences and perspectives.' (S112, OEQ, May 2023)

'Empathy helped me navigate disagreements constructively, turning potential conflicts into opportunities for growth.' (S88, RP, May 2023)

Some of the participants talked about how the WIL excursions helped them develop confidence and empathy in intercultural communication. For example, they mentioned:

‘One of our activities required us to work with students from diverse backgrounds and by actively listening and seeking to understand their perspectives, our communication significantly improved, fostering trust and stronger connections.’ (S77, RP, May 2023)

‘It wasn’t just about the words; it was about understanding their feelings and perspectives.’ (S49, VR, May 2023)

The participants’ acknowledgement of empathy as a bridge to understanding aligns with the literature, which stresses the role of empathy in breaking down barriers and promoting cultural sensitivity (Arasaratnam et al. 2010). This understanding fosters a more confident approach to intercultural interactions. Participants also described how empathetic listening and consideration helped de-escalate misunderstandings and fostered harmonious relationships, suggesting that students were confident in their ability to employ it effectively. This concurs with Arasaratnam et al. (2010), who illustrates that empathy, as a fundamental attribute, enables effective communication even in the absence of prior intercultural experience. An empathetic individual possesses the ability to connect with others on both cognitive and emotional levels, facilitating a nuanced understanding of diverse perspectives and thereby promoting successful and appropriate intercultural communication (Byram 2020). Moreover, the findings underscore the pivotal role of empathy in student intercultural communication during WIL excursions, emphasising its contribution to understanding, conflict resolution and trust-building within diverse teams. The recognition of empathy’s significance in these areas suggests that students’ confidence in intercultural communication was evident and possibly increased, as they understood the impact of empathy on building trust and promoting effective communication in diverse contexts. This aligns with the broader literature on intercultural communication, emphasising the value of empathy in promoting effective and harmonious interactions (Chen & Starosta 1998). Empathy can be inferred from students’ demonstrated ability to put themselves in the shoes of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, displaying a genuine interest in understanding their perspectives and experiences.

The findings from the students’ experiences in WIL excursions contributed to the development of FSTs’ confidence in ICC. Through their positive attitudes and open-mindedness towards diverse cultures and their demonstrated adaptability, empathy and cultural sensitivity, these student teachers enhanced their capacity to navigate cultural complexities. It is evident that the WIL excursions acted as a catalyst for nurturing their confidence in intercultural communication, preparing them for the demands

of diverse educational settings. Therefore, devising ways in which student teachers can further enhance their confidence in WIL is paramount and should be a priority for HEIs. These experiences have showcased the transformative potential of such programmes, emphasising their pivotal role in equipping educators with the skills and mindset needed to foster inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments.

■ Conclusion

The findings of this study shed valuable light on the importance of ICC in teacher education. Collectively, the findings emphasise an enduring need to develop the intercultural competence of FSTs, and WIL excursions serve as a pivotal avenue to facilitate this development. Additionally, the participants in this study realised the need to further enhance their ICC. The findings emphasise the significance of empathy and practical experiences in shaping the confidence of FSTs in ICC during WIL excursions. These experiences equipped students with the skills and attitudes necessary to engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in a respectful and understanding manner. As they embark on their teaching careers, the confidence gained through these excursions will serve as a strong foundation for fostering harmonious and effective cross-cultural relationships within diverse educational settings.

To strengthen WIL programmes and further develop FSTs' confidence in ICC, several key recommendations should be considered. Firstly, the strong focus on the integration of experiential learning opportunities within these programmes should be maintained. Such experiences enable students to actively engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering empathy and understanding. Secondly, the students should be recognised as self-directed learners who take responsibility for their learning. This entails not only the ability to independently initiate and manage their learning processes but also requires a high degree of autonomy, motivation and effective time management. Thirdly, cultural competency training should be incorporated within WIL excursions, providing students with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate diverse cultural landscapes. Moreover, assigning mentors or guides who are experienced in intercultural communication can offer valuable support to students, helping them develop the confidence needed to engage effectively with diverse peers (also see Chapter 8). Fourthly, encouraging students to engage in reflection and providing constructive feedback on their intercultural experiences can facilitate continuous growth and improvement, further enhancing their confidence and intercultural communication skills. By implementing these recommendations, WIL programmes can play an instrumental role in preparing student teachers

for successful interactions in diverse educational settings and in fostering meaningful cross-cultural relationships. This study is limited concerning the lack of involvement of all the student teachers in the Faculty of Education, as it only selected FSTs. It also used four instruments to collect data.

In light of the findings, we recommend that the NWU Faculty of Education:

- Continue to design and conduct WIL excursions to provide FSTs with cultural awareness and support their acceptance and appreciation of other cultures.
- Create a collaborative space where diverse student teachers can interact, collaborate and learn from one another to increase their confidence in ICC.

We also recommend that further studies use personal interviews conducted with students to obtain their verbal perceptions. Such an approach will add depth to responses and allow for iterative discussions to develop shared understanding.

Work-integrated learning excursions equipping Foundation Phase student teachers to value and accommodate diversity

Pateka Pamela Jama

Community-Based Educational Research (COMBER),
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

Rachel Rirhandzu Mayimele

Community-Based Educational Research (COMBER),
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Vanderbijlpark, South Africa

■ Abstract

The teaching profession in South Africa is encumbered by several challenges associated with a lack of expected skills suitable for the 21st-century classroom. Teacher training equips student teachers with knowledge of subject content and teaching methods; however, there are also calls for a holistically prepared teacher who values and accommodates the richness of diversity in South African schools. Teachers in the

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Foundation Phase (FP) can play a critical role in educating young learners about the value and contributions of diversity to the social fabric of this country. To ensure this happens, FP teacher training needs to prepare students for this task. The focus of this chapter is to report how work-integrated learning (WIL) excursions can be used to equip FP student teachers for diverse classrooms. Methodologically, this study was informed by a qualitative approach using open-ended questionnaires to understand the views of FP student teachers on their experiences of being grouped in diversified groups in WIL excursions. Findings revealed that initial interactions with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures elicited mixed feelings. However, students deemed these encounters as essential in creating opportunities for understanding differences. Engaging with other students from diverse cultural backgrounds exposed personal stereotypes, ultimately fostering cultural sensitivity. Lastly, exposure to different cultures in smaller groups contributed significantly to fostering a deeper appreciation for diversity. However, incorporating elements of cooperative learning in the outcomes of the excursion emerged as a necessary link in mobilising synergy among future FP teachers.

■ Introduction

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a programme for developing student teachers' competencies and improving personal skills that are necessary for adaptability to a classroom setting (Ibrahim & Jaaffar 2017). As a way of supporting student teachers in identifying challenges they may meet in the future, WIL excursions encompass diverse methods and strategies that encourage self-exploration through the utilisation of communicative tools and the examination of practical experiences that are a foundational aspect of learning from practice (Thi Ngoc Ha, Dakich & Grieshaber 2022). Hence, North-West University (NWU) saw a need to include WIL excursions that are designed to sensitise first-year student teachers to the complexities of the teaching profession (Petersen, De Beer & Mentz 2020), as part of their teacher preparation programme. Work-integrated learning excursions are a form of experiential learning where student teachers are exposed to simulated activities on challenges related to diversity and social justice, where they are expected to work together in resolving the challenges based on authentic issues. Through these simulated activities, student teachers collaborate in small cooperative groups of five, representing all three campuses, diverse races, languages, religions and genders (among various other diversities) (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). The goal is to align their way of thinking by immersing them in a dynamic and socially diverse environment, preparing them cognitively and emotionally to embrace

diversity in their own future South African classrooms. This view is supported by Reyneke and Botha (2020), who assert that the purpose of NWU's WIL is to socialise newly admitted student teachers to the teaching profession by promoting skills of critical reflection and self-reflection as a way of replacing narrow-minded thinking about the teaching profession, diversity and social justice issues.

Amin and Ramrathan (2009) assert that the South African school landscape is a space where multiculturalism and multiracialism are a reality. Multiculturalism is a cultural multitude and trend that emphasises diversity (Dursunoğlu & Şengün 2020), while multiracialism refers to a society where races live together and political power is not monopolised (Dixon, Tredoux & Clack 2005). Even though multiculturalism and multiracialism are prominent points of reference (Vandeyar 2008) in the education system, Howard (2016) reports that teachers are often not prepared to effectively embrace such diverse populations in their classrooms. Amin and Ramrathan (2009) are of the view that student teachers need exposure to the diversity they will meet in a South African schooling landscape. This is necessary to be prepared for contextual diversity that is not only part of the teaching staff but also the learners. Diversity in schools emerges from the heterogeneity of learners from various backgrounds (Lorenzo & Reeves 2018), encompassing a mix of racial and ethnic groups (Hunt, Layton & Prince 2015) and spanning different spatial settings, including rural and urban areas (Lobao & Saenz 2002). Therefore, the NWU Faculty of Education WIL excursion is expected to equip student teachers with the necessary skills that will help them to be accommodative of diversity as a way to meet the demands of inclusivity in the 21st-century classroom.

A 21st-century classroom is characterised by challenges that call for teachers to be exceedingly well-prepared. These challenges are influenced by the rainbow nation for which South Africa is known, including globalisation and immigration, which make our classrooms even more diverse in many aspects (Cretu 2017). Hence, Smith (2016) is of the view that the shift from the three Rs of 20th-century education (reading, writing and arithmetic) to 21st-century education's three Rs (rigour, relevance and real-world factors) was necessary. These new three Rs emphasise factors such as personalised curricula that blend in-class experiences and out-of-class experiences, increasing industry preparation of student teachers as well as embedding critical thinking, cross-cultural collaborations and understandings (Woodside 2018). All these factors contribute to extending a teacher's responsibility beyond mere instructional delivery to encompass holistic support for every learner. Therefore, it becomes imperative to incorporate these essential skills as part of their training (Amin & Ramrathan 2009). Holistic education emphasises skills such as communication, collaboration and critical thinking skills relating to different cultural

differences (Brookfield 2017). It is therefore important that teacher training equips student teachers holistically, including the life skills that will be necessary to handle the reality of a diverse classroom (Brookfield 2017).

Several studies revealed that diversity in a South African context is the root cause of the tough challenges facing the education fraternity (Amin & Ramrathan 2009; Smith et al. 2018). These challenges, in turn, can lead to teacher burnout and a high attrition rate in cases where preparation to overcome them is not incorporated into student-teacher training (Billingsley & Bettini 2019). This lack of preparation could be viewed as a critical flaw in the educational system. The WIL excursion is not just beneficial but essential for strengthening the education workforce, as the teacher crisis is directly proportional to teacher professionalism (Shakrani 2008). Without such excursions, the system fails to provide structured environments that offer opportunities for professional development. These WIL excursions are vital because they offer real-life experiences and exposure to the diversity that student teachers will inevitably encounter (Petersen et al. 2020). According to Perryman and Calvert (2020), the poor retention of teachers in the profession underscores the inadequacy of academic qualifications alone to equip teachers with all the necessary skills. This inadequacy is particularly glaring in the Foundation Phase (FP), the first four years of formal schooling in the South African educational system, where laying a foundation for all necessary skills is crucial (De Beer 2023). Therefore, integrating WIL excursions into teacher training programmes is not just advantageous but imperative to address the systemic issues leading to teacher burnout and attrition. Sayed and McDonald (2017) affirm that the FP is experiencing problems when it comes to attracting the best candidates as well as teacher supply in general. To mitigate this, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) developed an Action Plan for 2019, focusing on guiding efforts to provide the right quality and quantity of teachers who possess not only qualifications but also the right competencies (DBE 2015). Supply interventions such as the Funza Lushaka Bursary Programme and Strengthening FP Teacher Education Programmes were introduced to address the aforementioned FP teacher procurement problems (Sayed & McDonald 2017). Consequently, quality FP student-teacher training includes preparing them to be competent and efficient in imparting 21st-century skills to their learners as these are necessary for embracing a democratic and socially just society (Arasomwan & Mashiya 2021). Therefore, WIL excursions could help in ensuring that NWU's FP student teachers acquire skills that promote social justice, which is long-awaited in our communities (Zakaria et al. 2019). In support of the above, Smith (2016) is of the view that training FP student teachers in 21st-century skills is a way not only of promoting said skills towards social justice but also of retaining them in the profession and thus supporting continuity in

education while limiting the vulnerability to low job satisfaction at the beginning of their teaching journey.

The present chapter departs from the requirement that teachers are expected to bring about social justice (Petersen et al. 2022); therefore, the FP is an influential phase in which social justice can be promoted (De Beer 2023). Like any other student teacher, FP student teachers choose this career with limited knowledge and exposure to the complexities of the profession, and this includes how to manage the diversity of South African classrooms (Smith et al. 2018). The gap between theory and practice in relation to socially just practices can distort FP student teachers' perspectives, leading to them employing a parrot approach where they will only mimic the teachers they had in the past (De Beer 2023). Therefore, exploring how the WIL excursions equipped the FP student teachers to value and embrace diversity was necessary. This study was guided by the following research question: How did WIL excursions equip FP student teachers with skills to value and accommodate diversity?

■ Diversity and social justice in Foundation Phase teacher education

Diversity in education refers to the inclusion and valuing of individuals from various backgrounds, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, culture, language and abilities (Gay 2018). Diversity involves creating equitable opportunities for all learners and addressing systemic barriers to ensure equal educational outcomes (Sleeter & Grant 2007). Social justice in education on the other side focuses on addressing inequalities and promoting fairness within educational systems (Gorski & Swalwell 2015). Social justice refers to the degree to which the society supports the diverse needs of its population without discriminating against other cultural groups or individual backgrounds (Karakoç & Sakiz 2021). It involves recognising and challenging systemic biases, discrimination and inequities that affect marginalised groups. While social justice issues may be uncomfortable topics to discuss, it is crucial to address them in a manner that encourages student teachers to acknowledge and accept diversity. This allows the student teachers to be better prepared to embrace the diversity they will encounter in their future classrooms as teachers (Spaull & Pretorius 2019). Embracing diversity is essential for creating inclusive and supportive learning environments that cater to the needs of all learners.

Teacher education programmes are expected to equip student teachers to effectively navigate diversity through practical engagement, as course content alone may not suffice to alter their beliefs concerning it (Tinkler & Tinkler 2013). Student teachers must be made aware of the significance of

comprehending and proactively addressing diversity, as the school population is progressively marked by its diversity, necessitating social justice within the education system. This is vital to ensure that all learners can benefit from a democratic process (Cochran-Smith 2004) from a young age – the FP being the basis of all learning to come. Integrating social justice education into teacher training will lead to the development of future teachers who are skilled social justice practitioners. By understanding the complexities of diversity and its implications, these teachers will be better equipped to teach effectively in diverse classrooms and can thrive in diverse school environments (Sebotsa, Petersen & Speight Vaughn 2020; Spaul & Pretorius 2019). This will ultimately contribute to fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments that cater to the needs of all learners, regardless of their diversity. Therefore, fostering FP student teachers' disposition towards diversity and social justice is a valuable approach to improve their social abilities and prepare them for their future careers. By doing so, they are taught how to act responsibly and treat their learners equally, ensuring an inclusive and equitable learning environment (Sebotsa et al. 2020). This is necessary as Pillay (2023) and Jama et al. (2024) point out that it is difficult for learners in low-income and rural communities to have access to quality education, thus leading to inequalities within the South African education system that needs to be addressed to uphold respect for human rights guided by individual needs.

■ Preparing Foundation Phase student teachers for diversity and social justice

Foundation Phase teaching applies to Grades R to 3 in the South African school system. Although it involves developing learners' educational base, where their love of learning, reading, writing, numeracy and life skills is instilled (Hirsh-Pasek et al. 2009), it is also a place of influence (Hugo & Masalesa 2021). According to Murris and Verbeek (2014), the FP is not only about teaching learners something and imparting traditions and values but also a space where subjectification takes place. Subjectification involves changing the quality of a person rather than making them fit into the existing order of social injustice (Biesta 2015).

Degotardi, Peterson and Hu (2022) assert that the FP is a critical period where learners learn to assign representational meaning to things including sounds and symbols; it is therefore a phase where diversity and social justice can be introduced in a way they can understand. The FP is seen as the best stage to fortify learners with the necessary values and knowledge needed to become socially just 21st-century citizens (Naude & Meier 2020). Even though our societies are diverse in many ways, introducing learners

to it in their early years is in line with the *South African Schools Act 84 of 1996*, Sections 7 and 15(2), which guarantee the enjoyment of all the rights as well as the prohibition of unfair discrimination. Foundation Phase teachers are doing more care work when compared to teachers in other phases. Hence, it is important to change their mindset, assumptions and expectations to be more inclusive, and their training should comprise this (Bryan, Martinache & Szukala 2023). Teachers can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of their learners. Embracing this change is crucial for creating equitable opportunities and ensuring the success of all learners in the educational setting, especially in the FP. The shift in assumptions is vital, as teachers' beliefs and assumptions significantly impact how they interact with diverse learners in their classrooms (Anyichie & Butler 2023). Awareness of and valuing diversity requires student teachers to proactively understand and learn how to support the unique needs of diverse learners in their classrooms. This includes developing knowledge and understanding of how to engage these learners effectively during the learning process and sustaining inclusive practices that promote their academic and social development. It is especially critical in the FP as it is a phase that foregrounds developmentally appropriate formal education and relevant practices (Dixon et al. 2018), while, it is where a learner develops in totality as a psychosocial being who can comprehend the surrounding world (Mahlo 2017). Hence, FP student teachers need to be trained so that they can model a foundation of acceptable behaviour that their learners can embrace to follow social justice principles for the rest of their school journey and beyond.

Therefore, it is fundamental for FP student teachers to be well prepared for such differences so that they can be in a position to ensure that social injustice is addressed while a fair and human-centred understanding is promoted (Sandage Crabtree & Schweer 2014). Though tertiary education is a space where students learn in practice, there are things that can only be learned from practice, one of which is handling social justice issues (Reyneke & Botha 2020). The WIL excursion is a programme that is designed to address issues such as dealing with culturally diverse classrooms, social justice and inclusion (De Beer, Van der Walt & Bunt 2020; Petersen & De Beer 2019).

To ensure meaningful engagement with diversity and social justice during WIL excursions, it is important to arrange simulated activities that address real-world issues rather than to deliver a lecture on social issues. This can involve introducing the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as providing critical frameworks for understanding social justice issues (Adams et al. 2022). Work-integrated learning is a pedagogical intervention where student teachers are immersed in real-world understandings and practices

that inform the application of the skills and knowledge to influence their own practices in their future classes (Dean et al. 2020).

■ **Pedagogical approaches in North-West University work-integrated learning excursions that support diversity and social justice**

Pedagogical approaches play a crucial role in designing and facilitating WIL excursions to promote diversity and social justice. In the excursions, first-year student teachers are involved in engaging pedagogies that include problem solving and cooperative learning in culturally diverse groups (De Beer, Petersen & Dunbar-Krige 2012), which provide student teachers with awareness of the benefits of group work (Petersen et al. 2020). Group work that fosters cooperation among group members is encouraged and scaffolded to ensure participation, while it contributes to preparing student teachers for diversity and social justice (Johnson & Johnson 2018). Student teachers in groups interact and are encouraged to ensure that each member contributes either a skill or expertise for the benefit of all members, thus promoting interdependence (Chong & Razek 2014; Dean et al. 2020). By incorporating inclusive practices within WIL, transformative learning experiences that foster a deeper understanding of diversity, social justice issues and the importance of equity in the workplace are created (De Beer 2023). Literature indicates that pedagogical approaches should include preparing students for diversity and social justice, using culturally responsive pedagogy, critical reflection pedagogy, problem-based learning, giving students a voice in their learning, using formative (supportive) feedback, facilitating learning towards the intended outcomes, play-based learning and dialogue and collaborative learning (Petersen, Mentz & De Beer 2023; Van Vuuren 2020).

■ **Culturally responsive pedagogy**

Culturally responsive pedagogy emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing diverse cultures and backgrounds that can be found in most 21st-century classrooms (Gay 2018). It involves incorporating student teachers' own cultural experiences and perspectives into the learning process while simultaneously respecting learners' or others' diverse cultures. When designing WIL excursions, it is imperative to employ culturally responsive pedagogical approaches that acknowledge the diversity of the communities where student teachers will work and interact throughout the duration of their careers (Hammond 2014). This can involve

integrating cultural knowledge by ensuring that each cultural or ethnic group is given time to showcase different cultural practices while other groups are encouraged to be respectful and show appreciation-inclusive interactions during the excursions (Ferdman 2013).

■ Critical reflection and dialogue

Critical reflection is a vital pedagogical tool for student teachers to examine their assumptions, biases and privileges. During WIL excursions, student teachers are allowed time to be involved in guided discussions and group reflections, where they critically analyse their experiences through a diversity and social justice lens (Steenekamp, Van der Merwe & Mehmedova 2018). Having such activities can propel student teachers to explore the implications of their interactions in relation to diversity and social justice issues. Engaging FP student teachers in such activities can stimulate ideas in relation to how they can foster reflection on their own ideas regarding and stereotyping of different people, cultures and so on. Also, FP student teachers – in particular – can start contemplating diversity and how to approach this in an age-related way for their learners. Furthermore, critical thinking and open-mindedness are counted among the 21st-century skills that teachers must develop in their training (Esen 2021).

■ Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning approaches foster active engagement, knowledge sharing and perspective-taking among student teachers. In the context of NWU WIL excursions, the use of problem-solving tasks where student teachers are engaged in groups can therefore allow them to reflect on and evaluate their shortcomings in relation to how they act towards people different to themselves, as opposed to their thoughts prior to their exposure to real-life situations (Msimanga et al. 2021). By working together, student teachers can gain diverse insights that will motivate them to challenge stereotypes and develop empathy towards people who are different from themselves, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and socially just learning environment (Juvonen et al. 2019). It will also prepare them to model similar behaviour in their future classrooms with their learners (Barends & Nel 2017).

The next section describes how the WIL excursions, as part of teacher training, were designed and how those design principles could potentially contribute to capacitating FP student teachers' skills to value and accommodate diversity in their future careers.

■ **Work-integrated learning as a platform to capacitate Foundation Phase student teachers with skills to value and accommodate diversity**

Work-integrated learning excursions are a form of experiential learning, where student teachers are placed in a simulated working space with the intention of inculcating what cannot be taught in the lecture hall (Raghubar 2021). Furthermore, this approach is beneficial in not only orientating student teachers into the teaching profession but also raising their awareness of social issues they must acknowledge and address in their future classrooms (Gazeley & Dunne 2007). These excursions can also expose them to different contexts, cultures, languages and pedagogies. In this approach, inequalities are dismantled by exposing student teachers' own biases that are also found in society with the purpose of preparing them to productively address such matters in their classrooms (Bybee, Whiting & Cutri 2021). The WIL excursions can prepare student teachers for diverse classrooms and teaching social justice in South African classrooms, particularly at the introductory educational stage of FP. Following are some ways in which WIL excursions were constructed to contribute to their preparation for this task:

- *Exposure to diverse environments:* WIL excursions expose student teachers to unfamiliar environments, such as campsites or online learning environments with diverse populations. This exposure helps them understand and appreciate different cultures, backgrounds and perspectives, hence fostering a sense of inclusivity and empathy (Du Toit & Petersen 2023).
- *Interaction with diverse cultures, languages, genders, religions and races:* During these excursions, student teachers are directly exposed to diversity, as they interact with students from different ethnicities, abilities or socio-economic backgrounds. This first-hand interaction provides an opportunity to recognise and accommodate the diverse learners that student teachers may one day find in a classroom, thus sensitising them to the need for inclusive teaching practices (Du Toit & Petersen 2023).
- *Culturally responsive approaches:* The WIL excursion programme includes a cultural night (Rainbow Concert, also see Chapter 3) where students showcase their cultural uniqueness portraying it through poetry, dance and singing. This engages student teachers and enhances skills related to play-based pedagogy of learning, tailored to blend academic work with activities such as the use of songs, art and photographs, which impart socio-cultural consciousness that can be useful for FP teachers when they intend to introduce the importance of

embracing diversity in early years, thereby developing deliberate consciousness about differences (Mohan & Jepkemboi 2019).

- *Observation of diverse teaching approaches*: Student teachers can observe various teaching approaches employed by experienced facilitators (e.g. university teachers) during WIL excursions. This exposure allows student teachers to learn from and model different pedagogical strategies used to support and engage diverse learners effectively (Kruger & Mdakane 2023).
- *Collaboration with diverse professionals*: WIL excursions often involve collaborating with diverse groups of people, such as facilitators, administrators and campsite employees. This collaboration fosters teamwork, cross-cultural communication and understanding of diverse perspectives, preparing student teachers for future collaborations in multicultural educational settings (De Beer 2023).
- *Reflective practice and self-awareness*: WIL excursions provide an opportunity for student teachers to reflect on their own beliefs, biases and cultural assumptions while participating in small cooperative groups. Through reflective practice and self-awareness, they can identify and challenge any preconceived notions they may hold, leading to more inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices (Petersen et al. 2022).

Work-integrated learning excursions play a prominent role in bridging the gap between theory and practice (Reyneke & Botha 2020). They also provide exposure to activities that highlight socially just practices (Petersen et al. 2022). These learning activities engage FP student teachers in a way that makes them realise their learning needs, which they cannot easily grasp in their comfort zones (Jackson & Bridgstock 2021; Petersen et al. 2020) as the DBE emphasises that congruence must exist between motivations to enter the teaching profession and willingness to make a difference on realities in the South African education system (Sayed & McDonald 2017). Du Toit and Petersen (2023) assert that comfort zones are characterised by satisfaction where there is an unwillingness to learn new things. Hence, WIL excursions are learning zones where risks are taken, student teachers are open to knowing the unknown and older skills are challenged to open space for the new. Du Toit and Petersen (2023) suggest that learning that is impactful can only take place in an uncomfortable zone because it is where people get to know their needs and what to do to achieve them. Work-integrated excursions challenge comfort zones in different ways including taking student teachers away from campus to an unfamiliar environment and being grouped with diversity in mind.

This approach ensures that student teachers receive valuable and relevant learning opportunities while maintaining a supportive and conducive environment for their professional growth. The FP student teachers are also beneficiaries of the WIL excursions whose needs should

be well known when designing the programme (Olivier & Kunene 2022) to prepare them as future teachers (De Beer 2023). It allows student teachers opportunities to experience the richness of diversity, which builds on their personalities to develop the inner capacity necessary for dealing with people from different cultures whose values are different from theirs (Van Vuuren 2020). Therefore, as FP teachers are referred to as people of influence (Horner & Tetreault 2017), it is imperative that FP student teachers are challenged to address their own stereotypes and biases before they will be able to impart such to the learners they will teach.

The potential advantages of WIL excursions in fostering the skills of student teachers, including FP student teachers, to value and accommodate diversity are evident. However, it is essential to recognise that their effectiveness can vary based on factors such as the excursion design, facilitator support (see Chapter 10) and the availability of debriefing and reflection opportunities for the student teachers. Therefore, we launched the study reported here to explore whether these intended benefits in the WIL excursions are realised for FP students.

■ Theoretical framework

Experiential learning theory underpins this study as it is known to be all-embracing of learning approaches such as problem- and inquiry-based learning. This theory is based on four consecutive phases, which are repetitive in nature that are concrete experiences, reflective observation of the experiences, the abstract conceptualisation of the observation and active experimentation (Clark, Threeton & Ewing 2010). The experiential learning theory of Kolb and Kolb (2009) enabled us to understand that learning is conceived as a process that allows those engaged in learning to reflect regularly so that they can re-think their actions and be ready to adapt them. The theory is about hands-on learning where those who learn and reflect on the process have a chance to challenge their personal beliefs for them to be transformed. Experiential learning purports that transformation occurs when reflections lead to new ways of thinking and doing things (Girvan, Conneely & Tangney 2016). In the WIL excursion, the student teachers learned through hands-on experience when engaging in different activities that involve learning by doing, brainstorming, thinking and reflecting on their experiences (Girvan et al. 2016; McCarthy 2010, 2016). Healey and Jenkins (2007) define experiential learning theory as active learning that provides opportunities for a variety of learning methods including learning by doing, work-based learning and problem-based learning. This theory aligns well with this study that focused on the professional development of student teachers through experiential learning in lived experiences, thereby influencing their future practices

(Clark et al. 2010). It also relates to this study, because of its element of allowing participants, reflection time where they can be aware of themselves in relation to how they see people from cultures different from theirs.

■ Methods

The methodology section of this chapter describes the research design, population, sampling, data analysis and ethical considerations.

■ Research design

The present study adopted a basic qualitative research design. Qualitative research is the process of data collecting and analysis that is not numerical (Sutton & Austin 2015). Maree (2020a) mentions that qualitative research is usually based on an interpretative philosophy that is aimed at examining the meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data. Furthermore, the qualitative approach attempts to make meaning of a specific phenomenon by analysing participants' perceptions, values, attitudes, knowledge, understanding, feelings and experiences of the phenomenon (Maree 2020b). One major strength that made a qualitative approach particularly appropriate for this study is that it can provide an in-depth account and details of the phenomenon that is otherwise difficult to achieve with quantitative methods, and it seeks to gain rich, comprehensive data from a small number of participants (Creswell & Creswell 2005). The phenomenon that the current study examined was how WIL excursions equipped FP student teachers with skills in valuing and accommodating diversity.

■ Population and sampling

The WIL excursions were compulsory for all the first-year student teachers registered at the three campuses of the NWU in 2023. The current study, however, concentrated only on the first-year BEd FP student teachers who attended the excursions. Field-Springer (2020) holds the view that the fundamental use of a sample is to allow the researchers to conduct the study with the people selected from the population so that the results of their study can be utilised to drive conclusions applicable to the population. Because attending the excursion was compulsory for all registered FP students, the population was $n = 526$. Purposive sampling was used to select 526 first-year FP student teachers as potential participants. The principle of informed consent was used as a requirement for participants to contribute data for the study (Flick 2009). Only the participants who signed the informed consent prior to attending the excursion as an indication that they participated voluntarily took part in the study ($n = 463$).

From these, participant contributions were randomly selected as the data sample for this study, and data saturation was reached after analysing 50 contributions.

■ Data collection

In the current study, data were collected by means of reflective portfolios (RP) and post-excursion open-ended questionnaires (OEs), which FP student teachers completed during the WIL excursions. The following questions were analysed in the current study to gain an understanding of how WIL excursions equipped FP student teachers to value and accommodate diversity:

The following questions were from RP Activity 13 (Questions 5 and 6 were not included as they did not address the focus of this study):

1. How do you feel about interacting with people from different ethnic groups?
2. Tell us about your experiences during which you engaged with a culturally distinct person.
3. What are your thoughts on teachers' cultural sensitivity?
4. Do you think that cultural sensitivity and cultural competence are necessary in education?
5. Tell us about some encounters you experienced during the excursion that have impacted your views on cultural sensitivity.
6. Do you think it is important to address stereotyping in schools, why or why not?

Open-ended questionnaires – Question 9: Did you formulate any learning goals for yourself during and after this excursion (e.g. working on your communication skills, reading more about your chosen profession)? Please name them and explain why it was necessary.

■ Data analysis

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse data. During the data analysis process, as co-researchers, we grouped data sets based on their similarities using Clark and Braun's (2013) process of coding. Data were read carefully before the process of coding, categorisation and theme development took place, leading to the selection of pertinent quotations.

■ Ethical considerations

Ethical requirements and considerations were adhered to in the following ways: Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty and University

committees responsible for issuing it. Then, before students were engaged in the research, the extent and contribution of the study and the content of the consent forms were explained to the students. In the consent form, all students were ensured of their privacy and the confidential treatment of the data and reporting thereof.

■ Findings and discussion

The main themes that emerged from the analysed data were (1) mixed feelings that arose from interacting with people from different ethnic groups, (2) exposing personal stereotypes enhanced FP student teachers' cultural sensitivity, (3) the exposure to different cultures as an enabling factor to value diversity and (4) the skills that FP student teachers linked to valuing diversity.

■ Theme 1: Mixed feelings arose from interacting with people from different ethnic groups

The findings reveal that FP student teachers experienced mixed feelings as they were grouped with students from different races, cultures, languages and campuses. The following excerpts attest to this:

'At first, I was not comfortable because they were speaking different languages, but after a moment I felt so comfortable around them, and the experience was amazing.' (FPS, RP1, May 2023)

'I feel so excited because I saw how their cultural origins are [*sic*] and how they are so creative. The excursion was really a great idea as it taught me different ways to deal with learners as a teacher, how I can resolve learners' problems, and make them feel good because I got to learn new things from other ethnic groups.' (FPS, RP1, May 2023)

'Although I was not at ease when my friends were left in the upper hall while I went to the other hall, when I was working with my group it felt great because I managed to learn a lot about diversity, we are in this country [*sic*], and just how beautiful we all are.' (FPS, RP2, May 2023)

From these quotes, the pattern of initial unease gradually being replaced by positive feelings of understanding and even learning is evident. Most of the students who participated reported that they were happy and excited when they interacted with different ethnic groups. However, there were a few students who felt uncomfortable initially but ultimately enjoyed the experience of working in a group with students who were different from them. This finding matches those observed in earlier studies, in relation to mixed feelings when interacting with people from other cultures. Van Vuuren (2020) and Adams et al. (2022) indicate that although some people appreciate diversity, to others, it is still a contentious issue characterised by

mixed feelings of which some do not wish to be part. This indicates that the effort to sensitise and prepare future teachers to confront and analyse their feelings in this regard must be continued. Accommodating other people different from you can be enhanced as you spend time with them (Jackson & Bridgstock 2021). Moreover, their reflections show how students became more accommodative of diversity, confirming the claim of Girvan et al. (2016) who indicate that reflections in experiential learning led to new ways of thinking and doing.

■ Theme 2: Exposing personal stereotypes enhanced student teachers' cultural sensitivity

The analysis of the data shows that being in a diverse group exposed participating FP student teachers' personal stereotypes, as indicated from the reflection portfolio:

'Yes, because it helped to reveal hidden assumptions I had heard about people from cultures different from mine.' (FPS, RP8, May 2023)

'Yes, stereotyping is one thing I must be open-minded about as a student and being exposed to different cultures made me know that it's not right to stereotype.' (FPS, RP7 May 2023)

Many FP student teachers admitted to the stereotypes they had towards cultures different from their own. However, the interactions scaffolded into the WIL excursions made them realise the negative effects of these. Furthermore, they also exhibited open-mindedness – a critical 21st-century skill that teachers must develop.

When FP student teachers admit to having stereotypes, it may sensitise them to becoming more culturally sensitive, as emerged from our data:

'Yes, student teachers should learn to respect one another regardless of their skin colour, race or even where they come from.' (FPS, RP8, May 2023)

'Yes, because students must know that we must never treat each other differently in terms of culture, gender, or sexuality. We all need to experience the same love and comfort; everyone must feel welcome in school and consider his/her school as the happiest place ever. No one must be discriminated against or segregated. Addressing stereotypes in schools [*sic*] going to build students to become better and it also builds self-confidence in them.' (FPS, RP8, May 2023)

'[...] I learned that no matter the difference in skin colour or culture, there is something that I can learn from people of different cultures.' (FPS, RP7, May 2023)

The responses from student teachers when they were answering their views on the importance of addressing stereotyping show that, after engaging with different cultures, they became aware of the importance of

respect when dealing with people different from them. It is also evident that being in the group helped them to acknowledge that there is something that you can learn from other people regardless of differences. This finding correlates with what Dean et al. (2020) and Chong and Razek (2014) said about the promotion of interdependence through interactions with people who are different from you, while on the other side, it challenges one's stereotypes and assumptions. When student teachers interact in groups and are encouraged to ensure that each member contributes either a skill or expertise for the benefit of all members, it promotes interdependence (Chong & Razek 2014). Therefore, as FP teachers are viewed as people of influence (Horner & Tetreault 2017), it is imperative that they are challenged to address their own stereotypes and biases before they might impart such to the learners they will teach.

■ **Theme 3: Exposure to different cultures was an enabling factor towards valuing diversity**

The findings from the data analysis in the current study exhibit that being exposed to and working with students from different cultures helped FP student teachers value and embrace diversity. They also indicated that they understood its value for their future careers as FP teachers:

'Yes, because education is a type of profession that requires diversity in terms of culture, language, and religion.' (FPS, RP4, May 2023)

'Cultural sensitivity and cultural competence are both important because they help encourage learners to use their own strengths and encourage the acknowledgement and acceptance of differences in appearance, behaviour, and culture.' (FPS, RP3, May 2023)

'Yes, this helped us as student teachers as we gained a more comprehensive understanding of different cultures, and it helped us to interact differently with other people and know that if we can give each other a chance, we will be more productive, as combining our skills will benefit the whole group.' (FPS, RP4, May 2023)

Based on the aforementioned responses, FP student teachers saw the importance of accommodating diverse people in the profession itself, as they associated working together with productivity to the benefit of everyone. The current study found that exposure to different contexts, cultures, languages and pedagogies influenced how student teachers can become accommodative of diversity, thus contributing to meaningful experiential learning, in line with descriptions by Girvan et al. (2016). This finding concurs with Healey and Jenkins (2007), who assert that much learning comes through exposure to various opportunities of lived experiences as opposed to theory. It implies that FP student teachers need to be taken out of their comfort zones for them to become familiar with

how it feels to work with people from diverse groups as a way of providing them with a skill they would need in their classes in the future.

Foundation Phase student teachers in the current study believed cultural activity and cultural competence are valuable in an educational setting. They indicated that education is a profession that should embrace diversity in terms of culture, language, religion and other factors that make us different, supporting the usefulness of using this culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay 2018). The implication is that the experiential learning threaded through the WIL excursions exposed FP student teachers to diversity as one of the hidden complexities of the teaching profession. These student teachers, therefore, realised the necessity for valuing and embracing diversity in their own lives, as well as in their future teaching careers.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are consistent with those of Bybee et al. (2021), who indicate that allowing people to discover their own biases is an effective way of dismantling them, and it also provides the audacity to challenge them wherever they appear. Student teachers also indicated that engagement with other students who are different from them helped them to be open minded and treat everyone with respect, as it encouraged them not only to acknowledge differences but also to accept different appearances, behaviour and cultures (Elik, Wiener & Corkum 2010).

■ Theme 4: The skills that Foundation Phase student teachers link to valuing diversity

The students went on the excursions in anticipation of developing some skills that would contribute to their preparation as future FP teachers. Data analysis showed that the excursions met this need. The quotes bear evidence of this, particularly regarding developing students' communication skills:

'I need to work on my communication skills, in a sense, I have noticed that I am very rude towards other people, I need to take responsibility as some learners will be different from what I expect and prefer.' (FPT, OEQ, May 2023)

'Social skills and communication skills are necessary since you get to learn and have knowledge of how other people see things and interpret them.' (FPT, OEQ, May 2023)

From the excerpts and discussions, it is evident that FP student teachers appreciated the importance of communication, critical thinking, open-mindedness and social skills in valuing and embracing diversity. Consequently, working with people from diverse groups led to

self-awareness, as the FP student teacher who owed up to their rudeness explained, but they were also willing to work on this issue before entering her profession where she would be working with young children. Therefore, the WIL excursions contributed to making students aware of their own needs and a need to remove anti-social behaviours, and on the other hand, a willingness to develop positive attitudes and skills, which points towards self-directed learning. These findings resonate with those of Ibrahim and Jaafar (2017) and Brookfield (2017) who assert that holistic student-teacher training needs to improve personal skills including communication and collaboration skills that are necessary for managing and valuing diversity. Lastly, experiential learning allowed FP student teachers to reflect on their actions and become more open-minded by being accommodative to other people's views and interpretations. This echoes the statement of Kolb and Kolb (2009) that experiential learning is a process that allows students time to re-think and adapt their actions.

■ Conclusion

Exposing FP student teachers to the realities of diversity was a way of ensuring that they not only acknowledge multiculturalism and multiracialism but also have first-hand experience of its reality. The findings of this study show that the experiential learning embedded in the WIL excursions capacitated FP student teachers to embrace the diversity that characterises South African society and that they will encounter in their classrooms one day. This shows that WIL excursions contributed to unearthing the skills FP student teachers need to have or made them aware of their need to work self-directedly on them in cases where they are lacking, as these skills are necessary for embracing diversity. The WIL excursions, as a form of experiential learning, allowed students to reflect on how it feels to be in a culturally diverse group, while they were simultaneously faced with the challenge of attending to their own biases and assumptions towards cultures different from their own. Participants' knowledge creation, or deeper understanding regarding the value of diversity, was based on their transformative and hands-on experiences when they were actively involved in the WIL activities. These challenged their stereotyping and personal beliefs and opened their minds to becoming more accommodating of others or otherness – in their own lives and in preparation for their future careers. The findings revealed that FP student teachers were able to critically reflect on their personal beliefs and some saw a need to make self-directed adjustments in their approaches towards diversity before they can qualify as teachers.

First-year student teachers' perceptions of diversity and inclusivity in entrepreneurial learning

Adri du Toit

Research Unit Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

Hendrik du Plessis

School of Commerce and Social Studies in Education,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

■ Abstract

The South African Education Sector Plan for 2030 stipulates that teacher education must include preparation for entrepreneurial learning. Teacher preparation for enacting this Plan has received some consideration; however, the diversity of students' prior learning negates a one-size-fits-all approach, especially in a country such as South Africa, with its exceedingly diverse population and educational contexts. In socio-constructivist learning, both educators and students contribute to the learning process, providing opportunities for inclusion and various

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viewpoints to support diversity. Students' voices – in the form of their perceptions – could, therefore, contribute to scaffolding diverse and inclusive entrepreneurial learning content as part of teacher preparation for meeting the goals of the Education Sector Plan for 2030. The purpose of the investigation reported in this chapter was to explore how students' voices could be included in the development of their entrepreneurial learning programme. This purpose was attained by exploring first-year student teachers' initial perceptions of entrepreneurial learning and their perceptions regarding linking aspects of diversity and inclusivity with entrepreneurial learning in their future classrooms. All first-year student teachers at the North-West University Unit for Distance Learning attending the work-integrated learning (WIL) excursions in 2023 were invited to participate voluntarily in an exploratory qualitative investigation. Participants completed an online Google Forms questionnaire with 10 open-ended qualitative questions. Thematic analysis was conducted by a team of teacher educators with extensive experience in entrepreneurial learning, curriculum design and teacher preparation programmes. Two main themes aligned with the research questions were used to structure and discuss the findings. The findings contributed meaningful insights regarding first-year student teachers' foundational knowledge and understanding of entrepreneurial learning. It also shows that students can succinctly link entrepreneurial learning with aspects of inclusivity and diversity. Students made several feasible suggestions for linking these aspects to implement them in their future classrooms. Based on these findings, it was concluded that entrepreneurial learning as part of the WIL excursions positively enhances the preparation of future teachers and contributes to the attainment of the Education Sector Plan goals.

■ Introduction

The South African Education Sector Plan for 2030 stipulates that entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship must be included in teachers' training curricula as an essential component (Department of Basic Education [DBE] 2016). The Education Sector Plan envisions that teachers in all subjects and school phases will be prepared to implement entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial learning across South African school education (DBE 2016). This vision indicates a need to expand investigations into how entrepreneurial learning can be developed and implemented in broader subjects and school phases than the business-related subjects in which entrepreneurship was traditionally situated.

Research and developments to attain the goals of the Sector Plan have been underway since 2016, but progress is sluggish. Investigations have

been conducted on the content, skills and competencies to include in entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial learning programmes (Du Toit & Kempen 2018), the structuring of such learning plans (Du Toit & Kempen 2020; Koekemoer & Booyse 2013), as well as the pedagogical approaches needed to support effective learning therein (Du Toit 2021). Heeding the call in the Sector Plan, some studies focused on developing or expanding entrepreneurial learning as part of teacher education (Du Toit 2022) and particularly as part of the work-integrated learning (WIL) programme that is a compulsory requirement of the Bachelor of Education (BEd) teacher preparation qualification at the North-West University (NWU). Two such studies explored, for example, the construction of environments that would be conducive to fostering entrepreneurial learning (Du Toit 2023b) and how such learning can contribute meaningfully to bridging the theory-practice divide for student teachers (Du Toit & Petersen 2023).

The process of developing and refining entrepreneurial learning for teacher education is, therefore, ongoing. In 2023, the designers of entrepreneurial learning content in the NWU WIL programme decided to take a reflective step back to inform future adaptations of this learning. Their reflective stance was based on the following: One recommendation emerging from previous research at the NWU was that students' understanding of the concept of entrepreneurship needs to be carefully constructed and verified to enable students' grasp of the subsequent learning content (Du Toit 2023b). Furthermore, first-year students enter university from vastly diverse backgrounds. The diversity spans students' languages, cultures, socio-economic circumstances and prior experiences, to name only a few. The diversity and inequality in South African schools exponentially multiply the variations in students' secondary educational experiences. Hence, all first-year students do not have a shared or equal understanding or experience of entrepreneurial learning prior to attending the WIL programme. Instead of only focusing on what the teacher educators wanted to accomplish, the entry-level (foundational) knowledge of our first-year students at the outset had to be considered. This realisation aligned with the findings by Floris and Floris (2021); in that the programme developers had to acknowledge that each student 'is a unique individual that brings different prior knowledge, personal experiences and understandings to the table' (p. 273) and recognised that they had to 'design learning experiences based on learners' existing understanding of concepts and prior knowledge' (pp. 268–269). It was necessary to explore and understand which entrepreneurship knowledge, perceptions and experiences students entered the university classroom with before subsequent learning that would be scaffolded on their prior knowledge could be planned.

The diversity of contexts from which first-year students come to universities and in which such programmes are implemented negates a one-size-fits-all approach to entrepreneurial learning. In countries such as South Africa, which have exceedingly diverse populations, designing entrepreneurial learning that acknowledges diversity and supports inclusivity is vital. Universities have also joined the quest to become 'more proactive in the pursuit of diversity and inclusion initiatives' (Slatten et al. 2023:542). Initial exploratory literature reviews for the current investigation indicated that research linking diversity, equity and inclusion with entrepreneurial learning is increasing (Bates, Bradford & Seamans 2018; Gess, Brivio & De Leo 2021; Hietanen 2015; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2019; Slatten et al. 2023; Tihic, Hadzic & McKelvie 2021). According to Zainuddin et al. (2019), entrepreneurial learning programmes might even be less successful if the diversity of the students therein is not considered. Yet, although the diverse backgrounds and prior entrepreneurship knowledge of the first-year student teachers should be considered, all these future teachers must also be prepared to teach in diverse situations (Hietanen 2015). A similar viewpoint is expressed in the Sector Plan, which notes that the intention of the teacher training they require is, among others, to 'give teachers an understanding of how social entrepreneurship can address the current socio-economic challenges facing South Africa through marrying a problem-solving mindset with empathy for fellow South Africans' (DBE 2016:41). This last statement underscores the importance of considering diversity when planning entrepreneurial learning in teacher training, but also that entrepreneurial learning – when implemented well – supports inclusivity. Informed thus, the programme developers were determined to purposely link entrepreneurial learning with inclusivity and diversity issues in the teacher preparation WIL programme.

The aforementioned issues suggested that the problem of how and what to include when adjusting the NWU WIL excursion programme's entrepreneurship content was twofold. Firstly, the diversity of perceptions, knowledge and experiences that students bring to their graduate studies, which could help gauge their foundational entrepreneurship knowledge, has not been adequately considered. Secondly, it became essential to highlight the important role of entrepreneurial learning in addressing diversity and supporting inclusivity – principles that these future teachers will need to propagate in their own classrooms one day to align with the intentions of the Education Sector Plan. Yet, the programme developers could not plan adaptations to the programme before they knew what their students' perceptions and understanding regarding these concepts (entrepreneurial learning, inclusivity and diversity) were. Informed by

constructivist learning principles, which require a suitable foundation of prior understanding on which to construct or scaffold subsequent learning (Kay & Kibble 2016), as well as the participation of various role players – including educators and students – they chose to start their investigation with the critical aspect of giving student teachers a voice in the planning of their own education. This meant that they had to actively invite students to share their voices – in the form of their perceptions, experiences and suggestions regarding the three concepts mentioned before. In the simplest terms: the programme developers needed to understand what students know of these concepts (entrepreneurial learning, inclusivity and diversity) and how they think it can be used in their future careers. Thus, the following research questions were formulated to guide the current investigation and address the problem that this chapter reports on: (1) What are student teachers' initial perceptions of entrepreneurial learning? and (2) What are first-year student teachers' perceptions of linking aspects of diversity and inclusivity with entrepreneurial learning in their future classrooms?

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows: conceptual clarifications are provided against the background of the problem investigated, and the theoretical framework that underpinned the study is elucidated. The research methods employed to collect and analyse the data are explained, followed by details and a discussion of the findings. The chapter ends with the study conclusion and suggestions for future research.

■ Background and conceptual clarifications

This section explains the relevance and interpretation of the core concepts used in the current study. It begins with an explanation of entrepreneurial learning as a key aspect of teacher education in South Africa. This is followed by details regarding the construction or scaffolding of the current entrepreneurial learning section included in the WIL excursion of NWU. Finally, the connections between entrepreneurial learning, diversity and inclusivity are clarified.

■ Entrepreneurial learning as a key aspect of teacher preparation in South Africa

The usage of the term entrepreneurial learning, rather than entrepreneurship education, is becoming more common in educational research. Entrepreneurship education, which focuses on learning to become an entrepreneur, new venture creation or starting a business (Hägg & Kurczewska 2022; Lackéus 2020), is often narrowly associated with teaching and learning in subjects related to commerce, business

administration or business management. On the other hand, *entrepreneurial learning* has a broader focus and purpose.

The '-ial' suffix in the term entrepreneurial signifies 'relating to or connected with' (Collins Online Dictionary 2023). The implication is clear that being entrepreneurial, therefore, does not have the sole purpose of being or becoming an entrepreneur. Rather, it refers to a way of thinking – a mindset – or behaving entrepreneurially related to entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurial activity is not limited to venture creation or business management but has broader value creation as its core (Schoeniger et al. 2021). The value created is often linked to solving a problem or issue and can benefit the learner, the community, the environment and more (Baskaran, Chandran & Ng 2019).

The responsibility for and ownership of the learning process in entrepreneurial learning is shifted to 'the learner (or student) who chooses to learn about entrepreneurship (for whichever reason)' (Du Toit 2023b:124), whether their goal is to become an entrepreneur or not. Entrepreneurial learning encompasses developing knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as a positive mindset. Entrepreneurial skills closely align with 21st-century skills, including problem-identification and problem-solving, adaptability, communication, critical – and creative thinking and collaboration, which employers demand (Schoeniger et al. 2021), but that are also considered to be essential life skills (Van Beek et al. 2014) or even survival skills (Wagner 2010). Entrepreneurial learning, therefore, contributes to preparing students to adapt and thrive – and not just survive – in life and work (Du Toit 2022; Lackéus 2015). The potential benefits of entrepreneurial learning to prepare student teachers for their lives and careers after graduation are resounding.

If student teachers are prepared to effectively facilitate the development of entrepreneurial skills in their own classrooms in future, similar benefits will be imparted to their learners. This overarching goal forms the foundation of the South African Education Sector Plan for 2030's stipulation that entrepreneurial learning must be included in teachers' training curricula as an essential component (DBE 2016). To support the attainment of this far-reaching goal, entrepreneurial learning as part of teacher preparation programmes must be constructed exceedingly well. By 2023, seven years after the publication of the Education Sector Plan, only a few universities in South Africa have taken up the challenge to develop and expand entrepreneurial learning in teacher education programmes (De Villiers 2023). One university that has shown exceptional development on this front is the NWU (De Villiers 2023).

■ **Embedding entrepreneurial learning in work-integrated learning excursions at the North-West University**

Several efforts have been implemented at the NWU to intensively develop and expand entrepreneurial learning as part of teacher preparation. A dedicated team of teacher educators from various subject fields collaboratively design and develop projects and programmes to expand knowledge, understanding and enactment of entrepreneurial learning. These relate to curriculum (Du Toit & Gaotlhobogwe 2017), content (Du Toit & Kempen 2020) and pedagogy (Du Toit 2021; Koekemoer & Booyse 2013; Kruger 2022; Van Tonder & Du Toit 2020). Some of these studies focused on exploring and developing the mindset of students (Du Toit 2023b) and lecturers (Du Toit 2023a). Primarily, opportunities to embed entrepreneurial learning into existing teacher qualifications, such as the BEd degree or the postgraduate certificate of education (PGCE), are explored. Recently, accredited short learning programmes have also been developed for pre-service (student-) teachers, as well as in-service (practising) teachers, expanding these learning opportunities outside the NWU. Yet, most of these efforts still only impacted a limited number of teachers. To adhere to the requirement of the Education Sector Plan that *all* teachers must be prepared for entrepreneurial learning (DBE 2016:41), renewed attempts were made to purposely expand entrepreneurial learning and reach more student teachers with these efforts.

As a result, from 2022, the WIL programme developers embedded entrepreneurial learning as a new core component in the compulsory BEd WIL excursion programme for first-year student teachers at the NWU (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). The compulsory nature of the programme meant that all first-year student teachers would be introduced to the concept of entrepreneurial learning and its value-creation potential. A total of 2200 students attended the WIL excursion in 2022. The initial introduction of entrepreneurial learning as a component in the WIL excursion programme attempted to nudge first-year student teachers towards becoming more knowledgeable about entrepreneurial learning, based on the conceptual map proposed by Hägg and Kurczewska (2022). The entrepreneurial learning programme developers, therefore, endeavoured to create a space in which first-year students could gradually ‘advance from lecturer-based to self-directed learning, supporting their development from novice to expert’ on entrepreneurial learning content (Du Toit 2023b:126). The entrepreneurial learning programme developers scaffolded the content to

introduce student teachers to the concept of entrepreneurial learning (as opposed to entrepreneurship education), highlight its importance in teacher preparation, explain its value-creation potential and introduce the S.P.E.C.I.A.L. acronym for planning learning environments that will be conducive to entrepreneurial learning in their future classrooms (Du Toit 2023b). S.P.E.C.I.A.L. learning environments are Socially interactive, create a sense of *Purpose*, are *Enjoyable*, inspire *Curiosity*, encourage *Iteration* and foster *Active engagement* and *Learner autonomy* (Du Toit 2023b:133). It was vital that this learning would be meaningful and transferable to students' own lives and future teaching careers. In line with the proposition of Neck and Corbett (2018), the programme developers strove to motivate and inspire their student teachers to *want* to effectively facilitate entrepreneurial learning content in their future classrooms.

A student-centred, problem-based teaching-learning approach was used to scaffold the learning process in the excursion. Students were expected to be actively involved in and contribute to the learning process. The principles of problem-based learning, such as using a wicked problem (which can be a social or cultural issue or concern) as a starting point, scaffolding learning to allow students to gradually become more independent, self-directed learners, linking learning to real-world experiences and utilising formative feedback and reflective practices, were central in its construction (Du Toit 2023b). Wicked problems are complex and do not have simple solutions (Wiek et al. 2014), creating numerous opportunities for critical thinking, collaboration and linking learning to real-world issues.

Although this first round of embedding entrepreneurial learning in the WIL excursion reached a large cohort of student teachers and resulted in substantial positive feedback from staff and students, continued adjustments are always needed for curriculum innovation. As noted earlier in this chapter, a recommendation that emerged from the 2022 implementation was that students' understanding of the entrepreneurial learning concept needs to be carefully constructed and verified to enable students' grasp of subsequent learning content (Du Toit 2023b).

The entrepreneurial learning content developers, therefore, decided to take a reflective stance to inform future adaptations of this learning. During our exploratory literature investigations in the design process, the statement by Zainuddin et al. (2019) that entrepreneurial learning programmes might be less effective if the diversity of the students therein is not considered particularly struck a chord. The notion that it is vital to design entrepreneurial learning that acknowledges our students' diversity and supports inclusivity was established. Subsequent exploratory literature reviews indicated that research linking diversity, equity and inclusion with entrepreneurial learning is increasing across the globe, as discussed next.

■ Linking entrepreneurial learning with diversity and inclusivity

Whereas entrepreneurship education has a narrower business-oriented focus, entrepreneurial learning contributes broader value not only through ‘increased societal resilience, but also individual growth, increased school engagement and improved equality’ (Lackéus 2015:6). When entrepreneurial learning is viewed as ‘the pursuit of opportunities to create value for others’ (Schoeniger et al. 2021:22) – where value is created for the student as well as others in the community – numerous possibilities for addressing issues of diversity or creating inclusion are created, which contributes to ‘cultivate the human capital necessary for building societies of the future’ (p. 23). Similar viewpoints are shared by an increasing number of scholars, as is evident by the following examples.

Donaldson, Villagrasa and Sánchez (2021:386) view entrepreneurial learning as ‘an inclusive process of holistic enrichment in which the creation of value is not limited to a narrow role preparation view of starting a business’. The learning *process* can thus serve as the vehicle to enhance inclusivity if it is constructed accordingly. Floris and Pillitu (2019:1149) note that entrepreneurial learning creates opportunities for empowerment through value-creation by ‘developing active citizenship, social inclusion and collective socioeconomic enhancement’. The authors of this chapter endorse the description that social inclusion ‘is achieved when all have the opportunity and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural activities’ (Baskaran et al. 2019:386–387), demonstrating its impact being broader than only the economic sphere. The current authors further concur with the same scholars on the necessity to provide equal opportunities and develop or obtain resources that will support activities towards attaining social inclusion as part of entrepreneurial learning.

Furthermore, the term ‘inclusive entrepreneurship’ is increasingly used in research, alluding to increasing inclusive practices or creating equal opportunities for diverse or previously disadvantaged or under-represented groups or persons (OECD 2019:19). These opportunities often relate to business or venture creation (Bates et al. 2018; Pilková, Jančovičová & Kovačičová 2016; Shaheen 2016) and how such endeavours can contribute to equity and/or social inclusion. Others, however, refer to ‘a desire to advance and provide opportunities for more inclusive entrepreneurship programming’ (Slatten et al. 2023:536). Many countries – such as Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Malta and the United Kingdom – have already implemented policies to bolster inclusive entrepreneurship for previously marginalised groups such as women, youth and seniors (OECD 2019:50). Research on inclusive entrepreneurship

in South Africa is limited, but it appears to be gradually increasing. For example, the report titled 'Growing Green and Inclusive Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development in South Africa' by Slavova, Heuër and Agster (2015) links inclusive entrepreneurship to the green economy and sustainable farming practices. However, it does not address formal education structures. Klinger (2022) explored the role of franchising to escalate inclusive entrepreneurship in South Africa, focusing on venture creation rather than education. Another example, also unrelated to education, is Bakker and McMullen's contemplative discussion using entrepreneurship in South Africa as an example to ponder how 'unconventional ethnicities or religious affiliations can become conventional over time' (2023:7). Although the term 'inclusive entrepreneurship' may initially seem appropriate for the current study, it is argued that entrepreneurial learning is not as focused on business creation as most studies on inclusive entrepreneurship suggest. Instead, the learning process – rather than the outcome – should also emphasise inclusivity and diversity, in line with Donaldson et al. (2021:386).

Evidently, aspects of diversity and inclusivity as part of entrepreneurial learning or entrepreneurship education merit further investigation. In keeping with curriculum innovation requirements and aligning with current research reporting diversity and inclusivity as concepts in relation to entrepreneurial learning, university lecturers who teach entrepreneurial learning courses should 'identify diverse, inclusive narratives of entrepreneurship that could enrich their university classrooms' and will better align students' learning with real-world issues (Slatten et al. 2023:538). Hence, the current chapter reports on a study that investigated how aspects of inclusivity and diversity can be included in entrepreneurial learning as part of a teacher preparation programme. The authors' intentions broadly aligned with an argument made by Bakker and McMullen (2023:2) that, even though they accept that their students' diversity brings a variety of distinct understandings and perceptions about entrepreneurship, as researchers, they need to 'start looking for similarities where they might exist as a way to generate shared insights' to develop meaningful and inclusive entrepreneurial learning as part of the preparation of future teachers.

■ Theoretical framework

Teacher education is significantly influenced by 'who gets to participate in the production of knowledge' (Heimans et al. 2023:105). Mimicking patterns experienced across many other spheres, in educational circles, the perceptions and voices of certain groups were traditionally valued more than those of others. These 'others' often refer to people from minority

groups, marginalised communities, women, youth, people of colour, differently-abled persons or seniors (older persons) (Heimans et al. 2023; Pilková et al. 2016). However, increasingly, educational research reports on how students often do not have a voice in their own education, adding them to the list of ‘others’ who are excluded from participating in decision-making processes in education. Excluding students’ inputs (or ‘voice’) in their education is detrimental to their learning processes (Flavian & Kass 2015). On the other hand, valuing and encouraging students to voice their perspectives on the learning process can ‘shape our analysis and [...] inform our practice’ (Fouche & Andrews 2022:137) as teacher educators. In social constructivism, frequently associated with education, students are viewed as ‘creative actor[s] in their own learning process, both influencing and at the same time being influenced by their environment’ (Donaldson et al. 2021:386). Socio-constructivism was accordingly selected as the theoretical framework for the current investigation.

Scholarship and research produced in and on teacher education must, therefore, be ‘inclusive, diverse, and representative of the full range of perspectives and experiences in the field’ (Heimans et al. 2023:105). The same authors suggest the inclusion of aspects such as ‘critical thinking, ethical decision-making and civic engagement, as well as providing opportunities for students to learn about and experience different cultures and perspectives’ in teacher education, which will support them in positively shaping ‘their own lives and the world around them’ (Heimans et al. 2023:106).

The purpose of teacher education is to sensitise student teachers to the complexity of the teaching profession and to prepare them to become knowledgeable educators who are able and competent to effectively facilitate learning in complex and diverse situations (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). Heimans et al. (2023) describe foundational goals and objectives that should be used to guide teacher education programmes, including deep subject content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, proficiency in using technology and commitment to lifelong learning, ethical conduct and professional accountability. The same authors additionally mention that teachers must ‘be aware of the different stages of student development and be able to adjust their teaching practices accordingly’ and ‘be able to understand and appreciate the cultural backgrounds of their students and use this knowledge to create inclusive and equitable learning environments’ (Heimans et al. 2023:106). Teacher educators must strive towards attaining all these goals and objectives for their students, who are teachers-in-the-making. The university lecturers, as teacher educators, provide ‘support for collective [*constructivist*] learning by trying to establish a conducive context for its occurrence’ (Donaldson et al. 2021:386). So, if the overarching goal of teacher education is to prepare student teachers who can effectively

and positively impact the lives of their learners and contribute to the larger goal of creating a more just and equitable society (Heimans et al. 2023), programme developers would have to carefully plan the learning content to align to this overarching goal. Aligning to one of the core tenets of constructivist educators described by Donaldson et al. (2021:387), the researchers would have to 'seek and value students' point of view'.

■ Research methodology and methods

An exploratory qualitative investigation was used in the current study. Nieuwenhuis (2020:61) explains that 'many qualitative research studies are exploratory in nature' when researchers endeavour to expand their knowledge about a certain topic, process or phenomenon. The same author notes that in this type of research design, researchers must be open-minded about where they will find data and be flexible when they are exploring or looking for data. The two questions guiding the exploration to address the research problem were presented in the introductory section of this chapter.

All student teachers registered for a BEd teacher qualification at the NWU are required to attend a WIL excursion in their first year of study. The population for the study, therefore, consisted of 3,730 first-year students registered for a BEd degree at the NWU in 2023. The WIL excursions are offered as a face-to-face opportunity for full-time students and as a synchronous online opportunity to accommodate students from the NWU's Unit for Distance Learning (UDL). All first-year student teachers attending the WIL excursions in 2023 were invited to participate voluntarily in this exploratory qualitative investigation (convenience sampling).

■ Data collection

An entrepreneurial learning questionnaire (ELQ) with 10 primarily open-ended questions was developed by the research team. The students in the face-to-face excursions completed paper-based questionnaires, while the UDL students completed an online Google Forms questionnaire. The current chapter only reports on the analysis of the responses of the UDL students who voluntarily gave consent to participate ($n = 473$) (purposive sampling). Although broad and open-ended, the questions were constructed to relate to a wicked problem, in line with the existing problem-based design of our entrepreneurial learning content in the WIL excursions (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). The problem prompt accompanying the questionnaire was presented to students in the form of a photograph (Figure 7.1), which can easily be replaced with another example of a problem in other excursions. In the 2023 WIL excursion, the problem



Source: *Potchefstroom Herald* (2022). Reproduced and published with the permission of the *Potchefstroom Herald*.

FIGURE 7.1: The prompt that served to guide students' problem-based entrepreneurial learning in the 2023 work-integrated learning excursion.

guiding problem-based entrepreneurial learning showed a sidewalk in front of a school in shambles (Figure 7.1).

The first item in the questionnaire asked, 'How can entrepreneurial learning solve (or contribute to solving) the problem(s) shown in this photograph?' and was presented to students before any entrepreneurship teaching-learning took place. Their responses to the first item were analysed for the first theme. After the excursion section on entrepreneurial learning was facilitated, a few additional open-ended qualitative questions were asked to explore students' comprehension of entrepreneurship's potential to contribute towards diversity and inclusivity in South African schools. Participants' responses to these questions were analysed to contribute to the second theme.

■ Data analysis

Thematic analysis of participants' responses to each question was conducted by a team of two teacher educators, in line with Saldaña's

(2016:200) descriptions of 'themeing the data'. Both these teacher educators have extensive experience in entrepreneurial learning, curriculum design and teacher preparation programmes. The raw data were sorted, organised, labelled and analysed per question, and holistic coding (as an exploratory method) was used (Saldaña 2016). The researchers initially analysed the qualitative data independently to identify codes, patterns and incongruences. Following numerous discussions and an iterative process of re-coding, adjustments were made, and inter-coder agreement was established. To answer the research questions, this chapter reports on two of the key a priori themes that were explored in the data. These were: (1) students' initial understanding and perceptions of what entrepreneurial learning entails and (2) feasible suggestions first-year student teachers made for linking aspects of diversity and inclusivity with entrepreneurial learning in their future classrooms.

The research was conducted under the umbrella of scientific and ethical approval of the larger WIL excursion project (see Chapter 3) with ethical approval number NWU-01013-21-A2. All participants in the current study provided informed consent and participated voluntarily.

■ Findings and discussion

The findings are reported and discussed in alignment with the two a priori themes mentioned previously. Verbatim quotes from students' responses to the ELQ are included as evidence to support findings. All five virtual WIL excursions facilitated for UDL students took place during May 2023.

■ Theme 1: Students' initial limited understanding and perceptions of entrepreneurial learning as business focused

The first item in the questionnaire aimed to explore first-year students' understanding or perceptions of entrepreneurial learning and what it entails and if they are aware of the value-creation aspects thereof. They were asked to answer the question before any teaching-learning on the topic was implemented. In a finding similar to that of the previous year's implementation of entrepreneurial learning in the WIL excursion (Du Toit 2023b), the 2023 participating students also understood and perceived entrepreneurial learning as mainly associated with starting a business or creating jobs in their answers to the first questionnaire item. This was evident from several responses, for example:

'One can start a business where they offer their services to clean up in and around schools. it keeps the community clean, creates jobs and helps the

schools to continue being a safe place and have a good reputation.’ (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

‘Entrepreneurship education can help reduce unemployment and poverty in South Africa. By equipping learners with the necessary skills and knowledge to start their business, they can create job opportunities for themselves and others.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, ELQ)

‘It can provide jobs for people who are jobless to help keep the place clean. This means someone can start their own business and hire people to clean places like these, also educating people on how to take care of the environment while doing that.’ (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

This finding indicates that many first-year students still enter university with the limited mindset that entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial learning have a narrow focus or purpose to create jobs or start businesses. The entrepreneurial learning programme must, therefore, continue efforts to expand students’ mindset regarding the broader value-creation potential of this learning – for themselves and their future learners. It also emerged that many students understood how the problem (Figure 7.1) could serve as an educational opportunity – for learners and others (‘the community’), as is evident from the three previously stated quotes.

On the other hand, a large number of students only focused on the problem and did not try (or know how) to link the problem to entrepreneurial learning, giving brief or incomplete answers, as shown by the following quotes:

‘Provide recycle bins, educate students on the importance not to litter [*sic*]. Organise a clean-up day every once in a while.’ (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

‘Teach learners how to recycle waste materials.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, ELQ)

‘That the entrepreneurship can remove the rubbish and that there are things that can be recycled like the paper and the plastic what I see in the picture and that the entrepreneurship can make it child friendly where it is safe for the children to play and make the rubbish place a clean place. And then they save the learners’ health from the rubbish by removing it [*sic*].’ (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

Responses like these (especially the last one listed) indicate that all first-year students do not have the same level of prior knowledge and emphasised the need for us not to use a one-size-fits-all approach in the entrepreneurial learning programme. This finding echoes Ilonen’s (2021:520) argument that ‘a one-size-fits-all model or a universal pedagogical EE [entrepreneurship education] recipe cannot be developed, due to course-related and contextual factors, and institutions must thus determine their distinctive educational tasks’. The programme at the NWU would have to contribute to establishing a more equitable knowledge foundation as a starting point for subsequent learning on the topic. Such a foundation must not only

include content about what entrepreneurial learning is and what it entails but should also introduce problem-based learning as a teaching-learning strategy that can be utilised to structure and guide educational efforts. In addition, adhering to Ilonen's (2021) suggestions, the programme developers would have to determinedly consider the contextual factors of their students and university, which includes their differences in educational background and prior learning.

In the same vein, particularly for university-level entrepreneurial learning, the Mashauri Organisation (2019) recommends:

[4] one-size-fits-all approach cannot work in entrepreneurial education and so programme flexibility must be developed to allow for different pacing for different individuals and groups. Mentors can often be useful in this respect. (p. 19)

The NWU WIL excursions have been employing facilitators in all sessions, including the entrepreneurial learning section. These facilitators comprise mostly honours student teachers, together with a few teacher educators (lecturers) (see Chapter 8). To strengthen the entrepreneurial learning section in the WIL excursion, focused training would have to be developed and provided to the facilitators on problem-based entrepreneurial learning, to ensure that they will be able to suitably support and guide the first-year students towards a shared foundational understanding of this content, in line with recommendations by Hägg and Kurczewska (2022). Yet, the facilitators would also have to stay cognisant of their roles as facilitators (and not teachers), which will allow first-year students to gradually become self-directed learners, in keeping with the goals of the WIL excursion programme (Du Toit & Petersen 2023).

Next, the findings that emerged in the second theme are reported.

■ Theme 2: First-year student teachers' practical suggestions for linking aspects of diversity and inclusivity with entrepreneurial learning in their future classrooms

Students studying to become teachers in a variety of school subjects provided interesting and mostly feasible suggestions for linking or embedding aspects of inclusivity and diversity with entrepreneurial learning in their future classrooms. Several codes were identified from the data, and subsequently, a number of categories were developed that culminated in the current theme. Numerous categories were anticipated or predictable, including, among others, 'culture days', 'projects', 'valuing diverse ideas', 'breaking stereotypes', 'solving problems', '21st-century skills', 'respect', 'sharing' and 'praxis'. These codes provided a good overview of the distinct and general suggestions that first-year student teachers contributed.

The current researchers denote these codes as predictable or anticipated, as similar aspects have been reported in the literature. For example, Floris and Floris (2021:262), Wettermark (2020:299) and Jůvová, Čech and Duda (2017:64) report on students engaging in entrepreneurial *projects* to benefit themselves and others as an example of social entrepreneurship, and Bakker and McMullen (2023:1) argue that the *stereotyping* of entrepreneurs needs to be broken to create a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. Lyubova (2020:94) describes how *solving problems* that are 'related to values, such as cultural identity of a person and his full integration into a globalized world' can contribute to developing intercultural competence as part of entrepreneurship education, whereas Gess et al. (2021:97) explain that celebrating diverse backgrounds and ideas 'could bring new perspectives toward solving problems' in entrepreneurial learning. Wettermark (2020) also explains how *respect* for different points of view and individual ideas have to be embedded into entrepreneurship education to foster students' reflective abilities. Although there are various other examples of conventional links between entrepreneurial learning and aspects of diversity and inclusivity, the breadth of information around most of the categories that were developed, together with the restrictions on space in the current chapter, resulted in the comprehensive reporting of only one of these, that is: 'sharing'.

Cross-mapping of the different codes showed remarkably strong, interesting and recurring links to the category that was termed 'sharing'. Some of the links that emerged in the current study are illustrated in Figure 7.2 and are supported by the selection of quotes presented as evidence. Many students used the verb and suggested 'sharing' as a way in which they could potentially attain inclusivity or address diversity in relation to entrepreneurial learning in their own classrooms one day. Numerous students suggested sharing learners' cultural uniqueness, resources, ideas, knowledge, experiences and indigenous knowledge in their future classrooms.

Predictably, many students referred to various traditional, ethnic or tribal cultures (such as IsiZulu, Ndebele or Setswana) and how opportunities could be created to foster inclusivity by acknowledging such cultural diversity. The South African population includes many indigenous (ethnic) cultures, as well as many others of immigrants. Although South Africans celebrate indigenous cultures, it can, therefore, still result in some immigrant students, or students from minority groups feeling excluded (Masikane, Hewitt & Toendepi 2020). However, several students suggested creating a *unique culture* in a school to foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity. During the feedback discussions in the 'Entrepreneurial learning' section, several students also commented on creating a culture based on a shared understanding, such as respect, caring for the environment, appreciating education, innovation and others, as evident by these quotes:

'By building social connections, building cultures specific to each school, entrepreneurship education in South Africa addresses diversity and also supersedes it to a degree, everyone is now part of a new culture – the school. But, in the problem-solving process of entrepreneurial education, unique perspectives from the diverse backgrounds of the students add to the uniqueness of the solution to the problem.' (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

'Creating a culture of innovation – entrepreneurship education can help create a culture of innovation in South African classrooms by encouraging students to think creatively and develop new ideas. This can help foster a more dynamic and innovative learning environment, which can benefit all students.' (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

'Culture' was therefore viewed as broader than only 'tribal' or ethnic differences but also linked to shared expectations or behaviours. This finding aligns with Spencer-Oatey's (2012) argument that culture is both an individual and a social construct and that adopting shared beliefs, values or behaviours can be construed as a type of culture.

Most students mentioned that a lack of *resources* would hinder the implementation of entrepreneurship education and, therefore, its potential to support inclusivity. This challenge is a long-standing one in South African schools, as reported by Koekemoer and Booyse (2013). However, it is a problem that can be overcome, as seen in the positive comment from the following student:

'Entrepreneurship education can be used [...] no matter what the socioeconomic standards are of students, their backgrounds, or the school's economics [*sic*]. Students will be able to experience [...] entrepreneurial education [*with*] what they have, especially things that are around them, not necessarily resources that are required or usually needed for education.' (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

This student believes that, rather than focusing on what we do not have, teachers and learners should use and share resources that are available, which was seen as a step in the right direction. The WIL excursion includes content on education on a shoestring (Petersen, De Beer & Mentz 2020), which this student seems to have taken to heart and will help future teachers to overcome resource limitations.

Many students suggested *sharing ideas* to support entrepreneurial learning, develop solutions for problems and contribute towards a shared understanding of what others are thinking or believe. The following quote is one example of many similar suggestions:

'It gives learners the opportunity to be creative and share their ideas with their classmates or even communities [...] that is why entrepreneurship education is inclusive of all students.' (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

The importance of sharing ideas to create 'a shared understanding of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to be entrepreneurial' is

highlighted by the European Commission (OECD 2019:202). However, sharing ideas can have much broader benefits for learning on several levels, among others that it supports creativity and collaboration (Bilton 2016), and therefore, this was viewed as a positive finding in the current study.

Collaboration in *sharing knowledge* also emerged as a recurrent code in the current study. Again, only two quotes are presented as evidence although many other students made similar suggestions:

‘Creating an environment where children are all in the same boat, having to solve the same problem, allows children from differing backgrounds to share their knowledge and expertise and have a chance to contribute to a group effort.’ (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

‘The learners can be encouraged to share their thoughts and knowledge, which can make a classroom feel more engaging and welcoming to all students, which will encourage them to contribute in class which will, in turn, create a more inclusive classroom culture.’ (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

In constructivist education, sharing knowledge is vital and allows students to be co-contributors in the learning process, giving them a voice in their own learning (Heimans et al. 2023). Sharing knowledge allows for the comparison of information and supports collaboration and cooperative problem solving, which strengthens entrepreneurial learning (Jůvová et al. 2017). It is also foundational in self-directed learning, the approach emphasised by the NWU for their students’ learning (Du Toit 2023b).

Many students suggested sharing *experiences* to foster inclusivity in entrepreneurial learning, as shown by these examples:

‘Diversity in learners brings out different ideas, perspectives, knowledge, experience, [and] opinions. By utilising entrepreneurship education, it encourages learners to get involved and voice their different opinions and ideas. It shows that diversity is a good thing and that it could be used for the benefit of the entire group. Learners could also learn a thing or two from the diverse experiences told or brought forward by their colleagues [peers].’ (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

‘Increase awareness and understanding of how diversity and inclusivity can benefit entrepreneurship: Introduce students to successful entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds and highlight how their experiences and perspectives have contributed to their success.’ (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

Students’ suggestions mentioned that each learner will bring different experiences to the classroom and that together, these can contribute to a broader understanding and deeper insight into entrepreneurial learning as learners learn from others’ experiences. Jůvová et al. (2017:70) aptly refers to this approach as ‘experience exchange’. Similarly, Donaldson et al. (2021) highlight how learners’ idiosyncratic experiences contribute to constructing their learning and strengthening the learning process.

Not surprisingly – considering the cultural diversity in South Africa – several students suggested *sharing indigenous knowledge* as a way in which diversity can be brought into classrooms as part of entrepreneurial learning. Although most students did not explicitly use the term ‘indigenous knowledge’, it is clearly implied in the way they framed their suggestions, as is evident from the following quotes:

‘In life sciences, we cover the topic of natural remedies and homoeopathy. I would ask students of different cultural backgrounds to share what natural products are used for medical purposes and why.’ (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

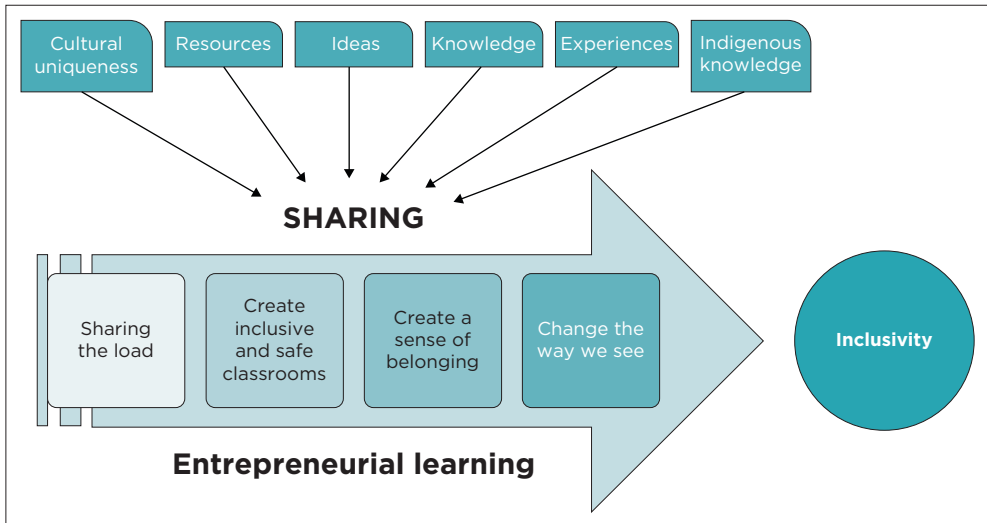
‘By encouraging students to share their cultural knowledge goods and services with others, this strategy can also foster an appreciation for and understanding of different cultures.’ (Student teacher, ELQ, May 2023)

The importance of including indigenous knowledge as part of teacher education in South Africa has been highlighted often for its contribution to continuing the legacy of prior learning and experiences of the elders and showing learners the importance of indigenous learning in their current, everyday lives (De Beer 2019). Further highlighting its value, De Beer (2019:129) points out that indigenous knowledge can serve as ‘a tool with which to contextualise a Western curriculum for diverse learners’. Students’ mention of sharing indigenous knowledge to foster inclusivity and celebrate diversity in entrepreneurial learning was thus seen as progressive.

When cross-mapping the different codes in the category that was termed ‘sharing’, several connections and links emerged, as illustrated in Figure 7.2. It shows how students believed that sharing the aspects (at the top of the figure, among others) in entrepreneurial learning contributed to constructing a pathway (the arrow in the figure) towards inclusivity (the positive overarching goal, circle shape in the figure).

The pathway (Figure 7.2) starts with *sharing the load* – of learning, of challenges experienced, of wanting to have a positive future. Sharing the load supports students to learn from each other, learn from mistakes and overcome challenges in new or creative ways (Walmsley & Wraae 2022). In constructivist education, and especially when giving students a voice in the construction of their learning programme (*including* them in learning construction), the load is shared by the educator and the students. This finding mirrors the statement by Donaldson et al. (2021:389) that ‘constructivist approaches to [*entrepreneurship education*] delivery promoted both active engagement from students and a contribution to the governance of their own learning’.

Also included on the pathway in Figure 7.2 were student teachers’ suggestions for *creating inclusive and safe classrooms* when fostering entrepreneurial learning. The programme developers believed that this



Source: Developed by the authors based on the themes that emerged from the data collected.

FIGURE 7.2: Some of the codes linked to the sharing category and its contribution towards inclusivity.

suggestion emerged strongly because of the specific inclusion of content on how the S.P.E.C.I.A.L. acronym could guide student teachers in planning and constructing environments (i.e., their future classrooms) that would be conducive to fostering entrepreneurial learning (Du Toit 2023b). This content was included in the 'Entrepreneurial learning' section to adhere to the Education Sector Plan's requirement that 'an enabling environment to implement Entrepreneurship in Basic Education' must be created (DBE 2016:55) and was viewed as a positive outcome of the implementation of the 2023 WIL excursion cycle.

Creating a sense of belonging was another core goal of the WIL excursions (Du Toit & Petersen 2023, see Chapter 3), and therefore, it was not surprising that numerous students included this in their suggestions on the pathway towards inclusivity (Figure 7.2). It was gratifying that the students recognised the transferability of their learning in the WIL excursion to their future classrooms one day, as well as the potential of this aspect for fostering inclusivity as part of entrepreneurial learning.

The pathway towards inclusivity in Figure 7.2 culminates in '*changing the way we see*'. Several students' suggestions referred to or strongly alluded to this link when the codes related to 'sharing' were cross-mapped. One example of such a suggestion is embedded in the following quote:

'Every learner can share their views and opinions, and sometimes if they have to create something, they can use their own skills and knowledge and share them with others. It can also change the way they see the world, which will help them think outside the box.' (Student teacher, May 2023, ELQ)

This student comment notes that the combined efforts they suggested could change the way people see *the world*. However, other students' suggestions more intently alluded to sharing various aspects (Figure 7.2) that can contribute to changing the way learners view each other's differences (acknowledging and accepting diversity); changing the way people see problems and changing the way people see each other's ways of understanding, among others. In this regard, Wettermark (2020) stresses the valuable contribution of feedback in entrepreneurial learning towards constructing and changing learners' positive views on such learning and also of each other. It was rewarding to find that first-year student teachers are grasping that change is needed, and that positive change will be the result if teachers adapt their teaching-learning endeavours in entrepreneurial learning to be more inclusive.

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2023) defines the verbs 'share' and 'sharing' as 'to partake of, use, experience, occupy, or enjoy with others' or 'to have in common'. The aforementioned findings showing that first-year student teachers linked aspects of diversity and inclusivity with entrepreneurial learning in their future classrooms through the verb 'sharing' was therefore seen as constructive. This could imply that they are ready to embrace that entrepreneurial learning should be structured to be a *shared experience* (to be *enjoyed with others*), using active learning strategies in line with oft-reported global best practices. If future teachers *have in common* a positive entrepreneurial mindset, they will be able to foster entrepreneurial learning in their own classrooms to the benefit of their learners (Floris & Floris 2021:258). The findings presented here for Theme 2 create a sense of optimism, as it was evident that first-year student teachers' suggestions for linking aspects of diversity and inclusivity with entrepreneurial learning in their future classrooms were creative, interesting and constructed on teaching-learning principles (such as collaboration, self-directed learning and embracing otherness) that are sought-after in educational settings.

We close our discussion of the findings with this comprehensive verbatim quote from one of the students, which encompasses most of the previous discussion and indicates that the 'Entrepreneurial learning' section in the WIL excursion truly contributes towards preparing future teachers for this task, in adherence to the requirements of the Education Sector Plan (DBE 2016):

'Entrepreneurship education can contribute to inclusivity in South African classrooms by providing students with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to create their own opportunities, solve problems, and pursue their goals, regardless of their socio-economic background or cultural identity. Here are some ways in which entrepreneurship education can promote inclusivity: Encouraging creativity and innovation: Entrepreneurship education can

encourage students to think creatively and develop innovative solutions to problems. By providing a space for students to express their ideas and explore their potential, entrepreneurship education can help to foster a sense of belonging and empowerment among students who may have previously felt marginalised or excluded.’ (Student teacher, May 2023, ELQ)

■ Conclusion

Based on the findings of the current study, there is clear potential for entrepreneurial learning to contribute towards inclusivity and acknowledging diversity. The findings reported in the first theme addressed the research question: What are students’ initial perceptions of entrepreneurial learning? The answers that emerged from the current investigation indicate that students generally still hold a narrow business-oriented view of entrepreneurial learning. Additionally, all first-year students do not have the same level of prior knowledge regarding entrepreneurial learning and what it entails. This finding underscored the need to not use a one-size-fits-all approach to develop entrepreneurial learning in the NWU WIL excursion programme. The findings in the second theme contributed to answering the research question: What are first-year student teachers’ perceptions of linking aspects of diversity and inclusivity with entrepreneurial learning in their future classrooms? In short, these students mostly developed positive perceptions regarding such linkages, as was evident in their suggestions for several feasible ways in which entrepreneurial learning could be implemented in their future classrooms to foster inclusivity. Furthermore, it transpired that the combination of the various sections in the WIL excursion – such as learning about shoestring approaches and fostering a sense of belonging – together with the entrepreneurial section contributed to scaffolding meaningful learning as part of these future teachers’ preparation. It will be useful to continue with the entrepreneurial learning in the WIL programme to reach a wider audience of student teachers than only commerce students and fulfil our university’s obligation to adhere to the requirements of the Education Sector Plan set out for future education in South Africa.

Facilitators as co-creators of equity and inclusivity in online work-integrated learning excursions

Adri du Toit

Research Unit Self-Directed Learning,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

Annerie Kruger

School of Psycho-Social Education,
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Vanderbijlpark, South Africa

■ Abstract

Curriculum innovation is a continuous process as part of efforts to scaffold work-integrated learning (WIL) excursions towards realising the South African vision for intercultural competence, equity and inclusivity. For this reason, the WIL excursion programme at the North-West University (NWU) is reviewed, revised and adapted annually to enhance and strengthen the imperative educational value thereof for future teachers. One key aspect that needs adaptation in future WIL excursion implementations is ensuring that equity and inclusivity are prioritised as competencies that student teachers must be prepared with. Therefore, the programme should

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encourage open dialogue to foster understanding and empathy among students from diverse backgrounds and prepare them for diversity in their future careers. Strengthening this aspect will contribute to the preparation of student teachers for a complex and diverse working environment. In the constructivist context that serves as the theoretical underpinning of the excursion programme, the input of various role players – such as students, facilitators and lecturers – as co-creators of learning is considered invaluable. Exploring these role players' voices – in the form of their feedback after the implementation of the virtual WIL excursions – contributed insights that can be used to enhance and strengthen future programme implementations. The current chapter, therefore, reports on the 'voices' of two groups of facilitators who contributed to the 2023 implementation of the virtual WIL excursions for student teachers at the NWU as part of an interpretative phenomenological investigation. The perspectives of student facilitators (Bachelor of Education [BEd] honours students) and lecturer facilitators (teacher educators in the Faculty of Education) provided qualitative data that were inductively analysed to determine the strengths and areas for improvement in the current WIL excursion programme. The findings from this exploratory qualitative research offer valuable insights into creating inclusive teaching-learning activities and strengthening subsequent implementations of the BEd WIL excursion programme, focusing on enhancing equity and inclusivity in future offerings. These suggestions aim to strengthen the programme's ability to provide an inclusive and equitable learning experience.

■ Introduction

South Africa has an exceptionally diverse populace. Its inhabitants are comprised of various cultures, ethnicities, backgrounds, religions and traditions, using 12 official languages and various miscellaneous dialects to communicate. These aspects are only a few contributors towards diversity in this country but confirm the breadth and extent of diversity of its people. Policy-related efforts to overcome a tumultuous history that included segregation based on race (apartheid) are ongoing across many sectors, including the educational sector (Cowan et al. 2024). Most of these efforts aim to increase equity and inclusivity through sensitising and educating learners and students about diversity to support intercultural sensitivity and awareness. Educators are expected to play a pivotal role in realising the valuable aim of increasing equity and inclusivity at the school level.

Teacher practices in South Africa are assumed to be directed by the curriculum, which must guide content ('what to teach'), as well as pedagogical approaches ('how to teach') to attain the curriculum intentions

(Du Toit & Booyse 2015:17). Some general ‘advice for dealing with inclusivity and diversity in teaching’ is proposed in South African school curriculum documents (Du Toit & Booyse 2015:18). The curriculum states that ‘The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 is sensitive to issues of diversity such as poverty, inequality, race, gender, language, age, disability and other factors’ (Department of Basic Education [DBE] 2011:5). This advice, however, is not explicitly realised in the curriculum documents in the form of pedagogical guidance. Without guidance in the curriculum, teachers might not know ‘how to teach’ to attain the curriculum’s aim to increase equity and inclusivity. The onus, therefore, rests on teacher preparation programmes to ensure that future teachers are suitably prepared to fulfil this broad aim. The problem is that structuring this content in teacher preparation programmes is not simple, as many aspects impact its effectiveness.

To partially address this problem, the current chapter reports on the efforts of North-West University (NWU) in South Africa to scaffold a segment of its teacher preparation programme towards strengthening aspects of equity and inclusivity. In particular, the chapter focuses on curriculum innovation efforts in the work-integrated learning (WIL) segment of the first-year teacher preparation programme. Instead of focusing on students’ experiences, the current study explored the experience-informed perceptions of facilitators who participated in the WIL excursions. The WIL excursion programme developers (which included both authors of this chapter, among others) believed that facilitators’ experiences of enacting the intended inclusivity and equity efforts in the programme would provide insights that could be used to strengthen future implementations of the WIL excursion as part of the NWU teacher preparation programme. The question that guided the research was: How do facilitators perceive the realisation of equity and inclusivity in the online WIL excursion as part of the NWU teacher preparation programme?

The chapter is structured as follows: some contextual background expands the information provided in the introduction. The theoretical framework used in the study follows. The methods used to collect and analyse the data in the study are explained, and subsequently, the findings are discussed and supported by evidence from the data. The chapter ends with the study conclusion and suggestions for future research.

■ Scaffolding equity and inclusivity in online work-integrated learning excursions

A background based on existing literature is provided as context for the research. Three aspects are discussed to provide context: The need for

strengthening equity and inclusivity in teacher education is explained first, followed by literature indicating how online WIL excursions can be scaffolded towards inclusivity. The discussion then narrows to literature explaining WIL facilitators' roles in creating inclusive learning spaces in WIL excursions.

■ Equity and inclusivity in teacher education

Universities are progressively becoming 'more proactive in the pursuit of diversity and inclusion initiatives' (Slatten et al. 2023:542) as part of their educational efforts to address the needs of an increasingly diverse student cohort (Tunny et al. 2022). According to Tunny et al. (2022), the current cohort of students enter the university with extensive exposure to technologies supporting worldwide interaction, and, as a result, they have had exposure to – and therefore expect – acceptance or appreciation of diversity in educational contexts. Universities must attempt to keep up with these expectations and often do so through continuous curriculum innovation (Tunny et al. 2022:9). According to Valencia-Forrester et al. (2019), inclusive education must be supported by incorporating it in all programme designs.

The students studying to become teachers most likely exhibit the same diversity that Tunny et al. (2022) report for university students in general. However, the strengthening of equity and inclusivity in teacher education programmes is twofold: (1) to create a sense of belonging for students during the attainment of their qualification and (2) to model behaviours and pedagogical approaches, which these future teachers can implement in their classrooms one day. Teacher education programmes, therefore, span a broad spectrum of content, skills, values and competencies (Van Vuuren 2020).

To support students' sense of belonging, the Equity Collaborative (2022) recommends the construction of safe and inclusive learning environments that will provide students access to instruction and content that are culturally responsive and contribute to their sense of being accepted or appreciated regardless of their differences or diversity. Similar recommendations appear in educational contexts across the globe. For example, in the Welsh curriculum, the concept of *cynefin* describes 'a sense of belonging and identity in a historic, cultural and social context, [which provides] a foundation for a local and international citizenship' (Weicht & Jónsdóttir 2021:2). Following this international trend, creating a sense of belonging for our students has been a core theme of the NWU WIL excursions since its first implementation (Du Toit & Petersen 2023).

Modelling behaviours and pedagogical approaches that support equity and inclusivity, which future teachers can implement in their classrooms one day, requires careful inclusion or scaffolding of these aspects in their preparation programme. Student teachers must be prepared to create successful teaching-learning experiences in their future careers, requiring teacher preparation for subject content, teaching-learning strategies, the context in which learning will take place, as well as ‘the role of the teacher as facilitator, and addressing diversity of learners’ (Du Toit 2015:89). Petersen, De Beer and Mentz (2020) add that:

[S]tudent teachers need to be guided in their learning to become effective facilitators of learning, critical reflective practitioners, teachers who will be inclusive, and who will promote social justice and agents of change and innovation. (p. 153)

The South African school context embodies the country’s population diversity; therefore, preparing future teachers with skills, values and competencies is critical for the complexity of the educational tasks they will face in their future careers (Du Toit 2015). Consequently, sensitising student teachers to the concepts and strategies for supporting equity and inclusivity is vital. Student teachers must be prepared and enabled to create inclusive and equitable learning environments, which will contribute to their understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural backgrounds – their own and future learners (Heimans et al. 2023).

Equity refers to the principle of fairness in attaining educational equality (The Glossary of Education Reform 2016). According to Western Governors University (2021), equity denotes:

[T]hat no matter what a student’s background, language, race, economic profile, gender, learning capability, disability or family history, each student has the opportunity to get the support and resources they need to achieve their educational goals. (p. n.p.)

Furthermore, equity in education supports students in developing ‘valuable skills and knowledge that help them live a full life and contribute to society’ (Western Governors University 2021:n.p.). Hence, modelling equity behaviours and pedagogies in teacher education programmes can contribute positively to these students’ personal and professional futures.

Inclusivity in education is sometimes referred to as ‘education for all’, ‘inclusive education’ or ‘inclusive teaching’ and unequivocally takes diversity into account (Hietanen 2015:513). Using inclusive approaches – where no one is or feels left out – contributes to achieving equity in education and comprises affordable and inclusive discussions – resources and – technologies that contribute towards equity and access in education (Acer for Education 2023). Inclusive education acknowledges diversity and pertinently includes role players (such as students and educators) in

teaching learning. For example, students collaborating in negotiating the curriculum or educators continuously reflecting on their ability to support all students contribute to inclusive education (Hietanen 2015). In turn, inclusive education contributes to students' sense of belonging (The Equity Collaborative 2022), highlighting the reciprocal relationship between these aspects in education.

In keeping with curriculum innovation requirements and aligning with current research reporting an increasing urgency to incorporate diversity and inclusivity as concepts in tertiary education across the globe, university programme developers must heed this call. Nevertheless, Tunny et al. (2022:10) caution that universities must 'provide flexibility within their programmes to enable diverse student cohorts the ability to access and participate'. At the NWU, where the current study was conducted, flexibility to support various students' access to the WIL excursion – one compulsory section of the overall teacher qualification programme – was realised by offering the excursion both in contact and online formats (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). Although equity and inclusivity were relevant across both formats of the excursion, this chapter exclusively concerns the virtual WIL excursions that took place in an online learning context.

■ **Scaffolding online work-integrated learning excursions towards inclusivity**

As teacher educators, the current researchers believe that WIL exposes students to circumstances and experiences they might expect to encounter someday in their professional careers, bridging the gap between theoretical teacher preparation and real-world praxis. Work-integrated learning experiences must be designed to be inclusive to optimally prepare students for the world of work – especially when faced with contexts comprising highly diverse populations (Bell et al. 2024; Valencia-Forrester et al. 2019). Equity and inclusivity must be made explicit in the curriculum by including various flexible opportunities to accommodate students with diverse circumstances (Tunny et al. 2022).

Work-integrated learning is a compulsory segment of the first-year preparation programme for the Bachelor of Education (BEd) teacher qualification at NWU. The WIL excursion was developed to creatively link teacher preparation with the real-world opportunities and challenges these future teachers may face in South African schools one day (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). Educational scaffolding is a support mechanism to structure the teaching-learning process, in which educators serve as facilitators (rather than teachers) to develop learning and help move students from learning dependency towards more self-directedness or

self-directed learning (Oliver & Oliver 2022). Literature reporting studies endeavouring to bolster equity and inclusivity in online learning environments is mounting. Therefore, only a selection of the recommendations for structuring or scaffolding online learning to attain the goals of equity and inclusivity found in the literature is reiterated here:

- *Early and timely communication* about when and where (or how) WIL will realise allows and enables students to plan their attendance of WIL activities and provides opportunities for students to articulate their circumstances so adjustments can be considered or made, especially for part-time students (Tunny et al. 2022).
- The *functionalities* embedded in various online applications or programmes can be used constructively to support inclusivity (Oliver & Oliver 2022). For example, in Zoom, the *chat* function offers an additional space where students can share opinions or ask for help in real time, and the *raise hand* function can be used to notify facilitators that students need help or to indicate that they have something to contribute to the whole group discussion. Students can *unmute* themselves or be unmuted by the facilitators to enable participation in discussions, even if unfamiliar with the programme. Navigation between the whole and smaller groups is facilitated using programme functionalities such as *breakaway* groups.
- Self-reflection – where students objectively reflect on and evaluate their prior learning, experiences, current progress and personal qualities such as biases – leads to insights on how they can overcome gaps or modify their thinking (Oliver & Oliver 2022) to better align with the intended WIL learning outcomes as part of teacher preparation. Self-reflection is critical to personal and professional development, allowing students to take *ownership of their learning* and contribute to their self-directed and lifelong learning (Van Zyl & Mentz 2020). They can then identify gaps in their learning and prior experiences, set learning goals, identify and select resources for bridging those gaps and eventually evaluate the attainment of their personal learning goals. These steps support students in gradually becoming self-directed learners, contributing to life-long learning, both essential competencies teachers must develop (Van Zyl & Mentz 2020:72).
- Interaction among and between students and educators occurs in various *group formats*, including whole-group and small-group discussions (Oliver & Oliver 2022). Students usually receive training as a whole group but frequently work in smaller groups to co-create responses with their peers (Donaldson, Villagrasa & Sánchez 2021). Students are allocated specific roles in each smaller group depending on the intended learning outcomes (Oliver & Oliver 2022). In the NWU WIL excursions, the five student roles in each group consisted of a materials manager, quality controller, organiser, communication

specialist and tech fundi (Lubbe & Petersen 2022). They were mainly implemented to contribute to cooperative learning. This scaffolding of group member roles in the online WIL excursion enhanced student learning, and social competence was considered beneficial as part of their preparation for their teaching careers and contributed to students' sense of belonging. Furthermore, this structuring is intended to support first-year students in transitioning towards a more self-directed approach towards their learning (Du Toit 2023).

- To support *constructivist learning* and contribute to bridging perceived gaps between theory and practice in teacher education, educational activities in online learning should also be a collaborative effort between students and facilitators (Oliver & Oliver 2022). The learning process is structured to support students moving from a space of learning dependence to becoming increasingly self-directed (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). In the co-construction of the teaching-learning process, educators serve as facilitators of learning rather than as teachers or 'givers of knowledge' (Du Toit 2022:235). Facilitators play a critical role in supporting 'students to internalise the values of consideration for others' (Donaldson et al. 2021:394) when guiding them in constructive discussions with their peers.

Oliver and Oliver (2022) assert that appropriately structured online environments will afford students WIL opportunities to acquire or enhance valuable experiences in a work-like or replicated work environment without physically being in a professional work setting. The input of all role players – including students and facilitators – as co-creators of learning contributes to the success of constructivist online learning endeavours. Several publications – for example, Petersen et al. (2023) and De Beer et al. (2022) – have reported the scaffolding of various NWU WIL excursions to support students' learning therein. On the other hand, the roles of facilitators in these excursions have not yet been highlighted or explored in much detail. The current chapter, therefore, endeavoured to bridge this lacuna in the literature, starting with the next discussion.

■ The role of facilitators in creating inclusive learning spaces in online work-integrated learning excursions

Although a well-structured approach is needed to enhance the effectiveness of online WIL excursions, Bell et al. (2024), however, caution that a well-facilitated approach is also needed to contribute to clear communication, meaningful learning and appropriate feedback. Therefore, facilitators' contributions to WIL's success are critical to its successful implementation

(Bell et al. 2024). However, WIL activities are often under-resourced and understaffed (Tunny et al. 2022:11), requiring staff 'to go above and beyond' to attain the intended learning outcomes. A similar administrative issue was reported for NWU WIL excursions in 2022 when programme developers reported their struggle to appoint more senior students or additional staff (university educators) as facilitators in those excursions (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). Facilitators are not teachers but rather guides on the side who 'smooth the path' or ease the progress of students' learning (Collins Dictionary 2023). In the NWU WIL excursions, facilitators are pivotal in developing and fostering first-year student teachers' self-directed learning abilities in alignment with the teaching-learning policy of the university (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). Lecturers and post-graduate students in the Faculty of Education are invited each year to serve as facilitators of these NWU WIL excursions. Careful planning and utilisation of facilitators as a critical (and often scarce) human resource in the WIL excursions are thus always necessary. Literature reports several roles that facilitators in online WIL experiences share, including the following:

- As a starting point, facilitators in virtual learning environments must 'master the *use of digital technologies*, to harness their power' (Oliver & Oliver 2022:757). This point may seem obvious, but failing to navigate the online learning environment expeditiously slows down and even hinders learning when facilitators cannot provide quick responses or immediate support to students struggling to navigate the online sphere.
- Facilitators are viewed as hosts of the virtual WIL excursions and must create a *welcoming and inclusive* dynamic in which students feel comfortable participating (Bell et al. 2024).
- Facilitators must create a *safe online environment* where students do not feel apprehensive about sharing their experiences and ideas (Donaldson et al. 2021). Wettermark (2020:293) confirms the critical role of facilitators in creating a safe space conducive to open discussion among students and lecturers, which will enable students to 'feel uninhibited in their search for novel perspectives and develop a grounded sense of consciousness and self-affirmation'. Similarly, creating a safe learning space has been a priority in the NWU WIL excursions since its first implementation (De Beer, Van der Walt & Bunt 2020).
- The facilitators must organise students into *smaller groups* that will make a large number of students' feedback more manageable (Donaldson et al. 2021). This can be conducted in various ways for various purposes. In the NWU online WIL excursion, the Zoom function that allows the random allocation of participants to breakaway rooms was used to make the process objective and swift.
- Students should be afforded time to *process* the information, reflect on their answers, discuss possible suggestions with their peers and be

guided by facilitators. Scaffolding the learning content in particular sections, tasks and time allocations supports the notion that ‘processing time’ can be built into the programme (Donaldson et al. 2021:393).

- Facilitators must ensure that *student engagement* is ongoing and reciprocal. The interactions and responsibilities should be cooperatively shared among and between students and educators or facilitators (Tunny et al. 2022) to support the co-construction of the teaching-learning process. Communication should be a two-way process involving regular, informative and timeous feedback (Bell et al. 2024).
- Facilitators must be active in the breakaway rooms to nudge students into *participating* and guide them towards reflective and critical thinking (Donaldson et al. 2021). Frequent and timely feedback is needed to scaffold this thinking-reflecting-discussion process. Different students in each group should be enticed to participate to avoid only one or two students contributing to the discussion. After the small group (breakaway) discussions, all students return to the larger (overall) group to present their answers or feedback to the whole class (p. 392). It would be ideal if all groups could present their work so that no students feel left out (p. 394).
- During whole-class discussion or feedback sessions, facilitators should *stimulate discussion*, interaction and even debate to entice students to think deeper and more critically and to support learning from each other. Such patterns contribute to students developing insights into others’ perspectives and interpretations, including those of their peers and facilitators (Donaldson et al. 2021). Increased opportunities for critical thinking can lead to ‘deeper exploration and understanding of the learning outcomes’ (Oliver & Oliver 2022:757), an ideal goal for teacher preparation.
- Facilitators play a vital role in developing and supporting students’ *time management* skills. For example, Donaldson et al. (2021) recommend displaying a digital timer on the screen and allocating each task or learning section a specific interval for completion within the programme. Supporting students’ time management provides momentum in the scaffolding process, which helps students spend more time on discovery and less time searching for answers (Oliver & Oliver 2022). Facilitators usually have limited time to spend in each breakaway room. Therefore, they are (or should be) aware of the efficiency with which they should provide support and feedback in each room they visit (p. 762).

Facilitators play a vital role in organising and guiding online WIL excursions. Their active involvement allows them to provide valuable insights and feedback for improving future programme implementations.

■ Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework selected for the current study was social constructivism. Framing and interpreting research in this manner implies that individuals and researchers pursue an understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell 2013). Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed towards certain objects or things’ (Creswell 2013:24). The meaning or understanding of ‘things’ or situations is often constructed based on interaction with others, which is why it is viewed as socially constructed meaning-making (p. 25). Studies rooted in social constructivism represent multiple perspectives and interpretations, resulting in insights into complex phenomena, and, therefore, the researcher must ‘rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation’ (Creswell 2013:24). In the constructivist context that serves as the theoretical underpinning of the NWU WIL excursion programme, the input of various role players – such as student teachers, facilitators and university educators or lecturers – as co-creators of learning is considered invaluable. All role players’ lived experiences and perceptions (student teachers and facilitators) contribute to a broader, realistic and meaningful learning experience (Oliver & Oliver 2022; Valencia-Forrester et al. 2019). Therefore, Heimans et al. (2023:105) suggest that teacher education ought to be ‘inclusive, diverse, and representative of the full range of perspectives and experiences in the field’.

In the current study, the role players contributed to socially constructing meaning-making and a deeper understanding of the situation – that is, the WIL excursions. Exploring these role players’ voices – in the form of their comments and experiences regarding the implementation (enactment) of the WIL excursions – contributed multiple perspectives or insights into aspects of the situation (the WIL excursion programme). Encouraging diverse perspectives, including those from various backgrounds, cultures and beliefs, is essential during the WIL excursions. The researchers intended to gain an unbiased perspective on how the programme content was implemented and perceived. Specifically, the study explored how facilitators perceived equity and inclusivity in recent WIL excursions. Their reflective feedback aided in understanding the programme’s practical realisation, helping programme designers identify strengths and areas for improvement. Moustakas (1994:70) notes that ‘[w]hen we reflect upon something and arrive at its essence, we have discovered another major component of meaning’. A constructivist worldview is often used in phenomenological studies (Creswell 2013; Moustakas 1994).

■ Research method

An interpretative phenomenological investigation was used in the current study, as the researchers were ‘primarily concerned with increasing [*their*] understanding of situations, contexts and people’ (Schurink, Schurink & Fouché 2021:289). Moustakas (1994) explains:

In phenomenological studies the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection. (p. 47)

Such research explores ‘what’ participants experienced, and ‘how’ they experienced the situation (Creswell 2013) and requires that research participants lived or experienced the phenomenon themselves (Schurink et al. 2021). The situation or context was the enacted online WIL excursion; in other words, how the intended programme and its outcomes were realised in practice. Interpretative phenomenological studies are qualitative investigations that require that participants relate their experiences but require interpretation of subjective meaning (p. 295). This type of research is also referred to as hermeneutical phenomenology (Creswell 2013; Schurink et al. 2021). In his seminal work on the five main approaches to qualitative research, Creswell (2013) outlines a few research activities used in hermeneutical or interpretative phenomenological investigations. Table 8.1 provides an overview of these activities and how the researchers in the current investigation applied them.

The phenomenon investigated was the enactment or practical implementation of the online WIL excursion as part of the NWU teacher preparation programme. Participants were facilitators (Honours students and university educators) who lived or experienced the online WIL excursions in 2023 and then conveyed their experiences on the broad themes noted in Table 8.1. Although facilitators reflected and provided feedback on many contributing aspects to the WIL programme, the current chapter only focuses on reporting the aspects of equity and inclusivity in the online WIL excursion.

■ Population and sampling

All student teachers registered for a BEd teacher qualification at the NWU must attend a WIL excursion in their first year of study. Online excursions are used to accommodate students from the NWU’s Unit for Distance Learning (UDL). In 2023, 1,117 first-year students were registered to attend the online WIL excursions scheduled for that year, which implied that many facilitators would be needed to support their learning process in the

TABLE 8.1: Overview of the application of Creswell's interpretative phenomenological research activities in the current study.

Research activity suggested	Implementation of activity in the current investigation
Researchers identify a phenomenon or 'abiding concern' that they want to investigate	The phenomenon investigated was the enacted online WIL excursion programme, in particular, how equity and inclusivity were realised therein
Researchers reflect on and identify essential themes that represent the nature of the lived experience that will be investigated	Two key themes were identified: (1) strengths and areas for improvement – in other words, which aspects of the programme participants experienced as contributing to or supporting equity and inclusivity, as well as (2) those aspects in the programme that can still be developed towards improving equity and inclusivity
Researchers compile a description of the phenomenon	A literature review was conducted on the need for equity and inclusivity in teacher education, the scaffolding of online WIL excursions to support inclusivity, as well as the roles of facilitators in these endeavours. In addition, the researchers, as programme developers of the WIL excursion, described how the phenomenon is intended to be realised in the NWU online WIL excursions.
The researchers interpret the participants' reports of lived experiences to make meaning thereof	The researchers 'bracketed' their own understanding of the phenomenon to allow fresh and objective perspectives from the facilitators' experience-informed perceptions to contribute to the co-construction of understanding of how equity and inclusivity are realised (or not) in the WIL excursion and what can be done to strengthen it in subsequent offerings

Source: Developed by authors, based on Creswell, JW 2013, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*, 3rd edn., Sage, Thousand Oaks, pp. 79–80.

Key: WIL, work-integrated learning; NWU, North-West University.

online environment. Therefore, to enable and support the attainment of the broad outcomes for the WIL excursion, all teacher educators (lecturers) at the NWU Faculty of Education ($n = 387$) were invited to serve as facilitators by contributing to implementing this learning experience.

Similarly, all full-time BEd honours students were invited to serve as student facilitators (SF) in the excursions. Despite the breadth of these invitations, only four lecturers and four honours students availed themselves to facilitate the online WIL excursions. Only three lecturer facilitators (LF) and three SF voluntarily consented to participate in the data collection for the current study. The three LFs were from the three different campuses of the NWU, comprised of different genders and ethnical groups with different cultural backgrounds. Each of the LFs had, for some part at least, also contributed to the presentations in the WIL excursions and facilitated student learning in the programme. Therefore, all the LFs had a profound experience enacting the online WIL excursion programme. None of these LFs were involved in the programme development; therefore, their experiences of how the intended equity and inclusivity in the programme were realised in practice would be more objective. The three SFs had all previously attended WIL excursions (when they were first-year BEd students) and were all females but from different ethnic and religious groups, and each had a different home language. The pseudonyms used

for the LFs are Sam, Mia and Ramsey, and for the SFs, Gisele, Neela and Hattie were used.

The research was conducted under the umbrella of scientific and ethical approval of the larger WIL excursion project with ethical approval numbers NWU-01013-21-A2 and NWU-GK-21-065.

■ Data collection and analysis

In line with recommendations for qualitative research by Creswell and Creswell (2018:181), the researchers in the current investigation collected and interpreted the data as co-creators of reality. Subsequently, an iterative process of inductive and deductive analysis was used to make meaning of the data and develop themes. Data were collected using a facilitators' questionnaire (FQ). The questionnaire was developed with only four broad, open-ended questions, as Creswell (2013) suggested for phenomenological research. The questions were made available via e-mail to LFs and SFs who consented to participate. These questions were:

1. What was GOOD about the virtual excursions? Which things did you experience positively as strong points of the virtual excursions?
2. Which aspects of the virtual excursions still need enhancement? Which things frustrated you, worried you or did you see as 'weak points' in the virtual excursions?
3. What do you think we should improve in the virtual excursions? Please make suggestions for improving the points you raise.
4. Would you like to be involved as a lecturer facilitator in future virtual excursions? Please justify your answer.

The questionnaire aimed to explore facilitators' experience-informed perceptions of the strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations regarding the implementation of the online WIL excursion. Facilitators' alacrity for future involvement with WIL excursions was also explored via Question 4 of the questionnaire. The breadth of the open-ended questions allowed facilitators to reflect and provide feedback on many contributing aspects to the WIL programme. However, the current chapter only reports the findings relating to equity and inclusivity in the online WIL excursion. The analysis focused on developing a holistic account or understanding of participants' multiple perspectives and perceptions about the issue under investigation (Creswell & Creswell 2018:182), that is, how diversity and inclusivity are realised in the online WIL excursion. By including multiple participant perspectives, the researchers' efforts to 'bracket' their own experiences or distance themselves from their preconceptions about the excursions to reduce bias in the analysis stage were supported (Creswell 2013:78; Schurink et al. 2021:294). The data were analysed with a particular

focus on codes related to aspects of equity and inclusivity, and these were subsequently sorted into two main themes – strengths and areas for improvement, in the online WIL excursions (Table 8.1). Data were collected after all the online WIL excursions were concluded in May 2023. An independent administrator anonymised responses and pseudonyms are used in the reporting to maintain the participants' privacy and contribute to neutrality.

Guided by Creswell and Creswell (2018), validity strategies employed in this phenomenological research included member checking to determine the accuracy of the study's findings and presenting different perspectives (both positive and adverse). Cross-checking codes in regular meetings, supported by coordinated communication between coders, contributed to qualitative reliability.

■ Findings and discussion

The findings are reported and discussed in alignment with the two *a priori* themes mentioned previously (Table 8.1). Direct quotations from the responses of the participating SF and LF in the FQ are included as evidence.

■ Theme 1: Strengths in the current online work-integrated learning excursion programme

Numerous strengths relating to equity and inclusivity emerged from the participants' experience-informed perceptions. Four sub-themes emerged most frequently: the expanded access the excursions provided for distance students to be and feel included in their teacher preparation programme, the *virtual classroom* creating a welcoming space, several aspects related to the *programme structure* and the *modelling of best practice pedagogies*.

□ Sub-theme 1.1: Increased access supporting inclusivity

The LFs, in particular, reported that the increased options afforded by the synchronous, online format of these WIL excursions supported access to this learning opportunity and, therefore, inclusivity. The NWU's UDL students are scattered across a vast geographical area, not only across all nine provinces of South Africa, but some also reside in other countries, such as Namibia and Botswana. The online excursions provided access to all students to participate in a synchronous, live event, no matter their physical boundaries, as, for example, was expressed by Sam:

'[The *virtual excursions*] allowed learners [students] from remote areas or with physical limitations to take part in these valuable learning experiences.' (SF, FQ, May 2023)

Furthermore, facilitators' responses indicated that student access – and therefore, inclusivity – was supported by offering choices for attending the excursion. This finding aligns with the suggestions of Tunny et al. (2022:11) that inclusivity in education is supported when students and their particular circumstances are considered, especially for part-time students. North-West University student teachers could choose to attend one of five virtual excursions offered on different dates (and days of the week). These choices allowed UDL students, who often study part-time while they have jobs, to choose the dates that would be compatible with their existing employment schedules, as well as family and other responsibilities. Both Mia and Ramsey succinctly explained this:

'[The] schedule suited the students well because it was presented in the afternoons when students who perhaps work could have a better opportunity to participate without any diversion.' (LF Ramsey, FQ, May 2023)

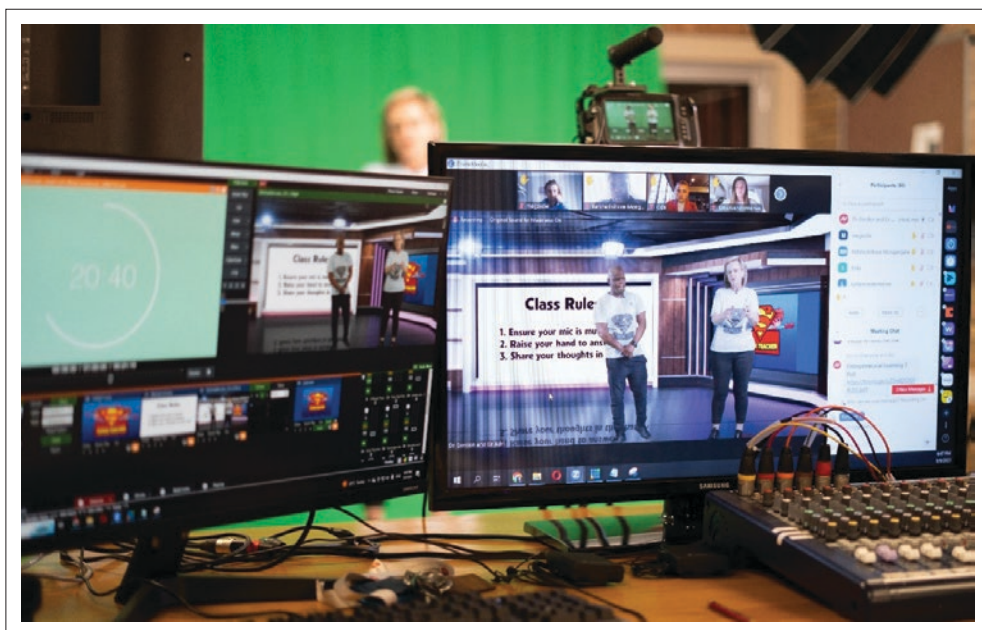
'[The virtual WIL excursions] accommodated most students as it started late in the day as we know most of the UDL students work and study at the same time. Being distance students, some of them are working as part-time teachers so they were able to share their experiences and enlighten the ones [students] who are not working or do not even have any teaching experience.' (LF Mia, FQ, May 2023)

Another strength emerging from Mia's quote is the co-construction of learning between students with experience (who are working in schools already, either as teaching assistants or teachers-in-training) and those who do not (yet) have teaching experience. Adding those students' experiences (and 'voices') to the excursion contributed to making the teacher education 'inclusive, diverse, and representative of the full range of perspectives and experiences in the field' (Heimans et al. 2023:105).

▣ Sub-theme 1.2: The virtual classroom as a welcoming space

The virtual classroom setting was perceived as another strength of the online WIL excursion. Facilitators experienced it as contributing towards inclusivity by creating a safe and welcoming space for learning, allowing students to feel comfortable participating and sharing their ideas, which aligns with suggestions in literature by Bell et al. (2021), De Beer et al. (2020), Donaldson et al. (2021) and the Equity Collaborative (2022). One of the SFs, Hattie, described it thus:

'I found the virtual setting used interesting; the classroom board with class rules in the background and the notion of "super teachers" being displayed on both the background screen as well as the T-shirts worn by the presenters. I perceive that this virtual design set-up was one of the main reasons that made students more willing to engage in the excursion. For instance, I think that the first-year students would have easily become uninterested if the virtual excursions were set up in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.' (SF Hattie, FQ, May 2023)



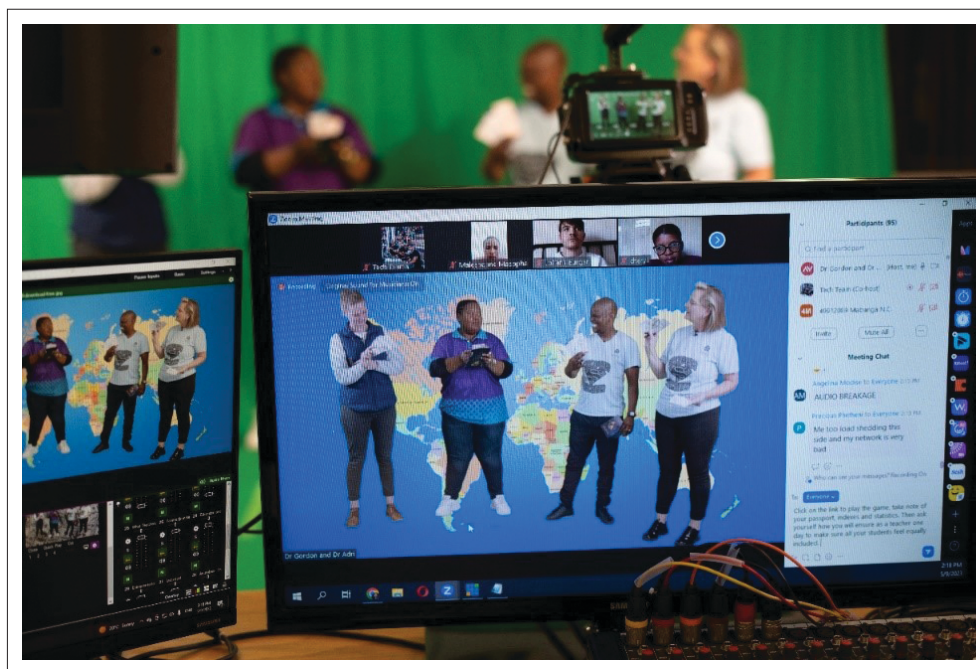
Source: Du Plessis (2023). Photograph taken on 05 May 2023 under instruction by Neal Petersen during the 2023 FEDU WIL excursions. Reproduced and published with the permission from the participants and Neal Petersen.

FIGURE 8.1: The virtual classroom's welcoming background.

The image referred to by SF Hattie is shown in Figure 8.1. The virtual excursions were presented in a so-called 'green room' to allow manipulation of the background in the image on the students' screens. The technical support team changed and adapted the background images according to the various sections and foci in the programme to create a welcoming and exciting learning space and help maintain students' interest. One example of an alternative background that was used is shown in Figure 8.2. In addition, Gisele (SF, FQ, May 2023) explained the fact that other presenters (there were only two key presenters, Figure 8.1) were invited to join the presentations of some sections (Figure 8.2) exhibited inclusive practice and contributed to making the learning space a welcoming one for all students.

❑ **Sub-theme 1.3: Aspects of the virtual work-integrated learning excursion programme structure that contributed to inclusivity**

Participants reported several aspects of the virtual WIL excursion programme structure or scaffolding as strengths contributing to inclusivity. One of the critical roles of facilitators in virtual programmes is to maintain



Source: Du Plessis (2023). Photograph taken on 05 May 2023 under instruction by Neal Petersen during the 2023 FEDU WIL excursions. Reproduced and published with the permission from the participants and Neal Petersen.

FIGURE 8.2: Using alternative backgrounds to keep the virtual space exciting and welcoming.

momentum through effective programme structuring and time management (Tunny et al. 2022:4), which facilitators agreed with. All activities and sections in the virtual WIL excursion were timed, and timers were also shown on screen when students participated in breakaway rooms to support the momentum of the programme, following suggestions by Donaldson et al. (2021:393). The built-in momentum and energy in the virtual WIL excursion programme were experienced and reported as positive, engaging and motivational, which contributes to inclusivity, as evidenced by these quotes:

'The presenters in the excursions were energetic and flawless throughout the excursion sessions, I even took notes of my own on how to keep students engaged in a four-hour-long virtual session.' (SF Hattie, FQ, May 2023)

'[The] organisation of the online excursion was very good, inclusive, and thoroughly planned; everything was promptly on time [...]' (LF Ramsey, FQ, May 2023)

'Most of the learners [students] seemed to show some appreciation for all the trouble that went into planning and organising the events of the two days for them. This small hint of appreciation even touched me, as a facilitator, as most of the first-year learners appreciated the help that we as facilitators gave them.' (SF Neela, FQ, May 2023)

SF Neela's quote indicates that students appreciated the scaffolding of the programme. The quote also shows that facilitators treasured students' appreciative comments, contributing to their experiences of feeling included and appreciated. Bell et al. (2024:12) report how small efforts can contribute to feelings of appreciation in virtual educational contexts. The programme developers for the NWU virtual WIL excursion viewed the fact that facilitators also felt appreciated as constructive, especially because the excursions tended to be understaffed (Du Toit & Petersen 2023), which often required facilitators 'to go above and beyond' to attain the intended learning outcomes (Tunny et al. 2022:11), as was the case in the excursions reported on in this chapter.

The second aspect of the programme's structure that facilitators reported as a strength contributing towards inclusivity, based on their experienced-based perceptions, was its scaffolding to enhance student engagement in the learning process. Each core section of the programme was introduced in the 'main room', followed by students reflecting, discussing and completing activities in small groups in breakaway rooms, where facilitators guided and supported them. After group discussions, everyone gathered in the main room again to share feedback with the whole group and the programme presenters. Not all groups had the opportunity to give feedback in each session (there were just too many students). However, students could contribute to the discussions through the chat box functionality (see Figure 8.2), extending engagement opportunities. These scaffolds towards student engagement align with the recommendations of Oliver and Oliver (2022:764) to use the functionalities embedded in online applications to constructively support inclusivity. These quotes indicate how facilitators positively viewed students' participation or engagement in these:

'Virtual excursions gave first-year student teachers the opportunity to work in groups, where I think it helped them to respect and accommodate each other as they were supposed to discuss different issues related to what they have learnt. Students were also able to listen to each other when sharing their opinions during group work.' (LF Mia, FQ, May 2023)

'[...] students were engaging in their rooms, once they were in their rooms with all their ideas, they couldn't wait to give feedback to the main room.' (SF Gisele, FQ, May 2023)

'Students were interactive in the chat box and as a facilitator reacting on their comments showed them that they were given attention.' (SF Gisele, FQ, May 2023)

Sub-theme 1.4: Modelling best practice educational pedagogies

Another aspect of the programme structure, particularly the teaching-learning content, was experienced by facilitators as a strength of the virtual

WIL excursion. Much of the learning content in the various WIL excursion sections was intended to model best practice teaching-learning approaches or pedagogies for future teachers (students) attending the programme. The purpose of such modelling was twofold: to bridge the theory-practice divide – in other words, showing practically how learning should be facilitated in active and engaging ways in student teachers' future classrooms and then, to negate the phenomenon of 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie 1975), where student teachers have low or unrealistic preconceived expectations about what it entails to be a proficient teacher, based on their own school experiences (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). It was rewarding to find that the facilitators observed modelling efforts as a strength of the excursions. Ramsey provided examples like inclusive teaching, fostering creative thinking, linking learning to real-life situations and effective group work, which the researchers hope student teachers will use in their classrooms:

'[...] the video diary [...] taught students how to behave inclusively and to treat all students the same [...] When I heard their discussions in their groups, I could conclude that it was a topic that renewed their minds and brought them new insights, not only in their school environment but also in their own immediate community. The cooperative learning video presentation definitely made the students look at groupwork from a new perspective, because students do not always understand how to implement groupwork successfully and groupwork has a lot of potential in any educational environment if implemented correctly. Thus, when they had to apply the cooperative learning work style, they could gain first-hand experience of how to approach and use cooperative learning.' (LF Ramsey, FQ, May 2023)

Several examples of co-construction of learning in the online WIL excursion also emerged. Co-construction of learning or constructivist learning is another preferred teaching-learning approach, in which educators serve as facilitators of learning rather than as teachers or 'givers of knowledge' (Du Toit 2022:235), and learners contribute to the learning content. What was interesting was that the facilitators unreservedly shared how much they themselves learned from their interaction with the students, for example:

'I believe they [*students*] learned a lot from each other and I also learnt many things from them.' (SF Gisele, FQ, May 2023)

'I enjoyed being a facilitator, and it helped me see the value of the activities differently as I saw it five years ago when I was a first-year student [...] I would advise future honours students to participate in these excursions as it could be a very reflective process for them.' (SF Neela, FQ, May 2023)

The findings thus far highlighted some of the strengths facilitators experienced in the excursion. They supported the notion that it is currently structured appropriately to attain most of the intended outcomes for the programme. Nevertheless, curriculum innovation implies that more than

just a programme's strengths should be studied when considering adaptations for its subsequent implementation. Next, we report the facilitators' recommendations for strengthening the virtual WIL excursion programme.

■ **Theme 2: Considerations for improving inclusivity in the online work-integrated learning excursion programme**

Participating facilitators made several recommendations for improving or strengthening the existing virtual WIL excursion programme to enhance inclusivity, based on their experience-informed perceptions. Three main sub-themes developed under this theme were *facilitators' orientation*, addressing the *diversity of school contexts* found in South Africa as content in the programme and engaging *more facilitators* in the virtual excursions.

□ **Sub-theme 2.1: Require facilitators' orientation for work-integrated learning excursions**

Several participants recommended facilitators' orientation or prior preparation before attending the WIL excursions. The facilitators' suggestions could contribute to enhancing inclusivity in subsequent excursions for both students and facilitators. The first recommendation that emerged in this sub-theme was that first-year students – all required to attend a WIL excursion as a compulsory part of their teacher education – should be made aware of or sensitised to the importance of the learning opportunities embedded in this programme towards preparing them as well-rounded teachers. Mia phrased this problem thus:

'I [*felt*] that some first-year student teachers are not well prepared for the excursions, or they are not aware of how important excursions are in general. In some instances, I thought some students thought the excursion was just an add-on in their BEd programme.' (LF Mia, FQ, May 2023)

This LF perceived that students do not value or understand the extent and depth of the learning opportunities embedded in the WIL excursions. Although the WIL excursion programme designers endeavoured to construct valuable and meaningful learning experiences for the student teachers (Du Toit 2023), they do not seem to be aware thereof, based on the observations of the facilitators. Students seem to not realise the value and importance of these excursions in preparing them for their future teaching careers. Hence, students may overlook the significance and relevance of these excursions in equipping them for their prospective teaching careers. Highlighting the excursion's

potential contribution towards teacher preparation might increase these students' sense of belonging when they realise how pertinently this learning opportunity contributes towards preparing them for their future careers. Facilitators should, therefore, be informed about these extended benefits as part of their orientation before attending the excursions.

Sam made another recommendation for the prior preparation of facilitators (and students) for the virtual WIL excursion:

'Encouraging informal virtual meet-ups or icebreaker activities before excursions could help build a stronger sense of community among students and facilitators.'
(LF Sam, FQ, May 2023)

Offering opportunities for facilitators and student teachers to get to know one another (even a little) on an informal basis before they have to 'work together' or function optimally in a structured work environment (as is expected in the virtual WIL excursions), such as those recommended by Sam, would contribute to their sense of belonging and contribute to creating a welcoming and inclusive learning space, adding to their sense of being accepted or appreciated regardless of their differences or diversity (The Equity Collaborative 2022). Gisele also had a recommendation regarding the prior preparation of facilitators for the excursions:

'I suggest that the facilitators be given the programme prior to the excursion so they can be able and more prepared to answer appropriately when students ask questions in the breakaway rooms.' (SF Gisele, FQ, May 2023)

Student facilitators did receive focused training to prepare them for facilitating the students' interactions in the virtual environment of the WIL excursion, to stimulate discussion and enhance student participation and engagement, in line with recommendations of Bell et al. (2024:12), Donaldson et al. (2021:393) and Tunny et al. (2022:4). Student facilitators did not, however, receive the actual programme beforehand. This is a situation that can certainly be remedied. Sharing and discussing the programme with SF beforehand will add additional opportunities to include their opinions and voices in the construction of the learning process and serve as co-constructors of the learning design.

□ Sub-theme 2.2: Include teaching-learning content to address the diversity of school contexts found in South Africa

Continuing from the previous discussion on co-constructing learning, facilitators suggested adding missing teaching-learning content to the NWU teacher preparation programme. They saw excursions as an ideal

opportunity to address this content, especially regarding the diversity of South African schools future teachers will face. For example, Ramsey phrased this problem thus:

‘What does this really look like in our under-resourced schools and how can a student make an impact on that school? [...] Especially in the schools that are truly suffering, which the majority of schools are, and to provide the students with refinement, which is so necessary, by training them to be successful educators in any school (prosperous or disadvantaged) in South Africa and to make a real difference.’ (LF Ramsey, FQ, May 2023)

Ramsey, therefore, suggested that teaching-learning content be included in the WIL programme about the variations in types of schools that these future teachers might be placed at in their future careers. Ramsey’s suggestion implies a lack of teaching-learning content in the WIL excursions on how teachers might deal with the diversity of contexts (in his example: prosperous and disadvantaged schools) in various types of schools and is a valid suggestion, considering the vast differences in educational contexts in South Africa. This recommendation links to a problem that is widely reported in the literature. For example, Du Toit and Petersen (2023:2) explain that South African school contexts are ‘exceedingly diverse and often much more complex than students are aware of. Consequently, many student teachers have misconceptions about what the teaching profession entails’. Du Toit (2018:70) reports the diversity in South African school contexts as varying from very under-resourced ‘tree schools where learners are taught outside, in the shade of trees, because no school building exists to accommodate the learners’ to ‘ultra-modern and well-resourced schools’ (p. 88) with many diverse types in-between. First-year students enter university with restricted school experiences, often limited only to how things happened or were managed in their schools, again referring to Lortie’s (1975) ‘apprenticeship of learning’. Should novice teachers be employed at a school with a vastly different context from what they have experienced, they may not have had the necessary teaching-learning content in their teacher preparation programme to effectively function in such an unfamiliar environment. It will be challenging, for example, for a novice teacher who comes from a background of privilege or abundant resources to teach in a school that is under-resourced, has little structure or suffers under poor management. The reverse is probably also true. For these reasons, Van Vuuren (2020:8) highlights the need to prepare student teachers with teaching-learning content that keeps these diverse teaching contexts in mind. Including teaching-learning content to address this gap would strengthen the WIL excursion and, ultimately, the teacher preparation programme.

□ Sub-theme 2.3: Engage more facilitators in the virtual work-integrated learning excursions

Considering the number of excursion attendees, it was not surprising that most participants recommended that more facilitators be engaged in the virtual WIL excursions. Neela, for example, described the problem thus:

'It was also evident that the bigger the groups got, the less participation there was [...] it became harder to motivate the groups to participate because of the huge number of breakout rooms compared to the number of facilitators that attended the sessions [*therefore*] we as facilitators did not manage to pop into all the other breakout rooms to assist them where they needed it.' (SF Neela, FQ, May 2023)

The number of student teachers compelled to attend the WIL excursions is increasing, yet the understaffing of WIL excursions reported internationally (Tunny et al. 2022) continues to be experienced at the NWU, too, where programme developers report their struggle to engage more senior students and staff as facilitators in these excursions (Du Toit & Petersen 2023). Tunny et al. (2022) warn that:

[U]nder-resourcing WIL limits the ability for education providers [...] to provide bespoke programs for students to address individual requirements and needs, and in effect, perpetuates social injustices and limits access to opportunities. (p. 10)

Teacher educators at NWU may not fully understand the value of the WIL excursion. To address this, the excursion's learning outcomes should be promoted to students and facilitators, generating more interest and involvement, which will strengthen the teacher preparation programme.

■ Conclusion

Exploring the voices of facilitators in the virtual WIL excursion contributed valuable insights into the perceived strengths of the programme, as well as perceived areas for improvement. The strengths that emerged based on facilitators' experience-informed perceptions, which they believe can contribute to fostering inclusivity, will continue to be implemented to contribute valuable and meaningful learning as part of the NWU teacher preparation programmes. It was heartening to find that the facilitators, too, experienced a sense of inclusivity, a small reward for their efforts to contribute to these students' preparation as future teachers. Therefore, the virtual WIL excursions can positively contribute to inclusivity and equity for students and facilitators if carefully constructed for that purpose. To further ensure that virtual WIL excursions effectively contribute to inclusivity and equity, it is crucial to consider factors such as technology

accessibility, clear communication of expectations, technical support and sensitivity to potential challenges faced by diverse participants. Additionally, seeking feedback from both students and facilitators can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that these virtual experiences are truly enriching for everyone involved.

Using virtual excursions to foster intercultural competence of undergraduate health care students³

Jessica Pool

Centre for Health Professions Education (CHPE),
Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

Yolande Heymans

Centre for Health Professions Education (CHPE),
Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

Rhea Koch

Centre for Health Professions Education (CHPE),
Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa

Gontse G Mokwatsi

Hypertension in Africa Research Team (HART),
School of Applied Health Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences,
North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

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■ Abstract

Higher education has a multifaceted purpose, including preparing students for their careers and fostering social and cultural readiness. Cultural sensitivity is crucial for health care students as they will work with patients from diverse backgrounds in their future professions. Understanding and appreciating intercultural differences improves patient care and satisfaction, while a lack of cultural competence can lead to communication breakdowns and disparities in health care. Hence, it is vital to prioritise cultural sensitivity training for health care students in South Africa, integrating it with undergraduate education to ensure that they are equipped to provide quality care to diverse patients. This chapter reports on how a virtual excursion learning event was used to foster intercultural competence in undergraduate health care students. The research question guiding this study was: How does the use of a virtual excursion contribute to fostering intercultural competence in undergraduate health care students? Framed from a social constructivist approach, a qualitative study design was used. Data were collected by means of an online, open-ended reflective questionnaire and thematically analysed. Findings revealed that participating in a virtual excursion sensitises health care students to embracing intercultural competence in an increasingly diverse environment. Additionally, findings confirmed that Deardorff's models could guide the fostering of intercultural competencies in undergraduate health care students to foster attitudes of respect, openness, curiosity and discovery – aspects crucial for intercultural competence.

■ Introduction

Higher education serves multiple purposes, encompassing various aims and objectives. One of its fundamental aims is to equip students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to excel in their chosen professions and careers. In addition, higher education has a broader societal and cultural function of preparing health care students for the increasing diversity that life and the workforce yield (Erikson & Erikson 2019; Scott 2018). Producing competent, effective and socially responsible professionals is a shared objective of South African higher education institutions (Council on Higher Education 2013).

Health care professionals worldwide are expected to deliver care to increasingly culturally diverse patients with unique beliefs, values and practices that may have an impact on their health (Kaihlalanen, Hietapakka & Heponiemi 2019). It is, therefore, essential to promote health care students' intercultural competencies to ensure that they are equipped to provide quality care for South Africa's diverse patients (Burch 2016).

Cultural competence can contribute to providing equal and quality health care services for culturally diverse patients (Betancourt et al. 2003). A lack of intercultural competence is recognised as a threat to quality health care and may lead to health care workers unintentionally offending or misunderstanding their patients, which may lead to a breakdown in communication and a lack of trust in the health care provider (Kaihlainen et al. 2019). This can furthermore result in patients avoiding or delaying treatment, which can have severe consequences for their health (Betancourt et al. 2003; Kaihlainen et al. 2019; Marshall et al. 2017).

Nationally, the diversity of the population in South Africa is reflected in its language, religious beliefs and customs. South Africa was home to a multicultural population of approximately 60 million people in 2022 (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA] 2022). According to Burch (2016), health care professionals need to possess intercultural competencies to provide quality care to culturally diverse patients, enabling them to comprehend and value diversity. By doing so, health care professionals can enhance patient care and satisfaction in the South African health care sector (Matthews & Van Wyk 2018).

The literature recommends an intentional focus on developing the intercultural competence of health care professionals (Burch 2016; Kaihlainen et al. 2019; Matthews & Van Wyk 2018). Training should be offered throughout a health care professional's career (Betancourt et al. 2003), which starts when students enter undergraduate studies. In agreement, the authors of this chapter argue that the development of cultural competencies should not be left to chance and that opportunities allowing students to understand and appreciate cultural differences should be included in undergraduate education.

Despite acknowledging the importance of intercultural competencies, literature on this issue in the South African health care context is limited, and there is little indication of how to best develop intercultural competencies (Matthews & Van Wyk 2018). According to Gregersen-Hermans (2017) and Matthews and Van Wyk (2018), numerous universities acknowledge the significance of intercultural competence as a crucial learning outcome. However, the challenge lies in effectively incorporating it with undergraduate education. The latter indicates that more research is needed about how intercultural competencies can be included in undergraduate education to increase students' intercultural competencies.

Against this background, North-West University (NWU) is dedicated to innovative curriculum design to equip students, including future health care professionals, with the competencies needed to tackle 21st-century

challenges, such as working in multicultural environments (NWU 2021). In this context, the first-year virtual excursion, as part of NWU's innovative curriculum, aimed to cultivate intercultural competence by enhancing students' awareness and sensitivity through a purposefully designed learning event outside the formal curriculum.

This chapter explores how a virtual excursion in undergraduate health education, as part of innovative curriculum design, fostered students' intercultural competence. The research question guiding the research was: How does the use of a virtual excursion contribute to fostering intercultural competence in undergraduate health care students? Findings from this qualitative study can inform innovative curriculum design to foster intercultural competence to prepare health care students for embracing increased diversity in life and the world of work.

■ Underpinning framework and concepts for the research

This study was framed by social constructivism. Social constructivism is a theoretical perspective that emphasises the role of social and cultural factors in shaping our understanding of the world (Lee & Greene 1999; Stahl & King 2020; Toblin & Begley 2004; Vygotsky 1978). In the context of intercultural sensitivity and awareness, social constructivism highlights the importance of recognising and appreciating diverse intercultural perspectives and experiences. According to this perspective, knowledge and understanding are not fixed or objective but rather shaped by social interactions and cultural contexts (Geller 2017). Therefore, fostering intercultural competence requires acknowledging and valuing different cultural perspectives and engaging in meaningful dialogue and interaction with people from diverse backgrounds. By continuously developing intercultural competence, individuals can expand their understanding of the world and develop a more empathetic view of different cultures (Geller 2017).

■ Intercultural competence

According to Shen (2015) and Beach et al. (2005), intercultural competence is a multi-dimensional concept encompassing a person's cultural sensitivity, attitudes, awareness, knowledge and skills. In health care, intercultural competence is defined as an understanding of the influence of social and cultural factors on the beliefs and behaviours of patients and health care professionals, and how these factors are considered at various levels of the health care system to ensure quality care (Betancourt et al. 2003).

In addition, intercultural competence refers to the ability of people to interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. It involves understanding and respecting cultural differences, as well as being able to adapt one's own behaviour to meet the needs of people from different cultures (Kaihlainen et al. 2019). Intercultural competence is crucial to build strong and positive relationships with people from diverse backgrounds. It assists in promoting mutual understanding and respect, enabling individuals to effectively navigate cultural differences in various settings, including health care contexts (Betancourt et al. 2003).

The significance of cultural competence as a means of ensuring equal and quality health care services for culturally diverse patients has gained attention for mitigating challenges related to cultural issues, recognised as a threat to patient safety, as noted by Betancourt et al. (2003). Shen (2015) warns that patient safety may be jeopardised because of a lack of intercultural competence. Marshall et al. (2017) also report that a lack of intercultural competence increases negative attitudes towards cross-cultural care and affects health care professionals' perceived preparedness to care for culturally diverse patients.

White et al. (2017) suggest that promoting intercultural competence among undergraduate students through activities such as self-reflection could foster students' awareness of the impact their own and other cultures and biases have on health care interactions. Understanding cultural competence concepts would enable students to comprehend how to respond to health care challenges, especially those arising from cultural differences, in South Africa (Matthews & Van Wyk 2018).

In line with the need to foster intercultural competence, the Faculty of Health Sciences developed and facilitated a virtual excursion for first-year health care students at NWU to sensitise them and enhance their intercultural competence.

■ Virtual excursions

Excursions are vital in connecting theoretical knowledge to real-world experiences (Behrendt & Franklin 2014). Excursions offer a unique opportunity for students to identify and challenge their unarticulated biases and prejudices before they enter the profession (De Beer, Petersen & Dunbar-Krige 2012). Virtual excursions, also referred to as virtual field trips or e-field trips, can be defined as educational experiences that simulate the immersive and interactive aspects of real-world excursions but take place in virtual environments through various digital platforms (Olivier & Kunene 2022). Depending on the objectives, the nature of virtual excursions can differ and can include, but is not limited to, participating in simulations

or gamified activities and engaging with experts and peers in a virtual environment (Olivier & Kunene 2022; Pool et al. 2022; Reitsma et al. 2022). Drawing on the work of the aforementioned scholars, virtual excursions in the context of this study refer to focused online interactive activities, which are delivered through specific online platforms such as the university's learning management system (LMS), StoryBoardThat (an online storyboarding tool for creating digital stories) and Zoom video conferencing software that allows users to connect with video, audio, phone and chat.

The use of virtual excursions as a learning tool has shown potential for fostering self-directedness in learners, as evidenced by recent research conducted in South Africa (Pool et al. 2022). In an increasingly interconnected world, graduates must have the ability to engage with diverse perspectives and global issues. Self-directedness can enable students to explore global topics and engage in cross-cultural learning experiences independently (Loeng 2020). However, despite this growing interest in virtual excursions, little is known about their effectiveness in developing intercultural competencies among undergraduate health care students. Hence, the current study aimed to address this gap by examining how virtual excursions can foster first-year health care students' intercultural competencies. To guide this investigation, the researchers used Deardorff's pyramid model of intercultural competence and process model of intercultural competence (Deardorff 2006; Deardorff & Hunter 2006).

■ Deardorff's models of intercultural competence

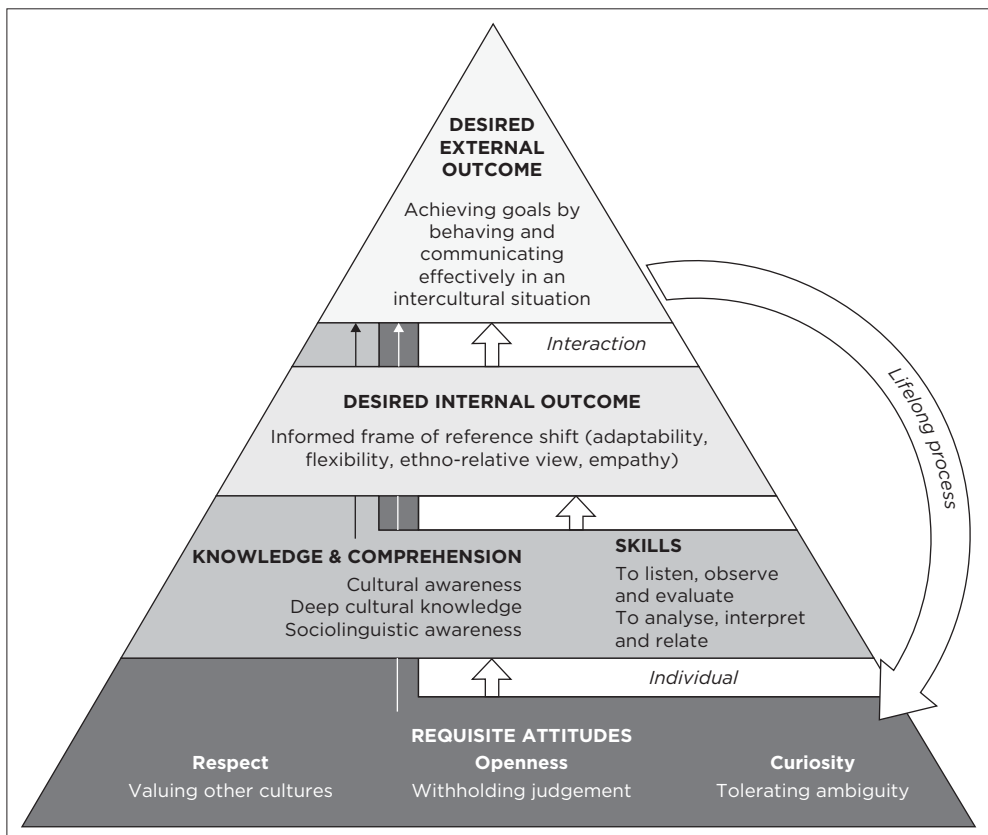
Using a Delphi methodology, Deardorff drew from 23 leading intercultural experts' conceptual perspectives and theories. Through documented consensus, Deardorff synthesised the results in two visual models, namely the pyramid model of intercultural competence and the process model of intercultural competence (Deardorff 2006). Both models focus on four components, namely requisite attitudes, knowledge, comprehension and skills and desired internal outcomes and desired external outcomes. In the pyramid model, Deardorff (2006) figuratively indicates that the lower levels enhance the higher levels. Requisite attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, as well as skills, serve as foundation elements for an internal shift in frame of reference for the desired (internal outcome), which then manifests in effective and appropriate communication and behaviour in intercultural situations (external outcomes). Underpinned by the same key components of intercultural competence as outlined in Deardorff's pyramid model, Deardorff's process model of intercultural competence (Deardorff 2006) emphasises the importance of self-awareness, active learning and continuous development in achieving intercultural competence

to bridge cultural differences in a globalised world. Deardorff and Hunter (2006) argue that the acquisition of intercultural competence is a lifelong and ongoing process that requires mindfulness.

Next, the authors draw from both models to discuss the key components therein, namely requisite attitudes, knowledge, comprehension and skills and internal outcomes and external outcomes, in more detail. The two models were merged into Figure 9.1.

■ Requisite attitudes

The first component of Deardorff's model refers to the importance of attitude to the learning process (Deardorff & Hunter 2006). These attitudes are crucial to the further development of knowledge and skills needed for



Source: Developed from Deardorff, DK 2006, 'Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization', *Journal of Studies in International Education*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 241-266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002>; Deardorff, DK & Hunter, W 2006, 'Educating global-ready graduates', *International Educator*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 72-83.

FIGURE 9.1: Integration of Deardorff's pyramid and process models of intercultural competence.

intercultural competence (Deardorff 2006). The fundamental attitudes essential for intercultural competence include respect, openness, curiosity and discovery.

An attitude of *respect* demonstrates deference for different cultures, beliefs and practices and also values the contributions of different cultures (Deardorff 2006). It is essential for intercultural competence that different worldviews are respected and focused on the relational goals of engagement (Deardorff 2006; Deardorff et al. 2013). Relational goals of engagement refer to the establishment of positive relationships and the fostering of mutual understanding between people from different cultures to build strong and meaningful connections across cultural boundaries. Respect and trust become essential building blocks in developing these relationships (Deardorff 2019).

Openness refers to the willingness of a person to approach different cultures with an open mind, without preconceived notions or judgement based on one's assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices (Deardorff 2006; Deardorff et al. 2013). Openness to new experiences and diversity provides a foundation for participating effectively across cultures (Deardorff 2019) as it allows individuals to see the same view from more than one perspective. This attitude is invaluable when cultural differences need to be negotiated and mediated when addressing cultural conflict (Deardorff et al. 2013).

Curiosity and *discovery* are described as tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty and are viewed as fundamental to intercultural competence (Deardorff 2006). Curiosity can thrive if assumptions and judgements are suspended to leave room for multiple perspectives (Deardorff 2019). Curiosity can set a foundation for more creative ways to turn differences into opportunities (Deardorff et al. 2013). Culturally competent individuals actively seek out opportunities to engage with people from diverse backgrounds, ask questions and broaden their understanding of other cultures and as a result increase their tolerance for ambiguity (Deardorff 2019).

■ Knowledge and comprehension

The knowledge component of Deardorff's models (Figure 9.1) involves developing a deep understanding of one's own culture, as well as the cultures of others (Deardorff 2006). It is crucial to understand other perspectives. Three types of knowledge are needed for intercultural competence, including cultural self-awareness, culture-specific knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness (Deardorff & Jones 2012).

Cultural self-awareness refers to the way culture influences one's identity. This component of cultural competence involves becoming aware of one's

cultural identity and how it shapes one's perspectives and interactions with others. Cultural self-awareness can be achieved through self-reflection and moving beyond one's cultural comfort zone. This can be done through education abroad, cross-cultural simulations or intercultural interactions on campus or in the community (Deardorff & Hunter 2006). Within the current study, the virtual excursion entailed a self-reflection activity and engaging with experts and peers in a virtual environment.

Culture-specific knowledge is deep cultural knowledge and understanding of the cultural practices, values and beliefs of different cultural groups (Deardorff et al. 2013). This includes knowledge of cultural norms, traditions, customs and behaviours, as well as an understanding of the historical, political and social contexts in which they exist. These are essential components of cultural competence because they provide a foundation for including and understanding cultural perspectives and knowing how to relate and communicate successfully with those from different cultures (Deardorff 2019).

Sociolinguistic awareness refers to the relation between language and meaning in a societal context (Deardorff 2006, 2019). This encompasses understanding the social and cultural context in which language is used, including variations in dialect, accent and communication styles. Sociolinguistic awareness is essential for effective communication with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, as it enables people to recognise and adapt to variations in communication styles. Language fluency can enhance deep cultural knowledge as it allows for communication in ways that incorporate the nuances of culture (Deardorff et al. 2013).

■ Skills

One of the key components that bridge cultural differences, as highlighted by Deardorff's process model (Deardorff 2006), depends on individuals acquiring certain skills (Figure 9.1). These skills are not acquired within a brief period but form part of a lifelong process based on an individual's experience, reflection and gathering cognitive and affective elements (Deardorff 2019). Skills in the process model include skills to actively listen, observe closely and being able to evaluate matters using analysis, interpretation or relation. The aforementioned skills assist individuals in engaging in self-reflection, identifying cultural similarities and differences, being able to live outside one's own culture, understanding differences in multiple contexts and questioning discriminatory behaviour (Deardorff & Hunter 2006; Matveev 2017).

Listening is generally defined as paying attention to sound. However, to foster intercultural competence, individuals need not only pay attention to

sound but must practise *active listening* for understanding (Deardorff 2019). People need to actively listen to one another to gain insights into each other's perspectives and to encourage openness and honesty before engaging in further dialogue. To determine whether one is actively listening to people they engage with, one needs to ask oneself how much one truly listens to other people or whether one listens to respond and judge others (Deardorff 2019; Deardorff et al. 2013). To encourage a successful dialogue and establish listening for understanding, it is also essential for individuals not to interrupt others while talking so as to be able to listen closely and ask questions thereafter (Deardorff 2019), which is also a demonstration of respect, one of other key components of intercultural competence (Deardorff 2019).

Learning to observe is another key skill in intercultural competence. *Observing* entails developing an understanding of what is going on around you to guide decisions, inform practices and prevent conflict. For effective engagement and communication, people must detach themselves from being biased, judgemental and involving personal feelings during interactions (Deardorff 2019). Such behaviour allows one to take note of how other people behave and contributes to understanding why others behave in a certain manner to reduce judgement (Deardorff 2019).

Being able to *evaluate* interactions and situations through an intercultural lens and understand underlying cultural explanations for how and why things occur in a certain manner is another crucial intercultural competence skill (Deardorff et al. 2013). The ability to evaluate a situation requires one to actively reflect on their actions and how they interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Deardorff 2019; Deardorff et al. 2013). While it is important to evaluate and understand why interactions occur in a specific manner, it is also crucial to self-reflect on lessons learnt from these interactions and how this might lead to changed behaviour (Deardorff 2019; Deardorff et al. 2013).

■ Desired internal and external outcomes

Deardorff (2019) argues that by developing knowledge and skills, individuals have a better understanding of the other person's way of knowing, being and doing, and this flexibility allows for appropriate communication and behaviour. The individual also becomes cognitively flexible as they adapt to the changing context and environment in which they function (Deardorff 2019). Additionally, the individual is more adaptable, adjusting to different cultural environments and the diverse needs of individuals within these environments. Having an ethnorelative view, the individual is more empathetic and culturally sensitive and as a result, sees things from

different cultural perspectives and treats individuals according to their cultural needs and standards (Deardorff 2006; see Chapter 2).

Deardorff (2006) describes external outcomes as the result of effective and appropriate behaviour and communication because of intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes as experienced by others. Additionally, the individual reflects on the effectiveness and appropriateness of their behaviour and communication when interacting with other people and what they could do differently to ensure more appropriate and effective communication and behaviour (Figure 9.1).

■ Virtual excursions to foster intercultural competence

In recent years, the development of intercultural competence has become increasingly important in health care education (Academy of Science of South Africa 2018). When entering the workplace, health care graduates will be expected to work with colleagues, patients and clients from different cultural backgrounds. For this reason, including opportunities to develop intercultural competencies both inside and outside the formal curriculum is essential (Academy of Science of South Africa 2018; Denysenko et al. 2021). Since 2021, first-year health care students from the three campuses of NWU (Potchefstroom, Vanderbijlpark and Mahikeng) have participated in a virtual excursion outside the formal curriculum. Findings from the 2022 virtual excursions revealed that some first-year health care students harboured cultural prejudices and stereotypes, which could impede their ability to adjust to diverse cultures and decrease their cross-cultural readiness (Pool et al. 2022).

Undergraduate university lecturers in the Faculty of Health Sciences, who are passionate about cultural responsiveness, actively pursued the idea of intentionally designing learning activities for first-year health students to overcome the issues identified in the 2022 excursion and foster intercultural competence. This initiative underscores the idea that the development of intercultural competence should not be left to chance. Additionally, it aligns with students' perspectives on the use of a virtual excursion to support the growth of cultural competence (Pool et al. 2022).

Underpinned by the components as outlined in Deardorff's models (Figure 9.1), the virtual learning activities were not only designed to allow for intercultural engagement with peers and practising health care professionals but also included opportunities for students to reflect on their own intercultural competence and map areas for development. Learning activities comprised the following:

□ **Activity 1: Cultural identity exploration through self-reflection**

Students reflected on their own cultural identity, including their ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, family background and other relevant factors and identified how their own cultural identity may result in personal biases and assumptions. In addition, students also had to reflect on their own cultural competence, the attitudes and skills they perceive to be most important to demonstrate intercultural competence and what they can do to become more culturally competent.

□ **Activity 2: Panel discussion with practising health care professionals**

Through the process of storytelling and intercultural dialogue, practising health care professionals and students shared scenarios, discussing the influence of cultural diversity on health care and how to deal with cultural differences to ensure optimal patient care.

□ **Activity 3: Reflection**

Students were asked to reflect on their own intercultural ways of knowing, being and doing. Guided by Deardorff's intercultural competence models (Deardorff 2006), students had to reflect on their own attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, as well as skills to bring about an internal shift in frame of reference (desired internal outcome), with the aim of becoming more culturally aware and sensitive which then manifests in effective and appropriate communication and behaviour in intercultural situations (external outcomes).

As part of the virtual excursion at NWU, the facilitation team conducted a research study to investigate how virtual excursions can be used to enhance the intercultural competence of undergraduate health care students.

■ **Research design and methodology**

■ **Research paradigm**

This study was anchored in a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism and social constructivism aim to understand how people make meaning, bringing a different emphasis on an empathic understanding of cultural context. In the context of this study, the researchers deemed interpretivism and social constructivism as appropriate paradigms as they enabled the researchers to explore the participants' individual views, subjective beliefs, viewpoints and learning through their interactions with other first-year health care students during the virtual excursion. In addition, it also enabled the researchers to interpret the participants' reflections to understand how a virtual excursion can foster intercultural competence

from first-year health and social care students' subjective frames of reference.

■ Research design

By utilising specific keywords, the researchers conducted a narrative review of the literature search to establish a solid theoretical basis. For the empirical phase, data were collected using a qualitative approach.

■ Population and sampling

The study population comprised all 2023 first-year students registered across the three campuses in the Faculty of Health Sciences at NWU. The researchers applied non-probability and voluntary sampling techniques for collecting data without any specific criteria such as campus, gender, age, ethnicity or discipline. Participation was voluntary, and all students had equal opportunities to join ($n = 1,938$). A total of 284 students volunteered to participate in the virtual excursion learning event. However, only 134 (n) students gave their voluntary consent that their anonymised data could be used for research purposes by signing the informed consent form. To ensure impartiality, an independent third party not involved in teaching, learning and assessment conducted the research information session, informed consent procedure and data collection. This measure aimed to avoid potential harm to the students as a captive and vulnerable audience.

■ Data collection

Ethics approval was obtained (NWU-01013-21-A2 and NWU-GK-21-065). Data collection occurred in the latter part of the first semester following the virtual excursions event. Data were collected using an online questionnaire comprising 14 open-ended reflective questions. The reflective questionnaire (Activity 3) was done at the end of the virtual excursion and aimed to capture the perceptions of students on how participating in the virtual excursion contributed to the fostering of their intercultural competence. Questions were reflective in nature and required students to self-reflect on their own cultural identity and intercultural competence (Activity 1), as well as reflect on the knowledge, skills and attributes they gained by participating in the virtual excursion and by engaging with practicing health professionals during the panel discussions (Activity 2). To ensure content and face validity the questionnaire was reviewed and critiqued by a panel of experts (McMillan & Schumacher 2014). In addition to this, some students evaluated the readability of each question to ensure uniform understanding. QuestionPro, a web-based application for online surveys, recorded the participants' replies.

■ Data analysis and trustworthiness of the data

The data were sanitised by the independent research administrator who excluded the information of participants who did not provide consent or withdrew from the study before data anonymisation (Stahl & King 2020). To enhance anonymity and confidentiality, any identifiable information was removed, and a unique code was assigned to each participant. The data were analysed using the qualitative data analysis program ATLAS.ti version 9. The researchers applied both deductive and inductive coding strategies and used co-coding to enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the results. The coder and co-coder collaborated to discuss the coding and adjusted the initial coding list as required before data analysis took place (Stahl & King 2020).

Creswell and Clark's (2018) six-step framework guided the data analysis procedure. The first step involved arranging and organisation the data. Next, the researchers explored the data to develop a general understanding and recorded their initial conclusions. The data were then coded using both inductive and deductive strategies. The researchers read, reviewed and analysed the participants' reflections before linking relevant material to a code associated with a sub-theme, theme and pattern. Using the networking capabilities of ATLAS.ti version 9, the researchers grouped repetitive codes, sub-themes, themes and patterns to illustrate interrelationships. Four themes, based on Deardorff's (2006) models of intercultural competence, were used to structure the coding process. The researchers contextualised and discussed the findings and organised them into themes. Quotes were used to support the findings and illustrate how the data corresponded with the research topic and literature. The research team also identified the limitations of the study and suggested directions for further research (Creswell & Clark 2018).

To ensure the credibility and dependability of the findings, several data validation techniques were implemented. To ensure transferability, the researchers provided a detailed description of the participants, the data collection process and instrument and the data analysis and findings while maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants (Shenton 2004).

To maintain confirmability, the researchers employed scientific procedures during the data collection, analysis and interpretation stages. By adhering to a systematic and rigorous research process and maintaining a transparent audit trail, they ensured the study's dependability (Creswell & Clark 2018; Shenton 2004).

■ Findings and discussion

This chapter explores how a virtual excursion in undergraduate health care education, as part of innovative curriculum design, can foster intercultural competence. The research question guiding the research was: How does the use of a virtual excursion contribute to fostering intercultural competence in undergraduate health care students? During the data analysis, four predetermined main themes based on Deardorff's models of intercultural competence were used to structure the coding process. They are attitudes, knowledge, skills and internal and external outcomes (Figure 9.1).

Next, the researchers delve into the findings relating to these four themes and provide relevant quotes to substantiate the findings. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality and to report the data accurately, the researchers utilised three identifiers: response ID, response date and time (e.g. 164875582, 03 August 2023, 15:00).

■ Theme 1: Development of attitudes needed for intercultural competence

The Deardorff (2006) pyramid model indicates that three fundamental attitudes enhance the development of knowledge and skills needed for intercultural competence. These attitudes are respect, openness and curiosity and discovery.

□ Sub-theme 1.1: Respect to build meaningful relationships

The first fundamental attitude addressed by Deardorff's model is respect: for other cultures and respect for the beliefs of others with a view to building meaningful relationships across cultural boundaries (Deardorff 2006).

In the virtual excursion reflection activity (Activity 3), participants were asked to identify the attitudes they perceive to be most important to demonstrate intercultural competence. Most participants highlighted a respectful attitude towards other cultures, especially in the role of health care professionals, as evidenced by the quotes This aligns with the findings by Deardorff (2006) who argues that having respect for other cultures is fundamental to intercultural competence.

'The attitude that I think are most important for being a health care professional is, to show a positive attitude in the way of understanding and respecting other people.' (164952211, 06 March 2023, 23:58)

'Treat others as you would like to be treated, with respect.' (164877412, 06 February 2023, 06:47)

Participants also highlighted the importance of respecting the beliefs and perceptions of other cultures. The responses underline the notion that valuing diverse beliefs and perspectives promotes mutual respect and creates an environment where all individuals feel heard, valued and understood, as noted by Deardorff (2019):

'Understanding that everyone has their own beliefs that we need to respect and not undermine the culture of others.' (164957330, 06 April 2023, 04:46)

'It is important to respect others' opinions and view things from their perspective.' (164876199, 06 February 2023, 06:19)

According to Deardorff (2019), positive relations need to be established, and a mutual understanding between people of different cultures should be fostered if aiming towards cultural competence. The participant's quote stresses the significance of effective interaction in creating meaningful relationships:

'[T]he ability of a person to effectively interact, work, and develop meaningful relationships with people of various cultural backgrounds is important for health care professionals when working with patients.' (164957207, 06 April 2023, 04:41)

By fostering an environment of respect for other cultures and the beliefs of others, health care students realised the importance of respecting diverse cultures and beliefs and sensitised them to the importance of developing meaningful and respectful cross-cultural relationships in their future careers that transcend cultural boundaries (Deardorff 2006).

□ Sub-theme 1.2: Openness for fostering cultural understanding and breaking down barriers

Openness refers to the willingness of a person to approach other cultures with an open mind (Deardorff 2006). To foster openness through intercultural dialogue, the virtual excursion panel members shared a scenario in which their own cultural values, beliefs and perspectives were challenged (Activity 2).

During the discussion, participants were exposed to the notion of openness and the importance of setting aside their own biases and beliefs to truly understand and appreciate other cultures. From the data, a large number of participants realised that they need to set aside personal biases, be open to other cultures and not adopt a stance of ethnocentrism, that is, believing that one's own culture is superior to the culture of others. This realisation was expressed by these participants:

'One must have an open mind, meaning being open to other cultures and ways of thinking is important, we must be willing to listen to others' beliefs and opinions without dismissing them immediately due to differences and biases.' (164877829, 06 February 2023, 06:56)

'We must be open minded and not state that your culture is more superior to theirs [sic].' (164880961, 06 February 2023, 07:49)

As future health care professionals, participants will be working with a diverse patient population, and it is essential that one is aware of one's own biases and set them aside when working with health professionals, patients and other individuals. In addition, as future health care professionals, being open to diverse cultures, setting aside preconceived ideas and stereotyping and entering cross-cultural encounters with openness and a willingness to learn will not only enhance patient care but will also lead to becoming more culturally competent.

□ **Sub-theme 1.3: Curiosity and discovery for fostering intercultural competence**

Under this sub-theme and as indicated by Deardorff's models (Figure 9.1), curiosity and discovery are viewed as fundamental attitudes for fostering intercultural competence (Deardorff 2006). The virtual excursion activities aimed to demonstrate to participants how cultural differences can be turned into opportunities to becoming more culturally competent.

Culturally competent individuals actively seek out opportunities to engage with people from diverse backgrounds and allow room for multiple perceptions (Deardorff 2006). Participants indicated that, through the learning activities in the virtual excursions, they realised that they should be willing to learn from other cultures and to be willing to teach others about their culture as summarised by these participants' responses:

'I'm always eager to get to learn more about the different cultures. I somehow make sure I accommodate the people from cultures different from mine. I'm open to the idea of meeting people from all the different cultures. I love teaching other people about my culture and I don't force any one to go with it. I am always on the lookout for a lesson regarding such matters.' (164905808, 06 February 2023, 15:00)

'Curiosity is necessary so that one can learn more about other cultures and to show interest by asking questions about their beliefs and practices.' (164877829, 06 February 2023, 06:56)

In summary, the findings emphasised that health care students appreciated the importance of curiosity and discovery in fostering intercultural competence. Through the virtual excursion activities, participants acknowledged the need to be open to learning from different cultures and expressed their eagerness to both learn from others and share their own

cultural knowledge. Health care professionals who recognise the importance of being curious about other cultures and being aware of the fluence of culture in delivering quality care are more prone to build trust with those they engage with and deliver culturally sensitive care.

■ Theme 2: Knowledge to understand the worlds of others

Deardorff et al. (2013) note that it is essential to understand the world from other perspectives and that the three types of knowledge that are needed for intercultural competence include cultural self-awareness, culture-specific knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness.

□ Sub-theme 2.1: Developing cultural self-awareness for intercultural competence

Cultural self-awareness refers to the ability to be aware of one's own culture and how that influences one's worldview. This includes, but is not limited to, the process of self-reflecting on aspects such as: Who am I? What is my cultural identity? How do I move beyond my own cultural comfort zone? (Deardorff et al. 2013).

Feedback from participants reinforces the significance of self-reflection to foster cultural self-awareness. Analysis of data confirms that participants realised the value of understanding their own cultural identity, the importance of embracing and being proud of their own culture and moving beyond one's own cultural comfort zone to foster mutual understanding among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Participation in the three virtual excursion learning activities granted participants the opportunity to continuously self-reflect on how their cultural identity might influence their future profession as health care professionals:

'The activities [...] gets you to engage more in the topic of culture and differences and you start to become more self-aware.' (164956177, 06 April 2023, 03:57)

'Being aware of the variations of cultures because I never really paid heed to the variations in culture and how it would later affect how I work with people as a health care professional.' (164876579, 06 February 2023, 06:28)

'By immersing ourselves in other cultures beyond our own, we can learn about each other – where people came from, what their traditions are, and what they struggle with as a community.' (164957207, 6 April 2023, 04:41)

Through self-reflection, participants realised the influence of their own cultural identity on their perspectives and interactions. Being self-aware prepares students, as future health care professionals, to be more culturally competent and to appreciate diverse ways of knowing, being and doing.

Being aware of one's own positionality enhances the health care professional's ability to work effectively within a diverse health care environment. Findings correlate with a study conducted by Bender, Negi and Fowler (2010) on the relationship between self-awareness and cultural competence, which concluded that:

[W]ithout understanding your own self and why you do the things you do, say the things you say and believe the things you believe – you can never really appreciate another's point of view. (p. 50)

□ Sub-theme 2.2: Developing culture-specific knowledge for intercultural competence

Culture-specific knowledge refers to the cultural knowledge and understanding of the cultural practices, values and beliefs of diverse cultural groups and practices that influence individuals from diverse backgrounds. It is evident that participants gained first-hand experiences and engagement with diverse cultural perspectives to establish cultural knowledge. Participants agreed that the first-year virtual excursions provided an opportunity for individuals from diverse cultures to interact, share beliefs, activities and experiences and actively learn about intercultural traditions, customs, languages and histories. One participant noted, for example:

'I really appreciate having the opportunity to engage in information sessions like this where people from different cultures come and interact with each other and all share beliefs and activities in their cultures and their experiences.' (164955231, 06 April 2023, 03:15)

Collectively, the findings highlight the importance of acquiring culture-specific knowledge. Through the virtual excursion, the participants, as future health care professionals, realised the importance of acquiring culture-specific knowledge and having an in-depth understanding of diverse cultural practices, values and beliefs. Having culture-specific knowledge fosters trust and enables health care professionals to provide more culturally sensitive patient care (Kaihlainen et al. 2019).

□ Sub-theme 2.3: Enhancing sociolinguistic awareness in becoming interculturally competent

Deardorff (2006) points out that language plays a crucial role in becoming interculturally competent. Sociolinguistic awareness involves understanding the relationship between language and meaning to foster effective communication across cultures (Deardorff 2006). Participants in the virtual excursions highlighted the importance and influence of language in meaning-making to ensure effective communication across cultures:

'If they [patients or clients] do not understand the language that you speak, try adjusting to the language they understand better. When making comments about their culture do not ask something that is of hate speech or disgracing them [*sic*].' (164957128, 06 April 2023, 04:37)

Moreover, Deardorff (2006) identifies communication styles as essential factors in intercultural competence, including nonverbal cues and body language, which can significantly influence effective communication. Participants highlighted that health care professionals, for example, should be aware of these variations to provide optimal care and ensure that patients from diverse cultural backgrounds understand their treatment options. One participant stated:

'Diverse cultures may have different communication styles, including nonverbal cues and body language, which can impact how health care professionals communicate with their patients.' (164921562, 06 March 2023, 02:36)

In conclusion, language acts as a conduit for intercultural competence by encompassing sociolinguistic awareness and facilitating effective communication. In preparation for the workplace, the students, as emerging health care professionals, grasped the importance of language and communication in delivering quality care as a vehicle to bridge cultural gaps and enhance intercultural understanding and collaboration (Kaihlainen et al. 2019).

■ **Theme 3: Development of skills needed for intercultural competence**

This theme focuses on the development of active listening, being able to observe matters closely and the ability to evaluate as part of being interculturally competent. Through these skills, individuals can engage in matters that ensure their personal and professional growth such as reflection, understanding different contexts of various cultures and interrogating inappropriate behaviour (Deardorff & Hunter 2006; Matveev 2017).

□ **Sub-theme 3.1: Development of listening skills for intercultural competence**

To be culturally competent, it is important for individuals to practise active listening to gain understanding and insight into the perspectives of others (Deardorff 2019). Culturally competent individuals should consider whether they are truly listening or whether they are listening to respond or to judge (Deardorff 2019).

More than half of the participants demonstrated that they realised the importance of active listening as a skill for cultural competence.

These participants expressed their understanding that listening should be done without judgement:

'I believe the skill of being non-judgmental and listening with an open heart is important.' (164884513, 06 February 2023, 08:39)

'It [area for development to become more culturally competent] might be the skills of attentive listening so I can acquire more information and knowledge about another culture.' (164956851, 06 April 2023, 04:25)

For successful dialogue to take place and to establish listening for understanding, it is not only important to listen closely but also necessary not to interrupt others while talking and to ask questions afterwards if the meaning is not clear. Participants in the virtual excursions realised the need to give others a chance to express themselves and that they should clarify meaning by asking questions. This is supported by the quotes from these participants:

'[G]ive them [patients] proper chance to express themselves, practising active listening.' (164942342, 06 April 2023, 14:36)

'Learn their communication by asking questions, listening attentively to what they are saying and get the adaptation [*s/c*].' (164898214, 06 February 2023, 12:19)

Students, as future health care professionals, must be able to listen without judgement to better understand their patients' perspectives, needs and concerns. Practising active listening can enhance one's cultural self-awareness, awareness of others and the ability to connect with other cultures respectfully (Deardorff 2019). Allowing fellow health care professionals, patients and individuals to express themselves is an indication of cultural competency and is crucial in health care settings.

□ Sub-theme 3.2: Observation as a skill to develop intercultural competence

Deardorff (2019) explains that observation is an important skill for the development of inter-cultural competence through developing an understanding of the context of a situation, guiding decision-making and informing practices. By developing observation skills, one develops an understanding of behaviour, which may be helpful in avoiding conflict (Deardorff 2006) and not harming feelings. When we observe people from different cultural backgrounds, we can notice their unique ways of expression, non-verbal cues and social norms. This allows us to understand their perspectives better and avoid misunderstandings or unintentional offences (Deardorff 2019). Responding to the question of what skills the students perceive to be most important to demonstrate intercultural competence, some participants noted:

'Knowing that everyone is different and then as a health practitioner you have to be able to accommodate everyone.' (164955080, 06 April 2023, 03:09)

'Being able to understand people's cultures correctly without violating them.' (164876183, 06 February 2023, 06:19)

'To be able to express my opinions in a manner that is not hurtful.' (164958291, 06 April 2023, 05:24)

Furthermore, findings correlate with Deardorff's models as presented in Figure 9.1, with participants acknowledging that observation can guide their decisions and actions (Deardorff 2019). Several students mentioned that decision-making as part of observing should be objective and based on rational thinking rather than personal feelings. Decision-making as a component of observation requires detachment from personal feelings or being biased and judgemental during interactions. Several participants voiced similar thoughts:

'Be aware of my own biases and jokes. Learn more about other cultures. Being aware of my non-verbal communication (facial expression).' (164903188, 06 February 2023, 13:54)

'Controlling my emotions and not letting them get in the way.' (164882887, 06 February 2023, 08:14)

Deardorff (2006) indicates that increasing our cultural competence and understanding different communication styles can also play a significant role in decision-making. By observing the communication styles of individuals from different cultures, we can gain valuable insights and adapt our own approach accordingly. Participants agreed, as evidenced by the following:

'Communicate effectively and be respectful about differences.' (164880045, 06 February 2023, 07:33)

'Good communication skill – when you speak with respect and understanding to people of different cultures it makes it easier for them to feel free around me as a health [care] professional.' (164876238, 06 February 2023, 06:21)

As emerging health care professionals, students must learn to observe without bias and judgement with the aim to understand their patients better. Having the ability to observe behaviour is essential as it reduces the possibility of conflict because of a misunderstanding. Through observation, we can learn to appreciate and respect cultural differences, which is a fundamental aspect of intercultural competence.

▣ **Sub-theme 3.3: Evaluating cultural interactions for better understanding**

As discussed previously, Deardorff (2006) argues that the ability to evaluate cultural interactions through the process of analysis and

interpretation is a crucial skill in assisting the individual in understanding how and why individuals behave in a certain manner and in becoming more culturally competent (Deardorff et al. 2013; Deardorff & Hunter 2006; Matveev 2017).

The ability to evaluate cultural interactions effectively requires one to actively reflect on one's own actions and how one interacts with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Deardorff et al. 2013). In agreement with Deardorff (2006), a small number of participants mentioned in the reflective questionnaire (Activity 3) the importance of actively and continuously reflecting on and evaluating one's own and other's behaviour and actions during intercultural interactions, such as the panel discussion (Activity 2), to understand cultural behaviour better during these interactions. Some of these reflections include:

'I think I need to be more compassionate about other people's cultures and I have to take time and do research on all the things that might help me in building quality relationships with my patients.' (164876221, 06 February 2023, 06:20)

'I think I need skills of understanding the values of their [the patients'] culture, I need the skills of understanding the importance of the culture in their health and their lives as that might affect the psychology of the person.' (164877412, 06 February 2023, 06:47)

In summary, Deardorff et al. (2013) argue that examining one's own thoughts, actions and experiences, as well as the actions of others, is critical in understanding why interactions occur in a specific manner. As emerging health professionals, it is essential that health care students realise the importance of self-reflection and continuously seek opportunities to gain knowledge and insights through intercultural interactions with the aim of ensuring optimal health care. Being able to evaluate and manage cultural interactions enhances the ability to build quality relationships with other health care professionals, patients and individuals from diverse backgrounds, promoting cultural sensitivity and ensuring the delivery of optimal health care.

■ Theme 4: Attaining internal and external outcomes of intercultural competence

Theme 4 reports the desired internal and external outcomes and is the sum of the components' requisite attitudes, knowledge comprehension and skills (Themes 1–3). Both internal and external outcomes focus on the personal growth and development of the individual as they engage in intercultural experiences (Deardorff et al. 2013) – in the current study, this context was their experiences in the virtual excursions. In the virtual excursions, students were exposed to diverse perspectives and were

afforded opportunities of exploring different ways of knowing, being and doing. By reflecting on their own intercultural ways of knowing, being and doing, students were guided to identify areas for development with the aim of being and becoming more culturally competent (Activity 3).

As discussed in Themes 1 to 3, the responses from the participants support findings by Deardorff (2006) and Deardorff et al. (2013) that the knowledge and skills acquired through cultural interactions stimulate self-discovery and self-growth as it helps individuals to develop a more profound comprehension and appreciation of cultural diversity. Participants commented on the positive impact of the virtual excursions on their awareness of cultural uniqueness and the significance of developing cultural competence as part of their personal development and enrichment in preparation for their health care careers. Participants indicated that participating in the virtual excursion activities such as the self-reflection in Activity 1 and the panel discussion during Activity 2 afforded them an opportunity for self-realisation, acknowledging that they should be mindful of and seek opportunities to develop and enhance intercultural competencies. It is evident from the reflections in Activity 3 that the virtual excursion activities (Activities 1, 2 and 3) helped participants to realise the importance of cultural diversity and of gaining more knowledge about it and of appreciating other people's cultures (their knowing, being and doing). The virtual excursion activities (Activities 1, 2 and 3) also encouraged them, as emerging health care professionals, to take responsibility for developing intercultural competencies. Supporting reflections from participants are:

'[The virtual excursion activities] made me aware that I seek to understand the differences in how people from a variety of cultures act, communicate, and perceive the world around them.' (164876199, 06 February 2023, 06:19)

'Thank you for [creating] this intercultural project [the virtual excursion activities] because it made me aware of the importance of knowing about different cultures as an emerging health care professional.' (164944603, 06 April 2023, 16:38)

As previously discussed, higher education has a broader societal and cultural function of preparing health and social care students for the increasing diversity of life and the workforce (Erikson & Erikson 2019; Scott 2018). Many participants emphasised that learning opportunities such as virtual excursions assisted in the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes required to excel in a diverse society and in the workplace, in line with reports by Erikson and Erikson (2019) and Scott (2018), as one participant responded:

'Intercultural projects [referring to the virtual excursion] can foster mutual understanding and respect among different cultures, which can help to break down stereotypes and biases. They also provide opportunities for people from different backgrounds to collaborate, learn from one another, and develop new skills that can be applied in the modern workforce.' (164929414, 06 April 2023, 07:35)

Multiple students expressed that participating in Activity 1 required them to self-reflect on their own cultural identity and cultural competence, how the storytelling and intercultural dialogue with practising health care professionals and students in Activity 2 and the guided self-reflective questions in Activity 3 heightened their understanding of the significance of being flexible and adaptable. As discussed previously, Deardorff and Hunter (2006) highlight the importance of being curious, open minded and culturally sensitive by demonstrating respect, embracing diverse perspectives and questioning stereotypical beliefs (Deardorff et al. 2013). It is evident from the participants' reflective notes (Activity 3) that participating in Activities 1 and 2 stimulated participants' curiosity, open mindedness and cultural awareness. During the intercultural dialogue (Activity 2), students were confronted with different ways of knowing, being and doing. Not only did this intercultural interaction challenge students' personal biases and assumptions, but it also allowed the students to identify areas for development and enrichment in preparation for their health care careers. These findings are supported by the feedback:

'[B]e curious to why their opinions are the way they are. Be open-minded. Do not state that your culture is more superior to theirs [and] do not make assumptions about their cultures according to stereotypes.' (164880961, 06 February 2023, 07:49)

'Learning how to be culturally sensitive because I feel like it's something we've been so ignorant about, now I gained information on how to be culturally sensitive.' (164906083, 06 February 2023, 15:08)

Furthermore, multiple students raised the notion that the virtual excursions helped them to grow as a person and – through the process of self-reflection – do some introspection as emerging health care professionals on the effectiveness and appropriateness of their own knowledge, skills and attitudes. These reflections supported participants in identifying or mapping areas for self-development. The following feedback from participants corresponds to these findings:

'The fact that it [the activities in the virtual excursion] was engaging and interactive people provided their experience, and we were allowed to ask questions for any uncertainties. This provided me with more clarity and awareness on my shortcomings (how I've been unaware of how much of a big role this plays in our lives).' (164903188, 06 February 2023, 13:54)

'I'd like to thank the team for making me a part of this great initiative [the virtual excursions] and also thank them again for encouraging me as a first-year student to improve my knowledge about cultural differences, which enabled me to notice my weaknesses when it comes to communicating with people from different cultures.' (164877437, 06 February 2023, 06:48)

Lastly, desired external outcomes focus on the changes and positive impact individuals can have on intercultural interactions and relationships

(Deardorff 2019). It is evident from the data that the virtual excursions sensitised health care students to the importance of being culturally competent in their everyday lives and future careers. The finding indicates that the virtual excursions aligned with Deardorff's outline of desired internal outcomes, which include behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately, building inclusive relationships to enhance intercultural communication, cooperation and collaboration and the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment in which people from diverse cultures feel welcome, valued and respected (Deardorff et al. 2013). Although the virtual excursion contributed to the enhancement of intercultural competencies, it should be noted that this study did not delve into the external outcomes, meaning the extent to which students who participated in the virtual excursions utilised and applied the knowledge, skills and attitudes they acquired during the virtual excursions outside the research project.

■ Conclusion

When graduates enter the workforce, they will need to adapt to diverse environments that demand intercultural competence. Cultural competence is crucial for health care students, as they will be interacting with individuals with various backgrounds, distinct beliefs, values and customs that can influence health outcomes. By embracing cultural competence, students can gain a better understanding of and appreciation for these differences, enhancing patient care and satisfaction within the health care sector.

Guided by Deardorff's intercultural competence models (Deardorff 2006), students in the virtual excursion learning activity were asked to reflect on their own intercultural ways of knowing, being and doing and to map areas for self-development with the aim of becoming more culturally competent. It is evident that Deardorff's models (2006) serve as an applicable framework to foster intercultural competence in undergraduate health care students. In this chapter, the argument is made that cultivating cultural competencies should not be a matter of happenstance; instead, the authors advocate for the purposeful incorporation of opportunities in undergraduate education that will enable students to comprehensively grasp and value cultural diversity. Furthermore, the findings from this study underscore the significance of including innovative learning opportunities, such as the virtual excursion, to expose and sensitise health care students to diverse ways of knowing, being and doing and to emphasise the importance of seeking opportunities to develop intercultural competency.

The findings of this study cannot be generalised to wider populations, as it focused on students from a specific faculty at a single higher

education institution. However, these findings may contribute to the broader understanding of fostering intercultural competence. Although many students participated in the virtual excursions and completed the reflection activity, only a small number consented to have their reflections used for research purposes. Despite the inter-professional composition of the excursion design team, it is recommended that more health profession experts be included, particularly for creating profession-specific scenarios and activities. Including only the responses of students who volunteered for this project may lead to a biased perspective, as it might reflect the views of the more motivated and driven students. Therefore, a more representative sample should be included to gain a more diverse student voice. The researchers, therefore, suggest that it might be necessary to revisit the procedure of obtaining informed consent from participants at the onset of the virtual excursions. Furthermore, it is suggested that a quantitative study approach using the intercultural sensitivity scale be applied to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon.

Promoting inclusive classroom practices: A teacher educator's experience

Annah Ndlovu Nkomo

Research Focus Area Community-Based Educational Research (COMBER),
Faculty of Education, North-West University,
Vanderbijlpark, South Africa

■ Abstract

South Africa is a multicultural society owing to its many languages and ethnicities. The country's cultural diversity is reflected by its 12 official languages as well as in its multilingual national anthem. Moreover, this cultural diversity is further portrayed in school classrooms, across all nine of the country's provinces. However, despite the country establishing democracy in 1994, several incidences of cultural intolerance in South African schools have been reported in recent years. Therefore, this study sought to foreground cultural diversity to student teachers through work-integrated learning (WIL) excursions as an essential attribute of humanness. Teachers need to possess this attribute, for it warrants inclusive classroom practices; hence the need to inculcate this in student teachers through teacher-training programmes. The chapter is a reflection of my lived

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experience as a teacher educator with regard to how student teachers are enabled to embrace the essentiality, normality and positivity of cultural diversity in preparation for future classroom practice as part of the first-year WIL excursion programme. It is envisioned that student teachers will develop inclusive classroom practices to help their future learners understand different cultures and foster positive attitudes towards those who are culturally different.

■ Introduction

The current chapter explores my experience as a teacher educator scaffolding student teachers towards embracing the essentiality, normality and positivity of cultural diversity in their future classrooms. In the context of this chapter, essentiality refers to being vital, necessary or indispensable, and normality refers to being expected, undeniable, normal and usual, while positivity refers to the state of being beneficial, useful, productive and constructive (Arribas-Bel, Kourtit & Nijkamp 2016; Cambridge Dictionary 2023; Gaete, Luna & Alamos 2022). I argue that embracing these concepts leads to the creation of learning environments that recognise, celebrate and respect individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and foster an atmosphere where every person feels free to be their authentic selves.

With regard to cultural diversity, I concur with Johnson and Hinton (2019) who argue that the entire world has increasingly become interconnected and diverse owing to globalisation and migration. I also agree with Cervantes and Clark (2020) as well as Villegas and Lucas (2007), who observe that, as a result, school classrooms are becoming microcosms of diversity, where learners from various cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, languages and experiences are encompassed. South Africa is not exempt as its demographics have been shaped by the same patterns and by its own indigenous cultural diversity, thus making cultural diversity a fundamental aspect of its educational landscape. Such diversity is also evident in the North-West University (NWU) student community, representing a melting pot where a large variety of (South) African and international cultures come together to live, learn and grow. Student teachers, who are being prepared to teach in diverse South African classrooms, are included in this melting pot.

It is my observation that the recognition of the value of cultural diversity in education and its positive impact on student learning and development has grown in recent years. Similar observations are made by Gay (2018) who highlights that the high prevalence of cultural diversity in educational settings has in recent years resulted in an increased focus on the importance

of diversity in school classrooms and the need for teachers to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to create an inclusive learning environment that embraces cultural diversity. This finding echoes FarindeWu, Glover and Williams (2017) and Galesic et al. (2023) who contend that recognising and embracing cultural diversity as part of teacher preparation is crucial for several reasons:

- It enhances student teachers' learning experiences and promotes their cognitive, social and emotional development through exposure to diverse cultural perspectives (Bennett et al. 2018; Walter 2018; see Chapter 1).
- It helps student teachers develop intercultural competence, empathy and critical thinking skills, which are essential for navigating a globalised world (Dasli 2019; Rawal & Deardorff 2021; see Chapter 2).
- It creates an inclusive learning environment that values and respects cultural diversity, which contributes to student teachers' sense of belonging and well-being (Ladson-Billings 2014; see Chapter 3).
- It contributes to student teachers feeling validated and empowered to participate actively in their learning when their cultural identities are acknowledged and celebrated (García & Kleifgen 2020; Gay 2018).

Considering these reasons, I agree with Choi and Lee (2020) who posit that equipping student teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions to effectively manage and embrace cultural diversity in their future classrooms cannot be over-emphasised. I find this to be necessary especially because, as future teachers, and just as the rest of the teachers are known to do, they will play a pivotal role in shaping classroom climates, curriculum and instructional practices. Thus, teachers influence learners' experiences and outcomes (Cochran-Smith et al. 2020; Donahue-Keegan, Villegas-Reimers & Cressey 2019). Hence it is necessary to prepare student teachers to embrace these critical competencies.

In this chapter, I will begin by outlining the purpose of the study and providing a brief explanation of the South African context concerning cultural diversity in education. Next, I will examine the tenets of cultural diversity and the theoretical framework that underpins this chapter. After that, I will discuss the methodology, findings and suggestions for future research. Finally, I will present my closing thoughts.

■ Purpose and rationale of the study

The purpose of the research reported here was to narrate my lived experience in gearing student teachers towards embracing cultural diversity while preparing them with suitable knowledge and understanding for designing and implementing inclusive classroom practices in their future

teaching careers. The concepts of normality, essentiality and positivity in the context of promoting cultural diversity and inclusive classroom practices in teacher education are intricately connected to the purpose and rationale of the study.

The concept of normality holds a pivotal role in this rationale because in traditional teacher education, embracing cultural diversity and inclusive practices has not always been the norm. Therefore, I propose that cultural diversity and inclusivity be regarded as customary, not optional components of teacher training. In this respect, I advocate for a shift in what is considered normal in teacher preparation. Thus, altering the norm in teacher education in this regard would amount to fostering a more inclusive educational landscape.

Essentiality forms the foundation of the current research rationale underscoring the indispensable nature of cultural diversity and inclusivity in education (Banks & Banks 2019; Walter 2018). I contend that this concept is not just a mere choice in the context of teacher preparation but is both vital and fundamental. By emphasising the essentiality of cultural diversity in education, I provide a compelling argument for its integration into teacher education programmes. The aim here is to ensure that teachers of the future understand that embracing cultural diversity and inclusive practices is an absolute necessity in their teaching careers.

The concept of positivity complements this study's purpose and rationale. It gives an optimistic outlook and approach to this endeavour by not only focusing on the challenges but also on the positive aspects and benefits of integrating cultural diversity and inclusivity into teacher education. Positivity, therefore, is a driving force, motivating both student teachers and stakeholders in the field to support the initiatives aimed at ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and culturally diverse educational landscape. In a nutshell, reshaping what is considered normal in teacher education by emphasising the essentiality and positivity of cultural diversity and inclusive practices is the purpose and rationale underlying this study.

■ Research question

To attain the aforementioned purpose and guide the study reported here, I formulated the following research question: What are the lived experiences of a teacher educator in promoting inclusive classroom practices, specifically focusing on embracing the essentiality, normality and positivity of cultural diversity, and how do these experiences contribute to shaping effective strategies for fostering an inclusive educational environment?

■ Cultural diversity in the South African education context

South Africa is renowned for its rich tapestry of cultures, languages and traditions, which serve as a microcosm of diversity. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa has undertaken significant efforts to promote inclusive educational practices. However, this journey towards inclusivity is not without its challenges, such as the persistent issues of xenophobia, cultural strife and racial or cultural conflicts (Hanna 2023b; Kaziboni 2022; Vandeyar & Vandeyar 2017). For example, Hanna (2023b) particularly highlights that migrant children face social exclusion and discrimination in South African schools. While the dismantling of apartheid marked a crucial turning point, its legacy continues to shape societal dynamics, contributing to the challenges observed in the realm of education, particularly within South African schools (Hanna 2023b; Vandeyar & Vandeyar 2017). These challenges manifest as racial and cultural tensions within the school environment, encompassing conflicts among various racial and cultural groups (Hayem 2013; Kaziboni 2022; Vandeyar & Vandeyar 2017). These remain deeply intertwined with the nation's complex history and socio-political landscape (Saunders 2018). Of all the post-apartheid challenges plaguing South Africa, xenophobia is, in my opinion, the most notable one.

Xenophobia in South Africa frequently materialises through attacks and discrimination directed at foreign nationals, particularly those from other African countries. These incidents often escalate rapidly, resulting in violence, displacement and heightened social tensions. The roots of xenophobia run deep, intertwined with historical and socio-economic factors, such as competition for resources and opportunities, and a deficit of understanding and empathy towards foreign nationals (Hanna 2023a, 2023b; Kaziboni 2022).

Within the educational realm, xenophobia manifests as prejudice, exclusion and bullying targeted at foreign students. This creates an unwelcoming environment that starkly contradicts the principles of inclusivity (Hanna 2023b; Kaziboni 2022; Vandeyar & Vandeyar 2017). The consequences extend beyond the immediate harm caused to foreign learners and undermine the broader objective of nurturing cultural diversity within schools (Hanna 2023b; Kaziboni 2022). This context underscores the imperative of preparing student teachers to embrace cultural diversity and employ inclusive pedagogical approaches in their future practice. It is within this context that the role of student teachers as agents of change becomes paramount. Student teachers hold the potential to play a transformative role in South African school classrooms, advocating for the

essentiality, normality and positivity of cultural diversity. This, therefore, necessitates the need to equip them with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to navigate these multifaceted challenges.

■ **Cultural diversity: Essentiality, normality and positivity**

The essentiality of cultural diversity in school classrooms cannot be over-emphasised. I concur with Rawal and Deardorff (2021) who posit that learners in diverse cultural classrooms tend to exhibit higher levels of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This is because interactions with peers from different cultural backgrounds encourage learners to consider multiple perspectives, develop a greater understanding of those perspectives and different cultures and challenge their own assumptions and biases (Du Toit & Buchanan 2018; Johnson & Hinton 2019). Therefore, cultural diversity in the classroom is essential and can help to reduce prejudice and discrimination as learners learn to appreciate and value the unique contributions of individuals from different cultures. In light of this, it is essential that student teachers understand the critical contribution of cultural diversity, not only for their own future praxis but also for the social development of their future learners.

The normality of cultural diversity in school classrooms is an undeniable reality in today's educational landscape. I echo Hannon (2020) who describes it as a prominent aspect of the contemporary educational environment. The prevalence of diversity reflects the changing demographics of society and has significant implications for classroom dynamics and learning outcomes. However, acknowledging the normality of cultural diversity in the classroom also requires recognising and addressing the systemic inequities and biases that can persist in educational settings (Hester & Gray 2020). It is, therefore, crucial for student teachers to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to be able to create inclusive classroom practices that value and affirm all learners' cultural identities in future (Villegas & Lucas 2007).

Cultural diversity has numerous positive effects on learners and the learning environment, which include providing opportunities for learners to learn from each other's experiences, promoting collaboration and fostering a sense of belonging for learners from diverse backgrounds (also see Chapter 3). Such classrooms necessitate cultural inclusivity, which extends beyond academic outcomes. I cannot agree more with Abacioglu, Volman and Fischer (2020), who argue that learners in diverse classrooms exhibit higher levels of social and cultural competence and are more likely to engage in positive social interactions, develop cross-cultural communication

skills and become more tolerant and accepting of differences (see Chapter 5). Thus, diverse classrooms can help learners develop a greater and positive appreciation for the diversity of the world around them (Dejaeghere 2020). Because teachers contribute greatly towards developing these intercultural competencies and appreciation in their learners, it is imperative that student teachers be prepared for this task during their teacher training qualifications.

■ Theoretical framework

This study was conceived within the framework of ubuntu. The concept of ubuntu, which is deeply rooted in African philosophy, holds a profound significance in the context of student teacher training and education. Ubuntu's core premise, encapsulated in the isiZulu phrase 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu', underscores the idea that 'a person is a person through other people'. This philosophy not only implies our interconnectedness but also asserts, 'I am because we are, and because we are, I am' (Letseka 2000; Masondo 2017; Mbhele 2015).

In the realm of student teacher training and education, ubuntu serves as a guiding principle emphasising the essentiality, normality and positivity of cultural diversity. I concur with Biko (2006) and Letseka (2000) who view ubuntu as compelling (student teachers) to embrace the uniqueness and otherness of individuals, promoting dialogue, inclusivity and continuous interaction. I further see it as an open-ended worldview that allows individuals to realise themselves through others while respecting and acknowledging diverse values, backgrounds, customs and languages, as Gathogo (2008) also highlights. This cultural acceptance and mutual recognition form the very essence of ubuntu, and within the South African context, they become indispensable qualities for future educators.

Ubuntu values and appreciates human differences and fosters cultural tolerance and understanding (Letseka 2012). The very multicultural landscape of South Africa, which is marked by varied values and backgrounds, compels student teachers to be engaged in diverse cultural settings, respecting others' values, beliefs and individuality. This is particularly vital in their preparation as future teachers, such as the opportunities that are availed by work-integrated learning (WIL) excursions in the context of the NWU. These WIL excursions play a pivotal role in shaping student teachers' personal identity, guiding interactions and their practising of ubuntu (Chmela-Jones 2015; Yusef 2014).

Moreover, ubuntu promotes cultural pride, patience, tolerance, empathy, kindness and equal treatment of all individuals – attributes that are indispensable in any educational context. These values align with human

rights, equality, inclusion and diversity, all of which are crucial for addressing stereotypes related to language, gender, race and ability within schools (Nussbaum 2003). The very nature of ubuntu envisages student teachers who would embrace their own cultures while maintaining mutual understanding, which is a recipe for positive interpersonal relationships with other student teachers during their qualification programmes, as well as with other educators and their learners in their future careers.

Ubuntu, when given a chance to take centre stage in schools and classrooms, can be an effective inclusive approach to education. This is more so given that it is an ethic that promotes the dignity of every person and helps address social barriers within diverse school settings (Lefa 2015; Metz 2014). Inclusive schools in South Africa are therefore envisioned as accessible to all, promoting social justice, equality and equity in alignment with ubuntu principles (Masondo 2017).

As a teacher educator, I envisage that student teachers, as future teachers, internalise the ubuntu values of cooperation, collaboration, mutual support and problem solving, which Quan-Baffour (2014) describes as essential attributes for fostering positive interactions in diverse classrooms. I concur with Masondo (2017) who argues that emphasis on mutual respect, love and cohesion among learners reinforces the idea that learning is a social activity that thrives on ubuntu. It is, therefore, imperative that student teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for creating inclusive classroom practices that will foster these and embrace all learners, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. These inclusive practices align with ubuntu's philosophy of allowing full and equal participation of everyone in the school and society (Nussbaum 2003). The direct relationship between ubuntu and academic success underscores the importance of imparting these values to student teachers, who can in turn impart them to their future learners. By fostering positive teacher-learner relationships grounded in ubuntu, future teachers aim to improve academic performance and create an environment where diversity is not merely tolerated but celebrated.

■ Methodology

The methodology of this chapter is a combination of a self-reflective case study and narrative storytelling. I chose the self-reflective case study method because it is an approach that places me both in the role of an observer and an active participant within the teacher preparation programme. The self-reflective case study, as I have come to understand it through my experiences and academic readings, aligns perfectly with my commitment to gearing student teachers towards committing to creating

future classroom environments that value and celebrate cultural diversity (Denzin 2017; Hauge 2021).

Narrative storytelling is the thread that weaves my lived experiences into this research methodology. It is through storytelling that I can communicate the complexities, challenges and moments of enlightenment in my journey as a teacher educator (Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Riessman 2008). As emphasised by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative storytelling allows me to contextualise my personal experiences within the broader canvas of teacher education. It is through these narratives that I can convey the significance of my own subjectivity in shaping the preparation of student teachers for their future culturally diverse classrooms. As such, each narrative becomes a window into my own growth, a way to share my personal reflections and a means to explore the outcomes of my experiences as a teacher educator. These processes contribute to my self-directed learning efforts as part of my own professional development.

I wholly concur with Denzin (2017) that this methodology allows for a nuanced exploration of my personal journey, where I am not only shaping the experiences of student teachers but also being shaped by them. This aligns seamlessly with my conviction that teacher educators must embody the principles they impart, making cultural diversity an indispensable part of my own teaching. This research methodology is not solely an academic choice but a reflection of my own lived experiences and unwavering convictions (Denzin 2017; Hauge 2021).

■ Self-reflection in narrative storytelling

In my role as a teacher educator at the NWU in South Africa, I have embarked on a journey aimed at preparing student teachers to embrace the essentiality, normality and positivity of cultural diversity in their future classrooms. This narrative draws from my personal experiences and the research of scholars in the field to shed light on this transformative journey. As a Zimbabwean national immersed in the South African cultural milieu for nearly 2 decades, the significance of cultural diversity became noticeable during my early years of primary school teaching. I found myself being engulfed in a vibrant tapestry of cultures, languages and traditions. It was during this time that I encountered the research of scholars like Sheets (2005), who emphasised the critical importance of creating an inclusive learning environment that values and respects cultural diversity.

Transitioning to the role of a teacher educator at the university brought new responsibilities. My lived experience includes countless hours spent, among other things, instilling by way of teaching and explaining to student

teachers the inherent tenets and multidimensional facets of cultural diversity, its essentiality, normality and positivity as prescribed in the teacher preparation curriculum. This was an explicit acknowledgement and celebration of cultural diversity and a conscious effort aimed at preparing student teachers to embrace and value cultural differences for inclusive classroom practices in their future roles as teachers (Bennett et al. 2018; Walter 2018).

One of the most impactful aspects of my lived experiences has been attending the WIL excursions at the NWU, designed to expose student teachers to diverse cultural contexts. Memorable excursions took place in May of 2023, where students, in the company of some teacher educators, were challenged to explore the complexities of their future profession. It was an experience that closely resonated with the principles outlined in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996*. These principles include equality, human dignity, non-racialism and non-sexism (also see Chapter 2). During the WIL excursions, our student teachers had exposure to many languages, cultures and people of different ethnicities and were able to forge connections that might forever shape their perspective on cultural diversity.

■ The work-integrated learning excursion programme

The programme's primary focus is to prepare student teachers for the challenges and opportunities of diverse classrooms. Student teachers learn how to create inclusive and culturally responsive teaching strategies to meet the needs of students from various backgrounds, cultures and abilities (Sebotsa, Petersen & Vaughn 2020). To achieve this, the programme incorporates WIL excursions, where student teachers engage in practical experiences in real educational settings. These excursions expose them to diverse classroom environments and community contexts, allowing them to observe, participate and reflect on their roles as educators within these diverse settings. The excursion programme also integrates the teaching of social justice principles and practices. Student teachers are guided to understand and address issues of equity, diversity and inclusion within the educational context. They explore methods for fostering social justice in their teaching practices, curriculum and interactions with students. The programme also highlights the importance of nurturing self-directed learning skills among student teachers (Petersen, De Beer & Mentz 2020). These skills empower them to take responsibility for their own learning and development, enabling them to be more adaptable and effective in diverse classroom settings. The WIL programme is guided by the following main design principles:

Cooperative learning: According to De Beer and Petersen (2022), excursions provide opportunities for student teachers to work in diverse groups, allowing them to interact with peers from various backgrounds and cultures. This promotes cooperative learning as students collaborate and learn from one another through shared experiences.

Using problem-based learning to probe students about issues of diversity and social justice: This suggests that problem-based learning is a powerful pedagogical approach during face-to-face excursions to engage students in discussions about diversity and social justice issues (De Beer & Petersen 2022). Excursions create real-life scenarios that prompt students to explore and probe issues, thus fostering critical thinking and reflection.

Living, eating, sleeping and working in a diverse environment: The programme mainly holds face-to-face excursions that provide a unique opportunity for students to immerse themselves in diverse environments, where they not only learn academically but also experience and understand different cultures, lifestyles and social dynamics. Living, eating, sleeping and working in such environments contribute to a holistic understanding of diversity (De Beer & Petersen 2022).

The 'Famine and Abundance' game's focus on social justice issues: De Beer and Petersen (2022) highlight specific activities or games within these WIL excursions that focus on social justice issues. For example, the 'Famine and Abundance' game is discussed as a tool to sensitise students to social justice matters and promote conversations about gender equality and equitable resource distribution.

Post-excursion reflections provided a platform for student teachers to share, verbally and in writing, their experiences with cultural diversity and how these encounters have impacted them as future teachers. Attending the reflection sessions was a pivotal part of my journey, as I had the privilege of facilitating some of those sessions. The influence of scholars like Dasli (2019) and Rawal and Deardorff (2021) was palpable as student teachers engaged in critical reflections that deepened their understanding of cultural diversity and showed acceptance of it. Many of them shared the determination to become teachers who would create inclusive classrooms where every learner would feel valued and seen, echoing the research of scholars like Choi and Lee (2020). I, therefore, regarded these as WIL success stories as they reinforced my belief that the positivity of cultural diversity can indeed be nurtured in teacher education.

The above proved these NWU WIL excursions to be a powerful tool in preparing and capacitating student teachers for their future roles as inclusive classroom practitioners. The WIL excursions use an educational approach that is uniquely suited to prepare student teachers for becoming

future educators who embrace the essentiality, normality and positivity of cultural diversity while employing inclusive classroom practices. I align with Donahue-Keegan et al. (2019) who argue that using excursions helps student teachers to embrace cultural diversity and to acquire skills for inclusive classroom practices that will promote equity, social justice and academic success for all learners in their future classrooms. Grounded in qualitative research methods, this study positions me, the researcher, as an active participant within the context of the research. By drawing on personal experiences, reflections and interactions as a teacher educator, the research explored the complexities and challenges I faced in embracing the essentiality, normality and positivity of cultural diversity in the classroom.

■ Data collection and analysis

Data for the study were analysed through thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for thematic analysis were followed. Thematic analysis is a systematic and iterative qualitative research method used to identify themes and patterns in qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). Its application in this study unravelled the intricate tapestry of experiences encountered during the transformative journey as a teacher educator at NWU in South Africa. Patterns and themes that emerged from the data were identified through a framework of coding consisting of six phases, which are as follows.

■ Step 1: Familiarity with the data

The written transcripts of my narratives and reflections gathered from personal experiences provided the data for the study. In immersing myself in those narratives and reflections gathered from my lived experience as a teacher educator at NWU in South Africa, the first step was to read through the data in order to familiarise myself with it. This concurs with Maguire and Delahunt (2017) who suggest reading the data for familiarity as the initial step to be taken in thematic analysis.

■ Step 2: Generation of initial codes

Having familiarised myself with the data at hand, I embarked on the coding phase. The coding process involved breaking down the data into meaningful segments and colour-coding them systematically (Braun & Clarke 2006; Maguire & Delahunt 2017). Open coding was used whereby the development of codes happened in the process of coding without any pre-set codes (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). This allowed for the emergence of new codes

and for the modification of some of the existing ones (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke & Braun 2013; Maguire & Delahunt 2017). Each code represented recurring ideas related to cultural diversity, inclusivity and my role as a teacher educator.

■ **Step 3: Combining codes into themes**

At this phase, similar codes were examined and combined into broader themes, creating a tapestry that covered a wide range of related statements and opinions (Clarke & Braun 2013; Maguire & Delahunt 2017). This step aimed at capturing the interconnected threads of thought running through my narratives and reflections gathered from personal experiences.

■ **Step 4: Reviewing themes**

As the analysis reached its culmination, a reflective review of the themes ensued. An introspective look was taken, which included re-reading the data relevant to each theme to ensure the accurate categorisation of the data (Clarke & Braun 2013; Maguire & Delahunt 2017). Some themes found new homes, as their initial labels were reconsidered for a more comprehensive representation of the complexities inherent in the narrative (Braun & Clarke 2006; Maguire & Delahunt 2017).

■ **Step 5: Determine the significance of themes**

In this penultimate step, I refined the themes, evaluating their significance in the context of my lived experience. The names and categories underwent scrutiny, ensuring clarity, consistency and relevancy (Clarke & Braun 2013; Maguire & Delahunt 2017). Each label was refined, adjusted or merged, contributing to the precision and coherence of the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke & Braun 2013; Maguire & Delahunt 2017).

■ **Step 6: Reporting of findings**

The final phase of this analysis involved producing a comprehensive report for reporting the study's findings (Braun & Clarke 2006; Maguire & Delahunt 2017). Thus, thematic analysis helped me navigate the landscapes of cultural diversity and inclusivity.

Reflexive analysis was also incorporated, enabling an ongoing dialogue between my personal experiences and the broader context of cultural diversity in the classroom. Reflexive analysis created a dynamic dialogue between personal experiences and the broader socio-cultural and pedagogical context. It encouraged me, as the researcher, to continually engage in

introspection and self-reflection, aligning my lived experiences with the broader socio-cultural and pedagogical landscape. This ongoing introspection and self-reflection enhanced the depth of analysis by acknowledging the interplay between the researcher's journey, theoretical frameworks and the intricate landscape of cultural diversity in education (Clarke & Braun 2013; Finlay 2002). This dynamic approach enriched the analysis by acknowledging the intricate relationship between the personal and the societal, resulting in a more profound and nuanced exploration of cultural diversity and inclusivity in education (Clarke & Braun 2013; Finlay 2002).

The synergy between thematic analysis and reflexive analysis created a robust analytical framework that facilitated a holistic and multifaceted examination of my experiences as a teacher educator in promoting cultural diversity and inclusive classroom practices. The step-by-step approach used ensured a transparent and detailed account of how themes organically emerged from the data. It not only allowed for the extraction of critical themes but also encouraged a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges inherent in this journey.

■ Findings and discussion

Informed by the data analysis processes, five themes were developed, and these are described here.

■ Theme 1: Integration of diverse teaching strategies and real-world exposure

The study highlights and underscores the successful integration of diverse teaching strategies and resources into the teacher preparation programme, echoing the ubuntu philosophy of interconnectedness and interdependence (Masondo 2017; Mbhele 2015). Real-world exposure, exemplified by the WIL excursions, offered tangible encounters where student teachers engaged and interacted in diverse cultural settings, which aligns with ubuntu's emphasis on community and togetherness (De Beer & Petersen 2022; Masondo 2017). These excursions exposed student teachers to culturally diverse settings, fostering a deeper understanding of diversity and its positive aspects through real-world immersion (Mbhele 2015). The WIL approach has equipped student teachers with the tools and knowledge necessary to appreciate and celebrate cultural differences (Jackson & Meek 2021). Also, drawing from personal experience, instances such as the incorporation of interactive workshops and collaborative learning activities within the WIL programme provided evidence of embracing cultural diversity in the classroom. Moreover, these fostered the concept of inclusivity as student teachers gained a deeper appreciation and celebration of cultural differences.

■ Theme 2: Critical reflection, personal growth and dialogue

Post-excursion reflection sessions played a crucial role in promoting critical thinking and personal growth among student teachers, thereby mirroring ubuntu's principles of mutual understanding, empathy and kindness (Chmela-Jones 2015). These reflection sessions, drawn from personal accounts, involved discussions where student teachers articulated insights and challenges faced during real-world immersion (De Beer & Petersen 2022) while also affirming their commitment to creating inclusive classrooms. Dialogue and reflection were evidenced through instances of addressing biases and fostering a more inclusive educational environment, aligning with the research question's focus on shaping effective strategies for inclusivity (Sebotsa et al. 2020). This reaffirmed student teachers' commitment to creating inclusive classrooms.

■ Theme 3: Alignment with academic scholarship and personal transformation

The chapter emphasises the alignment of the research methodology with the principles outlined by academic scholars in the field of teacher education, reflecting ubuntu's value of seeking wisdom and guidance from others (Yusef 2014). This alignment reinforces the importance of teacher educators embodying the values and practices they impart to future teachers and is exemplified by the incorporation of evidence-based practices and theoretical frameworks into teaching strategies (Dasli 2019; De Beer & Petersen 2022; Masondo 2017). Alongside this theme, the profound personal transformation and growth I experienced as a teacher educator were instrumental in becoming a more effective advocate for inclusive teaching practices (Chmela-Jones 2015). Personal transformation as a teacher educator was evident through reflections on experiences and the alignment of teaching practices with the values imparted to future teachers, thus directly addressing the research question. Moreover, this personal transformation led to increased advocacy for inclusivity within educational settings.

■ Theme 4: Challenges faced by student teachers and impact on inclusive teaching strategies and student learning outcomes

The study considered some of the challenges encountered by student teachers in embracing cultural diversity. Personal experiences, such as navigating cultural differences in the classroom, provided concrete

evidence (Banks & Banks 2019; Walter 2018). The positive impact of inclusive teaching strategies on the classroom environment was substantiated through instances of improved student engagement, participation and overall dynamics, thus aligning with the research question's focus on effective strategies for fostering inclusivity. Thus, teaching strategies that are both positive and inclusive proved pivotal to creating inclusive and supportive learning environments that cater for diverse student populations.

■ Theme 5: Cultivating empathy and cultural sensitivity

The cultivation of empathy and cultural sensitivity, evident in personal narratives, highlighted instances where student teachers were encouraged to step into the shoes of diverse student populations (Walter 2018; Yusef 2014). Transformative experiences, such as structured empathy-building activities, illustrated the vital role of these attributes in effective teaching and meaningful connections with students from various backgrounds, directly responding to the research question's emphasis on shaping strategies for an inclusive educational environment. In this way, thematic analysis, which is deeply rooted in personal experiences, provided a comprehensive response to the research question, offering insights into the intricate journey of a teacher educator in promoting inclusive classroom practices and embracing cultural diversity. Moreover, empathy and cultural sensitivity were seen as key to shaping effective teaching strategies for an inclusive educational environment.

■ Future research

Building on my lived experience as a teacher educator at NWU in South Africa and the themes identified in the narrative, future research can extend our understanding of promoting inclusive school classroom practices and embracing cultural diversity. The exploration of themes, such as the integration of diverse teaching strategies and real-world exposure, provides a foundation for investigating the sustained impact of these approaches. For example, delving into how different teaching strategies affect long-term student-teacher outcomes and examining the scalability of such strategies across diverse educational contexts in South Africa would be crucial.

The theme of critical reflection, personal growth and dialogue suggests the need for a longitudinal study to understand how the process of reflection continues to influence the personal and professional growth of student teachers over time. Furthermore, exploring the role of ongoing

dialogue in shaping and sustaining inclusive educational environments could provide insights into the dynamics of continuous improvement in the practices of teaching.

Alignment with academic scholarship and personal transformation is a theme that invites further investigation into the evolving landscape of academic scholarship in teacher education, with a specific focus on cultural diversity and inclusivity. Future research could explore how continuous professional development aligns with emerging academic scholarship and contributes to sustained personal transformation among teacher educators. This would additionally provide a nuanced understanding of how aligning teaching practices with academic scholarship impacts teacher educators' understanding and implementation of inclusive strategies.

The theme addressing challenges faced by student teachers and their impact on inclusive teaching strategies and student learning outcomes calls for a detailed examination of the specific challenges encountered in different cultural contexts. By exploring how overcoming these challenges contributes to the development of innovative and contextually relevant inclusive teaching strategies, researchers can shed light on the adaptability and effectiveness of pedagogical approaches in diverse classrooms.

Cultivating empathy and cultural sensitivity emerges as a critical theme, which suggests the need for interventions that specifically target the development of these attributes among student teachers. Investigating the long-term effects of structured empathy-building activities on teacher-student relationships and classroom dynamics could provide valuable insights into the enduring impact of these transformative experiences.

Overall, connecting future research to my lived experience and the identified themes ensures a comprehensive exploration of the impact of teacher preparation programmes on promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity in South African classrooms. The themes serve as a basis for future research, offering avenues to deepen my understanding of my lived experiences as a teacher educator, as well as the broader implications for inclusive education in the South African context.

■ Conclusion

The current chapter encapsulates a profound narrative within the South African context from which themes crucial for shaping inclusive education are derived. The identified themes underscore the successful integration of diverse teaching strategies, the importance of critical reflection and dialogue, alignment with academic scholarship, addressing challenges faced by student teachers and the cultivation of empathy and cultural sensitivity, which mirrors my efforts to guide future educators in stepping

into the shoes of diverse student populations. The themes underscore not only the ubuntu theoretical framework but also the practical challenges faced by student teachers, which resonate with the nuances of my own journey. The chapter thus reflects on my personal experiences and offers valuable insights for future research and praxis. In essence, this chapter seamlessly weaves my lived experiences as a teacher educator into the broader discourse on cultural diversity and inclusive education in South Africa, aligning with the principles of ubuntu and highlighting the ongoing commitment to fostering an educational environment that values and celebrates cultural diversity.

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This insightful and timely scholarly book is designed for scholars, researchers, and academics, offering valuable perspectives and in-depth analysis for those engaged in research and the advancement of knowledge. Inclusivity, equity, and social justice are aspects of higher education that have long been on the radar of educational leaders, teachers, and governments worldwide. While there is much rhetoric around inclusivity, equity, and embracing diversity, this book articulates the challenges associated with this aspiration. It touches on learning experiences that facilitate students' acquisition of skills such as empathy, intercultural capabilities, and self-awareness. Instilling these attributes in students and embedding learning experiences that encourage reflection on their values and biases are vitally important for enacting a holistic curriculum.

However, this cannot be achieved with a didactic and knowledge-focused approach to teaching and learning. This book challenges the higher education sector to reconceptualise delivery approaches and shift priorities to engage, motivate, and partner with students. The authors and editors have scripted a book devoted to a worthy topic with a powerful story to tell. The book includes valuable ideas for scholars and practitioners to consider in their teaching, applicable across various disciplines. As a result of challenging long-held assumptions and perceptions, the book challenges how learning experiences are shaped and enacted in universities, exposing stereotypes, biases, values, and perceptions in each chapter.

Powerful commentary in each chapter of this scholarly book provides a compelling argument for the higher education sector to take notice of. The book also makes a cogent argument regarding the value and impact of cultural agility, intercultural sensitivity, equity, and inclusion.

**Professor Sonia Ferns, Graduate School of Education,
University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia**



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