

Qualitative Assessment of Multicultural Competence Development of Pre-service Teacher Participants in Civil Rights Pilgrimage



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IRB Number: THESINJM80002017

Background

Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence analyzes the degrees of respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery. Deardorff displays in the Model that intercultural competence is a continuing process, evaluating individuals and their development over time (Deardorff, 2009). Research shows that an interculturally competent teacher encourages students to achieve higher. A teacher who respects cultural differences teaches students to think critically. Students can see views from multiple perspectives and it prepares them for life in a democracy (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Culturally relevant content in the classroom has been shown to boost higher learning. Upon developing a Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in 1997 in the city of Tucson, Latina/o high school graduation rates rose to 90% and those continuing to college rose to 80% (Blankenship & Locke, 2015). Schools that have developed a "color-blind" curriculum ignore the perspectives and experiences of students of color (Blankenship & Locke, 2015). Teachers must not only be open and be willing to have conversations about culturally relevant content in the classroom, but they must reflect on their personal and professional lives. (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). It is not enough to have a conversation, teachers must be willing to understand multicultural beliefs and traditions and challenge themselves in their teaching. (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire is currently working towards a more diverse campus. Currently, about 88.2 percent of students at UW-Eau Claire identify as White (Office of Institutional Research, 2016). The most recent census from 2010 shows that Wisconsin is 86 percent White and the national population identifies as 72 percent White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). With the Strategic Plan, UW-Eau Claire strives for 20 percent of enrolled students to be students of color. UW-Eau Claire's current enrollment of multicultural students is approximately 9.4 percent, with the University defining multicultural students as those of African-American, American Indian, Hispanic, and/or Southeast Asian ethnic origin. 10.2 percent of all university staff identify as persons of color (Office of Institutional Research, 2016).

Due to UW-Eau Claire consisting predominantly of students who identify as white, students do not have many opportunities to improve their multicultural competence. A diverse classroom provides a better, stronger education for both White students and students of color. They are able to interact and learn from each other (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). A less diverse campus impacts the intercultural competence of the students at UW-Eau Claire. Because of the low diversity, students in the educational programs lack a well-rounded multicultural schooling. These students move forward to teach young children in the country, but it can be argued that they are not fully prepared for the classroom if they have not had the chance to work on their intercultural competence. Individuals must have the opportunity to hear from underprivileged groups in order to comprehend the social injustices in our society (Bennett, & Salonen, 2007).

According to contact theory, individuals who are in direct contact with those who are different from them improve their thoughts, views, and beliefs towards diverse groups (Seaman, Beightol, Shirilla, and Crawford, 2009). With contact theory, immersion intercultural experiences are substantial in a student's school career as a way to become more interculturally competent.

Because UW-Eau Claire does not have a highly diverse campus to increase students' intercultural competence, students at the University in 2008 established a ten-day immersion experience entitled the Civil Rights Pilgrimage. Participants of the pilgrimage travel by bus to visit major sites of the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s through 1970s. This pilot program merged service learning and experiential learning to increase multicultural competence of student participants. Student researchers further enhanced the knowledge gained through this multicultural competence, White privilege awareness and attitudes, and sexism as educational components of the Civil Rights Pilgrimage experience.

The goal of this experience is to increase the intercultural competence in pre-service teachers. It is also so show the importance of an intercultural immersion experience for pre-service teachers. We anticipated that this experience would cause student teachers to improve in these key areas because of involvement on the trip.

Method

This year's research project assessed student teachers at UW-Eau Claire before and after the trip. The student teachers were interviewed before the trip to assess their level of intercultural competence and how they believed they could teach culturally relevant content in the classroom. While on the trip, the student teachers engaged in nightly discussions with the remaining participants, spoke with those involved in the Civil Rights Movement, and absorbed material from museums and monuments dedicated to the Movement. Upon returning to Eau Claire, researchers conducted post-interviews, asking the same questions from the pre-interviews. This was to gauge how the student teachers improved their intercultural competence and their views on culturally relevant content in the classroom.

Researchers used a thematic approach to assess the qualitative data. Thematic analysis is used to identify themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, n.d.). Thematic analysis was used by finding repeated key words used in pre- and post-interviews and evaluating themes in their pre-interviews versus their post-interviews.

Results

What does cultural identity mean to you?

Pre-Interview	Post-Interview
Focused more on a short definition of the term.	Also stated a short definition.
Common phrases were who you are, where you come from, and your traditions.	Went further with what cultural identity can be
A make-up of who you are and where you come from.	Noted it is deeper than the surface."

Table 1: Cultural Identity

Do you think your cultural experiences affect the way you conduct your classroom?

Pre-Interview	Post-Interview
Believed that participant's cultural experiences did have an affect.	Also stated a short definition.
Focused on foreign travel and languages.	Focused on individual students cultural experience and how it shapes their own behaviors in the classroom
Westernized expectation for students	Beliefs are different and what is appropriate in a classroom.

Table 2: Cultural Experiences

Where would you rate, on a scale from 1-10, your level of intercultural competence?

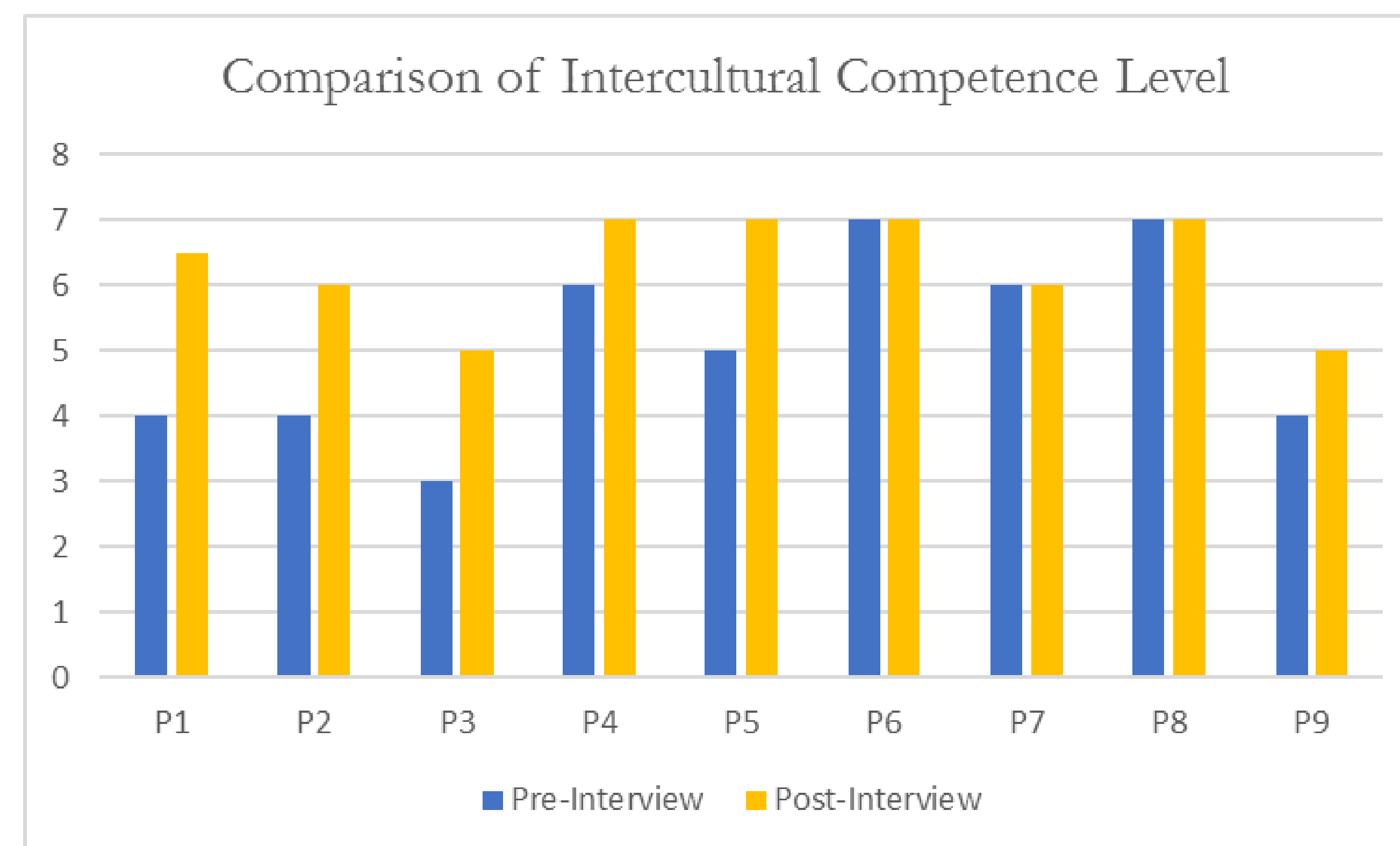


Diagram 1: Comparison of Intercultural Competence

Average Intercultural Competence Level

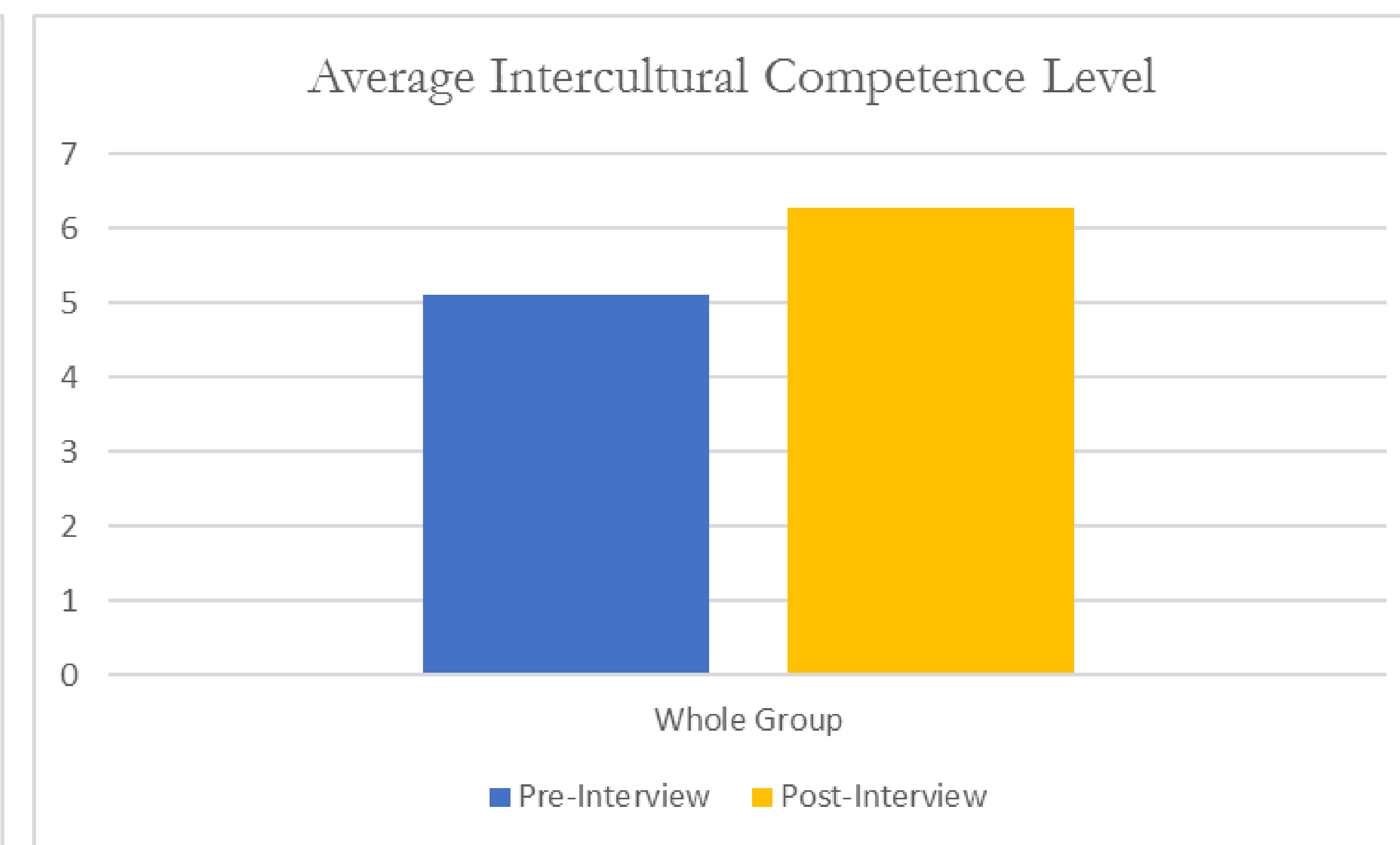


Diagram 2: Average Intercultural Competence

What do you think about the stereotypes towards other ethnicities?

Pre-Interview	Post-Interview
Speaks to the ways in which stereotypes can be true and helpful	Recognizes that stereotypes are generalizations and never will be fully educated
Indicates there is some truth behind every joke	Acknowledges own stereotypes and the origin of some of them in fear and lack of effort to know people better
Hard to not believe if constantly surrounded by it	Need to be changed and/or diminished to culturally mesh together

Table 3: Stereotypes

What do you think you can take from this trip to your classroom?

Pre-Interview	Post-Interview
Speaks about bringing back what was experienced	Weave in personal narratives and experiences
Bring information from the textbooks to real life	Put into context in history and create a more culturally relevant curriculum.
Feel more confident and gain intercultural knowledge	Add an activism component and be comfortable talking about racial issues

Table 4: Takeaways

Discussion

Overall, researchers found from the interviews that the language used did not differ as much as we anticipated. The answers given by the participants in the pre-interviews were shorter and less formulated. This was expected because participants indicated in their respective applications for participation in the experience a desire for more training and comprehensive education and training on intercultural competence. The answers given in the post-interviews were not as fully developed expected. More demonstrated growth with the use of key terms was expected. The research team recommends further development of the study to include focus groups and participant journals because perceived growth for participants was witnessed by researchers in nightly discussion and in reflection discussions on the bus. Yet, interview answers did not demonstrate this growth the degree that was expected. Researchers further suggest the use of pre-trip readings and guided discussion, using terminology that reflects current research in racism, critical race theory and intercultural competence to expand the vocabulary and comfort with terms of the participants. We believe that this was due to a lack of knowledge in the language used. The student teachers grew, but they did not know how to effectively articulate this growth in academic terms. Simply doing pre- and post-interviews is not enough. The lack of knowledge also could be from their education at the University. Many student teachers noted that they only had one or two diversity classes in their years at UW-Eau Claire. Some also said that they believed they learned more on the trip than they did in their diversity classes on campus. Participants indicated the University needs to have more on the topic of diversity in the classroom. Perhaps a more thorough collaborative research project with faculty from the Education Studies could be conducted in conjunction with this trip.

This study includes a number of limitations. The researchers conducting the study are novice, student researchers. All the subjects identify as white females. This is not a surprising characteristic of the sample, as the UW-Eau Claire campus community is predominantly white and female, and the education major is made up of predominantly white females. However, this did offer a control to the study. We were able to look at how a racially privileged group improved after the immersion trip. Participants also self-selected into participation in the immersion experience. Another limitation was that the subjects were interviewed by different researchers. This could have caused the questions to be asked differently. These researchers were diverse in both race and gender. However, this also offered multiple perspectives to the subjects on the trip. The main limitation researchers had was the lack of knowledge the pre-service teachers had. We believe that this is one of the reasons there was not a lot of change between the pre- and post-interviews. In the future, researchers plan to control for this limitation by giving more materials to the participants and going over the information with them.

We believe that for future research, researchers must have a separate discussion with the participants at the end of each day on the trip. This debriefing will help the student researchers increase their knowledge in the language used which will help them express their thoughts and views in a more articulate way.

The analyses indicate that it is important to continue to have pre-service teachers participate in an intercultural immersion experience such as the Civil Rights Pilgrimage. Although there was not as much growth in the interviews as we had hoped, the testimonies we heard during and after the trip display that this immersion experience is an effective tool for increasing intercultural competence for pre-service teachers.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. We are also thankful for all of the participants who had on the Civil Rights Pilgrimage this year and in previous years. Special thanks to the wonderful student teachers that came on this trip. We are grateful for the guidance of many mentors on this project and that we are able to share the experience of the pilgrimage with others. Lastly, we would like to thank Learning and Technology Services for the printing of this poster.