

2012

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# Evidence of Cultural Competence Within Teacher Performance Assessments

Amy Lynn Dee

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Professional integrity and changing demographics in the public school system in the United States coupled with standards for teacher preparation require that preservice teachers possess knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to work with diverse populations. Using the Teacher Work Sample, a plan for instruction serving as a teacher performance assessment, the research examines the document for evidence of cultural competence. Student descriptions, reflections, and lesson plans provide evidence of preservice teacher dispositions and attitudes toward diverse students. The research revealed that work samples fell into four distinct categories depicting different levels of competence ranging from static to proactive. Data collected generated a rubric suggesting the placement of preservice teacher work on a continuum of development in the area of cultural competence.

## INTRODUCTION

Required reading on the subject of increasing diversity in American public schools may dispel the myth of homogeneity held by some preservice teachers, but the larger task of developing the requisite dispositions delineated by organizations dedicated to excellence in teacher preparation remains difficult for some teacher education programs. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE; 2008) sets standards for teacher education institutions, and although some critiques focus on the need for greater clarification of unit and candidate expectations (Beyerback & Nassoii, 2004), Standard 4 clearly stipulates that preservice teachers must demonstrate the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work successfully with students from various cultural backgrounds. Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) stipulates in Standard 2 that new teachers create inclusive environments that allow students from diverse cultures to reach maximum potential (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Additionally, and not unusually, state credentialing agencies may also require that teacher candidates demonstrate the ability to work with various populations. For example, Oregon Administrative Rules require preservice teachers to demonstrate competence in working with learners from socially and culturally diverse backgrounds (OAR 584-017-0185).

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The ability to serve students from diverse and different cultures remains a mark of worth and excellence in new teachers. With increased attention on teacher quality and accountability (Herrera & Murry, 2006; Luster, 2010; Milanowski, 2004), the cultural competence of preservice teachers becomes an area of assessment demanding greater consideration. Such skills must manifest themselves in authentic teacher performance assessments such as the Teacher Work Sample (TWS), a unit of instruction demonstrating preservice teachers' abilities to plan and assess student learning. Developed at Western Oregon University more than 25 years ago and used by several teacher preparation institutions throughout the United States, the TWS provides an opportunity for preservice teachers to demonstrate contextual knowledge of the classroom and community, construct learning objectives tied to standards, choose effective teaching practices, analyze student achievement, and reflect on practice (Bell, Spelman, Mackley, & Liang, 2007; Denner, Norman, & Lin, 2009).

Through content analysis with a collection of TWSs, this research examined how preservice teachers demonstrate evidence of cultural competence within a teaching unit. The objective of the investigation was to gain greater understanding of the ways in which preservice teachers address diversity in the practicum experience through the writing of the TWS to determine if such teacher performance assessments can denote or detect cultural competency. Although considerable literature exists indicating qualities and dispositions that denote cultural competency broadly (Altshuler, Sussman, & Kachur, 2003; Hammer, Bennet, & Wiseman, 2003), research that ties teacher candidates' cultural competency to authentic assessments remains quite limited. This study provides teacher educators and educational researchers with a new perspective on discussing and addressing cultural competency in preservice teachers.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Defining what constitutes cultural competence in new teachers and identifying how teacher education programs help teachers develop cultural competency receive much attention in the field (Butler, Seungyoun, & Tippins, 2006; Garmon, 2005; Klug, Luckey, Wilkins, & Whitfield, 2006; Valentin, 2006). Cultural competence reflects preservice teachers' ability to assess their own culture and to value and respond to cultural differences in ways that recognize and celebrate others (Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005). Cultural competence ties directly to preservice teacher perceptions, attitudes, and dispositions (Ukpokodu, 2007); prior experiences (Moore, 2008); and the quality of field placements (Lee & Dallman, 2008; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2006; Wong, 2008). Although teacher education programs have little control over the experiences causing bias that preservice teachers carry into their course work and field experiences, these course work and field placements largely influence the reshaping of teacher attitudes and dispositions about diversity.

Barnes (2006) found that preservice teachers who take part in a course and field experience emphasizing culturally responsive teaching preferred to focus on course content and pedagogy as opposed to examining their own dispositions. Although that finding is discouraging, the study also suggests that preservice teachers were able to reflect upon their own perceptions and beliefs about diversity, leading to a greater understanding of the views of others. Major and Brock (2003), in recognition of the enormous role preservice teacher beliefs and dispositions play in the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds, studied interactions with a particularly

resistant preservice teacher in an attempt to foster the development of desirable skills and dispositions, including the ability to question and criticize practices as they relate to students of different cultures and languages. Garmon (2005), who outlined factors for influencing teacher attitudes and dispositions toward diversity, emphasized the importance of dispositions, especially openness, self-awareness, and a commitment to social justice. In addition to dispositions, Garmon also identified the importance of experiential factors, including prior experiences with different cultures and placement or field experience.

Institutions situated in White suburbia may encounter difficulties providing diverse field experiences for preservice teachers; nonetheless, studies stressing the importance of diverse placements warrant careful consideration, and institutions must strive to find diverse placements for preservice teachers. Although diverse placements remain highly desirable, many institutions rely on courses that focus on multiculturalism to stand in for experience in diverse settings. Lee and Dallman (2008) reported that preservice teachers feel that required courses in multicultural education do not provide them with the practical skills needed to work with learners from diverse backgrounds. At the same time, the preservice teachers in the study affirm the importance of working with this population in the field. In a study designed to explore cultural biases held by preservice teachers, Moore (2008) found that preservice teachers recognized that bias came from experiences and that awareness of their own thinking allowed them to find new ways to practice in urban classrooms. Early experience in urban settings or diverse classrooms provides a foundation upon which to build the remaining course of study (Klug et al., 2006). Finally, Wong (2008) studied a group of preservice teachers who tutored English language learner (ELL) students as part of a service learning experience and found that the teacher candidates fell into three categories of cultural responsiveness, suggesting the possibility of identifying characteristics that may assist in the development of strategies allowing progress toward the ideal of cultural competence.

Unquestionably, field experiences significantly influence the development of preservice teachers, and in many institutions dedicated to the preparation of future teachers, preservice teachers must write a TWS during the field placement. The TWS has long been regarded as an accurate assessment measuring the competence of a preservice teacher during the practicum experience with multiple studies focusing on its validity and reliability (Denner et al., 2009; Fredman, 2004; Henning et al., 2005). However, few studies investigate specific skills evident in the TWS such as evidence of inclusive practice (Dee, 2011), and exhaustive searching reveals no studies investigating the work sample as a means of identifying preservice teacher dispositions toward diverse populations.

This study explored how preservice teachers demonstrate evidence of cultural competence in the work sample. Employing content analysis on a collection of work samples from one institution, the research examined the characteristics of cultural competence as revealed in descriptions of students and context, lessons, and from reflections. The objective of the investigation was to gain greater understanding of the ways in which preservice teachers demonstrate cultural competence in the practicum experience through evidence written within the TWS, and whether such a teacher performance assessment is adequate in making judgments about the cultural competence of a preservice teacher. In adherence to the tenets of grounded theory, the study attempts to go beyond description and exploration (Birks & Mills, 2011) to an explanation of the evidence of cultural competence that appears in the TWS. This research examined the TWS to answer the question: How do preservice teachers address diversity within the TWS in ways that demonstrate cultural competence?

## METHOD

This research involved an analysis of the expression of cultural competence in TWSs written by preservice teachers working toward an elementary credential at one private, NCATE-accredited university in the Pacific Northwest in which the researcher teaches graduate students in the School of Education. The research employed content analysis with the results providing a framework for assessing TWSs on a continuum of cultural competence, and an examination of themes found within the TWS. Berg (2007) described *content analysis* as a way to reveal significant information and patterns from within written documents: the TWS, in this case. Through content analysis of archived TWSs written in 2008, the researcher examined the descriptions of students and the community context as well as lesson plans and reflections in 20 randomly selected TWSs from a single institution representing graduate and undergraduate preservice teachers. The TWSs were written prior to my arrival at the university and remain archived within the department for licensing and accreditation purposes. Stratified sampling allowed me to focus the study on work samples from undergraduate and graduate students. Babbie (1989) suggested stratified sampling as a method permitting the researcher to systematize the collection of like groups of participants. The purpose of looking at graduate and undergraduate work samples was not to compare groups, but rather to analyze a representative group leaving the institution with elementary teaching credentials. The research was conducted as an inquiry into if and how preservice teachers demonstrate cultural competence within TWS, and to look for themes in the development of cultural competence to appraise whether the acquisition of a professional disposition toward diversity appears within this teacher performance assessment. Note that the institution attempts to place all preservice teachers in diverse settings, so the preservice teachers have the context to address diversity.

Preservice teachers in Oregon produce a TWS that includes unit goals and objectives, assessments, lesson plans, analyses of student learning, descriptions of students and the community, and daily reflections. Often completed in the final phases of teacher preparation, the TWS typically serves as a capstone project by which preservice teachers demonstrate readiness for professional practice. The document should exemplify best practices, strong planning, and evidence of the knowledge and skills required for licensure.

Although TWS remains accepted as a reliable measure of preservice teachers' abilities to plan for instruction, to think about teaching and learning processes, and to demonstrate student achievement (Bell et al., 2007; Denner et al., 2009), analyzing the writing in work samples for evidence of ancillary or desired skills and dispositions remains unverified as a reliable measure of competence. Not only do preservice teachers sometimes write what they think professors want to hear, the content of the TWS also largely depends upon the directions each preservice teacher receives when working on the project; hence, the need for a large stratified sample. Regardless of the limitations, the writing of preservice teachers can and does reveal significant insights into the thinking and practices of preservice teachers (Schon, 1983). Reflections, a long and highly regarded practice of professors of education, provide a glimpse into the thinking of the writer. Respecting writing as process of thinking sanctions its use as a medium for data collection in the area of preservice teachers' dispositions toward diversity.

The definition of *cultural competence* presented by Lindsey et al. (2005) as the ability to respond to cultural differences in ways that recognize and celebrate others, served as framework for coding data within the study. Each TWS was analyzed was reviewed in three areas.

The first section of each TWS contains the descriptions of the community, class and students. This section revealed information about the students, classroom, and community in which the preservice teacher worked. All descriptions and comments from the 20 TWSs regarding the diversity of students and community culture were recorded. Initial coding of the data resulted in the TWS categorized as either descriptive or nondescriptive, denoting whether the preservice teacher recognized and described the ethnicity of the students in the classroom. Written data memos were compared against the descriptions following the initial coding process.

Following each lesson within a TWS, preservice teachers must reflect on their teaching and then write a final reflective essay to end the unit. These reflections revealed preservice teacher thinking about students who did not make progress and exposed any plans for remediation or parent contact. Again, I recorded any data relevant to diversity for the descriptive and nondescriptive groups. Codes were attached to preservice teacher narratives that revealed dispositions and attitudes concerning diversity. Following the analysis of these two sections of narrative, I reviewed memos and data coded as descriptive and nondescriptive to form an intermediate coding system that led to two additional categories for the TWSs: recognition and value. The coded content fell into those categories based on data that denote mere recognition of diversity, or an indication of value as determined by positive descriptors of students.

The constant comparative analysis required by grounded theory (Birks & Mills, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) resulted in data memos and categories of coded data making it apparent that further investigation of the work sample could indeed provide information needed to draw sturdy inferences about the degree preservice teachers' dispositions toward diversity manifested in the TWS. The final section was that containing lesson plans. Lesson plans were read and coded for references to diversity, along with differentiation or accommodations. Axial coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) united all groups of data into a clear pattern of four distinct categories. A professor in a teacher education program in a different university along with a professor teaching in a different department reviewed codes and data for trustworthiness.

## Data Analysis

The TWSs were initially divided into two groups—descriptive and nondescriptive—by the nature of the student descriptions. The nondescriptive group of eight work samples disclosed neither the ethnicity of students nor any other sociological factor denoting diversity. Interestingly, in all eight of these work samples, the preservice teachers included in their descriptions of the larger communities demographic data on ethnic diversity, but that data never appeared when describing the classroom or individual students.

Within the descriptive group, any indication of cultural diversity in the classroom came either indirectly when referring to students in an ELL program, or in the form of statistics describing the ethnic breakdown of the community and school. Student and community descriptions in the first section of the work sample revealed that only 12 of the 20 documents contained specific references to ELLs in the classroom. Seven of these 12 named the cultural identity of the student, and the remaining five simply mentioned the ELL label, leaving the reader to wonder about the first language, and thus the possible ethnicity of the student. With one exception, the 20 preservice teachers who produced the TWSs did not mention ethnic, religious, or other sociological factors when describing students unless the student

carried the ELL label. One preservice teacher described a student in the TWS as biracial, although the information was out of context and without any significance attached to the statement.

Once the TWSs were divided into these two groups, one group containing descriptors of diversity, and the other with no ethnic data on students, the analysis and coding process of the reflections resulted in a second subdivision within the TWSs. Reflections were categorized as recognition or value depending upon coded content that revealed preservice teachers' dispositions toward diversity within that section of the TWS. Although the TWSs that simply recognized diversity through explanations about a student's achievement hindered by a language barrier (recognition), those in the value group moved beyond recognition and contained comments about the preservice teachers' need to adjust strategies or content to promote academic achievement. Within the nondescriptive category of eight TWSs, three were designated as recognition as indicated by data within the reflections. Within the descriptive category, all TWSs were designated as value in that these TWSs moved beyond recognition of diversity to a teacher-centered need to make adjustments for students. Data were now divided into three categories: nondescriptive containing five TWSs, nondescriptive with recognition containing three TWSs, and descriptive with value containing 12 TWSs.

The lesson plans in the TWS served as the final section for analysis and coding. The lesson plans in the eight TWSs that did not mention any ethnic or racial diversity (nondescriptive) not only appeared teacher centered with a reliance on direct instruction regardless of content, but also seldom articulated plans for any type of instructional differentiation for diverse learners. In fact, five of the eight work samples specifically stated that no differentiation was necessary because the students could work with partners, the teacher would move around the classroom providing extra help when needed, or that all students could complete the lesson due to the use of manipulatives.

The remaining three work samples (nondescriptive with value) contained plans for differentiation for ELL learners, and these three attempted to embed the plans within the lesson plan sequence. Recall that these TWS contained no demographic information or insights into student or classroom diversity within the appropriate TWS section. The lessons in these TWSs contained plans for differentiation that appeared at the beginning of the lesson and again at the appropriate time within the body of the plan where the preservice teacher made note of what needed to happen at that moment for a particular student. Even though differentiation often remains an elusive skill for new teachers, emerging skills in this area, along with the teaching methods used in the lessons, separated TWSs within this study.

Twelve work samples in the group describing student diversity (descriptive and value) not only had plans for differentiation, but also four had strong plans and specifically mentioned how and why factors of diversity informed the planning of the unit, and this separated the exemplary four from the remaining eight in this grouping of work samples. Strong plans for differentiation were indicated by codes denoting changes to delivery of the content, providing student choice in activities, and assessing according to student need. Additionally, the TWS in this group of four were also coded for a high degree of community involvement in the TWS.

Finally, based on careful analysis of student descriptions, reflections, and lesson plans, the initial two groups of TWS became four distinct categories reflecting a progression of cultural competence. Now designated distinctly as static, reactive, active and proactive, each category represented unique characteristics that emerged from the data collected in this study.

## FINDINGS

Twenty TWSs ultimately fell into four distinct categories designated as static, reactive, active, and proactive. The static designation contained five work samples, the reactive contained three, the active contained nine, and the proactive category contained three. Each category presents unique characteristics that emerged from the data collected in this study. This section describes the distinctions that led to the placement of TWS in the resulting four categories.

### Static

The initial TWSs that held data coded as nondescriptive were recategorized as static. The static category contained five TWSs and was named as such due to the data revealing that TWSs in that classification did not contain evidence of movement toward cultural competence. TWSs falling into the static category contained student descriptions with no information about students other than clinical or statistical data. These descriptions contained only objective information such as age, sometimes in years and months, as well as test scores and any other measureable academic information. The descriptions left me to wonder if the preservice teacher had any information about student interests, strengths, or needs. The community descriptions often mimicked the student descriptions, relying on socioeconomic statistics or data on ethnic percentages. In a few cases, the neighborhood was described in terms of crime rates or the amount of high-density housing in the area.

Reflections for lessons and the unit consisted, to a large extent, of a focus on negative student behaviors such as students not paying attention, students extending little effort, off-task or disruptive behavior, and excessive absences. Unquestionably, the reflections in this group also acknowledged positive student gains, and the preservice teachers noted where they needed improvement, but these work samples left no question as to preservice teachers' belief that the loci of all problems lay squarely with the student and his or her response to the instruction. Examples from TWSs in this category include the following comments:

“Those students need more discipline in order to learn how to pay attention when the teacher is speaking.”

“Student did not progress due to absences.”

“Student did not make progress because of language skills.”

“Refer student for testing.”

Lesson plans did not contain differentiation and often used direct teaching as the only strategy. One preservice teacher wrote that all students were expected to do the same thing, so differentiation was not needed. Preservice teacher comments gave no evidence of reflection on teaching but rather focused on student behavior or failure. Blame or excuse permeated the language in the lesson and unit reflections. Concerns about classroom discipline appeared frequently. The term *static* was strategic in that doubt underlies the probability of a candidate in this category to demonstrate satisfactory movement toward cultural competence.

## Reactive

The term *reactive* denotes those TWSs that react to issues of diversity, but at a simplistic or superficial level. Student descriptions in the reactive category moved past those in the static category with the addition of limited descriptions of diversity. For example, descriptions contained labels such as ELL or Individualized Education Plan (IEP), but descriptors remain exclusive to special education or behavioral issues. Like those in the static category, the student descriptions in the reactive TWSs remained objective and centered on the academic and behavioral rather than denoting any personal information about the student. Community descriptions revealed an awareness or recognition of cultural difference and usually revolved around poverty rather than ethnicity. Again, the data presented within these TWSs were limited to objective demographic statistics with little or no commentary on how the information informs planning and teaching.

Comments within these TWSs changed subtly, moving from blame on the student to blame on the environment from which the student came. For example, preservice teachers provided home or economic factors as reasons for poor performance rather than placing blame on the student as seen in the previous, *Static*, category. Comments from this category included the following:

“These students come from broken homes.”

“The parents are not involved in the school.”

“This student’s parents don’t help with school work, so little homework is accomplished.”

Preservice teachers attempted to provide for students on an IEP, or designated as ELL, but differentiation was emergent, and the TWS contained little evidence of follow-through within the lesson plans. Lessons demonstrated emerging grouping strategies and referred to the need for some students to leave for a resource room. TWSs in this category contained evidence that preservice teachers recognized the necessity to differentiate but had yet developed the skill or disposition to carry any type of accommodations into the lessons. Comments included the following:

“I don’t need to differentiate because my classroom is active.”

“No need for differentiation because I use multiple intelligences.”

“I don’t need to differentiate because I use group work.”

Regardless of the misunderstanding of differentiation as seen in these comments, preservice teachers writing these TWSs demonstrated awareness of students within the class who had either an IEP or an ELL designation and spoke to a desire to increase the motivation within these students to achieve at a higher level.

## Active

TWSs in the active category contained descriptions and comments indicating dynamic interaction with sociological factors that informed planning and teaching. Preservice teachers wrote complete student descriptions that displayed no fear in naming culture or ethnicity. For example, students identified as ELL were also named as Latino, or in one case, Sudanese. The complete community descriptions moved beyond raw demographic data and included references to community

values and traditions. Two TWSs made references to the importance of religion in the community. Another two preservice teachers made references to the need to have letters and classroom notices translated for parents who do not speak English.

The reflections in active TWSs, like those in the other groups, made clear the preservice teachers' enthusiasm over student gains in achievement. Additionally, this group, like the static and reactive groups, articulated a desire to improve classroom management, and mentioned retrospectively what might have produced better behavior. The active TWSs are set apart by reflections that also include observations about teaching and an emphasis on students who were not achieving at the desired level. Individual students and classroom performance become the focus of reflections as opposed to ways to improve overall behavior or general achievement.

Differentiation became central to lesson planning and active learning clearly dominated the classroom ethos. Preservice teachers made comments in the reflections that indicated an embodied responsibility to and for students with a focus on changes to instruction when necessary. No blame or excuses appeared in reflections, and the preservice teachers in this group consistently presented plans for remediation and or inclusion. Examples of attempted differentiation included photographs, graphic organizers, prepared notes, and copies of PowerPoint slides. Examples taken from this group of TWSs include:

"I need to figure out what makes her tick."

"We will collaborate with the learning specialist."

"I want to find out what kinds of activities motivate him."

"This student will move to group three."

Interestingly, individual lessons contained not only clear plans for assisting individual students master content objectives, but also many more student-centered activities and fewer lessons depending upon direct instruction. One preservice teacher used literacy circles where each student had a role based on student need and level of achievement. Another preservice teacher provided individual choice in student projects. TWSs in this category also contained more comments regarding candidate concerns about participation, rather than motivation or behavior, as seen in the static and reactive TWSs.

## Proactive

The proactive category, named for its forward-thinking elements, represents the ideal in TWS methodology. Four of the 20 TWSs were categorized as proactive. Student descriptions moved beyond complete to include the impact each social, cultural, and academic factor had on the planning of the unit. Sometimes these were as simple as referring to ELL students' interests and using those to inform planning for those students. One TWS included plans to accommodate for possible absences due to cultural and family obligations. Descriptions of the community demonstrated value of and respect for its people. In one TWS, the preservice teacher had a plan to include the family and community in the learning and made adjustments for cultural background when needed. Another TWS was designated as proactive in part because the teacher candidate purposefully chose literature based on the ethnicity of the students and community.

TWSs in this group mentioned students' failures to meet objectives and the preservice teachers made plans for remediation. Often, plans included grouping students differently, using one-on-one instruction, providing more time on assignments, or using resource personnel.

Regardless of the strategy, the preservice teachers in this group were much more likely to find deficiencies or limitations in themselves rather than in the students. These TWSs contained evidence that the preservice teachers in this group wrote about the need to find alternate strategies or ways to boost student achievement, confidence, and self-esteem rather than presenting excuses for students who struggled. Examples of comments from proactive TWSs include:

“No ELL students are performing in the top 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, so I must make use of more pre-teaching opportunities and mini-lessons.”

“Student #5 will work with student #19 and #20 because he needs more opportunities to practice academic language at his level.”

“I need to use more one-on-one instruction with Student 6 next week because he continues to make the same calculation errors.”

Lesson plans included differentiation at a level one might expect from master teachers, containing differences for content, product and assessments. Student choice appeared in most lessons, and plans explained purposeful grouping of students. In proactive TWSs, preservice teachers set themselves apart from their colleagues by identifying students who would need differentiation and then planned for individual learners as well as for whole-class instruction. One preservice teacher wrote about the need to provide a student with time to brainstorm answers before speaking aloud, so she gave the student questions in advance. Another preservice teacher addressed differentiation by including plans that provided alternative poetry for students in an attempt to increase cultural sensitivity. Three preservice teachers made a note in the lesson plans that referred to the classroom involvement of community members or parents of ELL students. Interestingly, the TWSs in this category had the highest rate of changes made to lessons as they progressed through the unit, possibly signifying a greater awareness of student progress toward objectives. The proactive category may prove elusive for most preservice teachers, but those who embrace a disposition of justice and life-long learning stand a strong chance of moving that direction.

Many TWSs straddled categories, and given the belief that preservice teacher writing divulges values held concerning diversity (Moore, 2008; Schon, 1983), the comments in the reflections served as the deciding factor for which category to place those teacher performance assessments. The research resulted in four distinct categories through which teacher educators may situate assessments and dispositions toward diversity held by preservice teachers. These categories present themselves in a rubric (Table 1) that denotes characteristics of each and depicts a continuum against which teacher educators may locate preservice teachers and their work for the purposes of initiating conversations surrounding cultural competence and possible cultural biases.

## CONCLUSION

Whereas the term *rubric* denotes a scoring or assessment guide and the term *continuum* signifies movement or transition, neither fully satisfies the intent behind the categories presented in the research. The rubric may very well indicate where a preservice teacher falls in the area of cultural competence, but it certainly does indicate the nature of content in the TWSs in this study. The content within the TWS, or other teacher performance assessments, may suggest growth toward cultural competence; and therefore, the rubric serves as a guide or means by which a teacher educator may initiate conversation, and this presents an opportunity for preservice

TABLE 1  
Continuum of Cultural Competence

<i>Static</i>	<i>Reactive</i>	<i>Active</i>	<i>Proactive</i>
Nondescriptive	Descriptive Recognition	Descriptive Value	Descriptive Value
Student descriptions limited to gender, age, etc. No reference to learning needs/culture/socioeconomic status, etc.	Student descriptions limited to special education or behavioral issues.	Student descriptions include culture, interests, family support, learning styles and needs, etc.	Complete descriptions, including impacts of factors on the classroom, teaching and planning.
Community context described in derogatory manner.	Context description shows awareness of differences or need for alternate approaches. No plan.	Community context understood and diversity clearly valued.	Community valued and included in planning and classroom activities.
Lesson plans focus on direct instruction to whole group, using irrelevant curricula.	Lesson plans refer to pull-out programs or use of resource help. An attempt at relevant curricula.	Plans for a unit of study rather than consecutive lessons. Multiple methods of instruction.	Content is meaningful, useful, and relevant to transfers learning to the community.
No communication with home.	Communication with home initiated by parents.	Regular communication with home to report progress.	Communication to include family and community.
Unit of instruction is largely teacher centered with a reliance on direct instruction.	Student participation in some group projects.	Active learning centers on group and individual projects of choice.	Purposeful grouping of students explained in plans.
No or very little use of data to assist in planning for instruction or to explain student performance.	Excuses data showing poor performance of subgroups	Collects data to explain student progress.	Uses data to inform planning and instructional practice.
No differentiation.	Attempt at differentiation centers on what students produce.	Differentiates student products and content.	Differentiates content, product, and process.
Concerns about discipline.	Concerns about motivation.	Concerns about participation.	Concerns about achievement.

Student teacher comments:

“Refer student for testing.”  
“Student didn’t understand due to language barrier.”  
“Student is unmotivated.”  
“Students did not progress due to absences.”  
“Students did not progress because of language skills.”  
“Student has behavioral issues.”  
“Student should be tested for. . . .”  
“Those kids. . .”

Student teacher comments:

“These students come from broken homes.”  
“These parents aren’t involved in school.”  
“I don’t need to differentiate because my classroom is active.”  
“No need for differentiation because I use multiple intelligences.”  
“I don’t need to differentiate because I use group work.”

Student teacher comments:

“I need to figure out what makes her tick.”  
“I want to find out what kind activities would motivate him.”  
“We will collaborate with the learning specialist.”  
“The data show the student made little progress so I need to reteach.”  
“For the next unit, I will use another method.”  
“The student will move to group 3.”

Student teacher comments:

“I need to frontload for students 12, 17, and 22.”  
“No ELL students are not performing as in the top 25 percentile, so I must. . . .”  
“The IEP contains. . . , so I will. . . .”  
“Student 5 will work with 19 and 23 because he needs. . . .”  
“I need to use one on one instruction with Student 6 next week because. . . .”

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teachers to confront biases and then attempt a change in practice (as Moore observed, 2008), and therein lies the significance of this research for teacher educators. A preservice teacher who constructs a TWS falling into the static category might need anything from direct and concrete instruction on expectations to career counseling. Ultimately, each institution must decide how to judge any teacher performance assessment; but ethically, professors must not accept any work indicating that a preservice teacher falls short of meeting the needs of all students typified by those in the static category.

The objective of this study was to gain greater insight into the ways preservice teachers address diversity in the practicum experience through the writing of the TWS. Given the attention to cultural competency in the field of education (Banks, 1994; Barnes, 2006; Sleeter, 2009), the focus upon reflection as a sound practice for preservice teachers (Schon, 1983), the influence of the practicum experience in developing cultural competency (Lee & Dallman, 2008; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2006; Wong, 2008), and the movement toward greater use of teacher performance assessments within those placements (Luster, 2010), a reliable instrument by which teacher educators can make judgments about preservice teachers' cultural competence is long overdue. Further research could determine whether such an instrument would prove valid and reliable. The definition of cultural competence presented by Lindsey et al. (2005) as the ability to respond to cultural differences in ways that recognize and celebrate others, served as guide for coding data within the study. Teacher educators do not need to look far for recognition and response within the work of preservice teachers; and therefore, these factors seem like natural and obvious components to include within teacher performance assessments such as the TWS. This study found heavy evidence of recognition and response within the reactive, active, and proactive TWSs; however, teacher educators must take care to use multiple ways to measure the cultural competence of preservice teachers, and we need more research in this area.

Although the rubric provides a means to measure TWS content against a set of qualifiers on a continuum, until further research can validate the TWS and other teacher performance assessments as a measure of cultural competence, the rubric should largely remain a measure of a preservice teacher's ability to plan for instruction and analyze data on student gains. Foundational to good teaching, cultural competence does not qualify as an ancillary skill and must manifest itself within the TWS; however, the TWS alone cannot serve as the single measure of cultural competence. Strong planning for instruction inherently requires a disposition of openness to cultural diversity; thus, any teacher performance assessment must contain some measure of cultural competence. Presenting the rubric when instructing preservice teachers in the writing of the TWS may increase thinking about cultural competency and thus improve preservice teacher planning and practice—the ultimate goal of teacher educators.

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