

*Preparing Empathetic Teacher Candidates':  
A Cultural Simulation of Japanese Internment in Hawai'i*

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**Abstract**

In this phenomenological study, learning about empathy through the Japanese Internment in Hawai'i was explored by analyzing the experiences of seventeen undergraduate teacher candidates after visiting the Japanese Cultural Center in Honolulu, Hawai'i. Data gleaned from surveys, self-reflection, peer reflections, and photovoice assignments were analyzed using clustering and themes. Findings reveal the depth of candidates' empathetic lens from historical, cultural, and social empathetic lenses. The research offers implications for teacher preparation programs on the use of cultural simulations for developing teacher candidates' empathy for understanding others and working with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Keywords: Empathy, Teacher Candidates, Teacher Preparation, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Japanese Internment

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## Introduction

Culturally responsive teachers recognize the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson- Billings, 1994); they are empathetic because they “care so much” about *culturally and linguistically diverse* (CLD) students and insist on holding them to the same standards as other students (Rychly & Graves, 2012). The percentage of CLD students who attend public schools in the United States (US) is on the rise (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). CLD students often speak or are exposed to a language other than English at home and are therefore not fully proficient in the English language, despite English being used as the language of classroom instruction in US public schools (Rhodes et al. 2005). Even though CLD students are the fastest-growing student population in US public schools, they are the student population that teachers feel the least prepared to work with (Samson & Collins, 2012). As a result, teacher preparation programs (TPPs) work to better prepare teacher candidates (TCs) for working effectively with CLD students, using culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as a framework to guide teacher education coursework (Donahue-Keegan et. al., 2019). A central characteristic of CRT is empathy (Gay, 2018) and is vital to support teacher candidates development of empathy during their teacher preparation years.

Teacher education research empathy as being an important teaching disposition (Bullough, 2019; Warren, 2014; Warren & Lessner, 2014). Given the rapid increase in the number of CLD students in US public schools (NCES, 2018), it is imperative to understand how TCs develop empathy while in a TPP. To our knowledge, this has not yet been studied. This research aims to shed light on how teachers may be prepared with empathy for working with CLD students. As three teacher educators in Hawai‘i, the idea to conduct this research came about when we learned that seventeen teacher candidates (TC) in our cohort had limited knowledge of the Japanese Internment Camps in Hawai‘i during World War II. Over half reported not learning about the internment camps during middle and high school. The third author (the granddaughter of a Japanese internee in Hawai‘i) was involved in a commemoration acknowledging the innocent lives lost in internment camps. Research ensued to explore how a cultural simulation of the Japanese Internment Camps in Hawai‘i influenced teachers candidates’ learning of empathy.

## Literature Review

Empathy is described as being emotional and intellectual (Warren, 2014) or affective and cognitive (Bullough 2019). Emotional or affective empathy is low-level empathy because it involves feelings, while intellectual or cognitive empathy are high-level because it requires perspective-taking and critical thinking (Warren, 2014). Others, conceptualize empathy as being either historical, cultural, or social (Priddy, 2017). Historical empathy pushes students out of the present in order to understand people living in the past. Cultural empathy engages students with cultures outside of their own experiences and challenges their biases. Social empathy includes engaging activities where students learn and listen to one another’s perspectives and create new learning. Social empathy is the ability to understand people by perceiving their life situations and as a result, gaining insight into structural inequalities and disparities.

Empathy is challenging to teach and requires ongoing intentional efforts by teacher educators (Ullman & Hesch, 2011; Warren & Hotchkins, 2015). Frameworks used to prepare TC for urban classrooms must account for the multiple ways that teachers express empathy in their

professional work (Warren, 2014). For instance, school curriculum tends to avoid controversy, conflict, and the realities of sociopolitical issues plaguing urban communities. Consequently, teachers may feel that discussion on these issues is daunting, time-consuming, and emotionally draining. Thus, the challenge is for teacher educators to bring the perspectives, positionalities, and contextual realities of racial, social, and ethnic groups into classroom instruction to better prepare TCs for culturally responsive teaching.

### **Using Cultural Simulation Activities to Develop Teacher Candidate Empathy**

A cultural simulation experience "is an instructional technique that attempts to recreate certain aspects of reality to gain information, clarity, values, understanding other cultures, or developing a skill" (Cruz & Patterson, 2005, p. 43). Simulations may provide a basis for empathy exercises because they help TCs develop socio-cultural consciousness and build affirming attitudes about differences. During a simulation, participants (players) assume a role in an authentic situation. Simulations are often categorized as being a: (a) cross-cultural community-based learning experience in another cultural context, (b) explicit teaching about explorations and reflections on a specific culture while observing or working in that particular setting, or (c) structured field experience in a formal or informal educational setting (Cruz & Patterson, 2005, Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). A simulation should culminate with opportunities for participants to reflect on their experience (Padua & Smith, 2020).

### **Teaching Empathy Through Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

Interdisciplinary instruction builds collaborations between teachers of two or more fields of study to facilitate the integration and synthesis of knowledge (Stember, 1991). While in teacher preparation years, TCs need interdisciplinary experiences to meet the social, cultural, linguistic, and intellectual demands of an ever-growing multicultural student population (Rhodes et al., 2005). Research on how interdisciplinary approaches may be used in teacher preparation is scant. To date, the majority of research reporting on interdisciplinary work centers on science, technology, engineering, and math education to describe how in-service teachers' practices align with cross-disciplinary, multidisciplinary, or interdisciplinary instruction and the influences these practices have on student learning (Weinberg & Sample McMeeking, 2017).

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

*Culturally responsive teaching* seeks to improve the school success of culturally linguistically diverse (CLD) students. CRT contends that explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is imperative to meeting the educational needs of CLD students (Gay, 2018). A culturally responsive educator makes deliberate and intentional teaching praxis to promote learning opportunities for *all* students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language proficiency, able-mindedness/body, or socioeconomic class (Farinde-Wu, Glover & Williams, 2017). Culturally responsive teachers place cultural diversity in every subject they teach, in every content area, so school is more interesting, representative of, and responsive to CLD students.

### **Hawai'i: Past and Present**

Hawai'i is the only state outside the continental United States (US) located in the Western Pacific. During the 1800s, Hawai'i was recognized as an international kingdom governed by

a royal family. In 1893, American Colonists overthrew the kingdom and established the Republic of Hawai'i. In 1898, the US government annexed Hawai'i resulting in the state becoming a territory (Lichtenstein, 2008). On December 7, 1941, the Japanese military attacked the US military forces stationed at Pearl Harbor. Hours after the attack, amidst fears of invasion, martial law was declared in Hawai'i (National Park Service, 2017). The US military issued an order to seize persons of Japanese ancestry, deeming them as "enemy aliens." Martial law severely affected Japanese Americans residing in the Continental United States and territory of Hawai'i. Under Executive Order 9066 (issued on February 19, 1942). Two internment camps, Sand Island and Honouliuli, are located on the island of O'ahu. The *Honouliuli Internment Camp* served as civilian Internment and *prisoner of war* camp starting in 1943. It was the largest internment camp in Hawai'i and was also known as *Jigoku-Dani* (Hell Valley) due to the secluded location in a deep gulch that trapped heat. Over 2,000 Japanese in Hawai'i were interned despite the majority being American citizens by birth. Most internees were influential Japanese citizens in the community, such as teachers, priests, or business owners. In Hawai'i, martial law expanded over 35 months of Japanese Internment, the longest period in US history of the civilian population.

### **Situated Learning for Historical Empathy**

This study utilizes tenets of situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and a modified version of Endacott's (2014) work on empathy through a historical context. Situated learning theory proposes that learning takes place when individuals actively participate in an experience. The individual is "situated" in the learning experience and acquires understanding by participating in an activity. A cultural simulation is an example of situated learning content because individuals are actively participating in unfamiliar experiences to gain a better understanding of culture. Endacott studies historical empathy through activities requiring *cognitive-perspective taking* (i.e., understanding others' experiences, beliefs, attitudes, positions in the given situation from the past) and *affective connection* (i.e., connecting how the lived experience or situation influenced their affect). This study modifies Endacott's description of empathy by including interdisciplinary instruction and cultural simulations to teach TCs about empathy.

### **Methodology**

A phenomenology is an approach to understanding the world from one person's *lived experience (phenomenon)* or a life event and how it is transformed into consciousness (Moustakas, 1994; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). In this study, the *lived experience* is the participants' visitation to the Japanese Culture Center (JCCH). This phenomenological study is guided by the following research question: How did knowledge of the Japanese Internment Camps in Hawai'i influence teachers candidates' learning of empathy?

### **Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i (JCCH)**

In 1986, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce began the Japan-Hawai'i Culture Center project, *The Dream*, to preserve the legacy and history of Japanese immigrants (Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i, 2021). The goals were for (1) present generations of Japanese Americans to learn about their ancestors' sacrifices and contributions made by their ancestors to make their lives today possible, and (2) to leave a legacy for future generations to connect to Japanese ancestors. Before the visit, planning for the simulation activities occurred between the third author and the JCCH Education Outreach Coordinator.

## Participants

Seventeen participants from one elementary education cohort were in this study. Eight were born in Hawai'i, and nine were born on the US mainland. All were female, in the third semester of the TPP, and pursuing a bachelor's of education degree. They were from diverse ethnicities, but most were of Asian descent (see figure 1). Six were earning an additional license in multilingual learning. The *Institutional Review Board* approved this study, and all participants gave informed consent. Participants were enrolled in four methods courses: social studies, math, introduction to multilingual learners, and elementary field experience. Method instructors collaborated to develop an interdisciplinary approach aimed at building participants' knowledge through various cognitive lenses of examining Japanese immigration and Internment in Hawai'i to (1) shift participants' thinking away from the mindset that state history is only taught during social studies and (2) to understand the need to be empathetic about historical events that may shape students' realities in the field experience classroom.

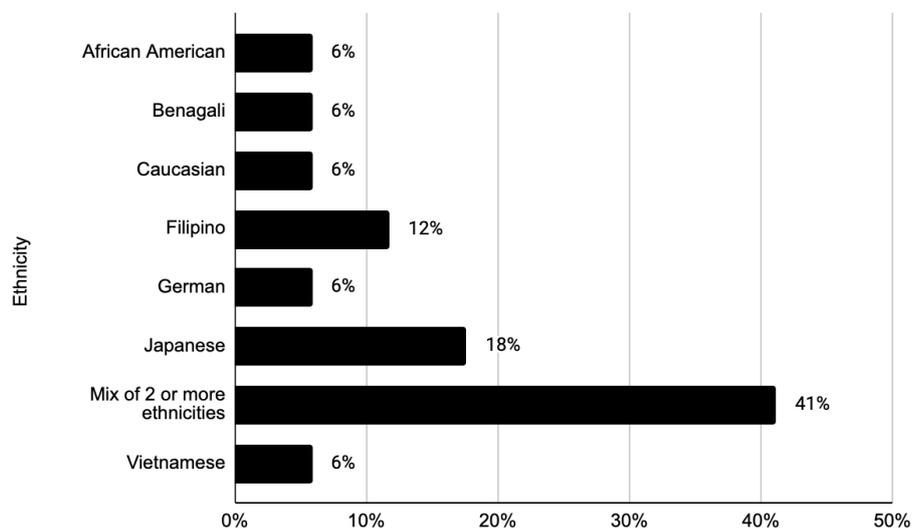


Figure 1: Ethnic characteristics of participants

## Lived Experiences

Two rotations with various simulations were designed for TCs to learn about the Japanese culture and internment camps. The first rotation was Discovery Boxes that included games and toys to develop participants' understanding of the play limitations Japanese immigrants experienced. The docent started the activity by posing questions to the TCs, such as *What is a toy? What can you use to make a toy?* Since immigrants were poor, the docent explained that immigrants entertained themselves by creating toys and games using everyday recycled objects such as bottle caps and string. In turn, TC's simulated these experiences with creating toys.

In the second rotation, TCs toured two galleries. The first gallery, *Okage sama de, I am who I am because of you*, consisted of historical artifacts of the Japanese immigration and their lifestyle in Hawai'i. Participants engaged in simulation activities such as dressing up in Japanese clothing and viewing primary and secondary sources. The gallery featured artifacts and images reflecting the Japanese immigration experience, working at the sugar cane plantations, going to school, and establishing Japanese businesses. The next gallery

emphasized the internment camp, World War II and Americans of Japanese Ancestry. One simulation activity included a reenactment of the arrest of a Japanese man.

### **Data Collection**

Surveys, online reflections, and a photovoice assignment captured the participants' voices and interpretations. The selected methods allowed expressions of personal viewpoints of the past and present so that TCs could learn their peers' perspectives.

### **Survey**

Similar to Ohn's research (2013), a survey was administered before and after the JCCH visit to assess any changes in TCs perceptions of Japanese Internment and immigration to Hawai'i. The survey included open and closed-ended questions.

### **Online Reflections**

TCs wrote online reflection posts based on prompts (written by the authors). The prompts encouraged TCs to share interpretations and build new knowledge about the Japanese Internment based on course readings, the field practicum, and personal experience. At the end of their response, TCs were asked to pose a divergent question for a peer to respond in the following week. To engage in a peer response assignment, TCs read all of their classmates' responses, then replied to one peer's responses. The responses allowed TCs to orient themselves as a community and the interpretations of the academic literature. Through collaborative online reflective conversations, TCs challenged, affirmed, or built new ideas and knowledge about Japanese Internment.

### **Photovoice**

During the JCCH visit, TC took digital photos (or videos) of artifacts capturing concepts (e.g., empathy, multilingual instruction, equity, culture) based on requirements determined by their methods instructor. The final product was a narrated photovoice essay using Google Docs or PowerPoint. Photovoice (Power et al., 2014) allowed participants to capture emotional geographies or whose preference is to present images over words.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach. Phenomenology takes into account how the human experience rises to consciousness on a single phenomenon or a *lived experience* (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Each person's lived experience is considered equal value and a contribution for others to consciously learn about one's perspective, embracing the notion that each individual engages in the same experience differently. The researchers used an inductive process, coding statements and treating each one as equal value regardless of its origin to create short textual descriptions. Data were reduced by clustering codes according to descriptions then formulating into *textual qualities* (Moustakas, 1994) by themes to generate possible meanings. The researchers exercised *imaginative variation* (Moustakas, 1994) in which examination of themes from varying perspectives were sought to better understand the participants' phenomena at the JCCH. To ensure trustworthiness, the researchers discussed and confirmed the agreement of how sources were coded, interpreted, and sought clarification of meanings if needed. Codebooks

and memos were written as other forms of trustworthiness or *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). *Dedoose* assisted with storing and organizing data.

## Findings

The purpose of this research was to understand how learning about the Japanese Internment camps influenced TCs learning of empathy. In adhering to anonymity, the embedded anecdotes about an individual's lived experience are represented in parenthesis abbreviated as teacher candidate (TC) and participant number. Findings are presented according to Priddy's (2017) empathetic lenses (e.g., historical, social, and cultural).

### Historical Empathy

All participants had a general understanding of historical empathy at the literal level and cited this lens the most in their work. They saw historical empathy through artifacts or activities, but few elaborated on why these items were selected. For instance,

*"I believe it was easy to be drawn to this (historical) lens and we were in an environment filled with primary and secondary sources from the beginning of Japanese immigration to Hawai'i to World War II and Japanese internment."* (TC10)

The amount of time learning about historical empathy in methods courses may have influenced decisions in capturing images for the photovoice essay.

*"Half of the exhibit was historical, and in this particular part of the tour, I was drawn to the old pictures, quotes, and artifacts from those who were interned."* (TC8)

Contrastively, participants who applied historical knowledge at a deeper affective level, elaborated on artifacts triggering their emotions. In this example, one person envisioned the impact on a family member.

*"All throughout JCCH there were artifacts and personal quotes. While reading the quotes I could feel myself becoming emotional because I cannot imagine how it would feel to have my family ripped apart, or to see my brother taken away to go to war. I could feel how hurt, scared, angered and/or empowered these people felt through these quotes. I think seeing these quotes posted on the walls really hit me hard."* (TC16)

Japanese immigration is defined by generations. Issei is Japanese people emigrating to a country. Immigrant children born in the new country are called *nisei*. Comparing generational experiences was seen by one participant who explained,

*"I am a Japanese *nisei* myself, but from a different generation of *nisei* compared to those who are displayed in the photos. Although I can connect to those who have Japanese parents but born and educated in the US, I did not experience war, mistreatment, discrimination, or trauma like those who did during the war."* (TC15)

Primary and secondary resources triggered comparative feelings between artifacts from the past and present as critical resources for student learning.

*“I feel that the current generation of students are not exposed to artifacts from the past, so people begin to lose and forget what it was like if you had no money, constantly being resourceful, and managing daily life with what you have. I believe that by presenting these artifacts and items to students, they can appreciate what they have, relate the items to their culture or homes, and be educated on how we can be resourceful and reuse items as well.”* (TC15)

*“Primary sources and artifacts get students excited to engage further with the content being taught. The use of artifacts can also help students to develop empathy for the people during a certain time period or event. The pictures to the right are of items that internees made as gifts for their families.”* (TC9)

Artifacts, simulation activities, and interactions with the docents deepened their knowledge in various ways. One person wrote,

*“Although I have been to the Japanese Cultural Center many times in the past as a student, I never delved into the past as much as I did on our field trip. Much of it was review and reminiscence, but also a learning experience through the artifacts and letters that were written by the people who lived through the war and internment camps.”* (TC15)

In the post-survey, participants self-identified their change in knowledge of the Japanese Internment Camps. Seventy-one percent responded “extensive change,” 24% responded “some change,” and five percent responded “minimal change.”

### **Cultural Empathy**

Since many participants come from Asian backgrounds, data on cultural empathy was sparse. Perfunctory responses were common such as:

*“Cultural empathy challenges a student’s biases and encourages them to understand a culture outside of their own.”* (TC14)

*“Challenging students cultural biases may achieve cultural empathy.”* (TC4)

For the few who resonated with cultural empathy, modest insights about ethnic identity were offered.

*“The empathetic lens that I mostly captured would be cultural. I believe that I was drawn to this particular lens because as I was observing and learning about the artifacts and the meaning behind each one, it made me relate to my own identity (as) being Filipino and what values and other beliefs that I share with another culture.”* (TC13)

*“This brings up the idea of assimilation versus acculturation. As my professor said, assimilation is this idea of a melting pot where everyone blends in, but acculturation is more like a salad in which people retain their cultural markers. I certainly would not want my students or anyone to deny their heritage just to become more American because that’s not what America is or should be about.”* (TC9)

Visuals and realia influenced participants' perspective-taking of empathy. As one participant expressed:

*"It was interesting to see how we both saw the same picture but took something completely different from it. For example, take your first photo slide from 317 showing the two different men, one during the Internment and the other now. I saw that picture as a way to remember the past, and how it is important to teach the new generation about what happened back then so it does not happen again."* (TC19)

*"Using visuals such as pictures are also beneficial for multilingual learners during instruction. Students may not be able to understand information that is given to them orally or written, but the use of visuals can help their understanding. The use of visuals and written or oral language allow students to make connections to the concept."* (TC6)

Participants saw how visuals could be used for culturally responsive teaching, noting that empathy is needed to understand others.

### **Social Empathy**

Social empathy was not as prevalent and most were superficial. Broad phrases such as *listening to others' perspectives*, *appreciating others*, or *collaborating to form new learning*, were frequently written. Minimal elaboration was made to their thinking such as:

*"Social empathy encourages students to think about the perspectives of others around them to support effective teamwork between students."* (TC7)

Peer responses permitted individuals to delve deeply and validate each other's thinking.

*"In your first two slides, you talked about the varying perspectives of different people during World War II, such as those of the interned Japanese and those of people on the outside. I think it's incredibly unjust that the stories our government tells our children doesn't include the wrongs that were committed against our own people, and I agree with you that it's imperative that we explore historical empathy and don't allow these acts of discrimination to happen again."* (TC2)

The inclusion of audio recordings provoked personal recounts of immigration built new learning of social empathy.

*"His-story versus my story. It made me think about how sometimes our own voices aren't shared, we end up not understanding ourselves. It falls under the mystery of identifying who we are. And I think that if we just take the time to develop a deeper understanding of ourselves, then we could share our own story. Being able to be an instructor and allowing my students to understand their roots and their identity is just a great way to have them to be a part of the classroom and to share their uniqueness with their peers."* (TC13)

Participants promoted critical discussions about the practicality and appropriateness of activities at the JCH for elementary students.

*“Not all field trips are effective, but ones like JCC have the ability to impact students in huge ways. This impacts my teaching philosophy by motivating me to search for meaningful field trips that hold lifelong learning experiences for my students.” (TC8)*

*“First, I am not sure that I would have my Kindergarteners go through the Honouliuli exhibit. I do not feel that it is necessarily appropriate for students of such a young age. If I were to take my class, I would love to do the mystery boxes and the Okage Sama De exhibit.” (TC8)*

*“The JCC is a great place to give that sense of belonging to some students. It also allows the students to understand some of the history of the place they call home. A time to remember the past so that the future does not turn out the same.” (TC11)*

## **Discussion**

Foundational knowledge of empathy was achieved by engaging participants in various activities prior to the JCCH. The simulations aligned with Endacott’s (2014) stance of “building and connecting knowledge” (p. 6) through a historical inquiry that is contextual, offers perspective-taking, and affective connection. All participants achieved perspective-taking; however, the affective connection was limited to a small number of participants. This finding aligns with Endacott (2014) on ensuring a balanced approach to cognitive and affective perspectives. The pre-visit activities were rich and added empathetic knowledge. For example, Kawamoto’s (2018) video, *Voices Behind Barbed Wire*, evoked an emotional discussion among TCs. Since realia and primary resources triggered emotions at JCCH, we should have created a process for TCs during the simulations to understand how the past affected their emotions, thinking, or actions in the present (Endacott, 2013). We believe these could strengthen their affective domains and empower TCs to design plans on how to act or incorporate empathetic teaching in the future and their daily lives

While building background was an asset, the researchers’ decisions might have created bias or influenced TCs perspectives. Activities were aligned with the Japanese version of the situation; thus, eliminating counternarratives such as the decisions made by the US government or military. Some participants had military ties, and most participants were of Asian descent. We are unclear if participants engaged with a false sense of involvement or an emotional distance (Ullman & Hesch, 2011; Warren & Hotchkins, 2015) to their own identities and to sustain established relationships with their peers. Future work would include *pedagogy of discomfort* (Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012) in which all involved would develop mutual understanding, confront tensions, and unconscious complicity.

We acknowledge the limitations of this research. First, the researchers’ access to the participants were effortless. A safe environment was established due to the cohort design. Other researchers may not have similar access if they were to replicate this study. Secondly, the JCCH had artifacts from the Japanese viewpoint in Hawai‘i. Other population groups or internment camps on the US mainland were not discussed. The JCCH visit triggered emotions that may not have the same effect as a virtual field trip or at gallery.

## **Conclusion**

This research advocates teacher preparation programs to include the teaching of empathy with teacher candidates so they are prepared for working effectively with CLD students in urban classrooms. Cultural simulations is an effective way in learning about empathy.

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