

Teachers' Reflections on Pedagogies that Enhance Learning in an Online Course on Teaching for Equity and Social Justice

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Abstract

This study investigated teachers' reflective perspectives on pedagogies that enhance learning in an online course on "Teaching for equity and social justice" in a teacher education program. Data were collected from survey, alternative anonymous course assessment, interview, and document analysis. Participants identified threaded discussions, partner-shared learning, course 3Rs (rigor, relevance and relationships), pre-post narrative inquiries and writing reading response papers as critical pedagogies that enhanced their learning in the online course. In this paper, I analyze and discuss the teachers' reflective perspectives and the construction and implementation of these pedagogies.

Introduction and Purpose

Increasingly, virtual and cyber universities are becoming a common phenomenon in the educational landscape. Program coordinators and department chairs at universities and colleges are encouraging, in some cases, demanding that online programs and courses be offered in order to attract students and increase enrollment. Imperatively, teacher education faculty feel compelled and challenged to develop and offer online courses. However, in many teacher education programs, online teaching/learning is still an underdeveloped frontier as teacher educators (myself included) fear that critical elements of the teaching and learning process will be compromised, especially the communal act of teaching and learning. Anyone familiar with the pedagogies used in many teacher education courses appreciates the learning interactions between instructor and students and among students. In these classes, the teaching/learning environment is designed to embrace and model a learning community where students engage in critical discussions and simulation activities that foster perspective consciousness and reflection. This is more so with diversity courses that are designed to foster critical dialogue, reflective thinking, collective learning, perspective consciousness, and transformative learning. Personally, I have struggled with the dilemma of teaching an online course on diversity and social justice to prospective and inservice teachers. However, in the fall semester of 2005, I challenged myself to develop and teach an online course entitled "Teaching for equity and social justice." Can students effectively learn discourses on critical multiculturalism and social justice and transform their perspectives in an online course? Would traditional pedagogies equally work effectively in an online course? In this paper, I discuss teachers' reflective perspectives of their learning and pedagogies that enhanced and transformed their learning in the online course.

Theoretical Perspectives

Can an online course effectively assist prospective and classroom teachers in learning critical discourse on issues of educational equity and social justice and foster their transformative learning? What pedagogies enhance learning in an online course especially transformative learning? Given these questions, this paper draws on the theoretical perspectives of multiculturalism, social justice, constructivism, transformative learning, and electronic pedagogy—constructs that place emphasis on critical discourse, communicative relationships, reflection, and collaborative learning environment (Bates, 1997; Dewey, 1933; Duffy & Cunningham, 1996; Greene, 1998; Mezirow, 2000).

For the last three to four decades, the discourse of multiculturalism has permeated the educational landscape, providing a critique of the traditional approach to education that privileged some students while marginalizing others to the extent that there is a learning and achievement gap (Lee, 2006; Oakes & Lipton, 2007) as well as processes for transforming educational and schooling practices. Following the Civil Rights Movement, multicultural education evolved as a vehicle for addressing the educational inequities due to students' racial, gender, class, linguistic, sexual orientation, and abilities (Banks & Banks, 2005). Since its inception, many definitions of multicultural education have evolved (Gay, 2003). Broadly, multicultural education has been defined as a concept, process, or movement aimed at transforming educational and schooling practices with the goal of promoting educational equity and social justice for all students (Banks & Banks, 2005; Gay, 2003; Nieto, 2000). Generally, multicultural education places emphasis on cultural pluralism, equity, power relations, and social justice (Banks, 2005; Nieto, 2000). Given the cultural encapsulation of predominantly White, middle-class, preservice and inservice teachers and the mismatch between them and the growing student population of color (Banks, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Zeichner, 1996; Zimpher, 1989), multicultural education has been advocated for preparing teachers to develop the knowledge (cultural awareness and understanding of self and others); skills by engaging in effective cross-cultural teaching (Banks, 2005; Gay, 1999) responding appropriately to learners' strengths and learning styles, and designing and facilitating culturally responsive curricular and using pedagogical practices and appropriate communication and interactional style (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Manning & Baruth, 2005); and dispositions through communicating acceptance, respect, affirmation, dignity, humanization, empathy, sensitivity toward learners, and establishing high expectation for their learning (Gay, 2000; Hale, 2001). Most importantly, multicultural education is viewed as a humanizing alternative to the traditional, monocultural approach to education and a hopeful framework for confronting the widespread and entrenched inequality in schools (Banks, 2005; Nieto, 2000; Oakes, 2005). Consequently, in many teacher education programs, multicultural education has become a required course for preparing preservice and inservice teachers to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for successfully working with students and families from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, language, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Although the notion of multicultural education has become pervasive in many schools, the achievement gap remains persistent and problematic (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nieto, 2000); structural inequities, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, pedagogy of low expectations, and tracking continue to be prevalent (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Oakes & Lipton, 2004). Hence, in recent years, some multicultural and transformative scholars contend that it is no longer sufficient for teachers to merely develop cultural awareness and sensitivity toward diverse students and their cultures. Instead, they argue that today's teachers must engage in social justice teaching and cultivate the habits of transformative intellectualism and change agency (Cochran-

Smith, 2004; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; Howard, 2006; McLaren, 1995; Nieto, 2000; Oakes, 1995; Oakes & Lipton, 2008) if they are to successfully maximize the learning potential and academic success of diverse students and to close the learning, achievement, and community gaps (Lee, 2005). Further, some multicultural scholars argue that the many forms of multicultural education currently implemented in schools are too soft and lack the framework that promotes educational equity and social justice for all students (Lee, 1998; Nieto, 2000). In particular, some social justice educators posit that many schools and classrooms which profess to engage in multicultural practice rarely reflect a social justice perspective (Ayers, 1998; Greene, 1998; Nieto, 2000; Oakes & Lipton, 2003; Shor, 1992). Given these concerns, some scholars have called for educating teachers to be prepared to become transformative intellectuals who view knowledge as a social construction (Giroux, 1988), understand teaching as a political activity (Cochran-Smith, 2004; McLaren, 1998), are aware of and act on their sense of social responsibility and agency (Giroux, 1988), and engage in socially just teaching (Ayers, 1998; McLaren, 1998; Nieto, 2000; Oakes & Lipton, 2004).

Nieto (2000) defines social justice education as a perspective that involves looking critically at why and how schools are unjust for some students and analyzing school practices and policies—the curriculum, instructional materials and strategies, and tracking and discipline policies and practices. Ayers (1998) views education for social justice as a means of realizing the goal of democratic education and so defines it as teaching consciously for social change. Others have viewed social justice education as teaching for conscientization (Freire, 1970), arousing heightened social consciousness, and a wide-awakeness that might make injustice unendurable (Greene, 1998). Greene (1998) explains social justice education:

Teaching for the sake of arousing the kinds of vivid, reflective, experiential responses that might move students to come together in serious efforts to understand what social justice actually means and what it might demand...that is, teaching to the end of arousing a consciousness of membership, active, and participant membership in a society of unfulfilled promises. (p. xxx)

Cochran-Smith (2004) has outlined six principles of a social justice educator and pedagogy. These include (a) enabling significant work within communities of learners, (b) building on what students bring to school, (c) bridging gaps by teaching skills, (d) working with families and communities, (e) diversifying assessment, and (f) implementing curriculum with a social justice focus.

Another framework that bears on this study is constructivism, which portrays the learner as an active conceptualizer within an interactive learning environment and describes ways of knowing in which learners collaborate and reflectively co-construct new understandings, especially in the context of mutual inquiry grounded in their personal experience (O'Connor, 1998). Constructivists have found that communication technologies can promote constructivist ideals of learning (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998; Collins & Berge, 1996; Fosnot, 1996; Garrison, et al., 2000) such as active, collaborative construction of knowledge and shared understanding. Central to this collaboration is the development of communicative competence that enables the learner to engage in open and critical discourse with peers therefore fostering the attainment of shared learning, understanding, and reflection. As Fosnot (1996) explains:

Learning from [a constructivist] perspective is viewed as a self-regulatory process of struggling with the conflict between existing personal models of the world and discrepant new insights, constructing new representations and models of reality as a human

meaning-making venture with culturally developed tools and symbols, and further negotiating such meaning through cooperative social activity, discourse, and debate.

(p. ix)

Imperatively, constructivism, especially social constructivism offers opportunities for learners to actively create and adjust their previous thoughts, ideas, conceptions, and constructions as they work in a socio-cultural context and communities of practice. Hence, constructivists believe that the interactive and collaborative nature of asynchronous technology allows students to share perspectives and experiences, to establish relationships, to share information that can influence intercultural attitudes (Müller-Hartmann, 2000), and to support and encourage each other (Collins & Berge, 1996).

One other important construct that framed this study is transformative learning. Over the years, research has posited that the purpose of learning is to effect change in the learner but that not all learning results in a change (Dewey, 1966; Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Miller & Sellar, 1990). Miller and Sellar (1990) distinguish among three types of learning (a) transmissional: when facts and knowledge are transmitted from teacher to student and merely regurgitated; (b) transactional: when learning is recognized as a mere exchange between teacher and learner; and (c) transformational: when learning results in a shift in perspective. Similarly, Jackson (1986) identifies two types of learning: mimetic and transformative. Mimetic learning is more or less the “transmission” model of teaching and learning that focuses on transmitting predetermined, discrete information to students which they passively memorize and regurgitate. The transformative focuses on the transformation of the individual, especially his or her beliefs, values, attitudes, and frames of reference. John Dewey (1938) explains transformation in learning as when a person comes to see some aspect of the world in a new way, when he or she finds new meaning and values the new meaning. Jack Mezirow (2000), a contemporary leading proponent of transformational learning, defines it as a process whereby:

We transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, [changeable], and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (pp. 5-8)

Mezirow (1991) argues that all learning/education is designed toward change but explains that not all change is transformational. In order to foster transformative learning, students would have to change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds and understanding (Mezirow, 1997). Other scholars have defined transformative learning as learning that produces a significant impact, or paradigm shift, which affects the learner’s subsequent experiences (Clark, 1993) and characterized by (1) active use of an idea (when the individual acts on an idea and begins to see possibilities); (2) expansion of perception (when the individual begins to perceive the world or phenomenon in a new way), and (3) expansion of value (when the individual becomes deeply moved by this new way and so begins to perceive and view possibilities) (Pugh, 2002). O’ Sullivan’s (2003) definition is also provoking:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and action. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of who we are and our self-locations; our relationships with other human and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, races, and gender; our body awareness, our visions of alternative

approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (p. 326)

Among multicultural educators, preservice and inservice teachers' disposition toward culturally, ethnically, linguistically, racially different, and low-income students is a major concern and challenge to educational equity and social justice. Hence, it is essential that teacher preparation programs provide opportunities for preservice and inservice teachers to rethink beliefs, values, and biases they have constructed from their encapsulated lives and to deconstruct them. In other words, preservice and inservice teachers must experience transformative learning if they are to cultivate the habits and minds for teaching for equity and social justice.

Lastly, since the inception of online teaching and learning, studies have explored its efficacy in promoting and enhancing student learning or quality learning as well as the pedagogies that foster successful learning. Several studies suggest that carefully orchestrated online courses can effectively and successfully promote and enhance student learning (Althaus, 1997; Berge & Collins, 1996; Brooks et al., 2001; Chong, 1998; Jaffe, 1997; Koszalka & Bianco, 2001; Northrup, 2001; Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Perrin & Mayhew, 2000). Specifically, studies indicate that online teaching and learning foster student-centered learning and promote student independence, intentional learning, and active engagement with course discourse and learning, high level of thinking, and scholarship. Other studies have also suggested that specific pedagogies must be in place to promote and enhance online learning. For instance, Jaffe (1997) outlines four pedagogical practices that foster effective learning in online learning: (a) interactivity, (b) active learning, (c) mediation, and (d) collaboration. Active learning involves students interacting with the subject matter through problems, exercises, and assignments that provide for knowledge construction and reconstruction; mediation is interaction between teacher and student through queries and course clarification. Collaboration consists of the interaction among students through information and perspective sharing, questioning, and support. The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' reflection on the pedagogies that enhanced their learning in an online course on teaching for equity and social justice.

Context and Background

I am a teacher educator with a teaching and research focus on diversity, multiculturalism, globalism, urban education, citizenship development, and social justice. For the past fifteen years, I have taught courses on diversity, multiculturalism, social studies methods, and social justice. When I first conceived the idea of teaching an online course on teaching for equity and social justice to K-12 teachers, I struggled with the dilemma that I would compromise critical acts of effective teaching and learning, but more importantly, the goal of transformative learning knowing that most teachers who are White, middle-class, suburban and rural have been culturally and racially encapsulated (Ukpokodu, 2003; 2004) and who also believe that education in America has been just and equitable for all cultural groups. Consequently, I have always believed that issues of diversity, multiculturalism, educational equity, and social justice are best facilitated and learned in a face-to-face community context. In many of the courses I teach, most White teachers often share their experiences of the perfect "academic walk" (good teachers, good grades, honors programs, and positive schooling and curricular experiences) and so believe in the ideology of meritocracy and work ethic: People succeed if they work hard, and those who fail do so because of lack of effort and motivation (Oakes 1995; Oakes & Lipton, 2004). This is deficit thinking that can impede teachers' abilities to engage in practices that promote the academic

success of students who have been marginalized due to their racial, ethnic, gender, linguistic, class background, and exceptionalities. Imperatively, transformative learning has been a central goal in my teaching and a commitment to help preservice and inservice teachers examine and deconstruct their conception of self and others (beliefs, values, biases) and their knowledge construction in order to become open to multiple perspectives (Gay, 2003; Gomez, 1996; Irvine, 2002; Nieto, 2005) and to experience transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000).

With a leap of faith, I embarked on the planning and development of an online course. In the fall semester of 2005, I taught the online course *Teaching for Equity and Social Justice*. I had taught the course once in a traditional face-to-face format. The course is a graduate-level course for students in the Master's degree program. The catalog description of the course states:

This course examines a systems approach to the design, development, and implementation of classroom practices, including curriculum, instruction, dispositions, and policies that support equity and social justice for all students. It places emphasis on the examination of issues of educational equity/inequities and social justice/injustice. Practitioners will develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to implement a more equitable and social justice education for all students, empower self as transformative intellectual and change agent as well as their students as agents of change in their families, schools, classrooms, and communities as they work collectively and constructively on social justice issues.

The course objectives include the examination of the connection between education for social justice and democratic citizenship, exploration of the role education has played and continues to play in shaping society and how schooling reproduces the inequalities in the larger society; comprehending and analyzing their role as teachers in a multicultural democracy and issues of equity and social justice in educational practices; developing skills for self-critique and transformative intellectualism and practice and examining models of curricular and pedagogical practices of social justice education and designing personal plans that integrate social justice into their development and practice. The broad goal of the course is to move teachers beyond mere recognition of diversity and the shallow multicultural practices common in schools and classrooms (Nieto, 2000) to raising and heightening their awareness of teaching as a political activity and social responsibility. The course goals listed above align closely with my School of Education teacher education program dispositions that include teachers who are open-minded regarding divergent worldviews; teachers who are aware of and actively confront their own biases, prejudices, and take responsibility for positive change; teachers who commit to and advocate for educational equity and social justice; teachers who commit to and display professional ethics and universal human values, and teachers who are reflective and conscientious about their professional responsibility.

The Online Course

Before describing the online course, it is important to define pedagogy and electronic pedagogy. Giroux and Simon (1989) define pedagogy as the deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within and among particular sets of social relations. Specifically, they explain it as “the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, a time and space for the practice of those strategies and techniques, and evaluation purposes and methods” (p. 239). I define electronic pedagogy as facilitative activities that include organizational strategies, delivery

strategies, and management and communication strategies used to promote teaching and learning “together” in an online learning context. The online course utilized the Blackboard Management Software®. Although the course was a full online course, it was necessary to meet with the students before they began the course. Three face-to-face class meetings were scheduled for the entire semester. The first two meetings occurred within the first two weeks of the semester for three hours each time. These meetings were designed to provide orientation and overview of the course and to engage students in initiatory and stimulating cultural and social get-to-know-you activities, community building, and completion of pre-course instructional surveys. The orientation meeting focused on Blackboard navigation, course expectation, location of materials, and assignments for partnership learning, discussion threads, and topics. Like a traditional class, students were provided hard copies of the syllabus, which was also posted on Blackboard. The second class meeting was a follow-up to the first meeting and focused on answering questions and taking pictures for self-introduction posted on Blackboard for reference. The second meeting also focused on full-class lecture and activities on conceptual understanding of educational equity and social justice. The third class meeting was scheduled two weeks before the end of the semester, aimed to bring the students back to share perspectives about their learning experiences and for oral presentations of their research investigation.

The required textbooks used in the course include *Teaching for Social Justice* (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998); *Rethinking Schools: An Agenda for Change* (Levine, Lowe, Peterson, & Tenorio, 1995); *Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Bias Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development* (Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 2002); *Savage Inequalities* (Kozol, 1991); *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multicultural Schools* (Howard, 2006) and *Teaching to Change the World* (Oakes & Lipton, 2007).

The course was divided into five learning modules. Modules 1 and 2 focused on conceptual understanding of educational equity and social justice (equality, educational opportunity, equity in education, equal outcome, access), the rationale for educational equity and social justice, the relationship between diversity, multiculturalism, educational equity, and social justice, an examination of America as a democracy, and its educational system and schooling practices. The major and specific required reading materials for Modules 1 and 2 included short articles: (1) from *Teaching for Social Justice: A Democracy Reader*, “Foreword: Popular education and teaching for social justice” by William Ayers and “Introduction: Teaching for social justice” by Maxine Greene; (2) from *Rethinking Schools*, “Multiculturalism: A conversation among different voices” by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and “How well are we nurturing racial and ethnic diversity?” by Louise Derman-Sparks; (3) from *Beyond Heroes and Holidays*, “Educating for equality: Forging a shared vision” by Louise Derman-Sparks; “Affirmation, solidarity, and critique: Moving beyond tolerance in education” by Sonia Nieto, and “Anti-racist education: Pulling together to close the gaps” by Enid Lee; and (4) from Jonathan Kozol’s book, *Savage Inequalities*.

Module 3 focused on an examination of issues of equity/inequities and social justice/injustice through curricular practice. The focus was on curriculum transformation with an emphasis on social justice curriculum, multiple perspectives, and culturally responsive assessment and evaluation of instructional materials for bias. The required reading materials for this module included articles: (1) from *Rethinking Schools*, “Trouble over the rainbow” by Stan Karp; “Building a vision of curriculum reform” by David Levine’ “Discovering Columbus: Rereading the past” by Bill Bigelow’ “What should children learn?: A teacher looks at E.D.

Hirsch” by Bob Peterson; “Why students should study history?: An interview with Howard Zinn” by Barbara Miner; “Distorting Latino history: The California textbook controversy” by Elizabeth Martinez; (2) from *Teaching for Social Justice*, “Education for action: Preparing youth for participatory democracy” by Joe Westheimer and Joseph Kahne; “Writing the word and world” by Linda Christensen; and (3) from *Beyond Heroes and Holidays*, “Approaches to multicultural curriculum reform” by James Banks; “Lies my textbook told me: Racism and anti-racism in U.S. history” by James Loewen, and “10 Quick Ways to Analyze Children’s Books for Sexism and Racism” by the *Council on Interracial Books for Children*.

Module 4 focused on examining pedagogical practices as they foster educational equity/inequity and justice/injustice. Students examine resources that highlight teachers’ dispositions and pedagogy of expectation, equitable/inequitable treatment in the classroom, use of critical pedagogy, fostering a learning community, responsiveness to students’ learning styles, practices of tracking and detracking, disciplinary policies, stereotyping, labeling, etc. The required reading materials for this module included book articles: (1) from *Teaching for Social Justice*, “Popular education—teaching for social justice” by William Ayers and “Teaching for Social Justice” by Maxine Greene; (2) from *Rethinking Schools*, “Whose standard: Teaching Standard English in our schools” by Linda Christensen; “Teachers, culture, and power: An interview with Lisa Delpit” by Barbara Miner; “Getting off the track: Stories from an untracked classroom” by Bill Bigelow; “Algebra for all: An equation for equity” by Barbara Miner; “Standardized tests: A clear and present danger” by Terry Meier; (3) *Beyond Heroes and Holidays*, “An anti-racist education: Pulling together to close the gap” by Enid Lee; “Detracking the tracking dialogue” by Deborah Menkart; “Growing up gay” by Katherine Whitlock. In addition to these materials, students also viewed videos such as CBS *60 Minutes* documentary on *Racial Tracking*; American Association of University Women (AAUW)’s *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America; It’s Elementary* and *Both of My Two Moms’ Names are Judy*.

Module 5 focused on teacher and student empowerment and change agency. In this module, students explored issues related to self-awareness—development of racial and multiple identities and impact, examining own biases, dispositions, and social activism and change agency. Critical reading materials included articles: (1) from *Beyond Heroes and Holidays*, “Teaching Whites about racism” by Christine Sleeter; “White racial identity and anti-racist education: A catalyst for change” by Sandra Lawrence and Beverly Daniel Tatum; “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh; “Looking through an anti-racist lens” by Enid Lee, and “Compassion and improvisation: Learning to stand up for others” by Linda Christensen; and (2) articles and profiles of activist educators from the book *Teaching for Social Justice*, “Awakening justice” by Haywood Burns; “A grassroots’ think tank: Linking writing and community building”; “On a mission—Hazel Johnson and Marvin Garcia” by Therese Quinn; “A dream that keeps on growing—Myles Horton and Highlander” by William Ayers, and “The fourth R” by Maureen Reddy. In addition to the reading materials, lecture notes that highlighted critical concepts and perspectives were provided to guide their reading and note taking.

The required course assignments consisted of (1) *Pre-post Narrative Inquiry*, which required students to write a narrative of their schooling experiences relative to educational equity and social justice and a post-narrative by reflecting, analyzing, and reconstructing the pre-narrative inquiry in light of new knowledge constructed from the course (see Appendix A); and (2) *Four Reading Response Papers*: For each module, a question/scenario was posted for students to develop a response (see appendix B). Students submitted reading response papers

(RRP) by (a) constructing a comprehensive, critical, and in-depth response to the module question/scenario with supportive evidence from the module materials; (b) providing a critical reflection by discussing the extent to which the materials resonated with them, personally and professionally, and new insights and thinking they constructed, and (c) raising critical questions and comments about the materials; (3) *Participation in Threaded Discussions*, which required students to participate in three threaded discussion boards (see appendix C for discussion board topics); (4) *Partner Shared-Learning and Reflection*, and (5) *Final Assessment*, in which students could choose a take-home examination or a research investigation.

Methodology

Participants and Setting

This study employed a qualitative research methodology and was situated at a university located in an urban community in the Midwest. The choice of a qualitative design was based on Patton's (1990) assertion that the intent of qualitative research is to "provide perspective rather than truth, empirical assessment of local decision makers' theories of action rather than generation and verification of universal theories and context-bound explorations rather than generalizations" (p. 491). The online course on teaching for equity and social justice had been taught for two consecutive semesters (fall 2005 and spring 2006) with a combined enrollment of 35 students. Demographically, there were 20 (57%) Caucasians, 9 (26%) African Americans, 3 (9%) Asians (international), and 1(3%) Latino American. There were 31 (89%) females and 4 (11%) males of which 18 (51%) were elementary teachers, 14 (40%) were secondary school teachers, and 3 (9%) were prospective teachers working toward certification and a Master's degree in curriculum and instruction.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study reported in this paper was part of a larger study that investigated students' perceptions of the effectiveness of an online course on fostering transformative learning. For this study, the research question was What were participants' reflective perspectives of the pedagogies that enhanced their learning in an online course on teaching for equity and social justice? The data for the study were collected from four sources: (1) an anonymous alternative course assessment, entitled "I need your help!: How can I improve?" (2) an open-ended survey, (3) participant interviews, and (4) document analysis. These are described below.

1) Survey. Ten (29%) participants responded to an open-ended survey that was emailed to them at the completion of the course. Specifically, the participants responded to four questions.

- a) How would you describe your learning experience in the teaching for equity and social justice course?
- b) To what extent would you agree that the learning experience was transformative? How and what does that mean?
- c) What pedagogical practices or learning activities enhanced your learning?
- d) In what ways did the pedagogies enhance your learning?

2) Alternative course assessment. The second source of data was collected from an informal, anonymous, alternative course assessment, entitled "I need your help!: How can I improve?" Thirty participants completed an open-ended assessment the last day of the course in

class along with the formal course evaluation. Students were asked to anonymously provide feedback that would be helpful in improving the course. The assessment items among others, included:

- a) What did you like about the organization of the course? List/describe.
- b) What specific activities and assignments enhanced your learning in the course? List /describe.
- c) What specific pedagogies enhanced your learning? List/describe.
- d) In what ways did the pedagogies enhance your learning?

3) Interviews. Through purposive sampling (Patton, 1990), four students were interviewed by telephone. They were selected on the basis of their racial, cultural, gender, professional, and motivational characteristics—one Caucasian female who taught high school in an urban school, one African American male who taught high school in a suburban school, one Asian international female, and one Latino American elementary male teacher. The interview questions were similar to the survey questions emailed to the participants except that the researcher probed for more elaboration during the interviewing process. The interviews lasted for about 25 minutes each. Notes were taken, transcribed, and shared with the participants and analyzed for emerging themes. For this paper, the perspectives of one participant who taught social studies were selected for analysis.

4) Document analysis. Course documents (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1994) of students' written work—pre-post narratives, reading response papers, book analysis (*We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*), discussion threads and partner-shared learning reflective summaries—were read and analyzed.

Data analysis occurred as a process of “examining, categorizing, classifying, and recombining the evidence” (Yin, 1994, p. 102). The use of multiple data sources from diverse participants helped to achieve triangulation that supported the themes that emerged from the study. The data from the survey and alternative, anonymous course assessment were compiled by the departmental Graduate Research Assistant (GRA). Data analysis was accomplished through thematic coding (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The GRA, a doctoral candidate with background in multicultural education, and I independently reviewed the lists and then identified the themes that emerged and compared our lists. Data analysis began with independent reading of the data and looking for emergent themes (Glasser & Strauss, 1999). Each data set was read and analyzed for emerging patterns and themes using constant analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1999) and constant comparison (Glasser & Strauss, 1999). Once initial themes were considered significant for answering the research questions, we read the data again, specifically looking for examples and non-examples of the major themes.

Findings

The data revealed five pedagogies that participants identified as enhancing and transforming their learning in the online course. These included writing pre-post narrative inquiries, writing reading response papers, discussion threads, partner-shared learning, and course 3Rs and are described as follows.

Pre-Post Narrative Inquiry

Narratives and autobiographies represent ways individuals come to know who they are and are valid and powerful ways of knowing and improving self and practice for educators. As McEwan and Egan (1995) explain, narrative is “essential to the purpose of communicating who we are, what we do, how we feel, and why we ought to follow some course of action rather than another...to our efforts to understand teaching and learning” (p. xiii). The pre-post narrative inquiry allowed students to step back and recollect their schooling experiences in K-12 and the American society relative to educational equity and social justice relative to their (a) construction of America as an equitable and just society, (b) beliefs about American educational system as just and equitable for all students, (c) conception of educational equity/inequity and social justice/injustice, (d) personal experience of critical incidents of educational equity/inequity and social justice/injustice, (e) awareness of forms of educational inequities and injustice that impact on some students’ academic achievement, (f) understanding of sources of educational inequities and injustices, (g) recollection of educational perspectives and societal events that have impacted their thinking about educational equity and social justice, and (h) their practice and advocacy for educational equity and social justice (see Appendix A). Data from the survey, alternative course assessment, and student written work revealed that all participants indicated that writing the pre-post narratives enhanced their learning about issues of educational equity and social justice. When asked what activities, assignments, and pedagogies enhanced their learning, participants used phrases like “writing the pre-post narrative inquiry,” “writing the narratives that made me get deep into myself, my experience, my practice,” “The pre-post narratives were truly meaningful and introspective. It moved me from my naïve and ignorant stage to understanding, although painful, that I was in the dark for so long and doing disservice to others.” As reflected in the literature, most preservice and inservice teachers are often unaware of issues of equity and social justice (Ukpokodu, 2002, 2004; Ward, 2000). Often most preservice and inservice teachers who are White and middle-class express experiencing the “perfect academic walk” and being in advanced and honors’ programs or gifted programs that limited their access to the larger societal realities, so they are oblivious to the inequities and injustice that are embedded in school and classroom practices. Monica’s comment illustrates this point in her pre-post narratives, noting:

Personally, I have had very little or no experience with injustice in the school environment. Growing up, I always maintained good grades, had good rapport with my teachers and generally followed the rules. I was always eager to learn more. I used to believe that all schools were just like mine and that everyone had a great American education; however I realize now that this is not the case. I was naïve when it came to racial and equality issues; I had never really met anyone of another race. I grew up sheltered in a small, Kansas town. Previously, my biggest conceptions about inequities in education lay mainly on the macro scale—the federal government. I ranted about how unfair it was for our national government to pass on so many mandates to schools, yet only pay a small percentage their budgets. Now, after having taken this course, I know that the problem also rests at the hands of teachers—on the micro level. In the classroom, I am as guilty as anyone of inequitable practices. I remember watching the module film, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America* and seeing how the teacher who thought she was equitable in her classroom, was not. The video made me take a closer look at simple things, like who I call on in class. It also made me see just how easy it is to *think* you’re doing things right in the classroom. To be just in the classroom, I need to learn to systematically observe my practices from an objective perspective. (White American,

fall 2006)

In their pre-autobiographical narratives, some participants especially those of color, recalled painful incidents of inequitable and unjust treatment and how such experience taught them what not to do to their future students as Shannella narrates:

I was a product of the desegregation era and bused to a school community where the dominant culture had control of the most successful schools and that the only way to get full range of opportunities for a minority child was to get access to those schools. I was soon given a reality check once I entered the classroom of Ms. Bowling, a White teacher who taught current affairs. One would think that a subject like current affairs would be a tool for educating people about their own cultural biases, but it did nothing for Ms. Bowling. My second week in her class we were given an exam over several of the events from the *Time* magazine. Even though I passed this test, I was accused of cheating. Ms. Bowling's cultural bias would not allow her to acknowledge that I could possibly be as intelligent as any White student. (African American female, fall 2005)

Participants also expressed that the pre-post narratives allowed them to assess and see their development in the course. Danny's comment is insightful and shows a progressive development toward learning to teach for social justice:

In my pre-narrative, my previous notion of a good teacher was one who is knowledgeable and caring; now I know this is not enough. Teaching is not only a job; it is a call for justice. Teaching is a political activity and now I must step up to challenge practices and policies that serve to deny my students access, equality, and opportunity for quality education. I have begun a new journey which requires that I develop new knowledge that helps me see the spaces, tensions, and opportunities for transformation. I know that I have made that move to allow my students' race, culture, gender, etc. to guide where the class is going to go. I pay close to my curriculum and students more than ever. I believe that I am a better teacher now than I was before. I think my students have a better connection to the material and are learning more now than ever before. I am no longer afraid to make a change or think outside of the curriculum. Curriculum is powerful part of teaching, and the wrong curriculum can be disastrous for a student. (White American male, fall 2005)

The most enlightening and revealing of the pre-post narratives came from international students who were educators in their respective countries and their views about America and its educational system regarding diversity, equity, and social justice. The international students soon realized their naiveté and expressed shock and dismay over the discrepancy between what they had learned about America and its institution prior to coming to America and the new knowledge they constructed from the readings and Blackboard discussions about the true reality of America as Chen notes:

Three months ago, I was a student who admired American education for its profession of equality for all students. My teachers, the newspapers, and the books from my homeland all described America as a land of freedom and a haven for everyone who dreams the American dream. Compared with my homeland educational system, I naively believed America is a paradise for students because every child has access to an equal, high-quality education before they are 18 years old, and all their teachers have received higher education and certified in teaching profession. It was not until this class that I knew there are so many disheartening stories about racially, economically, and linguistically diverse students in American schools. The readings and Blackboard discussions displayed

testimonies of many inequitable educational practices in American urban schools. My reading of Jonathan Kozol's book *Savage Inequalities* was very disturbing to me. (Asian, International female, fall 2005).

Writing Reading Response Papers (RRP)

The reading response papers (RRP) formed the thrust of the course for proving the content for examination and learning and allowed students to demonstrate an engagement and interaction with all assigned materials—articles, videos, texts—and (a) to construct a comprehensive, critical, and in-depth response to the module question/scenario with supportive evidence from the module materials, (b) to provide a critical reflection by discussing the extent to which the materials resonated with them, personally and professionally, and the new insights and thinking they constructed, and (c) to raise critical questions and comments about the materials (see Appendix B). Like the pre-post narratives, all participants complained about the volume and overwhelming workload, but all agreed that writing reading response papers tremendously enhanced their learning in the online course. In responding to the questions on the survey, alternative assessment and interviews about pedagogies that enhanced their learning, participants used phrases such as “doing the reading and writing the response papers,” “the reading response papers,” “writing reading response papers,” “the reading response papers, which required full engagement with the reading in order to write,” and “writing intelligent and scholarly reading response papers.” All participants interviewed expressed that writing the reading response papers significantly enhanced their learning. These comments from participant interviews illuminate the value of writing the reading response papers in enhancing learning, as Justin and Alesya notes:

Prior to this course I had never written scholarly papers. In fact, I had never read materials that brought to life issues of educational equity and social justice. The readings of materials from an array of perspectives really opened my eyes to issues of educational inequities and injustice. Reading Jonathan Kozol's book, *Savage Inequalities*, alone really opened my eyes. The other readings from *Rethinking Schools* and *Beyond Heroes and Holidays* were phenomenon and quite an enlightenment for me, not just philosophically, but scholarly as well. They say “knowledge is power,” and coming away from this course, I feel powerful. Writing scholarly papers required in the course was at first frustrating for me but in the end gave me confidence and helped me to deepen what I was learning. (White American, fall 2006)

Interacting with the module materials and writing the response papers helped me to become a reflective teacher. It helped me learn how to construct a coherent and scholarly essay but more importantly taught me how to make connection to the materials, think about the issues and question what I was reading. This practice gave me the confidence and language to work as a change agent with my colleagues and principal. This year, I've taken my practice and promoted them among my department. The teachers and I have formed strong alliances in the building, working harder than ever to teach multicultural and social justice across the curriculum. The effect has been more rigor academically, better relationships among staff and students, more accountability for students and a stronger backbone to use against inequitable practices imposed by the district. The more I read and wrote the response papers, the more I was able to evaluate my school and the district's policies and practices. I became a believer in the notion that I could provide

change, starting with my self-transformation and classroom. That is when I began to self-evaluate and take a hard look at my own classroom practices. The reflective section of the reading response papers has been tremendously valuable to me. I learned how to introspect and ask critical questions. *How may I be perpetuating the inequities I read about? How could I rework the standard curriculum and give my students the diversified, multicultural education they need to break out of the molds made for them by the school? How can I navigate the curricular and instructional mandates set by the district and/or principal? How can I practice in the ways I'm learning without being stunted by those mandates?* I began taking more time in my lesson planning, bringing aspects of my students' lives to light and encouraging them to question the status quo. (White American, fall 2006)

Threaded Discussions

Discussion, whether in a synchronous or asynchronous learning format, is an effective strategy for promoting collective and collegiate learning, because of its potential for interactive, active, participatory learning, perspective consciousness, and critical thinking. Most research on online courses document the importance and value of threaded discussions on enhancing student learning especially the benefits of perspective-taking consciousness, rethinking previous beliefs, values and assumptions, but more importantly, for fostering electronic learning communities through collaborative and collective learning (Alley & Jansak, 2001; Farmer & Bartlett-Bragg, 2005; Palloff and Pratt, 2001). As an online course, the use of threaded discussion was a major forum for helping students interact and connect to one another and to foster collaborative, collective learning and a learning community. In the informal, anonymous, alternative assessment survey, all students in the course expressed valuing the threaded discussions for enabling them to share with and learn from other students, clarifying questions and thinking and viewing others' perspectives and thinking. The following comments from the interview illuminate participants' expression of the value and power of the discussion threads:

I really valued the opportunity to participate in the threaded discussions. Being an online course, that was a great way to connect with others in the course, learn from them, and share your thinking as well. I looked forward to the discussions. As a White female who grew up in a small town and sheltered from the realities of inequalities and social injustice, I had no experience or knowledge about what was going on. Reading about others' perspectives about the manifestation of inequities in schools really opened my eyes and broadened my thinking. It brought me out of darkness, to so speak. Things that I would have denied existed or not believed even if I read them were clarified for me. I really liked the way others shared personal examples of how inequities and injustice have manifested in their lives and work as well as teaching practices about navigating district mandates, like SFA [Success For All]. (Angie, White American, fall 2006)

Partner-Shared Learning

Partner-shared learning (PSL) was a pedagogy designed to foster collaborative and collective learning. Students were partnered with a culturally different person (race, ethnicity, gender) to support each other's learning through sharing perspectives, clarifying questions, sharing responsibilities, and supporting each other's learning, etc. All participants agreed that the partner-shared learning profoundly enhanced their learning. Participants used words and phrases such as "incredible," "valuable," "excellent," "extremely helpful," "profound," "professor, thank

you for thinking of this,” “I really needed it,” “made me take responsibility for my learning,” “it made me read a lot and helped my understanding,” “got me organized and to read the materials in case my partner asked me some questions,” and “it stopped my habit of procrastination, waiting till the last minute to complete work” to describe the value and power of the partner-shared learning. Comments from participant interview also reflect the same sentiment. Kim and Monica’s comments during the interview shed some light:

Before this course, I had never taken an online course. I had some reservations about it, but being a self-starter, I believed I could complete the course and keep myself motivated. I really didn’t see the need for forming a partnership—in fact, the idea seemed more an encumbrance than anything. However, on my first reading response paper, I received poor feedback and you asked to rewrite and resubmit my paper. At around the time time, my partner sent me an email, introducing herself. Immediately, I was relieved. I shared with her my disappointment at receiving the dismal news about my assignment and she offered an immediate, sympathetic response. She also gave me some tips on how to write my papers up to the professor’s standards. In part of her response to me she said, “I suggest you email the professor and say you would like to revise your paper. I think if you reorganized your paper according to APA format, she would consider regrading your paper. Please let me know what else I can do for you.” At that point, I was sold on the partnership. (Monica, European American, fall 2006)

Dividing up the reading and supplying notes for each other helped alleviate some of the difficulties in getting through the *rigor* of the course. For instance, Module 3 was particularly difficult for us but through sharing of our interpretations of the module question and how the readings related, light bulbs started going off in our heads. We went back and forth from our module materials to our readings, finding connections and evidence to support our ideas. It was actually fun working on the module materials in that way. Our union proved incredibly beneficial for me throughout the course. Her inquiries and helpful knowledge kept me motivated and on track—more so than if I’d attempted to complete the course solo. (Monica, White American female, fall 2006)

Chan, an Asian international student’s comment from the interview transcript, also illuminates the value of the partner-shared learning in enhancing her learning in the course, especially knowledge on America’s institutions and society as she explains:

My previous educational experience did not give me much training or exposure as a participant or victim of racism. Plus, I am a non-native English speaker. The amount of reading and the depth of the module questions and the standard of performance required was a tremendous challenge for me. When I felt frustrated or overwhelmed, my partner was always there to write me warm emails and offered her understanding of the reading to me. Of course, she also shared her struggle with me. This largely assured me. At least I knew even native speakers felt the rigor of the course. More importantly, as one who came from another country, if I had questions about the historical or cultural information, she was the best resource for me to get the answer (Asian International student, fall 2005)

Course 3 Rs: Relationship, Rigor, and Relevance

Generally, most research on effective learning, including online learning, document the importance of relationships between professor and students and among students. Studies suggest

that the quality of learning is enhanced by the degree of instructor-student and student-student interaction and relationship. When asked what activities, learning conditions, and pedagogies enhanced their learning, participants noted instructor relationship, flexibility, warmth, encouragement, frequent communication, sharing of ideas, and prompt and informative feedback. Participants used words and phrases such as “You, professor—being flexible on assignment, extending due dates on assignment when I needed it,” “It was good to receive immediate and informative feedback on assignment,” “Talking with you on the phone about topics,” and “Allowing me to fix my mistakes.” In addition, communication of high expectation, rigor, and relevance characterized the online course. In all my courses, I often explicitly communicate to students the challenge and opportunities they will encounter. In my traditional courses, students consistently write in my end-of-course evaluations about the high expectations I set for them and the higher-order-thinking and critical reflection required in the course. The online course was no different. In the informal, alternative assessment survey that was administered, when asked what pedagogies and activities fostered your learning in the course, students noted “the high expectation, the course rigor and relevance.” Similarly, the course relevance is also very important for student learning. Participants expressed that the course topics and the materials were very important and interesting, so they learned to be passionate about them. Participants used phrases such as “Good stuff,” “Being an African American, this topic is really dear to me, and I am passionate about it,” “I teach sociology, and I find this topic very interesting,” “The readings and the materials are what I need to transform my teaching,” “I really enjoy this topic,” “Professor, I am so motivated by this topic, and I want to switch my major to urban teaching,” and “After reading Kozol’s *Savage Inequalities* and learning from the discussion board about his other book, *Shame on a Nation*, I immediately ordered and read it.” Maria’s interview comments powerfully express the value and power of the relevance and challenge that characterized the course:

Although this course has been extremely challenging, overwhelming and at times, frustrating, it has been the best professional development I have had. I was challenged by the technological demand, critical discourse, and the high standard of work expectation. But deep down, because of the course experience, I know that I will become a more responsible teacher for my students. The course opened my eyes to many of forms of educational inequities and injustice I never imagined or even believed existed in my own practice. Now I know. The change starts with me. I have gained new insights on how critical this component of educational practices has on my students. I must evaluate my own set of values and beliefs system about students and their families for me to become a culturally responsive teacher. I feel empowered to become a change agent for the good of my students, implementing a culturally responsive curriculum, assessment tools and gaining knowledge about my students to teach effectively. This course has helped me re-evaluate and understand the social injustices and inequalities that our diverse students. (Latino American, fall 2006)

Discussion and Conclusions

First of all, this study confirmed what most studies on online pedagogies have documented—that well-orchestrated pedagogies have the capability to promote and enhance student learning in an online course (Hoffman, 2002; Vrasidas & McIsaac, 2000; Wang & Bagaka, 2002). Most literature on online learning documents the importance of interactivity in

enhancing learning in online courses (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998; Egan & Gibb, 1997; Jaffe, 1999; Palloff & Pratt, 1999) and reflective discourse (Jonassen, 2000).

Second, the focus of this study was to investigate teachers' reflections on the pedagogies that enhance learning in an online course. Given the nature of the course, the participants were enrolled in—teaching for equity and social justice—it was important to determine the extent to which the course fostered participants' transformative learning, which was the ultimate goal of the course. Assessing the quality of learning, especially transformative learning, can be problematic and often controversial in higher education (Oblinger, Barone, & Hawkins, 2001). In fact, according to Alley and Jansak (2001), "There is no single checklist by which to design or evaluate quality; that quality expresses itself...through the viewpoints, values, and needs of the course consumer" (p. 3). However, transformative educators, through the definition of transformative learning, provide insights that researchers can use to discern evidence of transformative learning—learning that produces a significant impact, or paradigm shift (Clark, 1993), change in learners' frames of reference as they critically reflect upon their assumptions and beliefs and consciously make and implement plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds and understanding (Mezirow, 2000). Data from participants' documents, interviews, and surveys indicated evidence of transformative learning. Most participants in the study described previous practices they were engaged in that they thought were good teaching practices, such as ability grouping, but now found them to be inequitable and unjust and then discussed what and how they would do things differently to ensure equity and social justice for their students. For example, Laurie, who is a White teacher, reflects on her schooling and curricular experience relative to how she was shortchanged and the ways she emulated and practiced the same inequitable and unjust teaching practices of her teacher; she pledges to engage in a more culturally responsive and socially just practice, as she explains:

My curricular experience in my K-12 and college education didn't provide me with an equitable education. I was shortchanged. I did not realize it until recently. In my own education I played *Oregon Trail*. My teachers used it as a teaching tool. I also started to use it my social studies curriculum and teaching as well until I read from the course, the article *On the Road to Cultural Bias: A critique of "The Oregon Trail"* by Bill Bigelow. I didn't realize how inadequate and culturally unresponsive the game really was. As I have started to look at my own curriculum closely, although I have started to include social justice issues, I have begun to see how much farther I still have to go. When I looked at my textbook, I noticed that my book looks at issues only from the White, male, European perspectives. There are boxes labeled for "Women" of which draw attention to people of color, but that is where the cultural relevance ends. As we begin to choose new textbooks, I have begun to look critically at how groups and topics are addressed, because I believe that it is so important to have a textbook that is culturally responsive. I also see where my school curriculum lacks. The *Grade Level Expectations* are very limited in their requirements for looking at cultures, gender, etc. There isn't anything in my school curriculum about diversified assessments or teaching strategies. The schools still like to see paper tests, lectures, worksheets, etc. I have tried and am working to create lessons that take the topics required by the GLE's and look at them from multiple perspectives and create multiple assessments. I believe the piece *Dear High School Teacher* gave me great critical insight into how students really feel about their education. It's not that students do not want to learn it's that they don't see relevance in what is being taught. They are not learning about people who look like them, they don't see their heritage

being represented. The course materials challenged my thinking profoundly, by making me take a look at what is going on in my classroom. I never really looked at my textbook with a critical eye until I read the articles in *Rethinking Schools*. When I really sat down and looked at my curriculum and my textbook, I was appalled at the bias and inaccurate information that was present. I am using this new knowledge as I choose new textbooks for my department and rewrite old curriculums to be more culturally responsive. I am challenged to think about what I am learning from the readings and using that new knowledge in my classroom and district. It's helping me become a better teacher. (Laurie, White American, fall 2006)

Transformative scholars submit that learning is a socio-cultural process (Gay, 2004) with collaborative and communicative relationships (Mezirow, 2000) that involve higher-order thinking that requires reflection and knowledge construction, key elements for quality assurance in online learning (Alley & Jankar, 2001). Further, transformative researchers suggest that transformative learning occurs when individuals reflect on their prior experiences and are able to alter their preconceived or limited perspectives about society, institution, and practice. Using well-structured activities and assessments allowed participants to engage in critical reflection about their learning. For example, the reading response papers required participants to reflect on the module materials by demonstrating personal and professional connections to the materials and discussing the thinking and insights constructed. Participants consistently internalized the materials as they questioned and self-examined their own practice as one participant reflects:

As I read and learned about the ways that teachers are providing injustice and inequality to their students, I thought about my own classroom and realize that there are some things that I am doing in my classroom that are contributing to this problem that I did not even realize. After watching the video, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*, I simply sat down and reflected on my classroom and asked myself if I was making the same mistakes as the teacher in the video was making. I realized that as a teacher, I probably ask specific students to elaborate on their answers, while other students I just accept what they have to say. Also, after watching the racial tracking video, I thought and asked myself if I had differential expectations for my students because of their race, ethnicity, and linguistic background? I always thought that I should differentiate curriculum based on students' abilities by giving them different materials and activities. I had never thought about this being unjust or that I was practicing inequality to them, but I realize now that it is and that I was. (Bonita, European American, Fall 2006)

Third, the study indicated that building rigor and relevance into an online course enhances student learning. Participants in this study expressed that the rigor and relevance of the course engendered their passion for the subject matter and importance of the discourse. The rigor of the course is extremely important for challenging students to demonstrate learning at a high level and to foster critical thinking and transformative learning. In the alternative assessment, participants noted that the rigor and challenge of the course was intrinsically motivating, so it challenged them to do their best work. Building rigor and relevance into an online course involves creating assignments that challenge learners to demonstrate the ability to synthesize information from an array of course materials and to apply it to scenarios. In addition, as discussed earlier, participants found the use of critical texts to enhance their learning and transformation. The reading response papers and pre-post narratives required participants to

actively engage and interact with the assigned materials in order to demonstrate depth and critical reflection. This engendered intellectual effort, rigor, higher-order thinking (analysis, synthesis and assessment), and application. Research suggests that providing opportunities for active learning enhances online learning (Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Harasim, et al., 1997).

Fourth, the role of the instructor in terms of the relationship and communication with learners is extremely critical to enhancing online learning. Online courses in teacher education are rare. In most cases students are taking an online course for the first time. As a result, in addition to the content challenge, they also will be challenged by the technological demand as well as the self-regulated discipline needed to successfully complete. In this study, more than 95% of the participants had not taken an online course and were challenged both by the technological demand and rigor of the course. Hence participants were appreciative of the flexibility they received in terms of extending due dates on assignment, receiving immediate and informative feedback on assignment and opportunity to revise unsatisfactory work.

Fifth, studies on online learning have documented the value of threaded discussions in promoting learners' learning especially perspective thinking and consciousness. This study confirmed the value of discussion threads for promoting communal learning, perspective thinking, and active learning. However, to attain quality discussion thread, it is extremely important to provide structure in terms of posting a question or scenario that reflects a real-life issue. Participants expressed value for the discussion topics that related to them personally and professionally (see Appendices C, D, and E).

Sixth, the partner-shared learning was a novel and creative pedagogy that participants found profoundly powerful and enhancing their learning. The nature of most online learning can be really lonely. Hence, research suggests that opportunities should be provided for personal contact and communicative and collaborative activities to foster community and assist students in reducing feelings of isolation (Barab, Makinster, Moore, Cunningham, & IFL Design Team, 2001; Egan & Gibb, 1997; Haythornwaite, Kazmer, Robins, & Shoemaker, 2000). The partner-shared learning minimized the difficulties and loneliness in an online learning and served as a scaffolding and support system for participants. Moreover, studies have suggested that for effective learning to take place, students must feel that they are members of a learning community. While the threaded discussions provided for collective learning, it did not foster close learner connectedness or learning community. On the other hand, the partner-shared learning offered a great opportunity for collaborative learning and support system.

From this study, I drew two important conclusions: (1) Well-orchestrated pedagogies have the capability to promote and enhance student learning in an online course, especially in their development as independent, active and intentional learners, and (2) Experimenting with electronic pedagogies in teacher education is an ideal opportunity for meeting the realities of the 21st century world. Contrary to the fear that an online course will compromise the quality of learning discourses on multiculturalism and social justice and fostering transformative learning, the study clearly indicated that it is possible to effectively use pedagogies often used in traditional courses to foster and achieve a learning community, collaborative learning, and social network in online courses. This study is an important contribution to the sparse but growing scholarship in using technology or learning delivery in teacher education, especially when teaching courses on diversity and social justice that often require communal learning for deconstructing and reconstructing personal beliefs and values that affect professional decisions and choices. This study should encourage other teacher educators who are skeptical about online teaching, especially in diversity and multicultural education courses. The findings/conclusions

discussed could benefit other teacher educators who teach courses related to diversity, equity, and social justice.

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Appendix A
Pre-Narrative Inquiry
Narrative Inquiry
Task:
<p>Each student will write a narrative reflecting his or her schooling experience in K-12 and the American society relative to educational equity and social justice. Specifically, the student should discuss his/her (a) construction of America as an equitable and just society, (b) beliefs about America's educational system as just and equitable for all students, (c) conception of educational equity and social justice, (d) personal experience of critical incidents of educational equity/inequity and social justice/injustice, (e) awareness of forms of educational inequities and injustice that impact on some students' academic achievement, (f) understanding of sources of educational inequities and injustices, (g) recollection of educational perspectives and societal events that have impacted his/her thinking about educational equity and social justice, and (h) engagement in practice and advocacy for educational equity and social justice.</p>

Appendix B
Module Question for Reading Response Paper

Based on the readings/materials, how does the curriculum foster educational equity/inequity and justice/injustice? What would a curriculum for equity and social justice look like? Illustrate with specific examples.

Appendix C
Sample Discussion Board Topic

America is a democratic society, and schooling for all students is and has been just and equitable. The traditional education system works and has worked for all students. Those students that work hard succeed. Those who fail, do so not because schools are unjust and inequitable, but because of the individual student's background and environment and his or her response and disposition toward education and learning. In other words, the disparity in today's achievement gap among students exists because of individual students' effort or the inevitability of inequality. Advocating multiculturalism will not close the achievement gap or ensure equity and social justice for students. How do you respond?

Appendix D
Sample Discussion Board Response
Response: (November 5, 2006)

I think we can do it all. And here's how. I think the point of becoming activist educators is not going out on the streets with picket signs or necessarily voting if you don't believe in it. The point is bringing to light social issues—issues that speak to our students—in the classroom. We need to structure curriculum around these issues. You can't isolate academic knowledge from real world issues or kids just don't care. That's where most of our discipline problems in the classroom arise from in the first place—lack of interest. If we can get kids engaged in the subject matter, motivational levels increase, behavior improves, production increases, and work quality improves. I use my experience in the classroom as examples. In my teaching, I raise questions relevant to my students' lives to do it. This quarter, I've begun a curriculum on poverty and hunger to teach letter writing, feature writing, and commentary to 6th and 7th graders. I just began on Monday, and already I'm seeing a level of engagement—even from the students who never do their homework or participate—unparalleled during my personal experiment last quarter with teaching the genre out of context. I couldn't get the kids motivated. I'm looking forward to the rest of this quarter. Another quick case-in-point is my debate classes. Instead of teaching "how to speak" or "how to write speeches," I dedicate my class periods to discussions about big social issues of the moment—obviously many of these are very political. I don't ever say which side I'm on—we just discuss the pros and cons of every issue, for the last portion of class, we engage in student congress debates. The students know parliamentary style debate and do not speak out of turn. They listen to the other students. They critique each other, so I don't need to. They ask to come in before and after school to do research and find evidence (can you believe it?!) and to prepare speeches. They actually ask me during class if they can work on writing speeches. I don't have to ask them to do anything. Their motivations are the debates and topics raised during class. They ask for ways to make their speeches better because they want to—not because I've asked them to. Some days they ask me, "Will any of our debates really make a difference in the real world?" I tell them yes, not in the sense that they can make or change the laws now, but in the sense that they can turn their speeches into letters to our congressmen; they can talk to their parents about issues, and one of these days, they will be in a capacity to make a difference—whether in politics, themselves, in education, etc. They are becoming activists, and I'm enabling them. In this way, I try to continually organize my curricula. That's why I think it's important to use people like Bill Bigelow and Paulo Freire as mentors for our practice. They are doing this very same thing. And as educators, the more we are engaged and excited about our content, the more the students will be. (White American female, Fall semester, 2006).

Appendix E
Sample Discussion Board Response to a Posting

Hi, your posting is so alive and real! While letting us know the way your students behave and work in class these days, it speaks of what a difference this course has made to you in your class. You have conveyed the transformation in your classroom so well. I wish I were in a classroom while taking this course and experience this difference for myself, too. I wonder what my students would do when I steered my class through awareness of issues about equity and social justice to the stage of social action. My description of the process would be much different than yours simply because my students come from much amiable social conditions than the urban school students here do, but just as me, they need to go through a transformation that leads to understanding and practice of equity and social justice. (International female, Fall semester, 2006)

9 Transforming Awareness into Activism: Teaching Systems and Social Justice in an Interdisciplinary Water Course. (pp. 162-174). Cathy Willermet, Anja Mueller and David Alm.Â Learning about and doing social justice is a lifelong journey. For some of us, that journey begins with, or is intensified through, a particular life event or educational experience, such as an academic course about diversity. Annemarie Vaccaro, the instructor of two graduate-level courses about social justice in higher education, writes the first section of this chapter.Â 18 Using Applied Learning to Engage with Social Justice: Lessons Learned from an Online Graduate Course in Social Justice. (pp. 318-327). James M. DeVita.