

# White Preservice and Inservice Teachers' Engagement with Multicultural Content in Online Courses

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## Introduction

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the 2014–2015 academic year marked the turning point of a major shift in student demographics (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). For the first time, students of color (50.3%)—largely Asian and Hispanic students—outnumbered their White peers (49.7%) in public schools in the United States.

This trend is expected to continue. By 2022, White students are expected to comprise 45% of public school students. Unfortunately, the teacher demographics are not keeping pace. White teachers comprise 82% of public school educators (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). This raises important questions about teacher preparation and professional development to effectively educate the students of color in our classrooms.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) have argued that one of the critical goals of teacher education programs should be to develop teachers into “agents of change” who challenge and transform institutional and societal inequities that are reproduced in schools. White preservice and inservice teachers should be encouraged to go through a “journey of transformation” (Nieto & Bode, 2012) in which they acknowledge their own identities, adopt antiracist

and multicultural stances, and learn how to develop meaningful relationships with students of color and their families.

Although a significant number of studies have examined how White preservice and inservice teachers grapple with issues of diversity in face-to-face courses, there is a clear lack of research that has investigated this topic in online courses (Kitsantas & Talleyrand, 2005; Merryfield, 2001). With the proliferation of online teacher education programs across the U.S. (Kitsantas & Talleyrand, 2005), the clear impact of technology on teacher development has raised essential questions about how effectively these programs guide White preservice and inservice teachers on their journeys to becoming multicultural educators (Gay, 2003; Goodwin, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

In this article, we present the findings from a collaborative practitioner inquiry project that investigated student learning in three asynchronous, online teacher education courses about issues of diversity that explored the following question: How do preservice and inservice teachers “make sense of” and reflect upon issues of diversity in online teacher education courses? We examined White preservice and inservice teachers' engagement with multicultural content.

## Review of the Literature

### **Multicultural Education and the Development of White Teachers**

Nieto and Bode (2012) defined multicultural education as “a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students, [that] challenges and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and sexual orientation, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect” (p. 42). They posited that “*becoming*

*a multicultural teacher . . . means first becoming a multicultural person*” (p. 392, emphasis original).

Expanding on this transformation, Gay (2003) spoke explicitly about the processes of becoming a multicultural educator. She argued that developing teacher efficacy and empowerment in multicultural education—“that is, to be competent in and confident about one’s ability to do multicultural teaching” (p. 2)—begins with teachers’ critical reflection and self-examination. However, some teachers enter the multicultural classroom more prepared to begin this journey of transformation than others.

The resistance of White preservice and inservice teachers to learning about multicultural education is well documented in the literature (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Dunn, Ford, Dotson, & Roberts, 2014; Garrett & Segall, 2013; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Rose & Potts, 2011; Thomas & Vanderhaar, 2008). Although many multicultural teacher educators believe that an introduction to diversity topics will create dissonance, spark critical self-examination and reflection, and contribute to White teachers’ identity development (Daniel-Tatum, 2005), often White preservice and inservice teachers resist the knowledge offered in multicultural education courses. Such resistance can range from passive forms, such as silence and diversion (Gay & Kirkland, 2003), to more active forms, such as anger and aggression (Garrett & Segall, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Previous research has also documented White preservice and inservice teachers’ compliance with the expectations of multicultural education courses. Gay and Kirkland (2003) argued that although White students comply with the requirements of the course by discussing the course materials and completing the assignments, they might remain untouched and unchanged

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by the principles and philosophies of multicultural education. Gay and Kirkland suggested,

Rather than reflecting critically on the race-related and culturally diverse situations presented, [teacher education students] merely offer descriptions, evaluations or justifications for actions taken or predicted. For example, in discussing achievement among students of color, many preservice teachers simply repeat the trends, or the conventional reasons for why discrepancies exist, without examining their own personal positions on the issues, questioning traditional explanations, or analyzing how achievement dilemmas are influenced by culture, class, ethnicity, or racism. (p. 183)

Gay and Kirkland further indicated that some teachers may not possess the skills to engage in critical thinking and critical self-reflection because they have not been taught such skills or sufficient space was not provided in the class. In other cases, White teachers may actively avoid engaging in critical self-reflection by diverting attention away from race/racism and other diversity topics under consideration

In contrast, studies have also considered White teachers who fully embrace the knowledge and alternate worldviews presented in multicultural education courses. Gay (2003) chronicled the journeys of transformation of 13 teachers (including White teachers and teachers of color) who traveled on the path to becoming multicultural educators. In addition, Delano-Oriaran and Meidl (2012) described the identity development of White teachers and how they reconstructed their identities to reconcile dissonance and integrate new information into their worldviews.

Moreover, in DiAngelo and Sensoy's (2010) study the authors described how the White preservice teachers, who were newly politicized and empowered as agents of change, clamored for the "answers" and the "tools" to redress social injustice and create multicultural classrooms. They expressed, "It would be so much easier if we had a toolbox with its easy to understand lists of dos and don'ts. Yet such an approach would avoid the life-altering changes critical multicultural education asks of us" (p. 102).

### **The Convergence of Multicultural Education and Online Learning and Teaching**

There is limited research on online courses that focus on multicultural education. The existing studies, however, have revealed two benefits: improvement in the

quality of responses from instructors and possibilities for greater equity and participation from students. Akintunde (2009) shared that, when teaching in an online format, he was more attentive to students' assignments and emails that revealed personal struggles with the sensitive issues covered in the course. Akintunde also contended that an online format is beneficial for courses that focus on discussions of race and racism, because it lessens the fear of being directly and negatively confronted.

Merryfield (2001) discovered an increase in participation in which the students took greater risks and exhibited more vulnerability. Merryfield (2003) also found that learning about multicultural education online contributed to greater depth, rigor, and meaningful exchanges between students and the instructors. By "diffusing the triggers of difference" (p. 161), online students focus on the text instead of the nonverbal cues often present in face-to-face discussions of sensitive multicultural topics.

Finally, in discussing the benefits of merging multicultural education and technology together, Damarin (1998) cited the promises of technology in its connection to emancipatory pedagogies that foster shared knowledge among online participants and support diverse learners and learning styles.

The constraints of using an online platform to teach a course on multiculturalism have been documented as well. Despite the candid and honest interactions that occurred in Merryfield's (2001) online course on diversity and equity, the students reported that technology prevented them from building authentic relationships with their classmates. There are also questions about the quality of the learning experience for students who take a course focused on multicultural topics and if online courses have the potential to "trivialize or exoticize cultural differences" (Hinton, 2007) without careful facilitation and planning.

In summary, research on the experiences of White preservice and inservice teachers in multicultural education courses revealed a continuum of responses. Some studies showed that White preservice and inservice teachers demonstrated resistance to the knowledge and theories presented, and other studies described teachers who did not engage in critical thinking or self-reflection.

For online teacher education courses, the students' engagement and embrace of the concepts were directly related to the

faculty's approach and facilitation of the classes. Still other studies revealed White teachers who embraced the principles and practices of multicultural education. While research is emerging on the advantages and disadvantages of online multicultural education courses, more studies are needed to understand how online courses may best support the professional development of White preservice and inservice teachers.

### **Methods**

The three online courses in this study—ED 500, ED 600, and ED 700—are offered through the teacher education program of a large, private, urban university located in the northeastern part of the United States. The courses are taught on the Blackboard Learning Management System.

ED 500, Introduction to Multicultural Education, is an elective for all graduate students in teacher education. The second course, ED 600, Culture, Language, and Learning, is required for undergraduate and graduate students who seek an English as a second language (ESL) certificate in the state. Finally, ED 700, Special Education Process, is a required course for graduate students earning their state certification and/or master's degree in special education.

### **Participants**

Across two terms of these three online courses, a total of 19 preservice and inservice teachers agreed to participate in this study. Twelve of the participants were inservice teachers with teaching experience from two months to 16 years. The remaining participants ( $n = 7$ ) were preservice teachers. One participant did not indicate her professional status or aspirations.

The participants were enrolled in different bachelor of science, master of science, and certificate programs. The participants included 18 women and one man. All of the participants self-identified as White, with two identifying as Hispanic. For the purpose of this article, we focus solely on the data from the 17 participants who identified as White non-Hispanic.

### **Data Sources and Analysis**

Qualitative data were collected from three online courses during the fall 2011 and fall 2012 terms. Primary data were drawn from the students' weekly discussion board posts required for all three courses. Each week, students responded to discussion board prompts that required

them to reflect on and apply insights acquired from weekly learning objectives and activities. Learning activities included assigned readings, lectures, instructional videos, and other materials. Participants offered original responses to the discussion board prompts and engaged their peers' answers.

Each researcher analyzed his or her students' discussion board posts for initial codes. The second author collected and combined the initial codes, then revised and refined the codes after reading the discussion board posts from all three courses. The first author collapsed and categorized the codes into meaningful themes.

The themes were revised as needed to accurately depict the main ideas and concepts that emerged from the data. The researchers revisited their participants' discussion board posts in light of the new coding scheme and reconvened to discuss their interpretation and assignment of the themes.

### Findings

In this section, we describe three themes that emerged from the analysis of the students' discussion board posts. These themes reflected different levels of engagement that the White preservice and inservice teachers demonstrated with diversity topics across the three online education courses. The themes also connect to how multicultural theorists, for example, Daniel-Tatum (2005) and Gay (2003), have written about White preservice and inservice teachers' openness to multicultural perspectives and ideologies.

The first level of engagement can be characterized by some of the participants exhibiting resistance to learning about diversity and were not open to ideas that challenged their worldviews. The majority of students also exhibited a second level of "compliant" engagement in which they were open to learning about diversity, but they struggled with integrating new knowledge and insights that they learned from their courses into their existing worldviews and pedagogies.

The third and final level of engagement is characterized by transformation, in which the participants fully embraced learning about diversity and actively sought to integrate new knowledge and insights from their courses into their worldviews and pedagogies. All of these students were on a journey of transformation (Nieto & Bode, 2012); however, the paths they took conveyed differences in their levels of

comfort and skill with engaging in critical self-reflection. Participants also varied in the degree to which they accepted personal or professional responsibility as agents of change.

### Resistance

Interestingly, just two of the 17 participants could be characterized as exhibiting resistance to learning about diversity. In large part, this finding can be attributed to the nature and structure of online learning. Previous research on White students in multicultural education often cited students' silence as an act of resistance (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Thomas & Vanderhaar, 2008).

Silence is a form of resistance that can be used effectively in face-to-face classes. In online courses, "quiet students" are very rare. With the participation requirements in all three of the courses in this study, a student cannot easily demonstrate his or her resistance through silence. To be silent is tantamount to not participating; thus a student's grade would be adversely affected if he or she did not participate in class.

In online classes, resistance takes on forms and shapes that are different from silence. Donna, a White student in the Culture, Language, and Learning course, was a veteran elementary teacher with more than 10 years of experience. During the first week of class, she responded to a reading assignment by Ovando and Combs (2012) in which the authors argued that some White educators have stereotyped culturally and linguistically diverse students, and she found this statement to be offensive:

I was slightly affronted to be included in the generalization that cultures are stereotyped, especially in relation to how we educate. One point I always keep in the forefront of my teaching, is that each child is unique, and I have worked very hard with my students and parents to find out everything I can that might help me understand and/or teach the child. I was also raised to truly treat everyone equally and have always had a variety of friends.

Donna's pedagogy was informed by her personal worldview to "truly treat everyone equally." She practiced this in her relationships with friends of diverse backgrounds and with her students. She acknowledged that each child is unique and sought to learn about her students by "working very hard" with both the students and their parents to inform her teaching. She held firmly to the belief that she treated all of her students fairly and "was slightly affronted" to be included in

Ovando and Combs's assertion that some White teachers stereotype students from certain cultures. She was reluctant to engage in critical reflexivity and consider the implicit stereotypes that she might hold about her students or to interrogate instances in which she had witnessed other colleagues stereotyping students of color.

In Week 3, Donna revealed a bias concerning immigrant students and families. Instead of thoughtfully examining her position in light of a reading assignment that focused on the English-Only movement that had occurred in the United States in recent years (Ovando & Combs, 2012), which criticized bilingual education for English Language Learners (ELLs), Donna defended her views. She shared this post with the class:

After reading about the movement of English only . . . I can almost understand this point of view. I myself find it frustrating that I must push a number to get automated phone service assistance in English. . . . My own grandparents came to America via [Europe], and learned the language from family so that they could go to school. Sound familiar? While their culture was maintained at home (language, family traditions, etc.) they did not expect [it] to be maintained in school.

Donna conveyed the popular "immigrants must pull themselves up by their bootstraps" philosophy that many Americans embrace. Her great grandparents were European immigrants, they had to learn the English language without the benefit of an ESL program, and they learned to adapt to living in a new country. Donna showcased her family as a model for other immigrant families to emulate. By idealizing the experiences of her great grandparents, she did not consider how English-Only perspectives had resulted in unequal opportunities for immigrant children to learn in schools because they did not receive language instruction or support prior to the passage of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968.

Absent from her analysis was a consideration of the differences in the immigration experiences of different ethnic groups who may have experienced greater barriers and challenges to assimilating into American society compared to her grandparents. Donna romanticized her great grandparents' immigration experience and resisted any ideas from the course that challenged her deeply held perspectives on immigrants and education as viewed through the narrow lens of her great grandparents' lived experiences.

Donna's resistance to engaging in critical self-examination was guarded by her allegiance to a color-blind stance and the belief that ascribing to such a stance was "truly treating everyone equally." As a result, Donna could not consider the possibility that her interactions with ELLs and other non-English-speaking immigrants may need to be revised. Rose and Potts (2011) unpacked student resistance to diversity and interpreted the dismissal of multicultural education in three parts:

- (1) It is valuable to be colorblind and believe that all students are the "same" and only "different" based on personality; (2) Race is not a significant factor since there is not a direct cause-effect relationship between race and a person's culture; (3) The most significant cultural factor is where a child lives and experiences life. (p. 8)

Consistent with the characterization of student resistance by Rose and Potts, Donna evoked a color-blind response "in ways that resist acknowledging racial issues by disavowing the impact race has on anyone in the United States" (Garrett & Segall, 2013, p. 298). Donna's resistance to multicultural education led to the reinforcement and defense of her position and worldview.

Courtney, a student in Introduction to Multicultural Education, offers another example of resistance in an online diversity course. During the third week, Courtney and her classmates were asked to participate in a debate about a low-income, culturally diverse school lauded for closing its achievement gap. The debate centered on whether the school represented an example of multicultural education in action. Students were assigned one side of the debate and instructed to argue three points in support of their position. Courtney was assigned to argue against this school as an example of multicultural education. Instead, she refused and argued in favor of the school. She explained,

I find it hard to oppose this when I feel so strongly that [this school] is indeed one of the best examples of a multicultural school. I hope I don't lose points for this, but I feel so strongly about them being an excellent example that I cannot wrap my head around any other thoughts.

For Courtney, the school reflected and reinforced her ideas of multicultural education. In her defense of the school, she highlighted the diversity of the students, the passion of the teachers, and the incorporation of cultural content into the lesson plans and elements of the school

climate. Courtney was unable to adopt a critical stance and identify aspects of the school that fell short of the standards of multicultural education.

One of Courtney's classmates challenged her assessment. The classmate pointed out the school's shortcomings and constructively critiqued Courtney's defense of the school. Courtney responded,

I must say that I agree with your findings of how [this school] is not an example of multicultural education; however, I had trouble separating my personal opinion from that of textbooks because I felt so strongly about how impressed I was with [this school] and couldn't separate personal from factual at the time. I do feel that [this school] is a prime example of multicultural education, but I can see now there are instances that they may not be perfect in that sense, but what school is. Thanks for opening my eyes a little bit.

Courtney's response to her classmate revealed her continued resistance to the core principles of multicultural education. Courtney explained that she had trouble separating her personal opinion and strong feelings from the facts and the textbook. She was unable to consider new ideas about multicultural education that ran counter to her own. Courtney appeared to relent by saying that she "can see now there are instances that [the school] may not be perfect in that sense." However, her next comment, "but what school is," undermined that earlier statement. This statement, combined with "Thank you for opening my eyes a little bit," showed that she is, in fact, maintaining her original perspective.

Courtney was then approached by the instructor, who constructively took her to task on several of her unfounded observations about the school. Courtney was challenged to revisit her position. In response to the instructor, Courtney stated,

Although, I still see it as I first did, I now see it in another aspect which sheds light on this topic for me because now I realize that [the principal] does not see each child as unique and individual, but as a whole who deserve every academic chance as everyone else does. And, as you stated, multicultural education does acknowledge these differences. Thanks for opening my eyes and helping me to see all of this in a different light as well.

Courtney agreed with the principal's color-blind stance. Like the principal, Courtney did not see color, and she believed in treating all children the same. In her opinion, a color-blind stance was consistent

with her understanding of multicultural education. In response to the instructor's explanation that the color-blind approach runs counter to the principles of multicultural education, Courtney wrestled with the challenge to her ideas. She acknowledged that she could see the school "in a different light" but maintained her original perspective by stating, "I still see it as I first did."

### Compliance

Gay and Kirkland (2003) characterized compliance as a form of resistance. However, an important distinction between the two is that compliant students engage in a level of reflection concerning the course materials, whereas students who exhibit resistance are unwilling to do so. Eleven of the 17 participants exhibited "compliance" to new ideas about diversity, equity, and education across the three online courses, without moving toward the third level of personal or professional transformation.

Charlotte, a White teacher with four years of teaching experience, was a student in the Culture, Language, and Learning course. During Week 5, she responded to Jim Cummins's essay "Mother Tongue," which makes a strong case for preserving the native languages of our English language students. In her weekly discussion board post, she wrote,

I really found Cummins' article to be interesting. . . . I was most intrigued by Cummins' rationale of bilingualism based on our need to play a role in the global economy. . . . Individuals who are bilingual [are] assets to our country's economy and foreign policy. Individuals who are bilingual are considered "linguistic resources" and can promote national self-interest. This idea is so large and one that I could go on and on about. I had never considered bilingualism in global terms before.

Charlotte generally responded to discussion board questions with the word "interesting," a term that evokes a neutral response to ideas presented in the course readings, as well as the phrase "this idea is so large and one that I could go on and on," which struck an ambivalent tone about the issue of supporting the maintenance of a student's first language (bilingualism).

She summarized the ideas that "intrigued" her the most, but she did not make a connection to how the readings informed the way ELLs or their first languages are treated in her school or classroom or how Cummins's essay affected her personally and professionally. Moreover,

Charlotte's response is consistent with findings from Gay and Kirkland's (2003) research on White teacher education students in which the researchers discovered that "rather than reflecting critically on the race-related and culturally diverse situations presented, [the students] merely offer[ed] descriptions, evaluations or justifications for actions taken or predicted" (p. 183).

Charlotte also responded similarly to Cummins's article in acknowledging the arguments that she agreed with but going no further than this to advance the class discussion about how the issue of bilingualism affects ELLs.

A student from the Special Education Process course provided another example of compliance. Robin was a White preservice teacher. During Week 8 of the class, students were asked to respond to an article about the challenges that African American students who are gifted face in schools, including acceptance from other African American peers and negotiating identities within themselves and among different social groups. Robin wrote,

I thought the article gave me a real education on something I did not know much about. . . . I just did not know that there was a concern by African American students who are gifted, that they may not be accepted by [their] peers—that they might be considered too "White"—if they take the elevated, AP courses in high school. . . . I just think that we as teachers need to be vigilant and be aware of race and cultural influences. We must be willing to reach out to students and understand their culture better.

Robin's compliance was demonstrated by her surface-level engagement with the text. She completed the readings and met the requirements of the assignment. She acknowledged some of the key points and implications from the article; however, her consideration of the article was neither overly deep nor critical.

For instance, she did not address how African American students (both gifted and not gifted) have been treated and perceived in her school, what her own assumptions have been about these students, or what "being vigilant of racial and cultural influences" actually means and looks like for herself, her colleagues, her administrators, and other students at her school.

Her response also characterized compliance as described by Gay and Kirkland (2003), in which educators "simply repeat the trends, or the conventional reasons for why discrepancies exist," without a deeper

personal, sociopolitical, and historical examination of why some students of color struggle in schools.

### **Multicultural Transformation**

Four of the 17 participants displayed signs of multicultural transformation. Their engagement with the course materials reflected a deep engagement with, and internalization of, new knowledge and ideas presented in their online diversity courses. For instance, some participants recognized instances of injustice toward students of color and wanted to redress these wrongs as a future teacher or within their current school setting.

During Week 2 of the Special Education Process course, Megan, a White preservice teacher, wrote a discussion board post about cultural bias that she discovered in a standardized test that was used at her field placement site and the difficulty that one of her students, a young ELL, had with understanding parts of the test. She wrote,

I was tutoring an ELL student (Ethan) last year that had just [been] adopted from Egypt. He was seven years old and did not speak English when he arrived. He was in the U.S. for four months when I met him. He was remarkably intelligent and I was able to communicate with him quite well in English. . . . My mentor had me preparing Ethan . . . for testing as all children were required to take these assessments unless the assessment was found to be invalid or culturally bias[ed]. . . . The standardized assessment I was using to prepare Ethan had been used the prior school year. This assessment had a reading passage about baseball and questions to follow. Baseball is a cultural sport and very American. It did not occur to me that Ethan was never exposed to baseball or anything like baseball in his country until he began asking me questions like what is a bat? What is a base? What is a ball?

Molly discussed her concerns about potential cultural bias in the assessment with her mentor teacher, and it was decided that Ethan should not take the assessment that year. They both determined that an alternative assessment would need to be developed for him, one that took into consideration his cultural background and topics he had a firm grasp of in his content area classes.

In addition, Molly and her mentor teacher started to examine the textbooks that they were using to read stories with Ethan to find culturally relevant literature that would "bridge his culture with American culture" (Molly, discussion board

post, October 3, 2011). Molly also identified how cultural bias benefited students who were knowledgeable about American sports, a topic with which Ethan did not have any prior experience. Molly and her mentor teacher became agents of change (Delano-Oriaran & Meidl, 2012) by making the decision to create a new standardized assessment for Ethan that would incorporate his cultural background, experiences, and knowledge.

Another student who exhibited multicultural transformation was Bethany, a White inservice teacher in the Introduction to Multicultural Education course who was an experienced educator who worked in an international school outside of the United States for several years. She chose to enroll in this elective course to expand her understanding of multicultural education and become a better teacher for her students. In Week 3, Bethany struggled with reconciling her past professional experiences with her new insights on multicultural curricula. She expressed,

I have worked in some places that (on the surface) were truly "multicultural." However, in light of the readings, I also have struggled to come to terms with what it really means to provide a multicultural education. The curricula I have worked with have probably been as inclusive as you can get inquiry-based, focused on both local and global issues, . . . and yet, in light of the reading, some of these practices seem so superficial, they don't even come close to the pervasive forces talked about in the text.

Early in the course, her new knowledge and insights about multicultural education made her question her past experiences. Bethany wrestled in earnest with the difference between being a teacher who included multicultural issues and topics in her curricula and being a teacher who was an agent for change.

She critically reflected on this and realized that the curricula she had used in her school reflected "practices [that] seem so superficial." As a result, she began to change and expand her worldview and pedagogy to incorporate these new insights. In her final course reflection, Bethany shared,

This course has made me care more than I ever thought possible about education for social justice. It has made me realize how little I know about so many of my friends, students, coworkers and acquaintances because our society does not encourage us to speak out and tackle difficult issues. I have learned that by setting a framework for discussion and through education, we can have deep and

meaningful conversations about issues that are difficult to discuss. . . . One of my personal goals moving forward after this course will be . . . promoting multicultural education in the schools in which we work.

By the end of the class, Bethany was invigorated as an agent of change. She left the class caring “more than she ever thought possible about education for social justice” and with the personal goal “to make others care, and involve them in promoting multicultural education in schools.” Her practice of critical self-examination in light of new knowledge resulted in the expansion of her understanding of multicultural education.

Bethany’s experiences mirror those of the participants in Delano-Oriaran and Meidl’s (2012) research. The authors found that the teachers undergoing multicultural transformation first brought about change in their local settings—from sharing resources with colleagues to altering their own teaching practices.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In the present study, White preservice and inservice teachers endeavored to “make sense of” and reflect on issues of diversity in these three online courses in three different ways. While students’ resistance to learning is well documented in face-to-face multicultural or teacher education courses (see Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pezzetti, 2017; Pohan, 1996), resistance can be exhibited in online courses as well. Students can hold tightly to their previously held worldviews and remain closed to learning about diversity and other ideas that challenge their perspectives.

In addition, compliant students were willing to learn about diversity but struggled to integrate new knowledge and insights into their worldviews. Finally, students who engaged in multicultural transformation embraced learning about diversity, let go of previously held beliefs that ran counter to multiculturalism, and actively integrated new knowledge and insights into their worldviews and pedagogies.

The study also revealed how an online format may have encouraged students to become more transparent and honest about their authentic thoughts and feelings about the topics and issues that were presented to them across the three courses, particularly for students who displayed levels of engagement with the course that are characterized by resistance or transformation. This is evident in both the substance of the students’ reflections and

the fact that the students who exhibited resistance were not always willing to consider perspectives when they ran counter to their own. For instance, these preservice and inservice teachers firmly held on to their beliefs and could articulate why they held views about certain issues, such as English-only versus bilingual approaches to teaching ELLs.

This was also true for students who showed evidence of multicultural transformation. They critiqued current practices and policies at their schools and translated the practices that they learned about in their courses into actionable steps. Unlike “compliant students,” who tacitly agreed with the authors of the course readings, the students who exhibited characteristics of resistance or multicultural transformation displayed a much higher level of risk-taking and vulnerability in their responses. This finding is consistent with Merryfield’s (2003) and Akintunde’s (2009) studies in which the researchers also found that an online format improved participation and quality of responses about issues of multiculturalism from their preservice teacher candidates.

The findings from this study offer implications for online multicultural education courses in promoting preservice and inservice teacher learning and understanding of issues of diversity and social justice. First, teacher educators have the power and responsibility to direct (and redirect) their students’ learning (as seen in the exchange between Courtney and the first author).

The role of the online instructor is central to students’ processes of self-discovery and learning (Garrison, 2007; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). In addition, depending on the student’s level of engagement with issues of diversity, different approaches and strategies can be effective in cultivating his or her personal and professional development (Merryfield, 2001, 2003).

For example, demonstrative learning activities may prove effective in challenging students to rethink long-standing assumptions and stereotypes (Patchen, 2012; Pimentel, 2010). Online instructors can also help students to engage more deeply in reflexive practices with poignant questions that require them to think critically (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) as well as provide mentoring and opportunities to engage advanced theories to inform their pedagogy and practice (Gay, 2003).

In closing, regardless of course delivery format, face-to-face, blended, or online,

teacher education courses that promote, foster, and develop preservice and inservice teachers into culturally responsive educators are more critical now than ever because these courses are preparing the next generation of teachers for an increasingly multicultural society.

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