

Developing Professional Forums that Support Thoughtful Discussion, Reflection, and Social Action: One Faculty's Commitment to Social Justice and Culturally Responsive Practice

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There are many challenges facing those educators who strive to ensure that their pre-service teachers understand the issues surrounding equity and social justice. In response to these challenges, and in response to the interests, questions, and concerns of the faculty in a School of Education, two professors worked collaboratively with administrators, faculty, and staff to organize Professional Forums. These Professional Forums were designed to support and engage faculty in the re-visioning of their courses as well as their pedagogical practices for pre-service teachers, with the specific goal of enhancing students' understanding of equity, social justice and global issues. In this article, we share our objectives, structures, expectations, and outcomes for the six different Professional Forums we designed and implemented over a two-year period.

Teacher educators are intentionally, and responsibly, seeking ways to best inform and support the culturally responsive practices of pre-service teachers. However, there are many challenges facing those educators who strive to ensure that their pre-service teachers understand the issues surrounding equity and social justice. In a recent study, Jennings (2007) examined the data from 142 institutions and surmised that the major challenges to the inclusion of diversity within courses was faculty disinterest, faculty discomfort, faculty lack of knowledge, time constraints, and student disinterest and discomfort. Gay (1977) elaborates on this issue by suggesting that, ". . . teacher education curriculum must be designed to help teachers acquire the knowledge, attitude, and skills consistent with the principles of cultural pluralism and to translate the philosophy of multicultural education into classroom practices" (p.56-57). Marshall (1990) further explains, ". . . the basic content knowledge that many teachers have studied while training to become teachers may not have included varying cultural perspectives" (p.586). In response to these challenges, and in response to the interests, questions, and concerns of the faculty in a School of Education, two professors worked collaboratively with administrators, faculty, and staff to organize Professional Forums. These Professional Forums were designed to support and engage faculty in the re-visioning of their courses as well as their pedagogical practices for pre-service teachers, with the specific goal of enhancing students' understanding of equity, social justice and global issues.

In this article, we share our objectives, structures, expectations, and outcomes for the six different Professional Forums we designed and implemented over a two-year period. We share feedback from faculty and staff, artifacts, suggestions for resources, scholarly texts and articles, and audio and video materials that were introduced and utilized in each of the Professional Forums. Our intent in documenting this process, and in sharing the data and resources from the six Professional Forums that engaged our faculty, is that it may support the design and implementation of thoughtful and critical Forums for faculty and staff within other institutions.

Professional Forums

As co-chairs of a Diversity Committee in a large School of Education, we are exploring and developing ways to create intentional epochs of time where faculty and staff meet on a regular basis to discuss, share, problem solve, question, and examine beliefs and practices focused on culturally responsive pedagogy and social justice issues in their own classes and beyond. Our goal is to support faculty and staff in their own professional growth in the area of diversity, as well as to ensure that they have the resources and information needed to support their efforts in developing socially-conscious and culturally-responsive pre-service teachers. In our School of Education we support a broad definition of diversity as a structure that includes the tangible presence of individuals representing a variety of attributes and characteristics (Talbot, 1996, p. 381). These characteristics include, but are not limited to: ability, age, ethnicity, gender,

geographic origin, language, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or other physical or special needs. Our intent in this study was to encourage faculty to include more cultural engagement and service learning opportunities both locally and globally, in order to help pre-service teachers move beyond the concept of “heroes and holidays” toward a multicultural curriculum that truly addressed all aspects of diversity and culturally responsive pedagogy.

This article focuses on the specific ways we addressed, throughout the past two years, the issue of defining and redefining effective multicultural curriculum transformation. We created six different Professional Forums that are currently being offered on a voluntary basis to faculty in a School of Education. These Forums were designed so faculty were able to meet regularly, in a variety of contexts, throughout the year. In these Professional Forums, faculty were encouraged to explore and discuss ways that they could enhance their course curricula and pedagogy in order to inform and enhance pre-service teachers’ understanding of inequity in schools. We addressed further the need to develop pre-service teachers’ understanding of global issues and culturally-responsive practices in order to meet the needs of students in their care. Within these forums, faculty had opportunities to describe practices they currently used in their teaching and the ways in which those practices supported students’ understanding of multiculturalism, share ongoing research on issues related to diversity and social justice, recommend and share resources they utilized in their own classes, suggest materials for a Multicultural Resource Center located in a School of Education, and aid in the development of a University-wide Diversity Portal.

In each Professional Forum, we supported faculty and staff as they developed further the critical consciousness needed to transform their instruction (Nieto, 2000; Landreman, Rasmussen, King & Jiang, 2007). A primary goal in creating Professional Forums was to ensure that they evolved from the interests, comfort levels, and specific areas of concern that faculty were sharing, and that they would address, from a thoughtful informed stance, the faculty’s interests and specific needs. To achieve this goal, we decided to provide Forums that mirrored the paradigm of Professional Learning Communities that included supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice (SEDL). Darling-Hammond

(1996) advises further that Professional Learning Communities include the following characteristics: collaborative inquiry, shared decision making, and joint planning of instruction.

Theoretical Framework

In order to develop culturally-responsive dispositions in pre-service teachers, many teacher preparation programs implemented Multicultural Education; however, many pre-service teachers still lack the skills or dispositions necessary to make them effective in the classroom (Weisman & Garza, 2002; Sleeter, 2001). Marshall (1990) explains, “One of the greatest tragedies is that many teachers simply have not had a formal professional opportunity to explore techniques and strategies more appropriate for their work with diverse student populations” (p. 586). Therefore, it seems imperative that teacher educators must address broader issues than simply “tolerating diversity and group difference” (Jennings, 2007, p. 1265) and reactivate and re-envision faculty commitment to social action in course design (Cochran-Smith, 1999). Other concerns involve the overly simplistic ideas about what is required for pre-service teachers to develop cultural understanding (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Pope Mueller & Chatham, 2004). Landreman, Rasmussen, King & Jiang (2007) and Cochran-Smith (1999) confirm that there has been scant critical examination of the attitudes and development of teacher educators in this context.

In confronting these challenges, critical questions arose: how are faculty members going to facilitate a more dynamic approach to aspects of diversity, and how can they address global issues that ultimately engage pre-service teachers in viewing teaching as social change and the transformation of structural oppression? What kind of support from the institution can be provided for faculty to develop their courses, field experiences, and cultural engagements to address these needs? It is suggested by researchers that we must look more closely at how contexts are structured for professional development for faculty to discuss and design curricular engagements that enhance their practice. Potthoff, Dinsmoor, & Moore (2001), in their review of literature, identified two critical areas necessary for change to occur: establishing a readiness for change and community building. Therefore, we designed Professional Forums that addressed both the interests and comfort levels of faculty, as well as the

contexts that would support faculty growth and social action. We utilized the research of Potthoff, Dinsmoor, & Moore (2001) who advised that when creating an effective community, the context should provide: voluntary participation; large and small gains which should be celebrated; inclusion of faculty, staff and students should; change initiatives which should be aligned with the organizational structure; ongoing qualitative and quantitative assessment.

An extensive body of research suggests that Professional Learning Communities have important benefits for faculty. Lenning & Ebbers (1999) state, "Faculty benefits include diminished isolation, a shared purpose and cooperation among faculty colleagues, increased curricular integration, a fresh approach to one's discipline, and increased satisfaction with their students' learning" (p.iv). Senge (1990) suggests the faculty be engaged in Professional Learning Communities where they have "the ability to carry on 'learningful' conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others" (p.9).

Each Professional Forum was open to all full- and part-time faculty and staff. Our goal was to support all members of the School of Education through a shared commitment and a common discourse that focused on the issues surrounding ways to meet the diverse needs of all pre-service teachers whom we serve. DuFour and Eaker (1998) explain that developing shared understandings and common values in a professional learning community is the first and most important characteristic of a professional learning community. They explain, "What separates a learning community from an ordinary school is its collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what the people in the school believe and what they seek to create" (p.25).

This paper highlights specifically the "process" and development of the six Professional Forums and the benefits associated with faculty coming together to engage in a multicultural discourse that "offers people a language to further their understanding of racism, sexism, etc., and explore issues of equity, justice, and privilege within and outside of school" (Loughran, Fernsten, & Schlichting (2007, p.3). Several benefits include the potential to transform curriculum, methods of teaching the curriculum, and the types of resources shared with students. In each forum, we shared artifacts brought by the faculty, discussed how we established a Resource Center within our School of

Education for faculty, and the developed the University Diversity Portal. These resources are now shared across the University, and serve as a focus to highlight faculty research that addresses equity and issues of social justice.

We also present data collected throughout the two-year period as we continuously elicited feedback from participants in each Professional Forum. As Potthoff, Dinsmoor, & Moore, (2001) share, "an important aspect when developing a community for professional development is the use of ongoing assessment." Data included feedback and observations from each forum; surveys; face-to-face interviews; verbal and written reflections from faculty, staff, and students; artifacts; and email responses.

Professional Forums that Supported Thoughtful Discussion and Reflection

Professional Forum # 1: Brown Bag Lunches

The first Professional Forum we developed was a series of monthly Brown Bag Lunches which were scheduled from 12:30 p.m.–1:30 p.m. on alternate days each month in order to accommodate the teaching schedules of the faculty. The primary focuses of the Brown Bag Lunches were to provide a context where faculty could engage in open and honest discourse necessary to build a genuine sense of trust and community and to provide a context in which faculty were able to discuss their teaching practices within courses that supported pre-service teachers' understanding of diversity, as well as specific ways to best meet the needs of students in the schools. In our initial meeting, in order to support conversation and introduce a common language and knowledge base, we invited several faculty members from different departments within the School of Education to share examples of Multicultural Framework(s) that they currently used in their own classes to support the teaching of diversity and social justice. The faculty were invited to explain the frameworks and the issues these frameworks raised for students, as well as the discussions that ensued. Some of the frameworks shared by faculty included: Gorski, P. (2008) *Five Approaches to Social Justice Activism*; Bennett, M. J. (1993) *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*; and Banks, J. (2008) *Four levels: Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform*.

These informal sharing sessions were optimal opportunities for faculty and staff to come together in a non-threatening and collegial environment, to learn from each other, to ask questions, and to elicit advice in support of their teaching. These meetings also provided a place where faculty were encouraged to bring and present any resources and/or materials that they were using currently in their courses, especially those that provided a different insight or teaching strategy that could lead to an enhanced understanding or conversation on the issues surrounding diversity. Some examples of resources that were shared and discussed during the Brown Bag lunches included: theoretical and pedagogical articles, textbooks, quality children's and adolescent literature, literature-based strategies, videos, websites, and internet resources. We discovered that many faculty were unaware of these valuable, informative resources and many left the meetings with books, activities, and videos in hand. Often, at the subsequent Brown Bag lunch, these faculty members shared how they had utilized the resources and the impact that the resources had on their students' learning and understanding. One faculty member offered the following reflection on the Brown Bag discussions:

I don't want to go to a workshop and just sit down and get a video or activity, but better, I want to read and think about them, brainstorm with other people how you might implement them, and how you might help pre-service teachers think about issues. The Brown Bag lunches helped me keep a good pulse on the readings, resources, and the frameworks available.

Another faculty member shared her feelings about the Brown Bag Lunches, and she stressed the importance of meeting people where they are in their approach to teaching about diversity and social issues. She shared:

I benefited from talking with colleagues in the Brown Bag Lunches. . . just having time, or discussing how to use all the resources. I think that's one of the things I really enjoyed was the sharing, the how-to's, and the strategies. That may be because of where I am. . . I have the knowledge and I have the commitment. . . I wanted the how-to's. There are other people who have the commitment, but not the knowledge, who are not ready for the how-to's. We are all at different

places and so we have to accommodate for that and not throw everyone into the same spot.

During the first year, as well as the fall of the second year, the primary focus of this forum was on resources and discussion about course content, pedagogy, and issues. However, through conversations with participants we discovered that some of the faculty also engaged their students in community agencies that needed assistance. The Brown Bag Lunch afforded us the opportunity to invite members of local community agencies to talk about their needs, programs, and specific ways that our faculty and students could provide meaningful service and support. Invited representatives from agencies included; the director of a homeless shelter, the director of an afterschool program for adolescents, and the coordinator of a local literacy center. The discussions that ensued provided participants with opportunities to understand how they and their students could connect with community-based projects working with children and families from diverse populations. We were also able to develop reciprocal and ongoing relationships with each agency. Most recently, we observed several programs areas within the School of Education re-visioning their Program of Study to include more experiences for pre-service teachers in diverse environments. These placements will ensure that students have opportunities to work with diverse populations and to be a part of a support system for people within a given community. These opportunities will support pre-service teachers as they learn first-hand the importance of understanding, and working with, the home and community environment of the child.

Professional Forum # 2: Annual Faculty Diversity Showcase

The second Professional Forum evolved through conversations with faculty and staff in the Brown Bag Forum. We discovered that there was a "disconnect," or, rather, a lack of understanding, about what other faculty and staff were doing in regard to writing, research, presentations, and teaching. Several faculty were engaged in interesting and transformative research and teaching on the issues surrounding diversity, but there was little awareness of their efforts among the School of Education faculty and beyond. It wasn't disinterest, but rather a significant lack of communication, or lack of opportunities for

communication, between faculty and staff, especially between individual departments. We acknowledged that in the dynamic and intense environment of a School of Education, there were few, if any, opportunities to share or present substantive research, innovative ideas, and teaching strategies. We also acknowledged that many of these efforts could be most relevant to all members of the School of Education in their teaching, research, supervising student interns, working with Community-based programs, and potential service-learning opportunities. As we discussed this realization with faculty in both the Brown Bag Lunches, as well as the Diversity Committee meetings and subcommittee meetings, we discovered a genuine interest and eagerness among faculty to share their individual areas of research and to learn more about what their colleagues were doing. One member shared:

We need a systematic approach to what we are doing in each of our classes. . . sharing in the Brown Bag sessions was such an important first step but we need to move forward. We are not finding out where the holes are and really thinking about how we are going to address these issues developmentally from when students come into the School of Education and what we are each doing to ensure their growth. I think right now it is haphazard, and we don't even know what's going on in each other classes. I really feel that is the first step so I am really pleased that we are taking this on in the Showcase.

To address these needs and concerns of faculty, and to ensure a more systematic approach that would support the sharing of ideas and the dialogue between faculty within and between departments, we proposed an Annual Faculty Diversity and Technology Showcase. This Professional Forum invited all full and part-time faculty and staff to present their research and highlight their teaching in the area of Diversity and Technology.

The Showcase was held in the central Atrium in the School of Education on a Thursday afternoon/evening from 2:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m. in order to accommodate and encourage attendance of both undergraduate and graduate students. Each participant was offered a table for posters and/or other display materials along with resources and computers. Funding was provided for any necessary items. Internet access was provided to

each presenter and members of the Technology Assistance Center were on hand to offer assistance. There were refreshments provided throughout the day.

In our first year, there were 24 presentations involving 33 faculty and staff from all departments in the School of Education. In our second year, there were 27 presentations involving 48 faculty, staff and students. A wide range of topics and issues were presented. Some of the titles included: “Community Mapping: Development and Understanding of Resources,” “Incorporating a Diversity Emphasis in I-Search Assignment,” “Intern Impact on Student Learning Across Diverse Populations,” and “The Elephant in the Room: How Racial Beliefs Affect Classroom Practice of Pre-service Teachers.” Faculty and staff from across campus were invited to, and attended, the Showcase, including other administrators. For example, the Associate Provost for Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, the Dean of the School of Business, and the Dean of Student Affairs. This support from administrators sent a powerful message to faculty and students. One faculty member commented, “I thought it was great that several administrators from other buildings came to see and learn about what we’re doing.” The Associate Provost offered his insight on the Showcase:

I was impressed with the collegiality of the people serving in the projects and the resources that were utilized including both teachers and students (for example: Junior Seahawk Academy; Research-based approaches to serve diverse high school learners; pre-school at risk; the disillusioned teacher). These projects demonstrated the level of commitment and expertise of the faculty in the School of Education. I hope that we can continue these venues to showcase the contributions made by education faculty to their disciplines, UNCW and the communities we serve.

After the Showcase, feedback was solicited from participants through email and faculty surveys. Faculty were asked to share their experiences, to respond to questions about the Showcase, and to offer suggestions for future events. A sample of responses included the following: One professor shared, “It was great for my students to participate with me. They learned a lot. . . both from interacting, and from presenting with faculty.” Another shared, “. . . it is important to note that this is an opportunity for students to see faculty as

researchers. From my perspective, this is the highlight of the Showcase. . .that students engaged in the conversations along with faculty.” Yet another faculty member shared, “I had no idea what was going on in other colleagues’ classrooms. . .what other faculty were doing to address diversity with their students. We have so much to learn from each other, and this Showcase was a great way to begin that process.” One of the students who had the opportunity to collaborate and present her research in a poster format with a faculty member stated, “I had some conversations that I think influenced people to think a little more about their definitions of diversity. . .and a few people challenged me to think as well.” Another faculty member suggested a better day and time for future Showcases so that student participation is enhanced: “I think it would be an improvement to have the Diversity Showcase up for a Tuesday and Wednesday during the semester, rather than a Thursday at the end of the semester.” Many faculty members appreciated the informal context for the Showcase and the “friendly” setting. One presenter commented, “The Diversity Showcase was a perfect opportunity for us to explain our projects or research in a small and friendly setting that allowed for one-on-one interaction with interested faculty, staff, and students! I was impressed with the wide variety of topics that were on display! I thoroughly enjoyed learning about what others were doing.”

Professional Forum # 3: Professional Reading Response Groups

In our ongoing conversations with faculty and staff in both the Brown Bag lunches and Diversity Showcase, several faculty expressed an interest in creating a more “formal,” scholarly Professional Forum where faculty and staff would come together to discuss research-based articles on social justice, multicultural education, and equity in education. In response to this interest, we designed a Professional Reading Response Group that met once a month for two hours. In the initial meeting, the group unanimously agreed to meet on Fridays since most faculty do not have classes on that day. They also agreed that members of the group would suggest the articles for consideration and that the members of the group would decide on one or two articles to be read each month.

In order to focus on the topics for the articles, and to be sure that this Professional Forum addressed the interest areas of each member of the group, we invited

the members to generate a list of topics/issues that they wanted addressed in the Professional Reading Groups. Several of the topics generated by the group included: defining social justice, teaching ESL students, critical race theory, gender and pre-service teachers, education of males, sexual identity, socio-economic issues in education, means by which religion impacts education, academic diversity, and autism and the needs of special education students. A sample of the articles discussed in the Professional Reading Response Group include the following: “Five Rules for Teaching Social Justice” (Pettit, J. 2005), “Reclaiming Teacher Quality: The Case for Social Justice” (Shakman, K., Cochran-Smith, M., Jong, C., Terrell, D., Barnatt, T., & McQuillan, P., 2007), “Losing Strangeness: Using Culture to Mediate ESL Teaching” (Roswell, J., Sztainbok, V., & Blaney, J., 2007), and “New Directions in Multicultural Education: Complexities, Boundaries and Critical Race Theory” (Ladson-Billings G., 2003).

Typically, one or two members of the group – usually the individual(s) who suggested the articles – would volunteer to “lead” the discussion by introducing the article, discussing their choice of article, and sharing thoughts and insights on the article. The articles were circulated via email to all faculty and staff in the School of Education prior to each meeting, along with an invitation to attend the Professional Reading Response Group.

Professional Forum #4: Evening Video Night

Another Professional Forum evolved in response to the faculty’s interest in creating a forum that would encourage student involvement and support conversation and interaction between students, faculty and staff on the issues and topics surrounding diversity. After generating several ways to accomplish this, we decided on an Evening Video Night. Faculty felt this would be an authentic, engaging way to meet with students within and outside the course context to explore issues of diversity and to support a genuine discourse with students that would lead to greater awareness, understanding, and communication. A faculty/student committee was formed to “screen” and suggest potential videos, and they were charged with identifying a movie and suggesting a faculty member who would introduce the video and moderate the discussion with students and faculty. Faculty was notified of the event in meetings and via email and they were encouraged to invite their students to attend.

Posters were also displayed throughout the School of Education to extend the invitation to all.

The structure of the Evening Video Night involved a group of faculty and students viewing a movie together that addressed diversity and social equity with an opening and follow-up discussion moderated by a faculty member. The faculty member “set the stage” for the movie, explored issues presented in the movie, generated possible ways that the movie enhanced faculty and students’ understanding of the issues surrounding social justice and diversity, and discussed how the movie could have an impact on and/or influence their teaching and dispositions. Our first Evening Video Night was hosted by a faculty member from India who shared the engaging video, *Namesake* (2006). She opened the evening with an interesting presentation on her culture, her life experiences growing up, her family’s expectations of her as member of this Indian culture, and the conflict that caused as she grew up in America. The discussion truly set the stage for this video which addressed each of those issues from the stance of the main character. It offered the participants a genuine “look” into another culture, and the expectations, perceptions and pressures of growing up and living in a country different from one’s own, while maintaining one’s history, culture and heritage.

One student who attended this forum commented in a written reflection, “This movie allowed me to empathize with immigrants who live in America in ways I have never thought of before.” Another student wrote that the movie encouraged her to be more sensitive toward others. She explained, “. . . you never really think about how someone from a different culture accommodates themselves to our way of life.” In response to how this movie might impact her teaching in the future a student wrote, “I will try to recognize other cultures, because different cultures deserve respect just as much as we deserve it!” She also commented that in her future classroom she needs to remember, for her students who have parents who are immigrants, that, “It is not easy being American born when your parents are still so strongly associated with their former country, and as teachers we need to be aware of these issues and be respectful of them.” The increased sensitivity and awareness we observed through watching this movie and the subsequent discussion between faculty and students was further affirmed by the following student who explained that she had grown up in multiple diverse contexts. She discussed how this movie really emphasized for her the

importance of her role as a future teacher. She explained:

I was oblivious to the struggles of people in that situation, and I had never thought about the fact that those children were born and raised here in America. It is sometimes hard for me to remember that children are still being raised to discriminate against others, something the movie and comments after the movie helped me realize. We have to try and make our students knowledgeable enough of other cultures and people so that they develop a healthy respect for them.

It was not only watching the movie that enhanced pre-service teachers’ awareness, but more importantly, the conversation that was facilitated by the moderating faculty member and other faculty members at the forum. As one student stated, “Being able to watch the movie and listen to the faculty facilitator make it ‘real’ was the most important. Also, other international faculty members’ comments added to what I learned.” Several other movies suggested for future viewing and discussion included: *Skin Deep* (Reid, F. 1995), *What’s Race Got to Do with It?* (Cheng, J. 2006), *De Nadie* (Dirdamal, T. 2005), *The Shadow of Hate* (Guggenheim, C. 1995), *The Color of Fear* (Mun Wah, L. 1995), *Lost Boys of Sudan* (Mylar, M, & Shenk, J. 2004), *The Language You Cry In* (Toepke, A. & Serrano, A. 1998).

Professional Forum # 5: Faculty and Staff Retreat

In our ongoing research and conversations with faculty, and as faculty began to express a greater interest in community engagement, we discovered that a significant lack of communication existed in our relationships between teacher educators at the university and local community-based programs. As a result, we planned a half-day Fall Faculty/Staff Retreat. We invited all faculty and staff from the School of Education and assembled a distinguished panel of educators from local and regional school districts and administrators of community-based programs who interact with our students and families from diverse populations. The panel for the retreat included: an assistant principal, a community activist, an administrator and activist from the Literacy Council, an elementary school teacher from a rural school with a high population of children who are learning English as

a second language, and a high school teacher who works within a diverse school context. The retreat was held in a large conference hall on campus. There were 68 participants in attendance. The day began at 8:30 a.m. with breakfast followed by introductions; presentations by each member of the panel; whole group question, answer and discussion; and lunch in small groups where the discussions continued. The afternoon session included break-out groups, with a member from the panel joining each group. Each participant was able to choose the group/presenter with whom he or she wanted to interact. The day concluded with closing discussion and remarks. We utilized surveys and interviews to obtain data from this Fall Retreat. The following are samples of specific feedback from participants: "We need to have more dialogue like this with schools so we are moving together toward mutual goals." "Importance of service learning and the key role the coordinator plays in facilitating the needs of community organizations." "Continued conversations! Call to action!"

Professional Forum # 6: Diversity Portal

The Diversity Resource Portal was a natural extension of our efforts. It was created to further support faculty's commitment to diversity and social justice by providing a variety of informative and useful resources and materials. It is a free, searchable database committed to informing educators about innovative ways of viewing, addressing, and teaching about issues surrounding diversity. The Diversity Portal contains information about books, book chapters, articles, media (video and audiotapes) available within the School of Education or the University Library, and information about web-based diversity resources. In the future, the Portal will also highlight faculty research and provide a blog for discussion. As educators, we believe that every person deserves respect and equal access to education; therefore, the Portal aims to provide fresh insights into diversity issues that explore and question current ways of understanding systematic inequalities in education. Faculty and staff are invited to submit any relevant resources or materials for consideration to be posted on the Portal. By empowering everyone to be a part of the creation and ongoing development of this Portal, we aim to develop a sense of ownership and build wide-spread awareness of the Portal and the many resources available and, as a

result, to ensure frequent use and access by faculty and staff.

Closing Thoughts

It is imperative that all pre-service teachers understand their unique role in the development of equity in a global society in their schools, communities, and beyond. We discovered that by creating Professional Forums that supported faculty in confronting the issues of equity, social justice and culturally responsive practices, along with presenting and sharing materials and resources that supported these goals, our faculty began creating more connections within and across programs. These connections allowed faculty to grow in their commitment to meeting the holistic needs of their pre-service teachers and supporting their understanding of diversity and social justice. Faculty began engaging in genuine multicultural discourse that significantly impacted their teaching, research, and interactions with their pre-service teachers, schools, and communities. Through these forums we discovered that, "There is a deep hunger among faculty members for more meaningful collegial relationships and more 'conversational structures' in our institutions" (Gabelnick et al., 1990, p. 86). We found that through the variety of Professional Forums developed, and faculty's enthusiastic participation and attendance at these forums, we were able to address many of the issues raised by Jennings, 2007, including faculty disinterest, faculty discomfort, faculty lack of knowledge, and time constraints.

We discovered the importance of providing a variety of Professional Forums for faculty, staff, and students to choose from that addressed their specific areas of interests and needs. We also discovered that it was through discussion in the first Brown Bag Forum that faculty and staff often offered suggestions and co-constructed ideas for future Professional Forums, which addressed specific needs of faculty and provided a variety of contexts for discussion and social action. We recognized how this ongoing effort has the potential to develop more relationships among faculty, between departments, and across campus so that there are genuine opportunities for sharing projects and resources, as well as discussing teaching and research, not only at conferences, but within their own academic context.

It was essential that we provided faculty with time and opportunities, through these Professional Forums, to engage in meaningful conversations. We recognized that:

Such work to design curriculum continuity is time consuming and not always recognized as important work . . . just as the pre-service teachers need discussion over time, then the same applies to faculties who have a desire to develop a program that will effect change in pre-service teachers' understanding about diversity issues (Potts, Triplett, & Rose, 2008, p. 13).

Through this two-year evolving and ongoing multi-faceted project within one institution with a large teacher education program, we had the opportunity to examine closely how faculty in Higher Education come together to create supportive networks for discussing issues and supporting practices that could significantly enhance their pre-service teachers' understanding of social equity and culturally response practices. Each forum provided enlightening insight, thoughtful discourse, and a supportive network of caring and committed faculty. As Chavez (1990) explains, "Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore. We have seen the future, and the future is ours" (Cesar E. Chavez Foundation). Through these Professional Forums we discovered, as Margaret Mead explained, that one should "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

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