BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

This project built on the work of critical multicultural educators (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Morrell, 2005; Sleeter, 2005) to create a transformational educational framework designed to promote the retention, academic engagement and success, and potential for civic action in students from disenfranchised populations.

Specifically, this project explored how the focus areas of (1) critical thinking; (2) multiculturalism and pluralism; and (3) capacity for civic action can be developed in undergraduate students at the junior and senior levels.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As indicated from a review of current literature, justice oriented pedagogies provide faculty working with preservice teachers with the foundations for transforming their individual methods courses, and thus influence the larger field of public education as well (Darling-Hammond, French and Garcia-Lopez, 2002; and Gorski, 2012). The concepts that emerged from the literature lead to the development of a Justice, Equity, and Empowerment Framework.

Each stage of the framework is designed to build on the learning and experiences fostered in the previous stages, regardless of where students and educators are in terms of their own social justice identities. Such a process could include:

1. Foundations—Undergraduate students fulfill prerequisite requirements for teacher credentialing programs by taking courses designed to develop their ability to think critically about societal issues, particularly those connected to educational access and equity. Such courses also push students to consider the varying stages of multiculturalism and pluralism as well as what they can do to become more civically aware and active in their own communities.

2. Applications—Preservice teachers learn how to apply their knowledge of the sociocultural factors and their students’ backgrounds to their lesson design and implementation. Teacher candidates in this stage of their development as social justice educators build on their sociocultural competencies through researching the backgrounds of their students and forming action plans to provide equitable access to educational opportunities to their students.

3. Expansions—The final stage of the framework builds on the previous two stages for the express purpose of making justice oriented pedagogies and curriculum self-sustaining.

METHODOLOGY

An action research approach was used to complete this project. The following steps were taken during this project: (1) review justice oriented pedagogies; (2) determine how the threshold concepts of EDUC 121, Children’s Multicultural Literature aligned with elements of justice oriented pedagogies; (3) develop and implement curriculum and classroom activities to develop student capacities in the threshold concepts and focus areas of this project; (4) collect and analyze student work; and (5) use the findings to create a Justice, Equity, and Empowerment Framework for use with preservice teachers.

PARTICIPANTS AND DATA SOURCES

The participants (N = 34) in this project included: seniors, 25 (74%); juniors, 9 (26%); males, 14 (41%); and females, 20 (59%). Data was collected from student work including journal entries and writing assignments completed in one section of EDUC 121, Children’s Multicultural Literature during the Spring, 2015 semester.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As indicated by the results of this project, the Justice, Equity, and Empowerment Framework can be applied in a variety of courses, particularly those in the field of education and teacher development. Specific recommendations for applying the Justice, Equity, and Empowerment Framework to coursework for preservice and practicing educators include:

1. Clearly define the articulation of social justice and equity themes among coursework / fieldwork at the various academic levels;
2. Explicitly state the expected social justice and equity outcomes within course syllabus and assignments;
3. Sequence coursework to build on students’ existing social justice and equity awareness and challenge them to expand and act upon such understandings; and
4. Foster a connection (i.e., create activist networks) among the university and communities through teacher activists.

Such recommendations represent the initial stages of what could become a larger movement to create classrooms and school communities that truly serve students and families.

REFERENCES