



Developing Preservice Teachers' Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy

Debra Bukko^{1*} and Kimy Liu²

¹Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, California State University, Stanislaus, Turlock, CA, United States, ²Teacher Education, California State University, Stanislaus, Turlock, CA, United States

Teachers need the knowledge and dispositions to identify and dismantle barriers contributing to persistent educational inequity. This work begins by centering equity in teacher education with a focus on developing teachers' critical consciousness of the systems of power and privilege in educational institutions. Utilizing equity-focused instruction and coaching, this study explored the development of preservice teachers' Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy knowledge and dispositions during a teaching-coaching-reflection transformative learning experience. Participants demonstrated increased Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy, recognizing their assumptions about learners' lived experiences and the funds of knowledge students bring to the learning environment. Findings from this empirical study indicate this approach contributes to the development of the equity-based dispositions essential to dismantling current educational barriers and replacing them with inclusive and empowering instructional practices.

Keywords: teacher education, equity consciousness, equity literacy, transformative learning, self-authorship

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*Correspondence:

Debra Bukko
dbukko@csustan.edu

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher education is critical to the development of teachers' equity consciousness and equity literacy; without this critical consciousness, there is a danger that equity may become yet another empty educational buzzword (Jackson, et al., 2019; Shelton, 2019; Williams and Brown, 2019). Education is rife with buzzwords representing trends driven by socio-political forces; these words become labels ascribed to reform initiatives. Accountability is one such buzzword emerging in the wake of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) to explain changes in curriculum, instructional practices, and test preparation initiatives (Ladd, 2017). However, accountability did little to fulfill the promise of NCLB: elimination of the education debt created by systems that oppress rather than emancipate (Ladson-Billings, 2006). While accountability draws attention to disparities in educational outcomes, it does little to alleviate the severity, prevalence, and root cause of the problems (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

With the passage of the *Every Student Succeeds* (ESSA) legislation, a new term has become prevalent in the educational lexicon: Equity. The intent of ESSA is to prompt examination of systems and identification of practices and procedures creating barriers for historically excluded populations, including minoritized students, students with low socio-economic status (SES), English learners, students with disabilities, and those who are homeless or in foster care (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016). The promise of ESSA is that equity can be achieved by providing all students access to higher-order thinking and learning, multiple measures of equity, and evidence-based interventions (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016).

When meaningfully implemented, accountability and equity can be more than empty or misapplied educational buzzwords. Data (e.g., discipline, graduation, dropout, attendance, and academic testing) within an accountability system provide a means for revealing inequities created by racist, classist, and sexist practices (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Cook-Harvey et al., 2016; Gorski, 2016). Authentic equity-based practices are grounded in intentional identification and removal of the barriers creating inequity; this requires knowledge of the systems of power within educational spaces and an understanding of what equity means. Reform is necessary to create a central focus within teacher preparation programs on providing knowledge and nurturing development of Equity Consciousness (a teacher's belief in the importance of equity and the commitment to ensuring all children receive an equitable and excellent education) and Equity Literacy (cultural knowledge and abilities to disrupt inequity) (Skrla et al., 2009; McKenzie and Skrla, 2011; Sleeter, 2012; Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Gorski, 2018). A first step involves distinguishing equity from equality.

Equity is Not Equality

Educators often mistake the concept of equity with that of equality and use these two terms interchangeably (Jackson et al., 2019; Shelton, 2019; Williams and Brown, 2019). In fact, there is a noteworthy distinction in meaning (Cramer et al., 2018). According to the Center for Public Education (2017), "Equality in education is achieved when students are all treated the same and have access to similar resources. Equity is achieved when all students receive the resources they need." To address educational inequities, both equal access and equitable services must be provided.

To better understand current change initiatives and problems of practice in K-12 school districts, the authors conducted interviews and focus groups with in-service teachers and educational leaders and noted that these educators used the word equity often, but usually in conjunction with descriptions of pacing calendars, professional learning community work, interventions, and reducing suspensions. While the intentions may be well meant, for equity-based change to be realized educators must do more than repackage long-held practices and justify them with a misguided equity label. Equity will only occur if we have a deep understanding of what equity means and then take steps to remove the inequities that oppress students (Skrla et al., 2009; Gorski, 2012; Ladson-Billings et al., 2017).

An outcome of this work with K-12 educators was a commitment by the authors to research, create and implement professional learning designed to develop the Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy of teachers and educational leaders. This work began with a literature review that informed the development of an empirical study to examine the possible impact of equity-focused instruction and coaching, beginning in preservice teacher education and extending through professional learning networks in K-12 educational institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To ground development of an instructional model for use with preservice teachers, a review of literature focused on teacher education and theoretical frameworks of Equity Consciousness, Equity Literacy and Transformative Learning was conducted. Knowledge from this review informed the instructional model and research methods used in the investigation.

Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn

During the teacher preparation program, preservice teachers learn the craft of teaching as apprentices, engaging in practice teaching with a focus on content and instructional pedagogy to develop a better understanding of the perspectives of naive learners and the intricacies inherent in the teaching-learning process (Segall, 2001). While the emphasis on curriculum and instruction is evident, a focus on equity-based practices and dispositions is often absent from most teacher preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Warren, 2018). To fully prepare preservice teachers for the challenge of educating all children, teacher preparation must include three components: content pedagogy, instructional skills, and dispositions for equitable teaching (Warren, 2018). To address this oversight, teacher educators can center coursework and fieldwork to ensure future teachers plan lessons with equity in mind; teachers with equity-based beliefs and dispositions recognize the importance of inclusion, community, social learning, and diversity in creating a student-centered learning experience that is not based solely on hegemonic norms (Beck and Kosnik, 2006; Skrla et al., 2009; McKenzie and Skrla, 2011; Krahenbuhl, 2016). Essential to increasing equity-focused instruction and meaningful change in teacher education practice is knowledge relative to cognitive empathy and relational teaching.

Cognitive Empathy and Relational Teaching

Preservice teachers develop foundational knowledge of content pedagogy that prepares them for the technical aspects of teaching. Equally important is the aspect of relational-thinking and perspective-taking that is at the heart of the practice of cognitive empathy and is also instrumental for equity consciousness when planning for understanding students' unique learning needs (Barr, 2011; Sanford et al., 2015; Warren, 2018).

The first step toward building Equity Conscious educators is supplanting deficit thinking with an asset view of students and families (Skrla et al., 2009; Valencia, 2010; McKenzie and Skrla, 2011; Warren, 2018; Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Imperative to humanizing teaching and creating inclusive environments is the belief that students and their families come to educational institutions not as blank slates but as individuals who possess funds of knowledge that contribute to the learning process (McAlister and Irvine, 2002; Llopert and Esteban-Guitart, 2018).

Relational teaching is based on the premise that teachers will co-construct knowledge with their students so that students are more likely to recognize what they learn as relevant and meaningful (Sanford et al., 2015). When pedagogy is taught

through a relational and empathetic lens, teachers assume students come to school with prior knowledge and experiences that can contribute to sense making and, therefore, facilitate the learning process. They teach in ways that build on that foundation, designing instruction to make explicit connections to integrate new learning with students' culture-based knowledge and previous academic learning (McAllister and Irvine, 2002; Brownlee and Berthelsen, 2008; Barr, 2011; Llopert and Esteban-Guitart, 2018).

Recognizing the funds of knowledge students bring to education and authentically taking their perspectives will not happen without deliberate instruction and practice of these skills during preservice education coursework (Llopert and Esteban-Guitart, 2018; Llopert et al., 2018). Learning to consider the perspectives of others is a teachable skill. As was concluded by Barr (2011) teacher education programs "need to focus more on training future teachers to recognize and exercise their cognitive empathic capacities" (p. 368), including planning lessons with the students' knowledge and perspectives in mind.

Teaching future teachers about relational teaching is critical; however, without creating learning opportunities for teachers to practice implementation of relational-thinking in the context of classroom instruction this discussion may be no more than a hypothetical academic exercise. Little impact is created when abstract discussion is not put into concrete practice within a real world context (Sanford et al., 2015; Blanchard et al., 2018). An understanding of Equity Consciousness, Equity Literacy, Transformative Learning and Self-Authorship theoretical frameworks can guide this important change in teacher education practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

To facilitate preservice teachers' learning and capacity to embrace and enact equity-based educational practices, teacher educators must ensure future teachers learn and can articulate the difference between equality (all get the same) and equity (each receives what is needed). Integrating Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy within preservice teachers' professional knowledge is required to achieve this mission. Recognizing the dimensions of adult learning and the importance of relevance and situational learning, teacher education programs which create transformative learning experiences may guide preservice teachers to identify and critically assess their assumptions and beliefs about students, teaching, and learning and the roles of teachers and students in this process (Kegan, 2000; Cranton, 2016).

Teaching content knowledge and instructional strategies can be prescribed and a "formula" can be provided; however, equity-based dispositions require opportunities for adult learners to engage in self-authorship: "the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity and social relations" (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 269). Baxter Magolda (1992) identified three key learning environment principles that support development of self-authorship: 1) validating the learners' capacity to know; 2) situating learning in learners; and 3) mutually constructing

meaning. Creating learning experiences in which future teachers develop awareness and critical consciousness of their beliefs and dispositions provides a framework for developing Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy.

Equity Consciousness

Building on work relative to Equity Consciousness and effective equity-based teaching practices (Skrla et al., 2009; McKenzie and Skrla, 2011), McKenzie (2016) argued discipline-specific content pedagogy, student-centered instructional pedagogy, and Equity Consciousness serve as foundational elements in teacher preparation. Using the metaphor of a three-legged stool, McKenzie explained that the first leg of the stool is content; teachers must possess deep content knowledge and pedagogy specific to effectively teaching that content. The second leg of the stool is pedagogical knowledge that aims to improve learning processes and outcomes. Instructors must use instructional practices that ensure all learners are included in instruction and that barriers to equitable learning are removed (e.g., whiteboards and random selection to reduce bias when checking for understanding). The third leg of the stool is Equity Consciousness—a teacher's belief in the importance of equity and the commitment to ensuring all children receive an equitable and excellent education.

Skrla et al. (2009) define Equity Consciousness as the belief that all students, regardless of gender, race, class, culture or religion, are capable of high levels of success. McKenzie and Skrla (2011) further explain Equity Consciousness as an individual's level of awareness regarding the degree to which others receive equitable treatment, how well they understand the concept of inequity, and how willing they are to be authentically engaged in redressing inequity. Equity Consciousness is centered on the belief that traditional systems include barriers to equity that marginalize others and that those with fully developed Equity Consciousness purposefully work to identify, dismantle, and replace inequitable practices with systems that include high expectations and support success for all students. The Equity Consciousness Continuum as developed by Skrla et al. (2009) includes five levels: *None* (no knowledge of equity and a deficit view of students); *Limited* (some understanding of equity for some subgroups); *Inauthentic* (developed Equity Consciousness and articulates but does not always act according to those beliefs); *Vacillating* (developed and deep understanding of equity but may not always follow beliefs when pressured); and *Authentic* (deep understanding of the necessity to implement equity).

Equity Literacy

Complementing the concept of Equity Consciousness, Gorski (2018) contends a framework of Equity Literacy enables educators to disrupt persistent patterns of inequity. In the Equity Literacy framework, educators strive for proficiency in cultural knowledge and also in developing four specific abilities to advocate for equity. First, they must be able to *Recognize* bias and inequity, even when it is subtly manifested. Second, they need the ability to *Respond* to inequity immediately. Third, they work to *Redress* bias moving into the future. Fourth, they have the ability

to *Create and Sustain* equitable and bias-free environments in schools, classrooms, and institutional cultures.

The basic principles of Equity Literacy are based on transformative practice and critical consciousness. Gorski (2016) asserts that attending to diversity and cultural competence of educators is not enough because these approaches do not disrupt inequity. As part of his work with the Equity Literacy Institute, Gorski (2018) provides eight principles of Equity Literacy: 1) direct confrontation with inequity; 2) recognizing the “poverty of culture” is actually a power and privilege problem; 3) equity ideology as a lens and commitment; 4) prioritizing the initiatives to provide the greatest impact on marginalized populations; 5) redistributing resources to increase access and opportunity; 6) “Fix Injustice, Not Kids”; 7) realizing that one size fits few; and 8) using evidence rather than fads or trends to drive action (<http://www.equityliteracy.org>).

Developing the inclusive attitudes and practices essential to Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy requires opportunities for transformative learning so preservice teachers experience inquiry and perspective taking regarding difference, equity, and inclusion and the impact of oppressive and inequitable practices on student learning (Beck and Kosnik, 2006).

Transformative Learning

Transformative Learning posits that through experiences that challenge existing beliefs, individuals gain new perspectives. Mezirow (2000) identified ten phases that contribute to transformative learning: a disorienting dilemma, self-examination of assumptions, critical reflection on assumptions, recognition of dissatisfaction, exploration of alternatives, plan for action, acquisition of new knowledge, experimentation with roles, competence building, and reintegration of new perspectives into one’s life. For transformation to occur an individual need not experience all phases; nor must the phases be experienced in a given order.

To be transformative, an individual must experience learning that raises consciousness. Through the work of scholars like Freire (2000), consciousness-raising has been associated with freeing individuals from oppression and this freedom stems from the critical reflection that expands self-knowledge. Cranton (2016) explained that while some may experience transformative learning through exposure to new knowledge, consciousness-raising more often occurs when individuals engage in perspective taking that is dissonant to the typical habits of mind from which they have previously constructed meaning.

One approach to creating a disorienting dilemma that can prompt learners to engage in critical self-assessment and perspective taking is role play. Cranton (2016) argues, “for role play to lead to consciousness-raising, debriefing is important. Participants should have the opportunity to discuss their experience fully, especially what it felt like to view the situation from an alternative perspective” (p. 111). A transformative learning experience creates opportunities for learner empowerment. The learner can engage in critical consciousness-raising by questioning assumptions and perspectives, engaging in rational dialogue, revising habits of

mind, and planning for different action based on the transformative experience (Cranton, 2016).

Integrating knowledge of cognitive empathy, relational teaching, Equity Consciousness, Equity Literacy, and Transformative Learning provides a foundation on which construction of revisions to current teacher preparation practices can be made. To prepare teachers with the knowledge and dispositions needed to rise to the challenge of implementing authentic equity-based practices, there is a need to understand preservice teachers’ Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy. This knowledge may inform future professional learning for educators to ensure that equity does not become yet another meaningless educational “buzzword.”

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to seek better understanding of the Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy levels and perceptions of preservice teachers regarding the needs of diverse students, including English learners and students with specific learning disabilities. Moreover, the researchers attempted to examine how guided rehearsal and reflection through role play may help preservice teachers to develop self-authorship and Equity Consciousness. Further, it was important to understand the degree to which participants might perceive such an approach as beneficial for their professional development in equitably serving diverse student populations in K-12 schools. Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because it allowed for interpretation of meaning from participants’ lived experiences during the instructional model (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Participants

Participants included 12 preservice teachers, one of whom identifies as male, enrolled in a teacher education reading and language arts in special education methods class. Seven planned to work at the elementary level and five at secondary. Six of the students self-identified as Black, African-American, Latina or mixed race and the other six identified as White. None of these participants had begun their student teaching.

Procedure

This study included three rounds of lesson simulations conducted in four separate research sessions over a 12 week period. During the simulations, participants played the role of teacher, student, and observer. Each simulation included active content-focused instructional coaching and debriefings by the second author. The first author video-recorded the simulations and debriefings and provided equity-focused instruction and coaching relative to consideration of K-12 students’ perspectives, equity literacy framework principles, and the impact of instructional moves on school-age children as learners and as individuals.

When playing the teacher, the participant developed and delivered a mini-lesson focused on literacy. In the role of student, participants enacted the learning profile they had created of an elementary age child with disabilities. When

acting as observers, participants watched the interaction between the teacher and student, taking note of both instructional and interactional evidence of teaching and learning.

Each participant played the role of teacher, student, and observer in at least two of the three simulation rounds. During each simulation, the second author would observe for teachable moments and would stop the simulation to provide in-the-moment coaching. She would model and explain specific teaching strategies and provide insight into the impact of content pedagogy on student learning. The simulation then resumed to give the teacher and student an opportunity to apply learning from the coaching session. When the lesson ended, the authors then engaged the observers in an intermission coaching session.

During intermission, participants shared their observations of effective practices on the part of both the teacher and the student and provided suggestions for what they might have done differently or what more they would like to see the teacher and student do. At this point, the first author also provided equity-focused coaching. The second author would then direct the teacher and student to an area of focus and the simulation resumed for another 3 to 5 min. After each simulation, participants changed roles, shifting from one role to another for the next simulation. Over the course of the first three research sessions, participants enacted each of the roles (teacher, student, observer) at least two times.

Participants and the authors engaged in debriefing sessions following each simulation round. During debriefings, participants shared how they felt while enacting each of the three roles. They unpacked their realizations about the difference between learning about theory and enacting pedagogy in a teaching situation. The authors prompted metacognition and self-awareness through questions designed to probe participants' assumptions about the teaching process, the learning needs of students, and the lived experiences of the diverse students they will be teaching in the future. In response to participant comments, the authors provided explanations and suggestions for culturally inclusive teaching and equity-based practices when working with students and families.

Following the simulations, participants watched the simulation videos and completed a written reflection on the learning gained from enacting each of the three roles. In addition to reflecting on content and instructional pedagogy, participants responded to equity-based prompts to make visible participants' thinking regarding asset and deficit views of students and how these views may have changed throughout the simulations, coaching, and debriefing sessions. During the final research session, the first author facilitated a focus group during which participants articulated their content, instructional skills, and equity consciousness learning over the course of the three simulations.

Data Sources and Analysis

Transcripts of the videotaped simulations, debriefing sessions, and focus group interviews were the primary data sources. To substantiate and provide contextual information of the primary data, secondary data were collected, including participant-created

lesson outlines, student profiles, observation notes, and written reflections.

Guided by Transformative Learning theory, Equity Consciousness, and Equity Literacy frameworks, the researchers utilized a comparative analytic approach to derive meaning from the results (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Transcripts from each simulation and subsequent debriefing sessions were coded. Data from one simulation to the next were then compared with an analytical focus on the degree of change relative to Equity Consciousness levels and Equity Literacy abilities.

Over multiple joint coding sessions, the researchers engaged in analytical jotting and memoing to identify deeper or underlying issues or patterns for further analysis (Miles et al., 2019). Member checking was conducted by presenting initial interpretations to participants to check for plausibility of findings (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the small sample size and the absence of pre and post self-assessment data on the participants' Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy levels, content pedagogy, and teaching skills. Therefore, it is difficult to qualify and quantify the effect of the transformative learning experience on participants' learning gains in these areas.

RESULTS

Results are presented within the context of the five levels (*None, Limited, Inauthentic, Vacillating, Authentic*) of the Equity Consciousness framework (Skrla et al., 2009) and within the four abilities (*Recognize, Respond, Redress, Create and Sustain*) of the Equity Literacy framework (Gorski, 2018). In addition, results are framed using the Equity Literacy principles of *Fix Injustice, Not Kids* and *Equity Ideology* (Gorski, 2018). Evidence of developing Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy emerged from a comparative analysis of one rehearsal and reflection simulation to the next.

Findings indicate that during the first simulation participants did not provide evidence of Equity Consciousness or Equity Literacy. Nor did they *Recognize* their assumptions regarding students and their lived realities. In the second simulation, participants evidenced some awareness of Equity Consciousness in that they consciously used non-specific terms for family members or provided the opportunity for students to share who the individuals are in their support systems. They were more conscious of the reality that not all families and dynamics within a family are the same. Throughout the six rounds of role play in simulation three, consistent evidence of Equity Consciousness development was noted for all participants. Examples include teacher efforts to connect lesson vocabulary to languages spoken by the student, demonstrating awareness that English learners have funds of knowledge on which they can co-construct their new learning. Findings derived from analysis of each of the three rounds of simulations and participants' written reflections are provided.

Evidence of Equity Consciousness Levels and Equity Literacy Abilities

Simulation One. The most obvious assumption made by participants was that all children live in traditional family environments. This was evidenced by multiple teachers when checking for understanding or helping students to make connections to the text (*The Surprise Family* by Lynn Reiser) in the reading lesson. Prompts included statements that revealed an assumption that all children have a mom in their lives: “like when your mom has her arms around you (in an attempt to evoke a response from students about a warm feeling)” and “If you did that (running into water like the ducklings) to your mom (who was a hen in the book), would she be worried?”.

Participants also asked many questions, most of which were at the recall level, reflecting a low level of expectations for student funds of knowledge or abilities. In addition, multiple participants posed questions and then, without waiting, answered the questions themselves. No follow-up questions (such as “How do you know?”) were asked to prompt students to provide evidence to support their answers or to explain their thinking.

During the debriefing, in the context of discussing how to ask in-depth questions to monitor student’s comprehension, the authors framed discussion to guide participants toward unpacking the assumptions and unconscious bias from which they operated when developing instructional questions. For example, in this story, with ducklings and a hen as characters, the word gizzard was used in conjunction with the word grit. The teacher in the lesson told the student, “you would never eat that” unconsciously dismissing the reality that in some cultures the gizzard is considered a delicacy. A similar bias was evident when a teacher did not attempt to explain what grit was as she assumed it was an easily decodable word. Overall, the participating teachers in simulation one operated at the level of no Equity Consciousness or Equity Literacy.

Simulation Two. *Nasreen’s Secret School* by Jeanette Winter, a true story from Afghanistan, was used in simulation two. Participants were instructed to ask probing questions to facilitate students’ use of words to describe feelings. When participants asked questions to activate a student’s prior knowledge, their questions were not based on assumptions about the narrowly defined typical family:

Teacher (pointing at the book): What’s happening to Nasreen right here?

Student: The grandma is hugging her.

Teacher: Who helps you feel safe?

Teacher: When do people usually get hugged?

Student: When you’re feeling sad. When someone hugs me I feel safe.

Student: My grandma and my aunt.

In this instance, the teacher did not assume the child had a mom in her life to make her feel safe. She did not ask a rhetorical question, such as “just like your mom?” Instead, she asked an open and neutral question: “Who helps you feel safe at home?” Similar examples were evident in simulation two, which suggests

the simulation one debriefing and coaching influenced the participants’ Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy. However, in this example, the teacher did not prompt the student to elaborate upon what feeling safe means.

The plausible assumption was that feeling safe is a universally understood concept and there was no need to check for understanding. This participant’s Equity Consciousness was at the *Limited* level and she demonstrated the Equity Literacy ability of *Recognition*. She was aware of equity and had an asset view of a student’s home life. Between simulations one and two, the *Fix Injustice, Not Kids* Equity Literacy principle was evidenced in that the participants *Recognized* they needed to change their previously inequitable practices to *Create* conditions that empower rather than marginalize students.

Cultural assumptions and bias were evident in simulation two. This was most obvious when the teacher pointed to a picture of males in a story set in the Middle East and said, “they’re sneaky” to describe boys who were, in fact, attempting to distract soldiers in an effort to protect their friends. Later in the story, she points to another male character and says, “he’s bad”. Importantly, the Author’s Notes for the book provide key background information essential to understanding the story: girls were not allowed to go to school after the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan; women were not allowed to leave home without a male relative as a chaperone; and women were not allowed to work outside of the home. All of the simulation teachers omitted this information in their lessons. Without explicitly referencing the background information, the teacher could not help naive learners fully comprehend the events that were outside of their life experience when discussing the complex emotions exhibited in one of the conflicts of the story. In addition, by referring to the characters as sneaky and bad without referencing the cultural context of the story, students’ learning was limited to the deficit view the teachers exhibited regarding the characters. In this example, the teacher’s Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy ability operated at the *None* level.

Attempts at higher levels of questions were evident in simulation two. While some participants continued to ask basic recall questions beginning with *who* or *what*, or could be answered with yes or no responses, others had prepared questions designed to unpack student thinking such as “Why do you think that happened?” “What would you have done?” Some participants still struggled with the dynamics of asking questions and listening for student responses. For most participants, when questions that could probe at deeper levels of understanding were posed, teachers often missed the opportunity to unpack student thinking. In the following example, the teacher appeared to recognize the symbolism of the dark cloud and foreshadowing of a major event (Taliban Soldiers knocking on the door of the secret school). However, the teacher did not follow with higher expectations for evidence of student learning:

Teacher (pointing to text): Look, there are those clouds again. Do you think they’re a good sign?

Student: No.

Teacher: Probably not.

While the teacher in this example operated at the *None* level during teaching, during the debriefing session she evidenced *Limited* Equity Consciousness and the Equity Literacy ability of *Recognition*. During the debriefing, she articulated realization of her low level of expectations: “I am not asking them deep enough questions; they can do more” and engaged in dialogue with her colleagues regarding how to support students in ascribing words to feelings and making inferences. Through this dialogue the participants engaged in a conversation focused on the *Fix Injustice, Not Kids* Equity Literacy principle. They articulated the importance of changing their practices and not seeing the students as deficient.

During the debriefing, in the context of affect labeling (putting feelings into words) participants discussed what it means to be open to a new idea and to taking the perspectives of others. They acknowledged the instructor’s coaching to explore beyond simple emotions (happy, sad, and mad) helped them realize the need to teach students to make connections between their experiences and that of characters in the text. For example, that people can cry for joy as well as sorrow, which was demonstrated by the main character Nasreen. They also explored the varied emotions experienced by different people in the same situation, demonstrating a connection to being culturally inclusive. More importantly, participants were coached to use analogy (such as open and closed doors) to help students understand an abstract concept, such as feeling open. They also referenced their realization that they can guide students to talk about how their bodies feel when they experience certain emotions.

The participants also demonstrated heightened Equity Consciousness when they stated their new understanding that one student (in the hegemonic group) understanding the concepts does not mean all learners will understand them as immediately. Participants articulated their realization regarding the importance of checking for understanding and inviting students who might otherwise be marginalized into classroom discourse. In these instances, participants were operating on the *Limited* level of Equity Consciousness and the *Recognizing* ability of Equity Literacy. Importantly, this was also an indicator of participants developing the *Equity Ideology* principle (Gorski, 2018), recognizing that equity is a way of thinking and not merely an instructional strategy.

Simulation Three. Participants consistently demonstrated awareness that families are multifaceted. Asking open ended questions like, “who lives in your house?” and “who might do that for you?” showed recognition that each child may have a family dynamic that is different from the teachers’ lived experiences.

When checking for understanding, it was apparent teachers continued to struggle with higher level questioning. However, there was evidence that they were aware of the importance of engaging with each student in the group. One teacher playing the role of the student stepped out of the simulation and commented to peers that when asking students to make connections to the text, the teacher “had thoughtful conversation with each student, not just one or two as

teachers often do. She encourages students and makes it o.k. that they all have different answers”.

One participant not only asked guiding questions to help students with disabilities (as enacted by the participant) unpack what jealous means, but also prompted students to generate a real-world solution, “What can you do the next time you feel this way?” A defining element of Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy is having high expectations for all students. In this instance, asking students with disabilities the same high level questions a gifted student might receive is an indicator of the Equity Consciousness based disposition and *Equity Ideology* principle that all children are capable of performing at high levels.

When analyzing data relative to cultural inclusiveness in simulation three, the first indicator of developing Equity Consciousness was evidenced in the diversity of books selected for the lesson. In addition to topics exploring emotions, adoption, acceptance, and stories related to friendship, characters were representative of ethnicities, cultures, and customs other than those typically represented in hegemonic curriculum. Selections provided rich opportunities for teacher-created lessons that centered diversity and inclusion. While participants struggled with how to discuss these concepts within a literacy lesson, their attempts to engage with the children (as enacted by fellow adult learners) in the lesson indicated their awareness of the importance of lessons that include and value what students bring to the learning environment. Teachers made a concerted effort to invite and encourage each student to join the discussion, including using peer-assisted mediated learning to have other students paraphrase what the teacher just said and then the teacher checked for understanding. These actions suggest that the preservice teachers were operating at *Developing* Equity Consciousness as well as *Recognizing* and *Responding* Equity Literacy abilities. Through these actions, participants evidenced dispositions reflecting the Equity Literacy principles of *Fix Injustice, Not Kids* and *Equity Ideology*.

During the third debriefing session, participants who played the role of student discussed what they had learned about constructing a learner profile for a student with disabilities and staying in character during the lesson enactment. Participants who played the role of teachers commented on the challenge of teaching students about a complex emotion such as jealousy when students do not know the meaning of the word. Each participant recognized that they had made a marked improvement in creating student-friendly yet rigorous explanations. Teachers also articulated learning about the importance of utilizing the funds of knowledge that students bring to their own learning processes. Evidencing the *Equity Ideology* principle, they stated that they were responsible to help students make sense of what they were learning and grappled with multiple ways to teach vocabulary knowledge and comprehension, particularly, as one participant illustrated, “because each student has their unique learning needs and knowledge to build upon”. These discussions suggested that, while only at preliminary levels, all participants made marked

progress in their development of Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy over the duration of the study.

Final debriefing and written reflection. Following the third simulation, participants submitted a written reflection based on their own simulation three teaching videos. In this reflection, they described what they had learned in the three rounds of simulations, from in-the-moment and intermission coaching, and post observation debriefing. Most participants commented on gaining in-depth content pedagogy knowledge in how to teach vocabulary knowledge and comprehension strategies. They explored their own assumptions when they developed their lesson outlines and assumed the teacher roles. Participants also explained their learning as a result of constructing a learner profile and their efforts to stay in character when enacting the role of a student during the lesson. All reflected upon how they felt and reacted when “students” gave an unexpected answer and the importance of examining and reflecting upon these reactions.

Three themes emerged from analysis of participants’ written reflections. Participants grappled with questions such as “What are my assumptions?” “How do I include students’ viewpoints in the lessons?” and “How do my beliefs about my students impact my lesson preparation and teaching?” Results are presented here using Cranton (2016) reflective questions for habits of mind and kinds of knowledge relative to Content, Process, and Premise.

Content: “What are my assumptions?”

- I learned I have to think more when preparing the lessons. I need to think about what the students already know and what they need and not just what the textbook says. Making sure I am thinking about their cultural knowledge and what they have learned before will help make sure they get what they need.
- I definitely think this gave me the opportunity to get a glimpse of what my areas of growth are. It did get me thinking about how I would react in a situation. I’m glad I know now not to make a student feel bad by assuming their family is like mine. I know I would feel terrible if a student said, “Oh, well I don’t have a mom.” Now I know not to assume things about a student’s life.

Process: “How did I integrate others’ points of view?”

- I appreciate when a classmate talked about the tears and crying for different reasons. I think it’s good also because it makes students feel that they’re not alone - they feel more connected to other people. Like, “Oh, I’m not different. I’m just like somebody else. Somebody else understands me.”
- I realize it’s difficult to draw things out of people without feeding them too much vocabulary. Relating it to their prior knowledge is a good way to do it. I liked examples of similes and bringing students into it by activating their own experiences. Role playing helped me see that students know things we can build upon.

Premise: “Why Should I Revise or not Revise my Perspective?”

- When I played the student it really put learning into perspective for me. Some of the parts I really didn’t know, and it was nice to have a teacher who is encouraging and not just giving you the answer. I had a little bit of a struggle in the lesson, but once I got it, I felt a lot better about it. I know now that it is ok for a student to have a productive struggle.
- I’ve learned it is important to be careful. Playing the student and creating a learner profile helped because we need to know our students. Also I think there’s a possible problem with the learner profile. We are putting them in a box and not giving them a chance. I thought, ‘What if I put him with the stronger readers? He could be a stronger reader. I put him in the weaker box, and I’ve labeled him. I’ve put a label on a child that probably already has a million labels, and I’ve just done that to them. So I have learned you need to be careful.

Reflections shared in debriefings and written reflections suggest participants first experienced a disorienting dilemma and attempted to engage in critical self-reflection and rational dialogue with their peers and coaches to reconcile the competing ideas. Participant reflections indicated their views about learning to teach, teaching to learn, and equity were transformed during this experiential learning.

DISCUSSION

When comparing the data from one simulation experience to the next, participants evidenced growth in Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy. Over the course of all three simulations, they moved from *None* toward *Limited* Equity Consciousness, demonstrating developing understanding of equity. In terms of Equity Literacy, they evidenced the ability to *Recognize* bias and deficit views and to plan lessons in an attempt to *Respond* to biases in the immediate term. In addition, their growth in equity dispositions was reflected in evidence of their enactment of the *Fix Injustice*, *Not Kids* and *Equity Ideology* Equity Literacy principles. Importantly, participants shared that equity-focused coaching during the simulations and during debriefings helped them to understand that equity and equality are different and that there is no one size fits all teaching approach.

Evidence of participants’ growth in relation to Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy can be further understood within the framework of Transformative Learning. Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy sense-making was developed during the debriefing sessions, focus group, and reflective writing exercises, providing evidence of the importance of perspective taking and critical reflection in the transformative learning experience. “At the heart of Mezirow (2000) theory of transformative learning is critical reflection and critical self-reflection—questioning assumptions and perspectives” (Cranton, 2016, p. 50). While engaging in the simulations and being the center of attention for other adult learners, participants experienced a disorienting dilemma. In playing each of the three roles (teacher, student, observer), participants gained a 360° view

of a teaching-learning environment which was further explored in debriefing sessions.

Through debriefing and reflection, participants realized that how they teach is integral to how students respond. At the end of each simulation, participants and the researchers engaged in debriefings, during which they critically examined the learning experience. Building on Mezirow's work, Cranton (2016) developed reflective questions for the habits of mind and kinds of knowledge that individuals experience in transformative learning situations. In the debriefing sessions and the final focus group, participants articulated evidence of these habits of mind and development of Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy dispositions. They realized the importance of recognizing and maximizing upon the funds of knowledge students bring to the learning process and that seeing students from asset rather than deficit views is critical (Skrla et al., 2009; Valencia, 2010).

From this transformative learning experience, these future teachers became consciously aware of their assumptions, the value in taking the perspective of others, and how they can further develop their teaching and learning practice to more fully evolve their Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy abilities (Cranton, 2016). "Equitable educators should be proficient not only with cultural knowledge, but also with the knowledge and skills to ensure and advocate for equity" (Gorski, 2018). Awareness that inequities are issues of power and privilege and of the need to recognize and respond to bias and inequity is the first step toward authentic Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy (Gorski, 2018).

Teacher Education Program Significance

Centering equity knowledge and development of equity beliefs and dispositions is critical to the preparation of teachers. A traditional textbook-reading and lecture-giving method of delivery is neither sufficient nor effective. Similarly, writing a detailed lesson is a good academic exercise for preparing to teach, but it does not adequately address preservice teachers' blind spots when teaching diverse learners. Learning experiences that support teachers in achieving self-authorship and critical consciousness are needed throughout teacher education programs. To achieve the goal of recognizing and dismantling systems of oppression in educational spaces, teachers must learn about Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy.

Equity-based practice is teachable, just like content and instructional pedagogy. In this study, we integrated Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy development with clinical skills. One-size-fits-all approaches and instruction delivered from a hegemonic perspective meets the needs of few learners, including preservice teachers (Sleeter, 2012; Bauml, 2016; Gorski, 2018). Preservice teachers need instruction, guidance, and support so they are better equipped to perceive and process what teaching to learn entails in their professional development and how their students can benefit from this reflective practice (Teemant et al., 2011). Essential to success with all learners is a teacher who is well versed in Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy as well as content pedagogy and instructional skills.

This study explored the efficacy of teaching preservice teachers the concepts of Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy within a reading methods class. Instead of limiting learning by asking preservice teachers to write a detailed lesson plan and to perform a lesson demonstration, we engaged these future educators in the innovative approach of learning to teach through a lesson simulation-coaching-reteaching-debriefing experience.

Participants demonstrated enthusiasm when learning about equity; they were eager to integrate Equity Consciousness and Equity Literacy alongside content and instructional pedagogy. Adding Equity Consciousness as the "third leg" of teacher preparation will shift the dynamics of teaching, increasing the number of teachers who enact the belief that all students can learn (McKenzie, 2016) and that equity approaches that fail to directly confront inequity play a significant role in sustaining inequity (Gorski, 2018). To help preservice teachers understand and develop an *Equity Ideology*, we need to equip them with conceptual understanding and guide them to develop confidence in these belief systems before entering the profession (Blanchard et al., 2018; Gorski, 2018). Teachers need to see students beyond perceived deficits and weaknesses. They must guide students to utilize their life experiences, cultural heritage, personal strengths, and interests to enhance their learning processes and to improve their learning outcomes (Brown, 2007).

Another equity disposition teachers need is the ability to ask guiding questions to help students unpack their thinking. Posing high-quality guiding questions is positively correlated to Equity Literacy and Equity Consciousness, without which teachers struggle to ask questions that are practical, relevant, and meaningful to learners (Cramer et al., 2018). In responding to such questions, children can develop the critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills intended within the ESSA legislation.

CONCLUSION

This study explored a transformative learning experience that included equity-based instruction and coaching as a means to develop preservice teacher Equity Consciousness so they will be prepared to enact Equity Literacy and to accurately distinguish the concepts of equity and equality. Findings from this study indicate that as a result of their learning these participants are more prepared to challenge when equity is being used erroneously or as a buzzword. Results indicate participants were highly responsive to coaching and quick to implement practices following equity-focused coaching. Further research building on this initial study is needed with preservice teachers. Additionally, the approach shows potential for positive impact with in-service educators, particularly instructional coaches working with classroom teachers, mentors working with induction teachers, and administrators in their role as instructional leaders.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the California State University Stanislaus

Institutional Review Board. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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