

## Inquiry Based Method: A Case Study to Reduce Levels of Resistance

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This article is based on a case study exploring the effectiveness of inquiry-based method of teaching to reduce levels of student resistance to diversity issues and increase students' willingness to become activists. The case study draws from a one-year action research conducted in a Foundations of Education class. Data were collected through class discussions, informal interviews, reflective journals, papers, and observations. The results of the case study showed that application of the inquiry based method reduced levels of resistance and increased students' willingness to engage in activism. The results of this case study may be meaningful not only in the field of education but also in other fields of study that are presented with student resistance.

Teacher educators (Ladson-Billings, 2001; hooks, 2003; Thompson, 2004) have written extensively about student teachers' resistance in classes that seek to unveil institutional oppression of some groups in society. Ladson-Billings (2001) asserts that students manifest resistance to diversity issues in various ways, including the use of nonverbal communication such as silence. hooks (2003) also points out that if the professor teaching about social justice issues is a woman of color, as I am, such resistance is heightened, as many students perceive that professor as pushing her/his own agenda on them. Consequently, it is sometimes difficult to get students to move beyond resistance and sincerely engage with diversity issues. The purpose of this case study was to investigate the efficacy of the inquiry based method of teaching in reducing students' resistance to social justice issues and increasing students' willingness to engage in activism. The case study was undertaken over the course of one year in a Foundations of Education course that critically explores the social construction of schooling and how individuals within schools are impacted by larger social forces. Invariably, the course deals with issues of privilege and subordination within and outside of the education system.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Constructivist and critical theories anchor the inquiry-based method of teaching for this case study. Constructivist theory is based on the assumption that learning is an active process (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978) whereupon a student is not a receptor of information that she or he is expected to regurgitate at the end of the semester. Constructivist theory posits that students have to actively participate in the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of knowledge. It argues that the learning process should afford students with an experience, grounded in reality, that compels them to examine, form, and modify their

values and belief systems (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). Modification of these beliefs is critical in the development of students and learning in general.

One of the vehicles for constructivist theory is the inquiry based method of learning and teaching. The inquiry-based method is premised on four primary notions: (a) that knowledge is constructed, (b) learning is a journey or a process, (c) students have experiences which impact learning, and (d) learning is an interactive process (Marcum-Dietrich, 2008).

Lee (2004) defines the inquiry-based method of learning and teaching as a "range of strategies used to promote learning through students' active and increasing independent investigation of questions, problems and issues" (p. 9). The questions or problems that the students investigate have to, according to Dewey (1938), emanate from tension between the student and the environment. This tension or disequilibrium between the student's worldview and the environment is an essential component for growth, learning, and reconstruction of experience (Dewey, 1938). Tension induced questions or problems constitute the first step of the method, followed by an investigation of the identified problem in the real world context. Investigation of the problem entails students testing their hypothesis or beliefs.

Critical reflection also plays a salient role in the inquiry-based education. When students are investigating their questions or problems, they have to critically reflect on their old and new experiences (Plowright & Watkins, 2004). Freire (1994) points out that inquiry-based method of teaching and learning divorced from critical problem analysis and reflection does not offer students an opportunity to be agents of change and transformation. Instead it merely allows them to ruminate over the problem without any willingness to take action toward solving it. Echoing Freire's assertion, Lutterman-Aguilar (2004) posits that inquiry based education "without critical analysis and reflection is not experiential education; it is simply

experience” (p. 1). Therefore, the inquiry-based method of teaching has to be coupled with critical reflection on how students are positioned as both agents and victims of oppressive structures and their role in transforming those structures.

By requiring students to engage with the real world and society, the inquiry-based method affords students with “opportunities to learn through inquiry rather than simple transmission of knowledge, training in the skills necessary for oral and written communication...and opportunities to interact with people of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences different from the student’s own” (The Boyer Commission, 1998, p.12-13). Being able to interact with individuals who have had different experiences from theirs, students can see the world “as another would see it” (Dewey, 1916, p.5) so that the “other” person’s vantage point can be understood and appreciated. Seeing through another person’s lenses is what Lutterman-Aguilar calls (2004) “border crossing” in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, economic class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ability, which is fundamental to an educative process in courses that deal with diversity issues. Sleeter (1993) cautions that “border crossing” alone, however, is inadequate as it can reinforce stereotypes and replicate positions of power and subjugation. For example, in a study of white pre-service teachers who student taught in schools populated by students of color, she found that the stereotypes that the white pre-service teachers held about students of color prevailed after “border crossing”.

Leistyna (1999) also reported that most diversity courses use cursory forms of “border crossing” by only exposing students to cultural artifacts and foods from cultures dissimilar to theirs. This part of learning reifies the us/them dichotomy. For instance, when students take a trip to Chinatown, they are engaging in a form of border crossing, but, as Sleeter and Grant (1988) pointed out, “this is no guarantee that they will learn about issues such as the poverty in Chinatown or the psychological devastation that many Asian immigrants face” (p. 13). The inquiry-based method requires that students avert reinforcement of such stereotypes by remaining in dialogue with the instructor and fellow students about their new experiences. Such dialogue allows students to critically reflect on their experiences and avoid pitfalls of “border crossing” that may lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes.

Another theory that was foundational to this case study is critical theory. Central to critical theory is the notion of *conscientization*. According to Freire (1970), *conscientization* is critical cognizance of economic, social, cultural, and political attributes that shape human relations. Such cognizance requires that a student locates herself or himself within social and historical antecedents. When she or he has done that,

she or he may begin to see how her or his position facilitates or/and thwarts democracy. Bartolome (1994) also speaks of the relevance of critical consciousness. She points out that critical consciousness, or what she calls political clarity, can only exist when a person recognizes that she or he is shaped by her or his location in a hierarchically structured society. That political clarity will then propel an individual to work toward dismantling of structures that make her or him an agent of oppression and/or a subject of oppression. Without political clarity, Bartolome argues, one cannot move toward transformation of oppressive structures.

Both constructivist and critical theory call for authentic forms of learning. They both postulate that authentic learning is anchored by inquiry into real life issues, critical reflection, and, in case of critical theory, consciousness. The inquiry-based method of learning and teaching is a medium for authentic learning as it is based on the investigation of real life problems anchored by critical reflection (Dewey, 1938).

## Methods

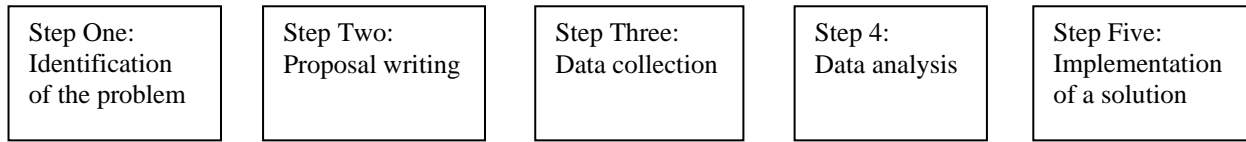
### Course Background and Participants

The case study draws from a Foundations of Education course that deals with history, philosophy, and overarching issues of social justice in education. The course is designed to introduce student teachers to the impact of macro social forces and ideologies on education. For instance, students explore the impact of capitalism as a social force on public education in the United States. The overarching aims of social justice education, which entail educating for a non-oppressive society regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and ability, formulate the framework of the course.

Students take the course to fulfill a general education requirement for a teacher certification program. They register for the course either in their second or third year of college. Similar to national teacher education demographics, the majority of the students in the course were white women who self reported to be middle class (Wasonga & Pivoral, 2004). In the two classes that inform this case study, which took place over a year, there was one woman of color; the rest of the students were white. A total of 50 students participated in the case study.

Primary textbooks for the course were Loewen’s (1995) *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*; Hooks’ (2000) *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*; and Tyack’s (2007) *Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society*. Articles relevant to the themes discussed in class, for example, McIntosh’s (1996) “White Privilege and Male Privilege” and Thompson’s (2003) “Tiffany: Friends of People of Color” on the theme of white privilege, supplemented primary readings.

Figure 1  
Five Step Inquiry Process



Assessment in the course was based on fulfillment of required assignments, which included investigating a problem assigned in class using a five-step process of (a) identifying a problem, (b) proposal writing, (c) data collection, (d) data analysis, and (e) implementation of a solution. In addition to the inquiry, students were to keep reflective journals. Formative assessment and guidance were provided to students throughout the semester; summative assessment was given at the end of the course. Grading was based on fulfillment of the assignment requirements, which meant completion of the five steps of the inquiry-based model, and work that displayed well-informed and potent analysis, originality, and thoughtfulness. Students were not graded on whether levels of their resistance were reduced or not reduced.

This case study was action research based. Mertler (2009) defines action research as “any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, and others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment”. Action research involves identification of a problem within the classroom and taking measures to ameliorate that problem. In the case study, the problem was identified as high levels of resistance in the classroom. The instructor is an immigrant African woman who speaks with a foreign accent, a relevant element to the discussion given that the nature of resistance experienced by educators of color can be different from resistance experienced by instructors from the dominant group, particularly when race, gender, and culture intersect (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Thompson, 2004). The instructor had experienced a lot of resistance from students in a similar course in the past (Sommers & Fasching-Varner, 2008) exhibited through what Amobi (2007) calls volatile conversations, spiteful silences, and general unpleasantness in the classroom. She undertook action research in order to reduce levels of resistance and help students better understand issues of social justice.

The instructor undertook this action research case study in search of methods of teaching and learning that would reduce resistance to issues of diversity and provide authentic learning opportunities for students. The inquiry-based method was used as an intervention strategy to reduce levels of resistance using action research as a vehicle to improve pedagogy and student learning (Burnaford, Fischer, & Hobson, 2001).

### Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods used were class discussions and informal interviews, students’ reflective journals, papers, and observations. In addition to discussing readings and the impact of social forces on schooling, the classroom served as a platform for debriefing on the students’ projects. I also informally interviewed students about their projects and experiences once a month when we met for individual conferencing.

Students submitted reflective journals fortnightly; they wrote about their experiences and how these experiences provided (or did not provide) a deepened understanding of social forces discussed in the classroom. Miles and Huberman (1994) contend that reflective journals are data sources that provide an in-depth understanding of students’ shifts in knowledge and understanding levels.

I also conducted observations of students’ body language during classroom discussions throughout each semester in order “to learn firsthand how the actions of the participants correspond with their words, and see patterns of behavior” (Mertler, 2009, p.80). Data were collected for one year (two semesters) from two different sections of the course.

### Findings

The students engaged in a five-step inquiry process (Figure 1), namely, identification of the problem, proposal writing, data collection, data analysis, and implementation of the solution. According to Dewey (1938) and Freire (1970), the latter step – implementation of the solution – is critical for students to engage in so that they are aware that they have power and ability to enact change within their communities and society.

#### Step One: Identification of the Problem

The first step in this process involved problem identification. I facilitated this process by observing students’ resistance in class. During class discussions, students often would object, verbally or/and non-verbally, to the existence of an injustice. For instance, when we were discussing marginalization of women in

society, some students would disagree that women were marginalized in any form; the following are typical responses from class discussions and informal interviews:

I can understand that women of my grandmother's age and maybe my mother's age felt oppressed; my generation – let me speak for myself- I do not feel oppressed in any way. I feel that there is a lot of bias toward males merely because they are males. We give them such a hard time and expect perfection from them.

I think men have it harder than women because, at least for us, we [women] are not really expected to succeed in both our careers and our private lives. For men they have to excel as providers and as fathers. The pressure is more for them [men] than us [women].

I'm sorry, but I am not oppressed. An oppressed person cannot make decisions about what she wants to do, where she wants go, any decision regarding her life. I make all my decisions; no man makes decisions for me. I am an independent woman, and I would argue that most of us here in the United States are [independent].

The few males in both classes were mostly silent when discussing issues of women and their marginalization, often nodding in concurrence with women who asserted that the notions of women's oppression and feminism were anachronistic. When I asked the classes if any of them perceived themselves as feminists, two out of 25 students in the class, a woman of color and a white woman, during the first semester class raised their hands. In the second semester class only one woman out of 25 students raised her hand.

When discussing issues of racial subjugation and domination, students were not as vociferous as they had been when discussing marginalization of women in the society. However, their nonverbal forms of communication indicated resistance. Silence was one way resistance was communicated, as Ladson-Billings (2001) also found in her study; other forms of resistance included rolling of eyes, students looking at each other in disbelief, constantly looking at the clock in the room, and uncomfortably shifting in their seats. Verbal resistance included statements like "people like to use the race card whenever it is convenient." The question was posed as to how many students considered themselves to be racist; none of the students in either classes raised their hands. This was not surprising, as Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2001) assert that white students never

perceive themselves as being capable of racism. In class discussions about race, some students would often preface what they had to say by stating "I hope I am not saying the wrong thing but..." or directing their comments to me, "Don't take this personally..." My identity as a black person seemed to be more dominant to the students and served as an inhibitor more than my gender as evidenced by their willingness to engage or disengage in the discussion about race.

Similar to gender, students seemed to be willing to acknowledge and verbalize their homophobia when it came to issues of sexual diversity. My position as a heterosexual woman made them less inhibited in discussing issues of sexual diversity. One student stated:

I do not want to offend anyone; actually there is a dude in my dorm, in my floor who is gay and I get along very well with him; but I must say that I am a religious person and I try to live according to the instructions of the Bible. So to me, this discussion seems to be against my religious beliefs and what I have been taught as right and wrong. It's like the Columbus story I guess; for 12 years when I was in school he was a hero and then when I am older I am supposed to criticize him. I don't know; it seems like in a way you [the instructor] are telling us what our parents have taught us is wrong. That just does not sound right to me. That's who I am.

This student's resistance was rooted in the perception that I was attacking his belief system and identity. Such resistance emanated from students viewing issues from their own perspectives.

Students were assigned to investigate issues about which they were most resistant. For example, the student who was most resistant to the existence of homophobia was assigned to investigate homophobia on campus. There were other students in both classes who wanted to investigate homophobia albeit they did not explicitly exhibit resistance to issues of sexual diversity. Out of 50 students, five male students investigated homophobia on campus by setting up information tables on gay, transgender, lesbian and bisexual (GTLB) individuals. Thirty students wanted to engage in a college awareness program in an urban school to investigate institutional racism against students of color. Twelve students (all women) sought to investigate if sexism still existed. Three students wanted to investigate discrimination against recent immigrants and refugees from Sudan who live in the community. Table 1 shows the numerical distribution of student inquiries.

Table 1  
Distribution of Student Inquiries

Number of Students	Inquiry Investigated
5	Existence of homophobia on campus
30	Evidence of institutional racism in urban high schools
12	Existence of sexism
3	Evidence of discrimination against recent immigrants

Students were eager to undertake the inquiry because, as one student pointed out in her journal, “they wanted to show me that they were correct.” In sum, all students in the class were assigned a question to investigate based on their levels of resistance; they then had to write a proposal about how they were going to investigate the problem.

### Step Two: Proposal Writing

Upon identification of the question or problem to investigate, students were required to provide a proposal as to (1) how they would investigate the problem and collect data, (2) sites for data collection, and (3) if they found evidence of discrimination, what actions would they take to mitigate the situation; if they found evidence of lack of discrimination, what were they going to do to apprise the rest of the student body of their findings. For instance, the students who believed that the notion of gender inequality was anachronistic proposed to conduct internet research on gender equity *vis a vis* (a) salaries, (b) number of women who occupied the highest office in the workplace versus men, (c) college attendance and graduation, and (d) general opportunities available to women. They were also going to interview their fellow college students and members in their communities on issues of gender discrimination. For implementation of the solution, they proposed that they would increase awareness of gender equity/inequity, depending on their findings.

The students who believed that recent immigrants and refugees were defiling the reputation of the community in the media by saying that the community was hostile toward them proposed to volunteer at a local centre that catered to immigrants by offering English lessons. They worked as English tutors in order to gain access to the population whose experiences they wanted to investigate. As part of implementation of the solution, these students proposed to disseminate the information collected from these interactions and increase awareness of either existence or nonexistence of discrimination based on their findings.

### Steps Three and Four: Data Collection and Analysis

The third step entailed the execution of the actions in the students’ proposals, while step four was analysis of data collected. As students were in the process of

both data collection and analysis, they shared their preliminary findings with their classmates during class discussions. It was clear from the beginning of the data collection step that the students investigating gender equity issues were not finding data that confirmed their hypothesis; as a group they reported that their electronic research was not “supporting our views, but we have not completed our data collection yet,” as one student pointed out in her journal. They seemed to be still convinced that their views were correct regardless of what preliminary evidence showed. According to Thompson (2004), such resistance even in the face of counter evidence is not uncommon as lifetime beliefs and ideologies cannot be expunged within a short span of time. These students believed that perhaps with more knowledge and research they would find factual evidence that women are no longer marginalized.

Similarly, students who were in the urban schools experienced some dissonance between their views and findings. One student wrote:

It is clear that schools are not the same. This school looks nothing like my old high school, students are unruly and loud. Even if I went to a high school like that I do not think I would be as loud and unruly as these students are; there is no excuse for rudeness.

Another student wrote:

Students have no respect for authority figures, and curse without any shame. I am starting to think they are getting what they deserve. I believe if they behaved in a respectful manner, the government will also give them suitable buildings and amenities.

While acknowledging structural inequalities that they encountered in urban schools, these students focused on the non-normative behavior of urban students as problematic and therefore deserving of inequities.

Students investigating discrimination (or lack of discrimination) against immigrants seemed to withdraw from class discussion and were not as vociferous as their classmates. One of these students wrote in his journal, “I am surprised, shocked, and embarrassed by what these people have to go through.” It was evident that his interactions with the immigrants had led him to believe that the community that he had previously thought was accepting and non-discriminatory was actually psychologically hostile to immigrants and refugees of color. This exposure had made him withdraw in class discussions because he was, as he reported in an interview, “trying to digest all of this.”

Another student also investigating discrimination of immigrants wrote in her journal:

I understand that people come to the United States for various reasons, but I wonder if I would go to another country and expect to be treated as one of the citizens. Wouldn't that be too much to ask? I don't believe anyone should be discriminated against. However, no one should expect to go into a different culture and expect people of that culture to adapt to his culture. He should adapt to the culture of his new country.

Parallel to the experiences of students in urban schools, this student was acknowledging that discrimination exists, but she focused on the recipients of discrimination as also culpable. She even went further to state that she is opposed to discrimination but that immigrants need to assimilate into society and have lowered expectations regarding humane treatment.

The five students who were investigating the problem of homophobia became exposed to GTLB students on campus who came to their information table on GTLB issues. One student wrote in her journal:

The gay students on campus seem to feel safe coming to us and talking about homophobia. I do not know them but they seem like decent people, I have no reason to distrust what they are saying. I am just disappointed that not many heterosexual students want to spend time talking to us like the GTLB students. They just pick up the flyers and go. The fear is real because I am starting to think that some people might think I am gay because I am doing this.

Another student reiterated the sentiment that he does not want people to think he is gay because of the project. When I asked him why this engendered such a fear in him, he said he feared it would "ruin" his reputation.

As the semester progressed, most of the students were becoming convinced that discrimination against some groups in society prevailed. For some students who were in an urban school setting, however, the lure of stereotypes seemed to serve as justification for institutional discrimination. For example, one student pointed out that high school students were "lazy" and therefore deserving of what they saw as an inferior education because "they will never make it in a regular [in a white middle class community] school." We spent a lot of time in class debunking some of the myths that students had about students of color and their parents. Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) assert that white students have a tendency to perceive themselves as racially open and accepting, when in actuality they harbor many of the myths that are cornerstones of racism. Students' comments in the classroom were reflective of such a tendency.

As the semester was concluding, many of the students were finding that evidence from real life did not support their hypotheses. For instance, students who believed that gender inequality was no longer a problem found that their hypothesis was disconfirmed. The results of the survey that they gave to campus students to discern if their peers believed that gender inequalities persisted showed that most male and female students – 85 % - on campus believed that gender inequality existed. Moreover, they found that most female students (63%) reported to have been direct or indirect targets of gender discrimination, and 77% of male students on campus reported to know someone who had been discriminated against on the basis of gender. Additionally, electronic research yielded results on salary differences based on gender; they discovered that women were chronically paid less than men, more so for women of color "even with affirmative action in place," as one student pointed out. Their research revealed to them what Hill-Collins calls (1990) intersectionality of race, sex, and class.

All of the students who investigated marginalization of recent immigrants and refugees in the community confirmed existence of discrimination. One student shared a turning point for him that involved a 12-year-old boy who wanted to break a five-dollar bill in order to use a vending machine at a community center:

He went to the clerk at the front desk to ask for change and the clerk (white middle aged woman) told him there was not any change and they did not keep money there. When he told me what the clerk said I decided to go there myself. The lady asked me if I wanted ones or coins. I did not say anything to the lady but I began to see my community through his [the boy's] eyes; it was not welcoming.

Another student reported that when she was accompanying two women who were wearing *burkas* to the license bureau to take the learner-driver exam:

Two older white males in line started talking about how can this country allow people who are killing our boys in Iraq to be here. This made me uncomfortable but I hope that the ladies did not hear the conversation.

These two students had opportunities to see the world from another person's vantage point (Dewey, 1938). It was through interacting with the immigrants that they were able to understand the challenges the immigrants face in the community.

Twenty seven students whose inquiry was in urban high schools also reported changes in their belief system. One student wrote:

I was in Mr. X.'s class and saw how unhappy he was with his job and his students. I think because I am white he was comfortable enough to tell me that educating 'these kids is a waste of taxpayers money because they will end up either dead, in jail, or strung out in a few years.' Mr. X. has made me realize that as a teacher I can be for/against institutional racism. I am against it and more determined than ever to work in urban schools.

For this student, it was the interactions that she had with a teacher who was overtly racist that made her realize that individuals are active participants in supporting and upholding institutionalized racism.

Overall, reduction of levels of resistance was evident for most students. The inquiry-based method allowed students to actively investigate forms of discrimination that they thought did not exist or were inflated. Upon investigation of these problems, they reached the conclusion that the forms of discrimination (i.e. gender inequalities, discrimination against immigrants, homophobia, systemic marginalization of students in urban schools) existed and were not as inflated as they had previously assumed. However, three students who investigated discrimination in urban schools found that discrimination did not exist. One student reported that students and parents were responsible for low achievements as this reflected "the natural order of people." Two of the students maintained that the hierarchical economic system and parallel school funding formula were justified in order to preserve the system of capitalism. In other words, they could not imagine an equitable education system that did not correspond with the inequitable economic system.

### **Step Five: Implementation of Solution**

After the students completed their data analysis they had to act on their findings. The students who investigated gender discrimination disseminated information about prevalence of gender inequalities through (a) holding a campus forum, (b) posting signage around campus on discrimination, (c) hosting two movie nights to be followed by a discussion of portrayals of women and men in movies, (d) developing a web site dedicated to raising awareness, and (e) signing a petition calling for an end to gender inequality. The petition was submitted to a local mayor. The students completed these assignments with enthusiasm and vigor.

The students who investigated existence of homophobia on campus approached student organizations on campus asking to attend their meetings and discuss how the campus could be made safer and more welcoming to GLTB students. As a result, one of

the organizations invited an outside speaker to give a lecture on how to create a GLTB friendly climate. It must be pointed out that the students also experienced a lot of resistance from at least two organizations on campus when they were presenting their findings— in one meeting, one of the students was physically pushed out of the room. In an interview, the student who was pushed out of the room said "this shows that change cannot be achieved without making some people unhappy and even angry enough to put their hands on you."

Students who had doubted that immigrants were targets of discrimination engaged in activism by personally visiting areas that some of the immigrants frequented, such as the community center, and passing out flyers detailing forms of discrimination that they had witnessed. One student reported that "people at the local community center were actually surprised by our findings and promised to be more conscious of this when dealing with this population." They also were included in the town's council meeting to discuss various ways the community could be welcoming and less discriminatory toward immigrants.

Students who were at the urban high schools implemented solutions that ranged from micro-level solutions such as conducting pencil and paper drives to address immediate needs in the classroom to seeking macro-level solutions by writing letters demanding reforms in the school funding formula. Letters were sent to the senators, and some students sent letters to the national Secretary of Education. The three students whose beliefs were unaltered held a forum on campus, which became a lively discussion as the people who came to the forum (mostly students from the class) passionately attempted to disprove their assertions.

Completing the last step of the inquiry-based method propelled students to engage in what Freire (1994) and hooks (2000) call agency. According to Freire (1970), students need to know that if schools and institutions are socially constructed, they can be socially reconstructed for realization of social justice. By engaging in the last step, students viewed themselves as part of the society's problems and solutions. They became aware that discrimination is socially constructed and therefore can be socially dismantled. Freire (1994) asserts that students' cognizance of their power to be agents of change is critical in development of a democratic citizenry.

For my action research, I learned that the inquiry-based method is instrumental in reducing levels of student resistance to social justice issues. However, I cannot claim causality between the inquiry-based method and reduced levels of resistance, as this was not an experimental study. Nevertheless, I can assert that the combination of students' ability to investigate a problem, engage in critical reflection, read social justice education material, and engage in class discussions was effective in reducing levels of resistance.

Even the three students who were not convinced that institutional discrimination played a role in the (under) education of the students in urban schools were able to engage in discussions in a constructive manner, as they had evidence from which to extrapolate. The inquiry based method therefore provided students with an ability to concretize theory regardless of whether they agreed or disagreed with it. The ability to make such connections yielded fruitful discussions; the silences and non-evidence based myths that I usually experienced in the classroom vanished.

### Conclusion

Inquiry based method of teaching places students at the center of their learning. Students are positioned as chief investigators of phenomena, while the instructor serves as a guide or facilitator. Using an inquiry-based method allowed students to engage deeply with issues that they were investigating. This case study was aimed at improving my teaching and student learning by reducing resistance levels and increasing students' willingness to engage in activism. The findings showed that through the inquiry-based method of teaching and learning, 47 out of 50 students were able to re-examine and transform their previous knowledge on certain diversity topics. They were able to juxtapose their knowledge forms against their findings and then re-adjust their own knowledge.

Such readjustments were critical in the reduction of resistance and were possible because the inquiry-based method positioned students as owners of knowledge. They independently investigated effects individual and institutional discrimination. They also came to understand how their identities shaped their world-views and the importance of seeing from another's vantage point (Dewey, 1938). When students see the world from various perspectives, Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998) assert, "[they] set the stage for a long running, meta-dialogue with themselves. This inner conversation leads to a perpetual redefinition of their images of both self and world" (p. 15).

In the classroom, there was an elevated sense of knowledge ownership, which resulted in vibrant and passionate discussions. Congruent with the inquiry-based method, students became "experts" and owners of knowledge. As one student put it in her journal, "it is one thing to hear your professor say it or read about it, and it is another to investigate it and find out yourself. It makes it more real." Being investigators provided them with an opportunity to make connections between theories and texts discussed in class and their experiences. Making these connections on their own and gaining an understanding of the hidden role of institutions—schools in particular—in the reproduction, marginalization, and privileging of some members of

society allowed students to have in-depth exchange of ideas, even when they disagreed. Employing inquiry-based method created an environment in which students could exchange ideas and engage in in-depth discussions as owners of knowledge. The inquiry-based method would therefore be appropriate for faculty in other disciplines seeking to improve student engagement in class discussions.

The inquiry-based method also propelled students to move beyond knowledge production to activism because implementation of a solution was incorporated into the five-step process. This eagerness for some was because they genuinely wanted to be social change agents. Some students continue to be actively engaged in the issues that they investigated in the course. For example, the students who investigated marginalization of women are still involved in feminist issues on campus and proudly call themselves feminists, a term they initially frowned upon. For the majority of the students, however, social agency ended after the course.

As effective as the inquiry-based model of learning and teaching was in the reduction of resistance, it was clear that complete transformation of students did not take place. For instance, the student who investigated homophobia was still concerned that activism against homophobia would "ruin" his reputation as a heterosexual man; his concern shows that activism without complete conscientization is problematic. The inquiry-based method is therefore not the panacea or the solution for teaching social justice issues. It is, however, a vehicle for students to confront their truths, see various vantage points, experience cognitive dissonance, and reduce levels of resistance.

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