

Effective use of ee-learning in a graduate education course

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Abstract: A graduate level education course utilized ee-learning (the combination of experiential and electronic learning) to break down barriers between theory and practice, and knowledge and experience. Students shared and reflected on experiences at volunteer sites, their personal lives, their individual school settings and coursework, to create a powerful, integrated learning experience. Results show ee-learning can be an effective pedagogy for classes consisting of controversial, personal and sensitive subject areas such as the exploration and discussion of beliefs concerning race, class and gender.

Keywords: online learning, electronic learning, experiential learning, service learning

Classroom teachers enrolled in graduate classes are busy professionals. They do not believe they have time to volunteer at another school site, nor do they initially perceive the benefits. One student wrote, "I would rather spend the hours helping out in my own school". However, the instructor believed students needed hands on experience in a different school to achieve the learning goals of the course. Ee-learning proved to be the solution that met the needs of both students and instructor.

Ee-learning is a pedagogy which combines experiential and electronic learning. This paper describes an ee-learning course called Issues in Education: Race, Class and Gender, completed by graduate education students at a small Midwestern regional college. The course was conducted online through the use of OnCourse, a course management software program. A wide variety of instructional technologies enhanced the course, including online surveys, quizzes and interactive exercises; video clips and audio interviews. Students were required to spend a minimum of ten hours completing volunteer activities in an educational setting as different as possible from their work setting in terms of race, income level, social class, and standardized test scores. The experiential learning combined with the electronic format to create an ee-learning course.

The goals of the course were to have students increase their awareness of educational issues involving race, class and gender; recognize, examine and challenge their own beliefs in these areas; and identify ways in which they can make a difference, or act as change agents in their own educational settings. The class was composed of practicing teachers with classroom experience ranging from three years to more than twenty years. Conversations with graduate students in previous classes revealed that most viewed the educational system through a lens based on their personal experience. To meet course goals, the instructor needed the students to fully understand the wide variety of PK12 students' educational experiences.

The researcher wanted to measure the effectiveness of an electronic class format combined with experiential learning, in terms of meeting course goals and in student satisfaction with the class. Research questions included the following: Was the ee-learning class successful?

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If so, what ee-learning factors contributed to the successful outcomes of the course? What lessons were learned from this ee-learning class experience?

I. Literature Review.

Previous research has detailed the impact of experiential learning on students learning about diversity and multicultural issues. The multicultural classes described in the literature had goals similar to the ee-learning class, and this literature was found relevant to informing the design of the ee-learning class.

Anderson and Szabo (2007) state that Teacher Education Programs typically integrate one or two courses dealing with multiculturalism into their program, and that these courses without the inclusion of experiential learning, have shown mixed results in the area of changing attitudes toward multicultural issues. Their research with one such class indicates “the successful completion of this teacher preparation course, despite the culturally responsive pedagogy, did not significantly change these pre-service teachers multicultural awareness attitudes” (Anderson & Szabo 2007, “Results”, ¶3). A leading expert in multicultural experiential learning believes that, “There is ... only so much one can teach about culture, difference, and power in a university classroom alone” (Boyle-Baise, 2002, xi).

Adding an experiential learning component to a traditional multicultural class has been shown to result in a variety of beneficial outcomes. Experiential learning is defined by Carl Rogers as significant or applied knowledge, equivalent to personal change and growth. Experiential learning includes the personal involvement of the learner, is self-initiated, evaluated by the learner, and results in pervasive effects on the learner (Kearsley, n.d, ¶1-2). Experiential learning includes active learning, service learning and volunteerism. In this paper, the term experiential learning is used to describe student volunteer activities occurring in a real world setting undertaken to meet class requirements.

Research examining the effects of including a service learning component in the multicultural training of teachers reveals that participants gain an “increased awareness of diversity, acceptance and affirmation of children of color, critique of prior assumptions and beliefs, and commitment to teaching diverse youth” (Wade, Boyle-Baise & O’Grady, 2001, p. 250). Verducci and Pope (2001) write about the benefit of service learning to help students understand the realities of diverse communities. Experiential learning can “cultivate sensitivity to issues of diversity [and raise awareness of] issues of and problems of equity, equality, power, voice, and resources in education” (p. 7). Social transformation can occur when teachers become agents of social change, and there is research showing service learning increases the participant’s sense of social responsibility, promotes tolerance and causes them to perceive social concerns as more personal (Verducci & Pope, 2001).

Research reports about combining online classes and service learning are not plentiful; however those published indicate this to be a promising pedagogy. Seifer and Vye Mihalynek (2005) write about the benefits in blending technology and service learning in two areas; course management software curricular tools such as discussion groups can be used to enhance learning and reflection, and online surveys help with program evaluation. James-Derano (1999) writes about a successful multicultural online service learning class which made extensive use of electronic communication, including email, discussion forums and real time chats.

Creamer (1999) used an online class format to help students realize that gender and race discrimination are not issues of the past but are also impacting society now. A goal of the course

was to foster a sense of responsibility for social inequity, and one of the effective pedagogies utilized was including ongoing opportunities for discussion and reflection in the online classroom. Bennett and Green (2001) write that service learning provides students with real life experience, and online instruction allows for effective processing of the experience.

Research examining the blend of electronic and experiential learning reported favorable results with the ee-learning pedagogy, especially in terms of student discussion and interaction online. This study will add to the research in this area.

II. Methods.

The researcher wanted to measure the effectiveness of an electronic class format combined with experiential learning, in terms of meeting course goals and in student satisfaction with the class. The course design, participants, student's experiential placements, measurement instruments, and data collection methods are described. The measurement instruments answer the research questions "Was the ee-learning class successful?" and "If so, what ee-learning factors contributed to the successful outcomes of the course?"

A. Course design.

The course design was based on research in the areas of multicultural learning and ee-learning. Adding experiential learning to a multicultural course for teachers may contribute to achieving desired outcomes; however, other factors are important to make the experience a success. Warren (1998) writes, "It is crucial that activities are not simply substituted for self-reflection, critical analysis and dialogue" ("Conclusion", ¶2). The ee-learning course included a strong emphasis on discussion, and the readings were chosen to both inform students and generate discussion. An ongoing journal due at frequent intervals helped students reflect on their experiences. The journal consisted of one Word file; with newer entries added to the end of the document. This design encourages reflection as students scroll through and review previous writings as they page to the end to write new entries. Class assignments were designed to help students understand race, class and gender issues and how they relate to education. To this end, students chose and read a book and viewed a movie dealing with race, class or gender, watched video clips, explored web sites, read two short textbooks and several articles, and wrote a final essay exam. Reflection and discussion was an integral part of each of these learning activities.

The online classroom supported instruction by providing one stop access to electronic resources. From within the electronic classroom, students could access the electronic library reserve material, click on a link to view a video or recorded program, or access the audio or text version of an interview. They could email the instructor or each other, ask questions, turn in assignments, review assignment criteria, check the gradebook, and read the syllabus, all in one place. Students accessed videos online at a time of their choosing, and were able to replay, pause, and rewind as desired. Certain assignments and activities work more smoothly online than in a traditional classroom, such as signing up to reserve books and movies using a discussion forum. Students could tell what books and movies had already been chosen, easily access the list of choices, and share their reports with classmates when they completed them. Students emailed each other to find placements for their experiential learning, to find out about different schools, and to exchange names of contacts for placements. Students linked to a web site from within the online classroom (<http://www.doe.state.in.us/istep/2006/welcome.html>) that provides specific

school demographics and standardized test scores, and used it to research potential schools as sites for their volunteer hours. The online classroom added to class goals by supporting week long discussions, and easily enabled student feedback through online surveys, as recommended by the research (Seifer and Vye Mihalynuk, 2005).

B. Participants.

Thirteen graduate students completed the course, and all fulfilled the required experiential learning assignment. The students reflected the diversity of the small Midwestern campus; primarily female Caucasians (eight), with one Hispanic male, one Hispanic female and three African American females. All but one of the students were in-service teachers.

A major assignment in the course was for each student to donate a minimum of ten hours at a PK12 school site as different from their work site as possible, in terms of race, class, gender, and standardized state test scores. Students teaching at a suburban school with middle class white students could volunteer to work at a lower income urban or rural school with a predominantly minority student body. Conversely, students teaching in a mostly minority urban school needed to find a suburban or rural placement. Most of the students spent their time in a classroom at a school as different from their own as they could find. Two of the students chose to help as assistant coaches, one tutored at a Native American center, and two volunteered at YMCAs as well as spending time in public school settings. For the experiential learning assignment, students chose their own placements, supporting Carl Rogers belief that experiential learning should be self-initiated (Kearsley, n.d.).

Selected student journal entries describing their placements follow:

When I began thinking about where to complete my service, I wanted to explore a culture that I have had little or no experience with or knowledge about. As a Caucasian woman, I have had the experiences of being in schools with upper-middle class families. I have had experience working with poor families and primarily families that were African American. But what about the native American culture? I have had little contact with persons of Native American descent.

I did select this site because the majority of the students are white and at my current school Caucasians are the small minority. I am curious if I will act any different or if the way I speak with the children will be different.

I am planning on volunteering at S High School to help coach their swim team. I hope to compare and contrast what it is like to be middle class and involved in a sport and what it is like to be lower class and involved in a sport. I would like to see how easily these athletes are given new equipment, spirit wear, and materials needed to be successful in the sport. I would like to see how differently an athletic director treats a male coach as opposed to a female coach. I would like to see if in anyway girl athletes are treated differently than boy athletes. Is there privilege for one gender as opposed to the other?

I chose this placement because I have a background in cheerleading and dance. The cheerleading team is 8 females and 1 male. As the generations have changed, so have what is expected in the roles of males and females. I hope to see the changes in dynamics that will take place in an activity that has always been all female.

I teach in an urban area, with mixed ethnic and mixed class students. I have taught in other schools where the student population was 98% African-American, but the students were mostly middle class and upper middle class. I have also taught in another school that was 98% African-American, where 95% of the students lived below the poverty line, and 75% of the students lived in the projects. For my service learning, I choose a school that was 98% white, and in a rural area, something completely new for me.

This assignment required us to choose a school that was opposite of our own. My school has a 99% African American population. This school has 9% Multicultural, 1% Asian, 13% Hispanic, 32% African American, and 45% Caucasian. Our school has 95% of the students on free lunch, whereas the majority of their students pay for lunch. The next reason I found this to be the place for me to serve, was after I got a chance to research their ISTEP scores. They scored a 84.3% in Math and Language Arts. This is well above the state average of 72.6%. This to me is a great achievement. Which leaves me with the golden question, how did they do it? So many schools are not making AYP in my school district, and I found this to be the perfect opportunity to ask that question.

One student created a chart comparing her home school and her volunteer site.

Table 1. Comparison of schools

	A Junior High	B High School
Locale	Urban Fringe of Large City	Rural
Grade Span	07-08	09-12
Attendance	95%	97%
Free Lunch %	81%	5%
Paid Lunch %	11%	92%
Total Enrollment 06-07	493	531
Ethnic Breakdown	White 3 Hispanic 208 Black 275 Multi-racial 6	White 494 Hispanic 25 Asian 5 Black 4 Multi-racial 3
ITEP (test scores)	Passed Both 39%	Passed Both 74.8%
Full Time Teachers	38	28
Single Parent	26.7%	9.7%
Median Income	\$26,538	\$45,799
Below Poverty	Families- 24.4%	9.1%

The students all found placements they felt would allow them to meet the goals of the class. Many wrote that they appreciated the chance to learn about another school or educational setting so different from their own institution.

C. Assessment measures.

The first two research questions were addressed through a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. Student survey data was examined and written artifacts such as reflective journal entries and final exam essays were coded, and common themes extracted.

The first research question investigated the success of the course, in terms of meeting the class goals and student satisfaction with the class overall, the online format, the instructor, and the experiential learning assignment. The second research question identified factors that contributed to the success of the course. Several surveys measured student perceptions and opinions of aspects of the course. Two surveys were delivered through Concourse. The first consisted of three short answer questions, was administered early in the course and gave students a chance to give feedback on the course (see Results, Early Feedback Survey). Another survey polled students about the value of the service learning experience after the course had been completed (See Appendix A Service Learning Evaluation). A brief in-person session during the last week of the semester allowed students to complete both the end-of the term course evaluation and an additional short survey about the online course format. The Online Course Delivery Survey asked students what they liked and did not like about the online course format. Surveys are a good instrument for measuring student attitudes, and the feedback from students was invaluable as formative and summative assessment, similar to results found in previous research (Seifer and Vye Mihalynuk, 2005). The use of several short surveys proved effective in gathering student feedback about different aspects of the course.

In addition to the surveys, the last journal entry and the final exam were analyzed using qualitative research techniques; specifically by coding using grounded theory. The last journal entry asked students to critically evaluate the time they spent engaged in service learning in a different educational setting, to discuss what they had learned, and to note any changes they noticed within themselves. Student responses were analyzed using Hahn's levels of coding; Level one Open Coding, Level Two Category Development, and Level Three Thematic Coding (Hahn, 2008).

One of the course goals was for students to identify ways in which they can make a difference, or act as change agents in their educational settings. The final exam asked students to describe if and how they will work toward social justice in their classrooms and schools. The exams were analyzed using grounded theory to determine if students felt their role as a teacher involved working toward social justice, and if they were able to give concrete examples of how they would do this in their classrooms and schools. The constant comparative method was utilized, and data was coded, categories were defined, and then reduced (Hahn, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The categories and themes were derived from the students writing, rather than predetermined by the researcher.

The third research question (lessons learned) was answered by faculty reflection and examination of student writing, including discussion posts, journal entries, emails, student comments on surveys, and the course evaluation.

III. Results.

The researcher wanted to measure the pedagogical effectiveness of combining an electronic class format with experiential learning. The effectiveness of the course was evaluated through an Early Feedback Survey, an Online Course Delivery survey, a Service Learning Evaluation, Faculty and Course Evaluation, the Last Journal Entry, and the Final Exams.

A. *Early Feedback Survey.*

This survey asked three questions, which are displayed below with data representing typical answers:

1. Please let me know what you like about the class - what should we keep doing?
 - I enjoy the discussion board. It is interesting to read what others have to say about the various issues being discussed.
 - We do have a long way to go on getting equality. I am glad that everyone is getting to see that we are just not cry babies when it come to insisting that things are not as equal as everyone wants to say they are.
 - I love being able to share my opinions with others and get feedback.
2. Please let me know what you don't like about the class - what should we do less of?
 - I think the Service Placement assignment is a hard requirement to fulfill, when schools have the same hours of operation, and when people have families and other classes to give attention to.
 - It's a bit difficult to work and do the extra work at another school. I am learning, though, so it's worth the extra work!
3. Please add any other comments you wish.
 - Please keep on offering this class. It's so very important for teachers today to meet these issues head on.

Student responses revealed concern about finding time to complete the experiential learning hours and an appreciation for the online discussions. This survey was given early in the class, so students had not completed the volunteer hours at the time they completed it.

B. *Online Course Delivery Survey.*

This survey asked students to comment on the online format. The online format was extremely popular with students and 12 of 13 wrote they valued this instructional method. Graduate students often have many commitments, and having the class online seemed to make students more amenable to putting in hours as volunteers at another school. One student commented that being able to fit class around her family and work schedules made it possible to spend more time on the class than if she had to come to school each week in person. Most of the students (9/12) also commented on the value of the online discussions.

C. *Service Learning Evaluation.*

This survey (see Appendix I) was delivered at the end of the course. When students were asked to evaluate the experiential learning assignment, 12 of the 13 students rated the hours spent in experiential learning at another school site as very worthwhile or worthwhile, and several were effusive in their praise for this assignment, saying that it changed them as people and teachers. This is in contrast to the earlier survey, *Survey Midway*, when students complained they could not find time for the experiential learning assignment. Although students worried about finding the time, and it undoubtedly was not easy for some of them to fit the service hours into their schedule, in the end, nearly all agreed it was a valuable experience. One student wrote. "When I first heard about this experiential learning experience, my thoughts went completely to

the negative (as they usually do). What like I don't have enough to do already? However in the end, the experience was very worthwhile.”

D. Faculty and Course Evaluation.

Students rated faculty and the course in 16 areas, using a scale of 1-5 with 5 the most positive rating. The aggregate scores for the class evaluations were 4.67 out of a possible 5.0. This indicates students felt they had an excellent learning experience and the class was a success from their point of view. Few comments were made on the evaluations, possibly because students had been extensively asked for their feedback on previous instruments. However, five students did say things like “great class”; “I feel a new perspective has been put into my mind”; and “I enjoyed the readings, assignments and discussions”.

E. Last Journal Entry.

For the last journal entry, students were asked to reflect and write about what they had learned through their experiential learning. The themes which emerged from these journal entries indicate the experience exposed students to different points of view, increased students realization that racism and sexism still exist today, helped students appreciate their own situation, helped student relate class readings to the real world, and increased students awareness of inequities. To illustrate these themes, student responses, edited for brevity, appear below.

Exposed student to different points of view

- I experienced culture shock. I have really led a sheltered life and did not realize how sheltered until I saw what is out there.
- I think that as an educator I have become more aware of the gender issues that exist in education when it comes to students. We have separate expectations for male and female students and that becomes apparent when it comes to school supports and extra-curricular activities.
- I am not used to being the minority and didn't like it, but think I learned a lot from this experience. I realized the privilege of one group always comes at the expense of another. I also found I examined my upbringing and the beliefs I was taught and this was an eye-opener. I think all this will make me a better teacher.

Racism, sexism are not just issues of the past

- One thing that stands out from my experience is really seeing the harm prejudice and bigotry cause and realizing that it is just as strong today as it was in the past. People are still judged based on things like skin color. I believe seeing this helped me grow as a person.
- Something that I take away from this course is the struggle that women in this country face. After hearing the discussions and doing the readings and a little research, I find it unbelievable that women are so mistreated in our society. This really opened my eyes.
- Through service learning I have seen first hand how racial discrimination affects the lives of so many people and how racial discrimination jades them against people who are different from them. I saw how their economic status made a difference in their education, clothing, friendships and much more. Young ladies, who were so tired from babysitting for their younger siblings while their

parents worked, fell asleep in class and were allowed to sleep by the teacher so that they can get much needed sleep.

- I was able to hear firsthand the horrible inexcusable actions that were placed upon the Native American people I came into contact with. Adults, who vividly remember as children, being second class citizens. I can still see the hurt and how those actions continued to bring pain to those who shared their experiences. Many of the people I came into contact with expressed wariness towards the “white man” as they called it.

Helped students appreciate their own situation

- I think that one major thing that I learned is that I am needed where I am. I think everyday about getting a new teaching job or even a new job in general. Through this experiential learning, I have realized that my students need me. I have realized that I don’t need everyone in my classroom to get all A’s, but if I can get one student a day to experience something positive or to learn something new then that is enough for me. Before this class it wasn’t enough, but now it is.

Related readings to real world

- The experiential learning was of great value to me because it reinforced the readings. When you experience what you read about it makes it real. When you look into someone’s eyes you understand what they have experienced but it is easy to distance yourself when you just read about things.

More aware

- I pay more attention to interactions between others and my interactions with the community. I now see more instances that address gender/race/class than I did prior to the course.
- At the site I volunteered at the teacher favored some students over others. It made me wonder if I was guilty of this, so when I went back to my classroom I tried to pay attention to what I do. I always call on girls for some things – like helping out, and I realize I have gender bias in that I prefer the girls in my classroom to the boys. I think by being aware of this I will be able to change how I act.

Students written comments indicate the experiential learning assignment resulted in growth and change in student perceptions, attitudes, understandings, awareness and knowledge. In addition, students were able to identify other ways they changed and grew through the class. Below are selected comments about how students felt they had changed as a result of the class:

Student Comments about Change

- I think that I have changed a great deal throughout this class. I don’t feel as bitter. I actually feel more empowered. Empowered to offer the kids I have in front of me, a way to a better and more successful life.
- The one thing that I know is this class has left me wanting to be a fighter for justice. I don’t want to complain about the terrible things going on; I want to do something about them.
- The biggest change I and other have noticed in me has been my observations of different social settings. My co-workers have pointed out several times how the class has opened my eyes to situations that I may not have noticed before.

Something else that I will take away from this class is the view that just because we may not see or hear overt examples of racism, sexism or classism that does not mean they don't exist. I think most of us (whites) just don't want to see that things haven't really changed.

F. Final Exam.

The final exam asked students to describe how they will work toward social justice in their classrooms and schools. Student responses went beyond this narrow focus to include how they planned to work toward social justice in terms of personal growth, and in their communities and beyond. Student responses for the final exam were grouped by the following themes: a general commitment to act as a change agent, plans for personal growth in class-related areas, their role as a professional educator (including the teachers' role, classroom processes, and curriculum; especially teaching students about social justice), change needed for their school, the community, the district and at the state or national level. These categories are illuminated with quotes from student exams:

Commitment to act as change agent

- I want to teach my students how to become change agents and advocates for social justice, and the key to that is not complaining about the injustice they encounter but fighting it with knowledge
- It is my goal to see that equitable changes are made for all students.

Personal growth

- The first step in any multicultural transformative process is to examine what issues, biases, prejudices, and assumptions I carry into the classroom and how these inform my curriculum. In fact, I must constantly engage in a process of examining and critiquing my own perspective because this will also affect the way I approach transformation. I will start by examining and critiquing myself in the classroom and go from there.

Professional role as an educator

- As a teacher, I need to make sure that I am constantly seeking to understand the student, their family, and their community.
- By working with educators who have had different life and teaching experiences, I will gain more knowledge; which in turn will help me to understand how to effectively reach and teach my students.

Teacher Role

- Becoming an advocate for my students, who may not be able to advocate for themselves, is an important part of being an educator and a role model.
- As teachers, we can expose our students to these "unfamiliar territories". By doing this we eliminate the unknown, which can play a role in gender, race or class discrimination

Classroom

- I started with a name-calling lesson with my kids. I was surprised to hear some of the things they have been called at school and even at home.
- I had one of the boys point out that I always have the girls help me and never the boys. I thought you're right I do so I made myself more conscious of not doing this anymore.
- Have a guest speaker once a week who is a male or focus on positive male role models in the community to down play the constant existence of a female figure.

Curriculum

- As younger children easily comprehend visual material, one method is to provide videos which deal with someone being left out.
- With this type of ethnic make-up in a classroom, it is important to incorporate many different types of activities that focus on each ethnic group. Learning and understanding another culture outside of one's own is an important part of learning and understanding the need for equality amongst one another.

Teach students about injustice

- Therefore, the only way to begin to eliminate the idea of privilege is to teach students that no one deserves something anymore than anyone else deserves it.
- Students need to be made aware of the continued injustices in the world. Because if students are not knowledgeable about the injustices, they will continue to watch it happen to themselves and others around them. Injustices can be eliminated from the world, one classroom at a time.

School Changes

- I thought after this incident we needed to have some kind of assembly to teach the kids what is right and wrong to say to someone. What is tolerable and what will not be tolerated.
- I am going to approach my principal about a possible theme for next year to do with tolerance.
- I feel empowered to educate my co-workers on the knowledge I gained in here and try to get them excited about using it in our classrooms.

Community

- It's our job to go to these community events and speak publicly against this injustice and then teach our students what we learn.
- I was intrigued by community education about racial bias in our region. There have been a lot of hate crimes in the immediate area and what if we talked about that at school with our students. They need to know about this stuff and how wrong it is. It's our job to educate them and make them aware of what this is and how terrible racial hate crimes are in the area.

District Level Changes

- I requested a classroom management seminar for next year that specifically targets urban children. I think often times "privilege" blurs the eyes of the teacher.

State or National Level Changes

- It is important to have educational policies that help to curb, if not attempt to eliminate inequality within schools and classrooms. It is apparent with some educational policies that lawmakers don't truly understand what goes in a classroom.
- I am a special education teacher and these tests are totally unfair and biased - we are not educating our student we are teaching them how to pass a standardized test and this is setting our kids up to fail.

Each student was able to identify ways they could be more effective as educators in the areas discussed in class. All felt they could do more than they had done in the past, some said they were more aware and would no longer be able to ignore things they had not noticed or ignored in the past, and many said they were motivated to change things in their schools.

G. Feedback about Class Discussions.

One recurring theme from students in the feedback instruments involved the online discussions. This was the first online class for all but one student, and they were astonished by the richness of discussions online, as compared to in-person discussions, and many remarked about how much they learned from each other. Students wrote that they appreciated hearing the voices of people from other races, gender and social classes, concerning issues that are rarely discussed. One wrote, "So often I look at things one way, but with more than one interpretation of an issue my views start to change and I start to view things differently. This class gave me the opportunity to see things in different perspectives". Students also believe they were more open online than they would have been in a classroom setting. One stated the topics were sensitive but conflict was minimized online. Another wrote that some of the discussions were very heated, but meaningful, and resulted in participants thinking about ways they can improve themselves, their classrooms and their schools in the areas of race, class and gender equality.

Student participation in the bi-weekly discussions was outstanding. The average number of comments from thirteen students was fifty posts per discussion. Students were only required to make two posts per discussion to earn full points, so students posted almost twice as many comments on average as needed, because they were engaged in the discussions. In addition to the number of posts, the depth of the discussions was humbling. Students shared life experiences and epiphanies, such as realizing they were brought up in a racist environment, or that they held biased views of how girls and boys should behave in the classroom.

IV. Discussion.

Combining experiential and electronic learning resulted in a class experience which met both instructor and student needs. The results address the research questions concerning the success of the class, factors leading to success, and lessons learned through use of ee-learning.

A. Success of the ee-learning class.

A variety of instruments and assignments were used to determine if the course was successful. The goals of the course were to have students increase their awareness of educational issues involving race, class and gender; recognize, examine and challenge their own beliefs in these areas; and identify ways in which they can make a difference, or act as change agents in their own educational settings. Measurement of goal achievement was primarily through the final exam, wherein students wrote of how they planned to act as change agents in their schools and lives, and in the last journal entry in which students reflected on how they had changed over the course of the semester through the class activities. Based on analysis of these instruments, students met the course goals. Analysis concentrated on the last goal, acting as a change agent, as it was believed students could not address this issue unless they had met the goals of awareness and self-examination. Particularly relevant were student writings indicating, upon completion of the class, they now believe an important part of a teachers' role is to teach about and work toward social justice issues, as well as students' own reflections noting how they had changed.

The second measure of class success was student satisfaction. Students indicated on survey instruments that they found the class personally and professionally valuable. Some students indicated the class had changed them profoundly, and many indicated they saw their

role as a teacher in new ways. All survey instruments indicated high levels of student satisfaction with the course.

B. Ee-learning Factors Contributing to Success.

The course goals were achieved through experiential learning, discussions, reflections, readings, and other class activities. Additional factors leading to the success of the class include students' outstanding participation in online discussions, students choosing their experiential placements, and the online format of the class freeing hours for service learning.

Experiential learning. Previous research indicates an experiential learning component in a multicultural type class can result in outcomes related to the goals of this ee-learning course (Creamer, 1999; James-Derano, 1999; Verducci & Pope, 2001; Wade et al., 2001). These outcomes include students becoming more aware of inequities based on race, class and gender; students realizing that discrimination still exists; students recognizing and challenging their own biases; and students becoming more sensitive to issues of power, voice, resources and equality in education.

Experiential learning assumes an important place in an ee-learning class. It is a learning experience unique to each student, and helps students realize they have valuable perspectives to share with the class. The volunteer work blends with all students have learned in life and as classroom teachers to enable each to share important insights and thoughts about the class material they study, such as the websites and readings. Students who think they know about education because they have worked as teachers for many years find a new lens to examine not only their volunteer site, but their no-longer-as-familiar classroom, school and community. Students undergoing this kind of awakening need an outlet, and the online classroom allows them to post their thoughts and questions as they occur, over the course of the semester, in great depth, and as often as they choose, rather than waiting for class meetings.

Research about successful ee-learning experiences suggests discussion to be an important class component (Anderson & Szabo, 2007; Bennett & Green, 2001; Creamer, 1999; James-Derano, 1999; Seifer & Vye Mihalyuk, 2005). For the ee-learning class described here, the discussions proved to be the most important element of the online class in terms of student learning, based on student feedback.

Online discussions. One of the big advantages to ee-learning is online discussion. Students are required to participate so everyone is heard, and quiet students find a voice. Students can choose which posts to respond to, allowing them to pursue or initiate lines of discussion which interest them.

Students learned by discussing the issues of race, class and gender with each other, and the distance or anonymity of the online classroom encouraged frank and open discourse. The online class format allowed for discussion of sensitive issues to take place in relative anonymity. The anonymity was more a matter of perception than actual, as students who desired to undoubtedly could discover pertinent details about fellow students, such as race or social class. The researcher believed discussions might be more honest if preconceived ideas based on appearances could be reduced, so did not have students introduce themselves the first night when the class met in person, share personal details in their electronic introductions, or post a self-picture in the online classroom. Six of thirteen students mentioned this anonymity as a positive factor in feedback. Some said they felt more comfortable expressing their opinions online, and one said she was more honest and less afraid of rejection. Another student mentioned she was at

first put off by students commenting on her posts, but came to realize the faceless responses made it seem less personal. Carl Rogers writes that learning which is threatening to the self, such as adopting new beliefs, occurs more easily and faster when external threats are minimized (Kearsley, n.d.). The distance of online discussions helped reduce inhibiting threats, a finding which is also supported by Bell's (2001) research.

The pedagogical choice of encouraging anonymity runs counter to the idea that one must build a community of learners through extensive introductory exercises and sharing of personal information, as some experts in online learning advocate (Palloff, & Pratt, 1999). A community of learners did emerge in the class, but it was a community focused on the issues of the class. Students took advantage of the class diversity and the discussions to learn about different points of view and explore their own ideas, and to ask questions and make comments they may not have shared in person.

Student choice in placement. Part of the success of the ee-learning class was due to students' choosing volunteer placements which were personally beneficial. This met Rogers' requirement that experiential learning needs to be something which is not only chosen by the learner, but involves the learner in the experiences and results in lasting effects on the learner (Kearsley, n.d.).

The researcher noticed that several students chose their placement because of a personal concern or question. For example, one student wanted to learn about a school that has an outstanding reputation for student achievement. She came away with some ideas she plans to implement in her school. Another is a coach in her school and decided to volunteer her services as an assistant coach in another district. In addition to experiencing another school culture, she learned about a different approach to coaching, a new set of students, a different program and more. Some students tutored in classrooms, and one satisfied her late career curiosity about what really goes on in the principal's office by volunteering there. One student was surprised when she learned a great deal about gender roles after volunteering as an assistant cheerleading coach. By choosing their placements, students may have been more vested in the success of the experience.

Online format. In addition to the experiential learning component, the electronic format of this ee-learning class was integral to success. The technology became transparent quickly, and communication and sharing became the dominant theme of the class. Although students for the first time interacted with online videos and audio files, web based activities and surveys, and many web sites, the focus of the course remained on the discussions and the experiential learning, which brought to life the course content.

Results of the various types of assessments and feedback show the combination of electronic and experiential learning resulted in a powerful learning experience. The students' diverse and multiple perspectives require time and space to be expressed and clarified. Week long e-discussions allow for this more than the traditional classroom, which has limits to both the topics and time allotted for discussion. Reflection is an important part of changing attitudes in the areas of race, class and gender (Anderson & Szabo, 2007, "Results", ¶3). The online classroom seemed to make reflection easier and more meaningful for students, perhaps because of the easy access to previous work, lectures, discussions, and videos stored electronically. Students can see growth and change more easily in themselves and their fellow students in the electronic classroom. One student mentioned that through the discussions she could note real growth and change in some of her classmates, and when she reread some of her earlier posts found she too had changed.

C. Lessons learned from this ee-learning class experience.

The primary lessons learned from this research are the identification of factors that made it a success and that can be duplicated in other settings. The use of ee-learning reported in this paper has broad implications for other disciplines. Many areas of study have an “issues” or “ethics” class specific to the discipline. Any class with potentially sensitive or controversial content can benefit from student centered online discussions. An asynchronous online class format encourages graduate students to find the time for experiential learning, as a rigid weekly time and place commitment is eliminated from their schedule. If the entire class cannot be held online, it may be beneficial to forego some in-class sessions to free up time for students to volunteer. It is strongly recommended that the majority of the discussions take place online, however, as both students and the researcher believe the online discussion format greatly contributes to the depth and breadth of the discussions.

Students who have never completed an experiential assignment as part of a course are initially worried about the time commitment involved, as based on comments in an early course survey. The faculty member can help alleviate these fears by researching in advance and sharing placement sites which can be utilized before or after normal work hours or on weekends. For example, faculty can find opportunities for students to tutor at a community center on the weekend or to volunteer to help with after school activities. In addition, students are motivated to look hard for a placement if they are convinced the experience will be worth the time and effort. Sharing the results of research such as the study discussed in this paper goes a long way toward getting students excited about the opportunity to learn from experiencing a different school setting. When students understand the reason for the experiential placement, and can clearly see how it relates to class goals, they seem more amenable to finding the time in their schedules.

It is easier for the faculty member to take a back seat in the discussions when they occur online. Too often in traditional class settings, students may direct their comments to the professor and not to each other, and faculty may be unable to refrain from “teaching”, perhaps by pointing out stereotypical thinking. In the online classroom, the instructor can allow students to respectfully disagree with each other and help each other see things from another perspective. The result is a more learner-centered discussion, with shared power (no hand raising or calling on people). Reading the discussion posts was one of the best parts of the class for the researcher, and it was hard not to participate too much. Warren (1998) cautions professors to be careful that their voices of authority and experience do not silence the student’s voices when discussing sensitive issues. The professor must create a safe environment for students to express themselves, but be careful not to control the discussions (Anderson & Szabo, 2007, “Results”, ¶3). This is much easier to do in an online class. The researcher learned that for this class and this subject matter, it was best to let the students discuss the issues with minimal input from the professor. A professor - authored discussion post sometimes inhibited a line of conversation, but by refraining, a student made the same point and the conversation continued.

Wade et al. (2001) discuss benefits which come from the formation of partnerships with community members who take an active part in the experiential learning experience. They describe how some of these community people visited their class and led discussions, answered questions, and expanded on student’s observations and experiences. Online students could easily have the same experiences through synchronous or asynchronous discussions, if the professor set up the electronic interface and provided support. This interaction between the experiential

learning site personnel and the online students would add greatly to the learning experience for both groups.

V. Limitations to Research.

The results delineated in this paper may not be representative of other populations and in other subject areas. PK12 teachers may be more motivated than other graduate students to explore issues of race, class and gender because of the changing population many are witnessing in their classrooms.

The online format was not an obstacle for students, although only one had previously had an online class. Students picked up the technology very quickly and after the first two weeks students stopped sending emails asking how to navigate the electronic classroom. The graduate students who participated in the class appreciated the online format, and thus were motivated to learn and succeed, but this may not be the case in other settings with other populations.

VI. Implications for Further Research.

There are many implications for further research deriving from this study. It should be replicated in other settings, with other populations and in other subject areas. One question to be explored is how successful the class would be with undergraduate students who are pre-service rather than in-service teachers. Work should be done in exploring which subgroups (race, teacher age, school setting, or years experience as a teacher) benefit from the class more than others and why some may benefit more. The areas of “perceived anonymity” of online discussions, and assigned as compared to self-selected placement sites are both areas for research. A follow-up study with participants would be of benefit in addressing such questions as: “Were plans for change actually implemented?” and “Were lasting or long term effects derived from the class experience?”

VII. Conclusion.

Our society is becoming increasingly diverse, and it is important that Schools of Education prepare teachers who have examined their beliefs in terms of diversity, who understand inequities in our schools and society, and who are willing to work for equity, beginning with their own classrooms. Instructor goals for the course were to increase student awareness of educational inequities, and to motivate students to recognize and embrace their responsibility as educators to work for social justice. The journal entries, discussion postings, and final exams indicate these course goals were met by students. Several students indicated the course was life-changing, in both personal and professional terms.

The combination of electronic and experiential learning as a pedagogy to achieve course goals was powerful. The classroom became students’ volunteer sites, their own school settings, and wherever they chose to complete work for the class. The electronic components of the course allowed students to record and share experiences, thoughts, and reactions in journals and discussions, view videos and explore web sites to learn about inequities in schools and society, and complete interactive web exercises designed to help users recognize their biases and misconceptions. The experiential learning component brought students into schools, and community centers to observe and confront inequities first hand. These two pedagogies worked

together to provide students the knowledge and opportunity to move from passive observers to active proponents for educational equity.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the IU Northwest Center for Excellent in Teaching and Learning for granting me a Service Learning Fellowship and to Dr. Judith Longfield and Dr. Kenneth Schoon for your valuable feedback.

Appendix I. Service Learning Evaluation

Service Learning Site:

Your Name:

Have you done service learning through another course? ____ Yes ____ No

If yes, how many times? ____ How many different sites? ____

Gender: ____ Female ____ Male

Please evaluate the following statements using the following scale: bold your choice

- 1- Strongly disagree
- 2- Disagree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Agree
- 5- Strongly Agree

I received adequate supervision while on site. 1 2 3 4 5

I developed an understanding of my organization's role and function in the community. 1 2 3 4 5

The role of SL in the course was clearly explained at the beginning of the semester and on the course website. 1 2 3 4 5

Overall, SL was a valuable component to the course. 1 2 3 4 5

Did you feel your involvement in Service Learning enhanced any class material? In what way?

Rate the journal assignments (bold all that apply or add your own comments)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Difficult to relate to topics | Enhanced my SL experience |
| Not explained thoroughly | Pointless |
| Perfect length | Too long |

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