**Proposed Title:**

# Fostering Preservice Teachers' Social Justice Awareness and Intercultural Competencies Through a Virtual Global Community of Practice

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Educational institutions (e.g., K-12 schools, universities) are charged with developing multicultural learning environments to prepare students for today's socially and culturally diverse world (Krajewski, 2011). In the U.S., the racial reckoning associated with the Black Lives Matter movement has magnified calls for attention to, and activism in support of, social justice in educational contexts. Thus, education programs are challenged with designing and implementing curricular activities that provide preservice teachers (PSTs) with opportunities to develop intercultural competencies and awareness of social justice (e.g., McBride et al., 2020). Intercultural competencies include specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable a person to respond effectively to others with different backgrounds, ways of thinking, communicating, and behaving when attempting to solve local and global issues of social justice (Deardorff, 2006; Lash et al., 2020).

Researchers have envisioned intercultural curricular activities as a means to address contemporary social justice issues, including socio-economic and political inequalities (e.g., Authors, under review; Barrett et al., 2013). However, existing intercultural activities, including teacher education study abroad programs, often lack sufficient attention to intercultural sensitivity, communication, and collaboration (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017; Thapa, 2020). Furthermore, many university study abroad programs are prohibitively expensive for PSTs, necessitating virtual platforms for global collaborations as alternatives to study abroad programs. Nevertheless, research that explores how teacher education programs provide PSTs with opportunities for meaningful international, intercultural collaborations using virtual platforms is still in its infancy.

To investigate the efficacy of such a virtual, international platform in a teacher education program, we designed and implemented an online, intercultural course, *Global Social Justice in Education* (*GSJE*) in collaboration with educators from around the globe. The primary goal of *GSJE* was to provide opportunities for PSTs to develop their synergistic understandings between intercultural competencies and social justice. In this study, we investigated how collaborations among educators from six countries (China, Kenya, Nepal, Tanzania, U.S., and Zambia) facilitated the understandings of, and connections, between local and global social justice.

We envisioned *GSJE* as a global community of practice (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991), which aligned with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN 2030 Agenda) Goal 4 that promotes "inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN, 2015; pp. 21-22). In *GSJE*, we designed and implemented curricular activities focusing on local and global social justice as well as intercultural competency. Through these intercultural curricular activities, we aimed to foster PSTs' knowledge, skills, and attitudes to (a) examine their own identities, (b) develop empathy for others' lived experiences, (c) enhance understandings of others' cultures and values, and (d) interrogate local and global social justice.

## Study Goals and Research Questions

In this chapter, we report on the process of developing methods and models for a virtually facilitated intercultural course (i.e., *GSJE*), and PSTs' learning (i.e., awareness of social justice and development of intercultural competencies) from their experiences, guided by the following research questions:

1. Which educational social justice issues did PSTs identify in their local contexts, and how did they connect these with global social justice?
2. Which knowledge, skills, and attitudes did PSTs develop when they engaged in curricular activities related to intercultural competencies and social justice in a virtual, international community of practice?

## Review of Relevant Literature and Theoretical Perspectives

In this section, we synthesize research related to three theoretical perspectives (Social Justice in Teacher Education, Intercultural Competency, and Community of Practice). These perspectives guided our course development (see Authors, under review) and all aspects of our study.

### Social Justice in Teacher Education

We drew our theoretical approach from Cazden's (2012) educational adaptation of Fraser's (2000; 2005) three-dimensional social justice framework: *redistribution, recognition*, and *representation*. *Redistribution* addresses the economic dimension; in the educational context, it includes the inequitable distribution of educational opportunities among different groups. *Recognition*, the cultural dimension, promotes curricular attention to the preservation and inclusion of heritage and indigenous languages and cultures. *Representation*, the political dimension, involves issues around whose voices are included in decision-making; in the educational context, certain minoritized groups are often not members of decision-making bodies (e.g., school boards). Besides recognizing identity on the basis of marginality or privilege, the framework also dismantles the impediments to privilege (Trinick & Heaton, 2020).

We used these dimensions to frame the *GSJE* curriculum (see Authors, under review). For example, in one of our curricular activities (i.e., Sharing School Photos), we engaged *GSJE* participants in a conversation related to marginalized groups and their access to education (i.e., *representation*). In the Sharing School Photos activity, the *GSJE* participants each shared a school photo which represented some aspect of their education. The participants then described the schools and students in the photo (e.g., urban or rural school, family background, type of school). Afterward, they were encouraged to reflect on and discuss how those photos represented issues of equity, including distribution of educational opportunities in rural and urban areas. Throughout the course, we guided participants to explore and reflect on issues related to *redistribution, recognition,* and *representation* in their local and global contexts. These curricular activities, discussions, and reflections provided opportunities to enhance PSTs' conceptions of social justice.

Researchers have suggested that experiences gained in university courses are not sufficient to prepare PSTs to attend to social justice and equity (e.g., Gorski & Dalton, 2020; Lynn & Smith-Maddox, 2007). For example, Lynn and Smith-Maddox (2007) argued that teachers often underestimate the academic ability of minority groups, necessitating curricular activities (e.g., reflecting on personal identities) that enhance PSTs' awareness of social injustice and develop their intercultural sensitivity. Gorski and Dalton (2020) argue that critical reflections, wherein teachers have opportunities to examine their own positionalities related to oppression and liberation and to challenge their position of dominant educational approaches, help them to identify their own beliefs and identities, ultimately enabling them to examine their personal biases and to strengthen their commitments to social justice in educational contexts. Gorski and Dalton also argue that educators, through critical reflections, also gain a better understanding of their cultural worldview and develop a sense of responsibility to eliminate injustice. Shannon-Baker (2020) also highlighted the importance of engaging PSTs in reflections and dialogues to develop an awareness of social injustice.

PSTs in the U.S. are predominantly monolingual and white; consequently, they struggle to recognize and address the needs of minority groups in their classrooms (e.g., Han et al., 2015; Ramsay-Jordan, 2020). Han and colleagues (2015) suggested that PSTs' engagement with diverse learners enhanced their ability to withhold judgment and reduce deficit thinking about people from minority groups, thus preparing them to address the needs of diverse student populations. Given these calls for learning opportunities for PSTs to explore social justice and engage with diverse populations, we created an international learning community of educators to provide space and time for intercultural conversations related to activities focused on local and global social justice issues.

## Intercultural Competency

We drew our conceptualization of intercultural competency from Deardorff's (2006) intercultural developmental model and Byram et al.'s (2002) approach to intercultural competence. Deardorff defined intercultural competence as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 194). Byram et al. defined intercultural competence as the "ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality" (p. 5) and indicated that social identities are embedded within a person's culture and profession.

Like Deardorff, Byram et al. also stated that intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes are components of intercultural competence. Intercultural knowledge includes a person's knowledge of historical, social, and political aspects associated with their own and others' cultures. Intercultural skills consist of skills required to interpret artifacts from their own cultures so that people of other cultures understand them, skills to communicate with people of different cultures, and the ability to relate with those cultures. Emphasizing on intercultural skills, Bennett (2008) defined intercultural competence "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts" (p. 95). Intercultural attitudes include curiosity and openness to learn about others' cultures, the ability to withhold judgment about other cultures as well as beliefs about their own cultural values. Aligning with Deardorff, Byram et al.'s definitions of intercultural attitude, Guntersdorfer and Golubeva (2018) explained that intercultural attitude, which is also referred to as intercultural sensitivity or empathy, is a critical aspect of intercultural competence, which refers to a person's ability to feel the joy and suffering of people from different cultures. Drawing upon Deardorff (2006) and Bennett (2008), Rhodes (2010) developed a rubric to assess intercultural competency, which we used in our analytic framework.

Song (2020) argued that students need intercultural competence to effectively function in today’s culturally diverse world; thus, educational institutions need to design and implement appropriate intercultural curricular activities that have the potential to meet this need. Researchers (e.g., Lee & Song, 2019; Meleady et al., 2020) have demonstrated that students’ in-person engagement in different forms of intercultural activities (e.g., engagement in conversations with people from different cultures) improved their intercultural competence. Meleady et al. (2020) found that positive contacts, including friendships with members of other ethnic, racial, religious, or national groups contributed to improving people’s intercultural attitudes. They also found that these relationships improved individual’s abilities to effectively communicate with members of different groups and/or different cultures.

In Lee and Song’s (2019) study, university students’ engagement in multi-layered opportunities to learn about a specific culture, including their engagement in conversations with host families, service learning, and participation in extracurricular activities contributed to the development of their intercultural knowledge. The students were enrolled in foreign languages courses in South Korea and the U.S. Consequently, students began to appreciate the differences between their own and others’ cultures, developed intercultural sensitivity, and increased students’ willingness to learn about other cultures. These studies suggested that students’ engagement in intercultural activities at multiple levels enhanced students’ intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

In addition to these in-person experiences in intercultural activities, Lenkaitis et al. (2019) reported that U.S. and Mexican university students’ engagement with one another during synchronous video conferences contributed to their development of intercultural competence, including cultural self-awareness and cross-cultural communication skills. Chun (2011) explored how online exchanges (i.e., synchronous chats and asynchronous forum postings) between students who were learning German in an U.S. university and students who were learning English at a German university developed intercultural communicative competence. Their findings indicated that synchronous chats contributed to students’ enhanced intercultural communicative competence. In particular, the students showed curiosity and suspended judgments about others’ cultures. Even though there are some limitations of virtual platforms for developing intercultural competency (e.g., not being able to have physical intimacy; Lenkaitis et al., 2019), it is a viable option to address the study abroad program constraints. In particular, PSTs who cannot afford study abroad programs find opportunities to engage in intercultural conversations using such platforms. In our study, we aimed to extend this literature to the context of a virtual, intercultural course wherein the participants had opportunities to engage in intercultural activities, including interactions with people from different cultures and reflections on their own and other cultures.

## Community of Practice

An additional theoretical perspective guiding the course design, implementation, and research was Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). Lave and Wenger (1991) first proposed communities of practice as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (p. 98). Later, Wenger (1998) further elaborated communities of practice, describing learning as a participatory process that integrates *meaning*, *practice*, *community*, and *identity*: *meaning* is a way to experience our life and the world individually and collectively; *practice* is a way to share historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action; *community* includes social configurations in which participation is recognizable as competence; *identity* changes and transforms in the context of community.

We cultivated *GSJE* as a community of practice in which participation was purposeful and meaningful for members. We began with participants’ personal, educational, and cultural experiences, which allowed them to reflect on and reconstruct their stories. The practices in *GSJE* were achieved through participants sharing experiences as well as perspectives on common topics in culture and education and relating them to local and global social justice, allowing multiple levels of social relationships among members. Identity was an important focus in *GSJE* as participants not only explored their individual and in-group identities, but also potentially developed new identities through their participation in *GSJE*.

*GSJE* was a heterogeneous community bringing together participants with different cultural, language, and disciplinary backgrounds. Sharing experiences and perspectives on common topics was a strong motivation for cultivating a community and shared practices. The *GSJE* activities highlighted issues that participants commonly experienced, which created a safe and comfortable space to share ideas (Wenger et al., 2002). Over time, conversations evolved as participants engaged with the experiences of others in the community, resulting in the development of cross-cultural relationships.

Though the participation in a community of practice could be voluntary or assigned, the actual level of engagement is a personal choice (Wenger et al., 2002). The U.S. graduate and undergraduate students in *GSJE* registered for this elective course. They were assigned tasks of taking notes and leading group discussions. Even though we encouraged active participation, the levels of engagement varied based on personal agency. Wenger et al. (2002) suggested that leadership in a community of practice should be distributed instead of depending on a certain person. In *GSJE*, leadership was distributed to professors, graduate students, international leaders, and U.S. students. The roles of leaders were formal and informal; some leaders were concentrated in a small subgroup and others were distributed in the whole *GSJE* community.

## Course Design and Implementation

We designed *GSJE* as a three-semester learning experience; we identified course objectives, designed curricular activities, and established connections with educators and their students in six countries. *GSJE* was a virtual, international community of practice (e.g., Wenger et al., 2002), which provided opportunities for diverse education participants (i.e., faculty, PSTs, undergraduate and graduate students) to develop intercultural competencies and a social justice perspective. To ensure intercultural sensitivity and inclusion of ideas, we held virtual meetings with the international educators and collaboratively designed these global learning experiences. In this chapter, we used data collected from the first semester the course was implemented. Every two weeks (seven meetings in total), we hosted group Zoom meetings to implement curricular activities described in more detail below. In subsequent semesters, we continue to collaborate with international educators and facilitate the curricular and research activities with modifications based on our learning from the initial implementation.

### Course Participants

Twelve educational leaders representing China (3), Kenya (2), Nepal (2), Tanzania (1), U.S. (2), and Zambia (2), as well as approximately 50 graduate and undergraduate students from these countries participated in *GSJE*. The participants were from diverse fields of study, including Elementary Education, Political Science, Asian Studies, and Computer Science. One Nepali leader, one Chinese leader, and one Zambian leader are graduate students at a U.S. university and are authors of this chapter, along with the two U.S. leaders.

## Course Design and Curricular Activities

We used three theoretical frameworks—Social Justice in Education (e.g., Cazden, 2012), Intercultural Competency (e.g., Deardorff, 2006), and Community of Practice (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991) to design *GSJE* and the curricular activities. Through these activities, we aimed to achieve the following learning objectives:

- Identify social justice issues in local and global contexts
    - Understand three dimensions of social justice in education
- Identify global (non-U.S.) sources of knowledge
    - Value South to North knowledge flow
- Foster intercultural relationships with educators in other countries
    - Cultivate an intercultural professional learning community
    - Gain knowledge of cultures represented in the community
- Develop intercultural attitudes and skills
    - Recognize cultural communication norms
    - Understand multiple world views related to social justice in education
    - Develop empathy for diverse learners

Drawing on perspectives of intercultural competency and communities of practice, we established communication guidelines for use in the community:

- Attend to communication: Since most of the participants' first language is not English, we should use a reasonable pace of talking.
- Be respectful: Make sure you respectfully ask everyone to share their ideas and attend to those ideas.
- Show appreciation: Let everyone know their ideas are valuable and thank each person after they share their ideas.

Participants completed a survey related to their demographics, their educational backgrounds, and reasons for joining *GSJE* at the beginning of the course. We identified participants’ educational and community backgrounds, which provided information for us to approach conversations within the curricular activities. We recognized that allowing participants to share their own experiences would be a productive learning opportunity for them to explore others’ cultural and individual identities and to navigate their own identities. Thus, in each curricular activity, we provided opportunities for participants to share their experiences and insights.

During bi-monthly meetings, participants had conversations in large and small groups about their own cultures, others' cultures, and social justice associated with those cultures, with particular attention to educational contexts. After each activity, participants were invited to complete a 300-word written reflection on what they learned about their own and/or others' cultures as well as about social justice issues. A summary of the *GSJE* activities is presented in Table 1; the Identities activity is elaborated in the Appendix.

**Table 1**

*GSJE Curricular Activity Summary*

| **Activity Title** | **Activity Description** |
|---|---|
| Cultural Artifacts | Participants introduced an artifact representing aspects of their cultural, ethnic, and/or national backgrounds. |
| Memes | Participants presented a meme, cartoon, or photo representing their local contexts and/or culture. |
| Identities | Participants discussed their multiple/intersecting identities (e.g., gender, language, religion) and discussed how cultures influenced identity development. |
| Environmental Diversity | Participants explored their environments (e.g., school, neighborhood) in terms of demographic categories (e.g., gender, ethnicity, social class). |
| Commemoration | Participants shared information about commemoration of important people in their context/culture and reflected on how commemoration was associated with issues of dominance and marginalization of certain groups. |
| Cultural Inclusivity and Exclusivity | Participants investigated how their cultures were inclusive or exclusive based on particular identities and group membership. |
| School Photographs | Participants shared a school/class photo that represented their educational experiences. |

In the middle of the semester, we conducted focus group interviews wherein the U.S. undergraduate and graduate students reflected on and discussed their cumulative learning from the curricular activities. At the end of the semester, the participants completed cumulative written reflections, in which they reflected on what they learned about themselves and others from engagement with *GSJE* participants. The participants also reviewed two of their peers' reflections and wrote what they learned from their reflections.

## Research Methods

As we aimed to understand how PSTs who are engaged in an intercultural, virtual community of practice described their experiences related to local and global social justice, and which intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes were attributed to their experiences, we were guided by an interpretive qualitative approach (e.g., Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach was appropriate because our research design involved two rounds of meaning-making (Smith & Osborn, 2008). First, the participants made sense of their cultural norms and values and explored how those values represented social justice in local and global contexts. Second, we (authors) made sense of the participants' experiences and interpretations of cultural self-awareness and cultural worldviews as well as how they explored social justice.

### Study Participants

More than 50 education scholars and students from six countries participated in *GJSE*; however, in this study, we focused on intercultural competency development and social justice awareness of the six U.S. PSTs (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Participants' Demographics*

| Participant | Gender | Race | Program Area |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cindy | Non-binary Female | Asian and White | English Language Arts Education |
| Josie | Female | White/Caucasian | Elementary Education |
| Kate | Female | Caucasian | Mathematics Education |
| Mary | Female (cis) | White/Caucasian | Social Studies Education |
| Pamela | Female | White/Caucasian | Elementary and Special Education |
| Sarah | Female | White | Agricultural Education |

*Note.* This information was self-reported.

Being primarily white and female, the PSTs were representative of the populations of students in the teacher education program. In addition, PSTs were from various programs of study; thus, they represented diverse field of studies in teacher education programs.

## Data Sources

For the purposes of this study, we used data collected from a pre-course survey, curricular activities, meeting sessions, mid-semester focus group interviews, and end-of-semester cumulative reflections. Survey data included PSTs' educational background (e.g., program area) and their reasons for joining *GSJE*. Data collected from curricular activities included descriptions of cultural artifacts, PSTs' individual written reflections, and transcripts of *GSJE* Zoom meetings. Meeting transcripts and reflections included PSTs' descriptions about how cultural artifacts, memes, photographs, readings, and commemorations represented cultural values/norms as well as social justice in local and global contexts. Transcripts of mid-semester focus group interviews included PSTs' collective reflections about their learning from *GSJE* curricular activities. Finally, data from PSTs' cumulative written reflections addressed how their awareness of social justice and intercultural competency was enhanced across the semester. Thus, these cumulative reflections were PSTs' self-reported learning from their engagement in *GSJE*.

## Data Analysis

We employed top-down and bottom-up interactive analysis (e.g., Chi, 1997). Initially, we used lenses provided by: (a) Cazden's (2012) social justice theory, and (b) Deardorff (2006) and Bennett's (2008) intercultural competency frameworks as well as Rhodes's (2010) Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Rubric which we addressed in the previous section, to develop our analytic framework (i.e., top-down approach). Members of the research team independently reviewed all data sources and identified instances in which PSTs addressed the framework dimensions. We also identified additional descriptors during the data analysis process. For example, initially, we did not include *family beliefs and traditions,* and *colonization* in our framework. However, as we reviewed the data, we identified these dimensions in PSTs' reflections and added them to our analytic framework. Thus, our analytic process was also data-driven (i.e., bottom-up approach) (See Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Data Analytic Framework*

**Social Justice in Education Framework (Cazden, 2012)**

| **Dimension** | **Descriptors** |
|---|---|
| Redistribution | Access to Education<br>Rural vs. Urban Opportunities<br>Socio-economic Structures |
| Recognition | Language<br>Family Traditions and Beliefs<br>Religion |
| Representation | Sexual Orientation<br>Freedom of Expression<br>Gender<br>Racial Discrimination<br>Colonization |

**Intercultural Competency Framework (Bennett, 2008; Deardorff, 2006; Rhodes, 2010)**

| **Dimension** | | **Descriptors** |
|---|---|---|
| Intercultural Knowledge | Cultural self-awareness | Recognizes and articulates insights into own rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity, aware of how her/his experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description) |
| | Knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks | Demonstrates an understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture concerning its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices |
| Intercultural Skills | Empathy | Demonstrates ability to act in a supportive manner that recognized the feelings of another cultural group |
| | Verbal and non-verbal communication | Recognizes and participates in cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication<br>Begins to negotiate a shared understanding based on those differences |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Intercultural Attitudes | Curiosity | Asks complex questions about other cultures and seeks out answers to those questions which reflect multiple cultural perspectives |
| | Openness | Initiates and develops interactions with culturally different others<br>Suspends judgment in valuing his/her interactions with culturally different others |

Reviewing our data through the combination of these analytic frameworks allowed us to capitalize on the synergies between intercultural competencies and issues of local and global social justice (Ahmed, 2014).

## Findings

We organize our findings by research questions. First, we present findings related to PSTs' awareness and exploration of local and global social justice. Next, we report findings that suggested examples of how PSTs explored and developed their intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes through their engagement in *GSJE* curricular activities.

### PSTs' Awareness of Local and Global Social Justice

PSTs explored their personal identities associated with family relationships, religion, social-economic backgrounds, gender, sexual orientation, and professional roles. PSTs also explained how those identities were associated with social justice, including class, gender, and racial discrimination. Specifically, PSTs were able to identify social justice related to the three dimensions of Cazden's (2012) social justice framework in local and global contexts. In the following section, we present examples of social justice issues that PSTs explored during *GSJE* curricular activities.

#### *PSTs' Conceptions of Social Justice Related to Redistribution, Recognition, and Representation*

In their activity reflections, PSTs identified local social justice issues related to *redistribution, recognition,* and *representation*. For example, Josie discussed how inequitable *distribution* (i.e., *redistribution*) of educational resources created different learning opportunities:

> From our reflections, we found that the availability of resources played a big part in the academic success of each of our experiences. In [Chinese colleague's] case [50 students

> in her classroom] it was probably really difficult for students to learn when the quantity of them is so large. Whereas in my class, there was one teacher for 20-ish students.

Pamela also identified existing social injustice related to unequal access to education, which indicated her awareness of social justice related to *redistribution (*i.e., economic aspects related to inequitable sharing of resources):

> It was pretty easy to notice patterns in how much support the school received from its community and students reflected that school's effect on the future of its students, especially if they attended college/future education or not. This is an issue of social justice, because ideally, all students (regardless of elementary school they attend) should be given access to the same resources and receive the same support and training, but this is not the case.

When PSTs were prompted to reflect on their personal identities, they explained that they were not comfortable sharing all of their identities due to potential discrimination. For example, Mary stated:

> I am least comfortable with my socioeconomic class and my sexuality. These are things I am uncomfortable revealing to other people and are somewhat uncomfortable for me to come to terms with as well. I think this has a lot to do with the fact that they can open up my persona for judgment by others more easily than my identity as a daughter or teacher. It makes me more vulnerable.

In this quote, Mary identified an example of *recognition* (i.e., cultural aspects related to accepting and valuing identities)*;* people do not want to reveal their identities due to existing biases in society. Another PST, Kate, also reflected on cultural and language barriers (i.e., *recognition*):

> I also became increasingly aware about the struggles associated with language barriers and cultural divides. For example, it was interesting to share memes with other students, but it seemed like the concept of a meme in some countries was incredibly different from the conception that I had developed prior to the activity.

PSTs also explored *representation* (i.e., political aspects related to agency and voice). In the following quote, Josie explained the dominance of Western cultures and underrepresentation of other cultures:

> Something I found among our three responses was also how dominant the Western culture is on the rest of the world. I do not see us as people who have a specific culture or way of life but listening to how some of the others talked about us in the U.S., it was apparent that there are aspects that they wish to obtain.

Kate reflected on gender difference and *representation* while discussing people that were commemorated in society. She explained that the commemoration described by a Nepali participant made her proud because of the *representation* of women, saying:

> Despite women being commemorated less frequently than males, I can be proud of who I am as a woman because we have made giant leaps within society's perception of us. I am proud to learn the accomplishments of so many amazing women in our world, such as the first Nepalese woman to climb Mount Everest, Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, and I want to continue to celebrate the accomplishments of women like her. In a similar manner, women are not as represented within history as a whole, which impacts the education that everyone receives within my country.

Pamela shared her reflections related to underrepresentation of some races in commemoration:

> This activity also resurfaced the fact in my brain that there are still commemorations for Confederate soldiers from the Civil War. I found this extremely controversial, and I feel that it brings pain to people's lives as they fought to divide our country on the issue of racial justice. I am proud to commemorate those who have brought our country higher, but I am ashamed of those we commemorate who have hurt our country.

PSTs identified that some groups are less *represented* than other groups in the global context. For example, Cindy recognized the need to foreground diverse voices, suggesting that they identified an existing social injustice related to *representation*:

> I would like to relate this to social justice when two or more groups meet at an intersection. How can we strive towards social justice if we only understand social justice from the perspective of one group but not the other? Would this not just perpetuate the dominating social voice in representation?

In their end-of-semester meta-reflections, PSTs acknowledged that the *GSJE* community enhanced their awareness of social justice, and they were willing to learn more about social justice related to *redistribution*, *recognition*, and *representation*. Mary described how *GSJE* activities enhanced her understanding of *redistribution*:

> My own experience has been challenged most specifically by the [*GSJE* meetings], It was interesting to learn the greater global context of the teacher shortage, that it exists in the U.S. as well as China seems to communicate a global issue in recruitment of teachers, in retention of teachers, and of teacher value in these countries.

Sarah appreciated the opportunity to discuss social justice, including *recognition* in *GSJE* community*:*

> I am very thankful for everyone in this class, they have opened my mind to new ideas and concepts. [A] concept that was discussed quite a bit in every meeting was religion. We discussed whether we were religious or not several times throughout our meetings. I learned that those who live in China are not religious and identify as atheist. This was a shock to me, but I was still able to have discussions with these students about where I stood on religion.

Pamela acknowledged that after *GSJE* discussions, she began reconsidering people that were commemorated, indicating her increased awareness of *representation*:

> We can use these discussions to recognize that maybe there should be more thought about who is commemorated on that grand scale. One participant marked that in Zambia, there are Europeans from colonialism commemorated in statues and street names that brought, and continue to bring, painful memories to the people of her country.

Besides recognizing social justice related to *redistribution*, *recognition,* and *representation*, PSTs also articulated issues of local and global social justice, which we discuss in the following section.

### ***PSTs' Recognition of Relationships Between Local and Global Social Justice in Educational Contexts***

PSTs identified social justice related to issues such as religion, race, and gender in educational institutions. They also discussed how these identities played varied roles across social contexts. PSTs explored the complexities of social justice educational issues in local and global contexts. Kate reflected on the privileging of some religions in U.S. educational institutions:

> As a teacher specifically, I think it is important to recognize the differences in students. One way that we can see inequity in education is when we look at the traditional school calendar, which mostly aligns with Christian holidays such as Christmas, Good Friday,

> and Easter. While this was very convenient when growing up Christian, it does not seem fair to students of different religions because other religious holidays are generally not observed.

Josie identified racism as a national and regional phenomenon:

> Something we brought up in discussion was how in American schools there is still racism today. As sad as it is to admit, there is a lot of outright racism in schools in our country. It depends on the region, but it is still there.

Reflecting on *GSJE* conversations, Mary connected local and global gender inequalities:

> I also noticed that many people were uncomfortable with the status of their gender in their country or their marital status. These things are certainly different in other countries but we all seem to share some form of social differentiation based on gender and relationships in our respective countries; whether that be discrimination, oppression, or simply the need for privacy in the matter.

Mary also discussed resource inequities in local and global educational contexts, stating:

> Though I know how much school districts vary in diversity and resources across the country, I did not realize that such a large part of the inequity in these systems is not providing resources but connecting students to the resources. This helped me to understand the finer differences between my experiences and my groupmates [*GSJE* participants].

PSTs reflected on similarities and differences in rural and urban educational opportunities in different countries. They discussed how these opportunities revealed inequity in education. For example, Kate described:

> Students in rural areas do not have as much access to education in comparison to students in urban areas in both China and the United States. This ultimately progressed my understanding of equity in education because it made me realize that students everywhere value more urban or suburban schools in comparison to rural schools because the quality of education received is higher.

In comparing her educational opportunities with an African peer’s opportunities, Josie highlighted global inequities:

> We had lots of resources, the teachers were well trained for their jobs, the class sizes were big, and we were taken care of. This was different contrasting to [a peer] who is

> from somewhere in Africa. She described her schooling experience to not be as accommodating as ours. Her and her classmates had to walk quite a way to get to school and they were often hungry throughout the day. Their schools did not have as many resources available to the students, so they made do with what they had.

Cindy also compared her educational opportunities with those of other *GSJE* participants:

> Through our sharing of school pictures, I gained a much more complete understanding of the relationship between access to resources and social justice in education. For instance, I have recognized my privilege and the resources I had access to because of the socio-economic standing that I belong in.

Overall, the *GSJE* curricular activities, including individual and cumulative reflections as well as meetings provided opportunities for PSTs to explore social justice in their own local contexts; in addition, PSTs learned how those local issues relate to parallel global issues.

## PSTs' Intercultural Competency Development

PSTs identified aspects of their culture, including family traditions, social norms, and stereotypes throughout their engagement in *GSJE* discussions and reflections. They described how their engagement in the international, intercultural community of practice (i.e., *GSJE*) enabled them to identify social, political, and historical contexts across cultures. In the following sections, we discuss two themes: (a) PSTs' awareness of self and others and (b) PSTs' enhanced intercultural sensitivity during their engagement in *GSJE*.

### *PSTs' Awareness of Self and Others*

PSTs engaged with ideas related to cultural self-awareness from the beginning of their engagement in *GSJE.* They identified cultural artifacts, traditions, and values, and related them to local and regional contexts. For example, Josie used playing cards as her cultural artifact saying:

> This artifact was important to my culture because they are used a lot in the Midwest region of the United States. At any function or event, playing card games is a common occurrence. As a family, play it at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and just about any time we all get together. Playing cards brings us closer together.

PSTs identified the role of cultural values and traditions in shaping their personal identities. They also recognized the complexities of multicultural families and their influences in shaping their perspectives and values. In the following quote, Cindy described that their parents' different races and cultural values shaped a unique perspective:

> Reflecting on which couple of my identities are most important to me, I would pick my "mixed Asian/White race." First, I pick my mixed-race heritage because having two parents who come from very different cultural backgrounds has shaped my perspective on who I am with regard to the people around me in two very different ways that I am still learning how to merge together.

In addition to explaining the relationships between personal identities and their cultural values, PSTs also explored historical contexts associated with different cultures and their connections with social justice. For example, Mary reflected:

> The issues of access for women that some of the participants from Tanzania and Zambia and Kenya have different cultural implications than in the U.S. and are shaped by their own specific histories and cultures. This shows me that these issues are complex and rich in historical context and likely will take a full understanding of this context in order to be fully addressed.

Kate shared that she learned about parenting in China during a *GSJE* discussion:

> One thing that I learned is that parents in China support their kids for the rest of their lives. I know in the United States, most parents are very supportive for a long time, but one of the representatives from China made it sound like most parents pay the bills for their children, buy the houses, and babysit their children. She made it sound like Chinese parents essentially devote the rest of their lives to their children.

Another PST, Mary, also wrote that she was able to relate her own culture with Nepali culture:

> [Nepali Colleague's] meme was the most similar to those I see in the U.S. It used pictures and words to create social commentary about a practice that is found to be humorous. I can definitely relate to the "nosy neighbor," I find this is particularly true in my own family among matriarchs.

Cindy reflected that they developed a nuanced view of several cultures. In addition, they described that they were able to challenge their understanding of diversity as they engaged in conversations with international participants:

> As I read over my past reflections, I noticed a pattern of decentralizing my own cultural

> narrative when learning about the culture and society of others. Because my concept of diversity was already built on the foundation of my constructed cultural narrative, I had to actively decentralize my thought process from what I had been taught to better understand what my non-U.S. constituent peers were describing.

Similarly, Sarah explored the social contexts associated with a different culture during *GSJE* activities:

> The meme shared by [a Chinese educator] showed the importance of elderly people in his culture and served as a way of communicating that importance, especially to young people. This helped me learn about some of the social structures in his country, and definitely made me think about how my country's structures differed.

Overall, PSTs identified historical and social contexts across cultures, suggesting that they enhanced their intercultural knowledge. In the following section, we discuss how PSTs described intercultural skills and attitudes.

### *PSTs' Enhanced Cultural Sensitivity and Intercultural Communication Skills*

PSTs acknowledged that they developed intercultural attitudes and communication skills from their engagement with their international *GSJE* colleagues. As such, they described how they learned to be empathic (i.e., beginning to recognize feelings of individuals in another cultural group) and learned to value interactions with people of different cultures. They shared ways that they could relate feelings, norms, and values of other cultural groups to their own culture. For example, reflecting on the Identities activity (see Appendix), Mary stated:

> I think this was an important activity as it taught me to make fewer assumptions about people based on a first impression and realize that there are many intersectionalities at play within people's lives, cultures, etc. This will make me a better teacher as I go on to work with students who may be struggling with the identities prescribed to them and identities which may not be so comfortable for them to cope with. I learned to be more open-minded about what to expect in my environment. There are likely traits and backgrounds that I have not discovered in the people around me, and I should be sensitive to their intersectionalities. I think this mostly comes down to treating everyone with the utmost respect and keeping myself from making assumptions about those around me.

Similarly, Sarah realized that she needed more historical and social contexts associated with cultures to be able to understand nuanced aspects conveyed through media:

> I learned that there’s a lot of knowledge that I take for granted when I consume media. Trying to explain the meaning of my meme was more difficult than I would have expected - there was so much situational knowledge that went into my understanding of it, which was hard to communicate. It’s amazing that so many people can look at a meme and understand it immediately when there is so much history and extraneous knowledge behind it.

Sarah also expressed that she learned to accept differences in an intercultural group, sharing:

> One concept that I have stated serval time throughout every reflection is how it has become so acceptable to share our different views, And I am very thankful that this class has allowed me to see other people's views.

Pamela reflected on her and her peers’ developing intercultural sensitivity at the end of the semester:

> In reading and reflecting on some of my peers’ reflections, the first thing I noticed is that all three of us made some comment about the role assumptions and/or bias played throughout this course. I agree with [my peer] in her reflection when she shared that she now feels more capable of actively changing the way she’s using assumptions in her thought process. It takes a few extra steps to identify your bias and check those assumptions before entering or judging a discussion, but it allows for everyone to take away more from it!

In terms of intercultural skills, PSTs acknowledged that their conversations with the members of the community enhanced their intercultural communication skills. For example, Pamela reflected that she learned to meaningfully communicate and facilitate group discussions as she engaged in the *GSJE* community:

> Going into the course, I was worried that I wouldn’t feel comfortable contributing to discussions or that I wasn’t smart or cultured enough to be included in this community. After the first discussion though, I felt so welcomed into the community and so supported, and each week I became more and more invested in facilitating discussions and asking more critical questions. By the end, I saw myself asking a lot more questions.

> These questions elicited a much deeper response and discussion amongst participants as well.

Mary stated that she learned to minimize informal language during interactions in intercultural, multilingual groups:

> I have thought more about the way I interacted with participants from other countries, and the effort I put into using words which would be familiar and language that is free of metaphor and U.S. sayings. A few of my peers mentioned adapting their language to the setting. I think it made me reflect on how this practice could help in a classroom and even how accepting I should be of slang and particularly of AAVE [African American Vernacular English] in my own classroom.

In addition, PSTs stated that they could relate with other cultures during *GSJE* discussions. For example, Josie explored the following similarity between U.S. and African cultures:

> I highlighted how there is a tradition in Africa where they sit around a fire and just chat and tell stories. They have a special object [talking stick that is passed around] for this, but here in Indiana where I have grown up, we sit around a campfire outside. It was simple things like this where I could find parallels in our lives.

Sarah also commented on her developing intercultural skills (i.e., ability to relate with others' culture):

> One thing I learned during this meeting was that we are very similar but yet very different. A few from China mentioned that they will have statues of commemorated people, and then festivals that also celebrates them. I feel like we do this too, but it isn't to celebrate one single person it is to celebrate a culture. Such as Thanksgiving or Indigenous Peoples day.

Overall, our findings demonstrated that by exploring historical, social, and political contexts associated with their own cultures and identities, PSTs developed awareness of social justice in local and global contexts. Specifically, from the *redistribution*, *recognition*, and *representation* dimensions, PSTs conceptualized social justice issues in education and recognized the relationships among these issues using critical perspectives. Further, PSTs demonstrated their abilities to relate with others' cultures, suggesting that they developed intercultural skills by participating in the virtual, intercultural learning community of practice.

Finally, PSTs, in the cumulative reflections, self-reported that their intercultural sensitivity and communication skills have been enhanced as they engaged in the intercultural community.

# Discussion

In this section, we highlight global social justice awareness and intercultural learning developed through the virtual, international *GSJE* community of practice. We discuss the implications of our findings and the potential of *GSJE* to prepare PSTs as future educators to value the backgrounds and histories of diverse learners and to facilitate productive communities within their classrooms.

## PSTs' Learning Through Engagement in the *GSJE* Community

Our findings indicated that *GSJE* provided PSTs with opportunities to: (a) explore their personal identities, cultural values, and social justice in local contexts; (b) learn about others' cultures, values, and identities; and (c) develop intercultural sensitivity, communication skills, and awareness of global social justice. Since our activities provided PSTs with opportunities to engage with diverse colleagues, these findings align with the arguments of Han et al. (2015) that PSTs' engagement with a diverse group of people developed their attitudes to withhold their judgments about minority groups' learning. Our findings suggested that PSTs enriched their intercultural sensitivity and, at times, actively resisted judgments about other cultures.

Our findings also support Gorski and Dalton's (2020) and Shannon-Baker's (2020) suggestions regarding critical reflections focused on culture, identities, cultural competence, justice and equitable educational environments, and social transformation. These two authors teams suggested that critical reflections cultivate PSTs' awareness of biases and stereotypes, enhance educators' responsibilities to eliminate injustice, and potentially position PSTs toward future critical educators. Even though our curricular activities did not explicitly focus on critical reflections, we also encouraged our PSTs to reflect on culture, identities, and social justice. Thus, our findings support Shannon-Baker (2020)'s claim who stated that educators' engagement in reflections on racism, privilege, and the self help them to eliminate biases and stereotypes about cultures.

As we reported in the findings, PSTs' engagement with reflections and discussions about social justice not only encouraged them to explore individual experiences, attitudes, and beliefs, but also facilitated them to envision their roles as future educators who are aware of social justice issues. Our findings also support the argument that a virtual international community of practice, such as *GSJE*, is a viable alternative to study abroad programs in terms of developing PSTs' intercultural competency and awareness of social justice. However, further research comparing outcomes between such virtual experiences and more traditional study abroad programs is needed.

PSTs' cumulative reflections about how they developed intercultural sensitivity and communication skills throughout the course provided us with evidence of their intercultural learning. PSTs reported that they learned to be less judgmental about other cultures and more open to considering multiple perspectives. PSTs also stated that they realized the need for having historical, social, and political contexts associated with different cultures to be able to fully understand others' cultures. This finding indicated that PSTs began to develop their curiosity to explore the complexities associated with other cultures. However, given the short-term nature of this experience (i.e., one semester), we acknowledge that PSTs will need additional opportunities to explore the complexities of local and global social justice in educational contexts. We look forward to further exploration of this intercultural collaboration and learning as we continue *GSJE* for the next two semesters.

As we reflect on what we, as instructors and researchers, have learned from this study, we see *GSJE* as an example of how collaboration between Western and Non-Western scholars can be productive to promote intercultural learning. We learned that a virtual intercultural community of practice can provide opportunities for a diverse community of scholars to consider assumptions about each other's cultures and educational experiences. We also learned that such a community of practice can simulate the complexity of diverse classrooms to some extent, providing opportunities for contemplation of social justice in local and global contexts. In the intercultural community, PSTs have opportunities to identify needs of diverse learners by interacting with scholars from around the globe.

Three authors of this chapter and the majority of the participants were from Non-Western countries. The U.S. PSTs appreciated the opportunities to engage with diverse participants, including Non-Western participants because they explored nuanced aspects and examples related to social justice. For example, Mary expressed:

> I am glad to have interacted with these future educators (from all countries) in order to evaluate the changes that need to be made in my own education system. I feel I am more

> understanding, compassionate, and less likely to make quick judgements/assumptions after taking this course.

Sarah, during a focus group interview, also appreciated the opportunity to engage with people from outside of the U.S.:

> I find it interesting because sometimes I don't want to say, but it's the truth, I always think outside of my American box if that makes sense. I try to but then when someone like the people from China were talking and the people from Kenya were talking, I was like it's so cool to see how similar we are.

In these quotes, the PSTs acknowledged that they welcomed opportunities to talk with educators from Western (e.g., U.S.) and Non-Western (e.g., Kenya, China) cultures. In addition to intercultural learning, PSTs also reflected on how they envisioned themselves as future educators, which we describe in the following section.

## PSTs' Anticipated Use of *GSJE* in Their Future Teaching

In addition to providing PSTs with opportunities to understand the intersections of cultural worldviews and social justice, *GSJE* also contributed to the preparation of teachers who are empathetic to their future students. PSTs mentioned that their engagement with the diverse group of international colleagues in *GSJE* motivated them to identify issues that are important in their future classrooms. PSTs also expressed commitments to addressing the needs of diverse learners. For example, Kate, Sarah, and Pamela in the following three quotes, respectively, stated:

> In my future career, I will address equity in education by ensuring that all of my students have access to all materials being used within the classroom. I am also planning on teaching in several different types of schools so that will broaden my perspective of equity in education.

> Acceptance is an ideal in this course that we are to accept those and their differences. As a future educator, I have now a small form of experience in being able to talk to people who are different from me. I can include everyone and not assume they are an expert because of their race or gender. I can also accommodate different learning styles and disabilities; I want my future classroom to be inviting.

> This class has taught me a lot about the kind of teacher I want to be and has provided me with more ways to help my students understand interculturalism, and it’s really nice to see that this impact has also reached other future educators.

Here, the PSTs articulated their vision on how they would address equity in their future classrooms. In particular, they mentioned they will invest their efforts into understanding their learners instead of making assumptions about learners of certain groups. In addition, PSTs expressed their commitment to create welcoming classroom environments by addressing needs of diverse learners.

To summarize, the *Global Social Justice in Education (GSJE)* community is learning community for educators from around the world. In this community of practice, educators reflect on their own and others’ cultures and explore local and global justice. Thus, we envision this community as a space to explore the intersections between intercultural competency and global social justice in education. *GSJE* is evolving and we are strengthening and expanding our collaborations with international partners. We also plan to develop additional curricular activities that focus on the intersections of intercultural competencies and social justice. In future studies, we will explore the efficacy of *GSJE* and how it provides similar and/or different learning opportunities compared to traditional study abroad programs.

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## Appendix

## Activity 3: Identities

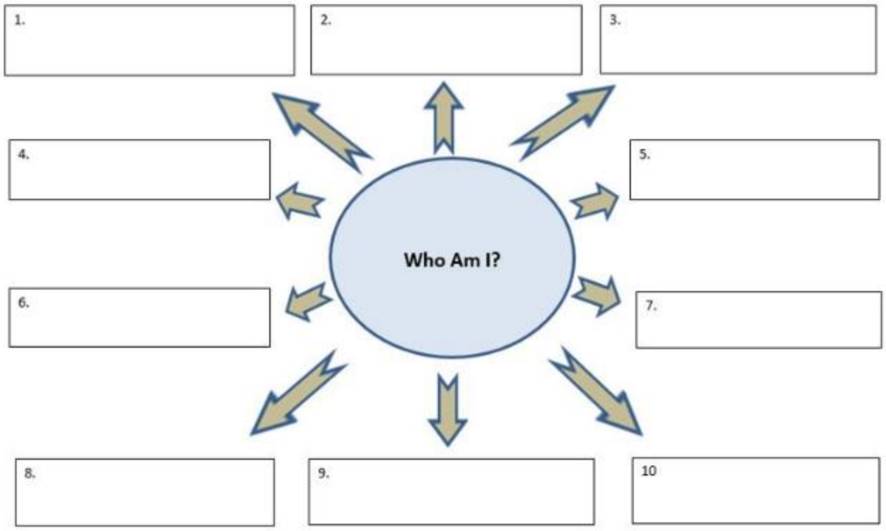
### Objectives

At the end of the activities, the participants will:

- Identify and internalize their own cultural and social values
- Examine how personal identities are connected with cultural and social values
- Understand how cultures influence in shaping a person's identities

### Procedures

Please explore your personal identities and add "I am…" statements (e.g., I am XX, I am Nepali, I am Asian, I am a daughter) in the diagram below.



### Discussion Questions

- Which identity are you most comfortable with? Why?
- Which identity are you least comfortable with? Why?
- What are the similarities and differences that you noticed in your conversations about identities? What is one insight you've learned from the conversation?

### Reflection Questions

- Which 2-3 of your identities are most important to you? Why?
- What did you explore about the role of a person's cultural and social values in shaping their personal identities?
- What did you learn about yourself and others from this activity?
- How do you see yourself using what you learned in the future?