

# Chapter 13

## Preparing Teachers of Young Children to be Social Justice-Oriented Educators

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The elementary inclusive education program in which I teach receives hundreds of applications each year from prospective teachers. In their essays, more than a few applicants write about their love for children. However, when selecting students for our program we look for applicants who acknowledge the struggles teachers may face when working with young children and their families. Although we know that teaching must involve deep caring for children (and their families and communities), we also know that many prospective teachers' own life experiences have not adequately prepared them for the immense challenges inherent in a social justice-oriented approach to early childhood and childhood education. After all, in our public school classrooms are: Children whose basic needs for food, medicine and shelter have been ill-met; children raised within non-traditional family structures; children from families with unconventional religious beliefs or political ideologies; recent immigrants just starting to learn English who may or may not have literacy in their native language/s; children living in the midst of chronic illness (their own or their families'); children who punch and kick others, who cry all day, or who may be too anxious to talk; children who have learned not to trust adults; children who do not make eye contact or use other conventional social cues; and children who have documented disabilities that appear to interfere with their learning.<sup>1</sup> Yet teacher education from a social justice perspective involves much more than only meeting the enormous needs of all these learners; it is also involves planning both curriculum and instruction as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this list is from our collaboratively authored program position paper on inclusive education by the faculty of the Teachers College Elementary Inclusive Education Program.

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## What Is Social Justice-Oriented Teacher Education?

Teacher educators who work from a social justice perspective start with a few working assumptions. We understand that classrooms are sites of cultural and social reproduction and therefore cultural and social hierarchies must be carefully examined for the ways inequality and injustice are produced and perpetuated within the curriculum, the classroom, and the school. From this perspective, a “teaching tolerance” or “appreciating diversity,” liberal-humanist perspective is insufficient; preservice teachers must graduate from their programs with knowledge about how racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, nationalism, linguistic privilege, religious intolerance and class bias operate in schools and society. Furthermore, teachers must have the skills to recognize how these forms of oppression are commonly expressed in the curriculum and in day-to-day school practices. Finally, awareness and critical analysis skills are not sufficient: Teachers must also have the tools to teach differently. This chapter begins with an overview and description of key attributes of social justice-oriented teacher education; continues by outlining some pedagogical approaches and practices; and concludes with some research findings and a theoretical framework for understanding social justice-oriented teacher education.

### *Definitions*

The phrase “social justice” has proliferated in teacher education in recent years and is an umbrella term encompassing a large range of practices and perspectives (Adams et al. 2007), not limited to, but often including: building classroom communities of dialogue across and with difference (Sapon-Shevin 1999); critical multicultural and anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks and Ramsey 2006; Schniedewind and Davidson 2006; Sleeter 2005); culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1994); culturally responsive and competent teachers (Irvine 2003; Irvine and Armento 2001); anti-racist teaching (Berlak and Moyenda 2001); equity pedagogy (Banks and Banks 1995); anti-oppressive teacher education (Kumashiro 2004); critical literacy practices (Comber 2001; Dozier et al. 2005; Vasquez 2004); disability rights (Charlton 1998; Linton 1998), ableism (Hehir 2002; Oliver 1996), and access to academics for students with disabilities (Kluth et al. 2003).

There are an increasing number of books designed specifically for social justice-oriented teacher education which build upon the missions of: teaching for social change (Darling-Hammond et al. 2002; Oakes and Lipton 2006; Sapon-Shevin 1999); teaching and learning in a diverse world (Nieto 2000; Ramsey 2004); and critical, social justice teacher education (Cochran-Smith 2004; Delpit 1995; Sleeter 2005; Soohoo 2006). In looking for the underlying commonalities across all the analyses and recommendations for social justice-oriented teacher education, two main themes emerge: (1) it is important for teachers to assume a capacity—rather than a deficit—orientation to young children, their families, and their communities; and (2) it is important for teachers to develop knowledge of oppression, a keen eye for inequity as it functions in schools, and a commitment to equity pedagogy.

## **Teaching a Capacity Approach to Young Children and Their Families**

Social justice-oriented teacher educators challenge deficit constructions of young children, their families, and their communities. Instead, we advocate that teachers take up a capacity-oriented viewpoint. Such an orientation is often counter-hegemonic (Whitson 1991) and thus is often simultaneously attractive to some students, and destabilizing to others. Deficit constructions of public school children abound, both inside public schools and also in the popular press. Yet as Fennimore (2000) has noted,

The language of educational deficiency is neither neutral nor benign.... Students invariably sense the attitudes and feelings of professionals who routinely describe them in terms of deficiency. They also experience serious repercussions from constant public dialogue about their presumed educational or familial inadequacies. (pp. 4–5)

### ***A Capacity Approach to Children with Disabilities***

In my program, we begin our challenge to taken-for-granted deficit constructions of children by examining the traditional notion of special education that is built upon a medical model of human difference. The dual system of special education and general education divides children into two categories: normal and abnormal. Thus, disability is viewed as pathology and after a full diagnostic process, a label is attached to the child. Special education professionals then relieve general educators of the responsibility for educating the child and design special, remedial educational services.

In contrast to this deficit-based special education orientation, a capacity-oriented teacher education program (with a critical special education perspective) prepares prospective teachers to carefully assess individual children's learning needs and work with special education partners to collaboratively plan multilevel and accessible curriculum (Oyler 2001). In this way, all children are provided with access to the general education curriculum, no one is banished (Kliwer 1998) from the regular education classroom based on a disability diagnosis, and children and teachers work to build classroom communities inclusive of the full range of human diversities (Sapon-Shevin 2007).

### ***At Risk versus at Promise***

The second main focus in helping prospective teachers develop a capacity rather than a deficit orientation to children, their families, and their communities, challenges mainstream notions encoded by the everyday term "underprivileged." When asked to imagine an "underprivileged" child, my preservice teacher education stu-

dents most often describe a poor, child of color, or a rural white child living in devastating poverty. However, when children are framed in this way, educators are not able to explore the potentially rich “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al. 1992) that children from non-dominant groups bring with them from their homes and communities as they come to school.

As social justice-oriented teacher educators, we understand that school curricula and classroom discourse privilege certain forms of knowledge and certain forms of language. Thus, we aim for prospective teachers to carefully examine the discourses of middle class upbringing, ways of talking and acting that Annette Lareau (2003) has termed, “concerted cultivation.” Through concerted cultivation, children learn how to negotiate with institutions and authority figures (such as teachers), and their parents have the confidence and knowledge (cultural capital) to negotiate with teachers on their behalf when necessary. Middle class cultural capital is further evidenced in norm- and criterion-referenced standardized achievement tests and thus reinforcing societal codes of power (Delpit 1995), privileging children who come to school immersed in the discourse and knowledge that has the greatest currency in schools. Therefore, central to any social justice-oriented teacher education program is an introduction for new teachers to the research that demonstrates the discourse and knowledge discontinuities for poor and working class children as they enter school (e.g., Delpit 1995; Heath 1983; Lareau 2003).

For teacher educators, some nuance is required here, as we assist our prospective teachers in developing lesson plans that start with careful assessment of young children’s expertise and knowledge. Although by all standardized measures, the young child raised in poverty may score as delayed and deficient—particularly on tasks that tap academically-valued vocabulary—the very same child may be able to independently navigate the public bus system, protect a younger sibling, go to the corner store and bring home a gallon of milk, or get him or herself ready for school every morning. Teachers who develop an assets-based assessment strategy are then able to build upon the competencies of their young students, carefully scaffolding the building blocks to school-valued knowledge, and thus usher their students into the codes of power that circulate in mainstream society. Learning to see the unspoken assumption of white, middle class norms as the basis for many decisions in classroom pedagogy and curriculum, preservice teachers in social justice-oriented programs must be asked, “How can we create spaces where students not only attempt to merge their two worlds of home and school, but are rewarded and validated when they do so?” (Jones 2006, p. 40). We want our graduates to be able to critique deficit constructions of poor children that assert there is a “culture of poverty.” Rather than viewing children as at risk, we challenge our students to see children as “at promise” (Swadener and Lubeck 1995). Rather than locating the problem in the individual families and within the individual children, social justice-oriented teacher education aims to develop socio-political understandings of culture, curriculum, and school change.

## ***A Rich Curriculum for Poor Children***

A third deficit-oriented perspective that social justice-oriented teacher educators challenge is that poor children require a pedagogy built on direct instruction and “basic skills,” while middle class and wealthy children can be educated with a rich, integrated, experiential, inquiry-oriented, project method. Unfortunately, the current accountability movement has resulted in low-income children being subjected to endless rounds of test-prep curricula as desperate school leaders try to increase their achievement test scores. As Feinberg (1997) noted some time ago, “Minority children are more likely than their peers to spend time taking multiple choice standardized tests and to be taught a low-level curriculum designed around those tests—all in the name of ‘raising standards,’ of course” (p. 92).

As with the previous topic, this issue requires some nuanced instruction with prospective teachers; all too often, beginning teachers tend to conflate integrated, inquiry-oriented, project-based learning with a *laissez-faire* approach to instruction. Yet this should not be an either/or position. We have to assist our student teachers to learn to engage children in rich pedagogy that integrates strong and direct skills instruction. As Delpit (1995) points out, for poor students of color “to effect change which will allow them to truly progress we must insist on ‘skills’ *within the context of critical and creative thinking*” (p. 19). Furthermore, students “must be *taught* the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life, not by being forced to attend to hollow inane, decontextualized subskills, but rather within the context of meaningful endeavors” (Delpit 1995, p. 45).

Looking across these three capacity-oriented, assets-based orientations that problematize deficit constructions of children with disabilities, or poor children, or of families and communities of color, it is easy to notice a particular challenge those of us in teacher education face; that is, when so much of mainstream schooling positions children in deficit ways, we have to work diligently to find appropriate field placements for our students, particularly in urban centers. It is imperative to find individual cooperating teachers with capacity-orientations to children and to find building principals who create and sustain a learning environment that builds upon parents’ skills and assets. Such schools certainly exist, and are usually grateful for the support of their local teacher education programs.

## **Oppression, Inequity, and Equity Pedagogy**

The second main stance that unites social justice-oriented versions of teacher education relates to the importance of integrating issues of oppression and inequity into the university curriculum, along with their corollaries: equity pedagogy and multicultural curriculum design. Rather than have a stand-alone course on “diversity” or “teaching for social justice” or “integrating students with disabilities into

the curriculum” or “school, society, and equity,” it is important that matters of social justice, multicultural curriculum, and equity pedagogy are integrated into foundation courses, methods courses, and field-based courses. This is, of course, no simple task as such content evokes reactions from students. Two preservice teachers from another university provide some insight into this from the student perspective, writing:

Why did it seem that so many people in our program had difficulty confronting issues of diversity and social change? We came into the program expecting solutions and practical results; we had overlooked some very real issues that arise when individuals raise questions about social justice. Issues of inequality, oppression, and racism often invoke feelings of fear, guilt, helplessness, and anger. These feelings are what make the discussions about social change so difficult; each of us came into the program with different kinds of understandings and experience. (French and Garcia-Lopez 2002, p. xv)

To prepare teachers from a social justice perspective requires sustained attention to racism and other forms of oppression at many levels: institutional, historical, professional, as well as interpersonal, and even intrapersonal. This sustained attention is not only for white students, but is essential for students of color as well (Knight 2002). The students of color in my program make up almost one-third of the student body, yet have major differences in their backgrounds: They come from a wide range of class positions; grew up in different parts of the world (including the suburbs and rural United States); and have different ethnic and cultural roots (including, of course, within similar racial groups). Noting the inherent dangers in assuming a prospective teacher’s “minority” status will yield knowledge of culturally relevant teaching practices or even commitments toward social transformation, Carmen Montecinos (1995) reminds us that just because a teacher of color is bicultural (her own home culture and white, dominant culture) we cannot make assumptions about her multicultural understandings. Indeed, some students of color even identify most strongly with white cultural frames, given their own class and educational backgrounds. (This does not mean, of course, that they have not encountered racism.)

Prospective teachers come to teacher education programs having been well educated by their culture(s). They have been studying teaching, schooling, and education in their many years spent in their apprenticeships of observation (Lortie 1975): That is, in their 13+ years of formal schooling they have been inducted into how schools are organized, what counts as knowledge, and the differentiated roles and responsibilities of students and teachers. Most people who become teachers were good students in/of school—otherwise, they would not graduate from high school and do well enough in college to be attending a university-based teacher education program. Part of doing well in school is based on compliance to authority and authoritative knowledge; this involves following teacher directions, memorizing the correct information that appears on the quizzes and tests, completing the homework on time, and getting along reasonably well with one’s peers.

Education by one’s culture(s) also takes place in out-of-school settings, including recreational sports, religious and community institutions, and popular culture media such as television, the arts, literature, film, magazines, and newspapers. Such

cultural sites and artifacts are coded with explicit and implicit assumptions and expectations regarding identity, human relationships, power, status, and behavior. These assumptions and expectations are, of course, continuously contested, negotiated, and shifting. They are also multiple, rather than singular, and are offered and taken up (or rejected) in different time periods and different geographical places.

Finally, prospective teachers' cultural immersions also take place in their homes and local communities. These families and communities enact different cultural practices and logic from other families and other communities, even within shared ethnic, religious, national, linguistic, and class groups. Prospective teachers in their home communities may experience a great range of cross-cultural interactions, thus developing differential cross-cultural capital that they can bring to bear in their future classroom teaching. Yet no matter what the similarities and differences among prospective teachers may be, or what they may accrue from, all teachers arrive at their teacher education programs *speaking their culture(s)*.

## Practices for Social Justice Teacher Education

Given the limited amount of time teacher educators have with our students, we engage in sustained reflection on what practices are most powerful, most productive, and thus most important to prioritize in our teacher education programs. In this section, I outline two broad pedagogical approaches we use in our program: inquiry and multilevel–multicultural instructional planning.

### *Inquiry*

Many teacher education programs assume an inquiry stance toward learning to teach; this means we view teachers' work as complex problem-solving, involving ongoing collection of assessment information that is used to bridge teachers' instructional decision making about the child, the curriculum, and the world of the future. Such an orientation toward teaching means that as teacher educators, we are less interested in providing a list of "best practices" than we are in helping teachers learn to carefully study children's strengths and needs, the requirements of curriculum mandates, and the knowledge and skills needed in our complex and rapidly changing diverse world.

*Critical autobiographical analysis.* We begin the year-long course that accompanies student teaching by asking each prospective teacher to write a critical autobiographical analysis paper (Genor and Goodwin 2005). This assignment is predicated on the assumption that "we teach who we are." We tell the students that the purpose of the paper is to look reflectively at their life experiences and see how they will impact their practices as teachers. Specifically, we ask them to deeply analyze their assumptions, values, perspectives, positions, cultural locations, biases,

and limitations. They have various levels of support for this project, including various book-length accounts related to disability, inclusion, diversity, social class, and multiculturalism. One of the graduates of our program (Barbara Wang) explained the purpose of the assignment in this way:

[Our] past experiences are often inescapable, regardless of how often we try to avoid or suppress them. They have shaped who we are and in some cases, who we *do not* want to become. Consciously or unconsciously, how, and in what environment we were raised affects who we are today. And as teachers, this translates into the way we teach and respond to children. (Oyler and the Preservice Inclusion Study Group 2006, p. 33)

As a support for student teachers to start examining their own lives and social locations as a powerful influence on their pedagogy, we lead them through the creation of a genogram (Bahr 1990). In our version of this psychology-derived tool for self-understanding, we ask students to portray their family tree with an emphasis on the messages they received about human difference and diversity. In small and then larger groups, they share these various messages and are asked to pay close attention to not only what was said, but also what was left out of their genogram all together. Where are the silences and gaps? What were on your classmates' genograms that were never mentioned in your own life? What are you prepared to talk about and examine, versus what will be new territory for you here in this program, this year?

Unpacking one's implicit expectations for schooling is central to our process. Taking up the matter of social class for example, we want our students to see how their own social class location affects many of their assumptions and then helps structure their subsequent instructional plans. In this instance, teachers must understand how classroom curriculum can privilege children from a higher social class. It often begins insidiously on the first day of school when supply lists are sent home. In her autobiographical analysis one student teacher made this important link between her own experience and a common classroom routine:

At the school where I am student teaching all the parents were asked to bring in a long list of supplies. As I read the list I could not help but imagine how my mother would have reacted if I had brought a similar list home. I could not have imagined any other reaction except tears. I grew up poor and a list like that would have caused my mother who already worked two jobs, to feel very isolated in our community. She would have felt pressure and been extremely embarrassed. I would never want to put parents in that position.

For this student teacher, who can use her own childhood experience to critically evaluate the effects of this type of "parental involvement," it is easy to see that she will not expect all families to be able to support the classrooms' school supply needs. However, for teacher educators working from a social justice orientation, we have more work to do on this topic: Next, we need for all the students (many of whom come from privileged backgrounds in my university's case) to understand the impossibility for many poor families to devote even a small portion of their incomes to classroom supplies. A very common middle-class teacher analysis of many poor and working-class parents is, "They don't care about their children." In this case, caring would be demonstrated by sending in a bag full of school supplies, using the list that the teacher sent home on the first day of school.

We must make this student teacher's knowledge and feelings, common knowledge, but not at her expense. Thus, we need pedagogical strategies for the teacher education classroom that protect this woman's dignity and do not position her as the one who has to teach all her classmates to feel poverty. I often write Readers' Theater scripts using many student teachers' writings to accomplish this; I also frequently use anonymous free writes that are put in a pile, reshuffled and read out loud by students sitting in a large circle. This collective sharing of knowledge, life experiences, and perspectives is critical as part of social justice-oriented teacher education.

*Child inquiry project.* The inquiry process next turns from a self-focus to a child-focus. Over the course of an entire semester, student teachers learn a variety of ways to collect data on children's learning and behavior. We draw upon the work of Almy and Genishi (1979) in *Ways of Studying Children*, and also on the Prospect School Descriptive Review of the Child process (Himley 2000). Throughout the semester student teachers bring in their data (children's work samples, anecdotal records, sociograms, transcriptions of classroom talk, behavior tallies, inventories, etc.) As a class, we work together to note where the student teacher may be making assumptions that may not be supported by the data. Student teachers come to realize how many understandings we make as teachers are filtered through our own lenses, which sometimes tint our vision (Goodwin 2002). We challenge the student teachers to brainstorm other possible conclusions they may draw from the data; a process that is much easier when done with colleagues who have a fresh set of eyes on the child.

When all the data have been collected, the culminating project is for student teachers to engage in a collaborative Descriptive Review in which they present their child to their colleagues and discuss instructional implications. This process is supported by having teachers from schools that formally engage in the Descriptive Review process come and talk with our student teachers about how their schools use this approach. Thus, the data collection processes and the collaborative review of the child are tools that teachers can use throughout their careers if they decide to be teachers who base their instructional decision-making on student assessment data. A recent email from a first-year teacher illustrates these points quite well. Suzanne Budesá—in a much longer email to program faculty—wrote:

I have pages of typed notes on each child so far. I am constantly taking notes on the things they say and do. I am constantly re-evaluating every move I make, thinking of how I can do better for them, how I can better support them. Who needs putty in the meeting area? Who needs to sit on the bench? What about the kid who is not comfortable on the floor, bench or chair? How do I get around the school rule of no gum so that a child can chew that instead of random pieces of plastic he finds I don't even know where? How do I fit into the schedule families coming in to read stories in their native language when I can't even fit math in every day?... The questions I have for myself and the items on my to do list are endless.... I like that I am striving for a better understanding rather than a simple answer.... Every time I write what I observe and make a guess about what may be going on, yet acknowledge that I could be completely off, I think ... of the child inquiry study. I think about the language that is used to describe children and how language is so loaded.

## ***Multilevel–Multicultural Curriculum Planning***

Even if all students in all social justice-oriented teacher education programs were to develop nuanced, complex understandings of their biases and assumptions and then carefully study children's learning while taking these cultural understandings and misunderstandings into account, it still would not be sufficient to say they would be prepared to actually *teach* for social justice. Not only do teacher education programs have to help preservice teachers unpack their own social locations and identities, we simultaneously have to help them learn specific and general pedagogical practices. Such practices are themselves quite complex, involving equity pedagogy, a wide range of multicultural resources, and oftentimes sophisticated content knowledge. For early childhood and elementary level teachers, this development has to be conducted not only across categories of diversity (religion, gender, sexual orientation and gender expression, race, class, disability and ability, language and dialect, culture, and national origin), but also across all disciplines and content (including science, mathematics, reading, writing, speaking, the social studies, and in many states art, music, and physical education). At entirely the same time, student teachers must learn to interface with students' families: foster families, adoptive parents, grandparents, stepparents, gay and lesbian parents, siblings acting as parents, homeless parents, and parents incarcerated. We also have to prepare preservice teachers to collaborate with other educators: in co-teaching teams between special education and general education, in grade level curriculum development teams, and with special service providers ranging from social workers to speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists.

In our program, having successfully completed the critical autobiographical analysis and child inquiry projects, the second semester of student teaching turns to a focus on curriculum development. Although current forms of teacher-proof curriculum often call for scripted lesson plans, we argue that teachers are curriculum designers, who are responsive to external mandates, but who add to and challenge traditional curriculum that is often devoid of critical multicultural content.

As curriculum is the roadmap of knowledge, it automatically carries with it undercurrents of power. Whose knowledge will be included in the curriculum? Indeed, what knowledge is of most worth (Schubert 1985)? What ways of knowing are privileged? What ways of knowing are termed, "folklore" and "myth" and which stories are rendered as "history"? Of equal importance is learning to teach in ways that equalize status interactions (Cohen and Lotan 1996) in the classroom. But if children are to grow up to be citizens who care about and act to promote the common good—and not just their own personal gain—classroom pedagogy must account for, and seek to undermine, social inequalities.

A significant aspect of preparing teachers to be teachers of all children is helping them learn to teach for the heterogeneity of skill level that exists in all classrooms. An old-fashioned concept was that teachers should "teach to the middle," which of course results in many children being bored and many others being frustrated. Both boredom and frustration can easily lead to classroom management

problems, to say nothing of learners' time being wasted. To design multilevel curriculum or accessible pedagogy (Oyler 2001), students must draw upon the learner assessment strategies they learned in the child inquiry process. That is, creating classroom instruction that is accessible begins with strong information on what all children know, what their interests are, and most importantly, how they learn.

To engage in such sophisticated multilevel, critical multicultural curriculum planning requires that teachers draw upon multiple sources, ranging from mandated curriculum guides and standards, to published teacher resource materials, to the collection of alternative sources for multiculturally rich artifacts. In our teacher education program, we help student teachers engage in collaborative curriculum framework design, working in small groups throughout the course of one semester. It is their task to design a multiyear, multilevel curriculum framework that includes the following components: a rationale; the organizational principles related to time and coherence and continuity; goals; subject matter overview; a learning experiences bank; and a plan for assessment of student learning. These curriculum frameworks are then housed electronically and can be utilized by the teachers throughout their years in the classroom.

This experience in collaborative curriculum design is a key piece in preparing to be a social justice-oriented teacher. Underlying this assignment is the understanding that no matter what the mandated curriculum in any one school may be, teachers are always making decisions about what to include, what to emphasize, and what to pass over more lightly. They need to understand that the books and materials they select for units of study and the learning experiences in which they ask children to engage, offer children a window into the world and a mirror into their own lives (Style 1988). These choices are cumulative and can foster knowledge that supports the development of multicultural citizenry or limits it. Likewise, if children are carefully taught to work together across their academic and social skill differences, they will emerge from their schooling experiences more competent to assume the role of democratic participation.

## **Looking Forward: Sharpening Understanding of Teaching for Social Justice**

The work of social justice-oriented teacher education is a time-consuming practice that requires ongoing inquiry and also multilevel and multicultural curriculum design. As a scholar of teacher education, I am also eager to engage in research that investigates the relationship between teacher education and classroom-based practice. Specifically, when teachers leave our programs and express the commitment to teach for social justice, what happens to them? What does their curriculum and instruction look and sound like? What happens to their early commitments once they gain experience in the field?

Accordingly, I organized a doctoral research seminar around the task of studying our elementary preservice graduates' enactments of social justice curriculum in their beginning years of teaching. Fifteen doctoral students enrolled in the course. Each doctoral student conducted a small case-study of a beginning teacher. Our idea was to study the teachers' conceptions and understandings and try to trace with the teachers (through interviews) how they came to hold these understandings. Then, we looked at lessons the teachers taught and examined them for evidence of their conceptions of social justice.

As the course unfolded, it became apparent to me both through the data we collected on the beginning teachers, as well as through our own seminar conversations as researchers, that many of the doctoral students and participating teachers talked about their social justice commitments and knowledge in reference to prior experiences (or lack of experiences) with oppression, marginality, and/or resistance. I began to call this "presenting one's social justice credentials." For many of the beginning teachers, they apologized for not having more well-developed credentials, and frequently expressed tentativeness about what social justice actually meant to them. Others of the doctoral students seemed initially interested in determining if the beginning teachers had "correct" interpretations of social justice. They argued that the research team needed to draw up a definition of social justice curriculum and then use those standards to evaluate how closely these beginning teachers matched our criteria.

As anyone who has engaged in this work could predict, the overall findings from our combined case studies demonstrated a wide range of understandings among the teachers about the meanings and implementations of social justice teaching. Although all the teachers were volunteers who invited us into their classrooms to observe social justice curriculum enactments, and were all graduates of the same program, significant differences in interpretation emerged. Approaches compiled across teachers included definitions of curriculum for social justice as: Teaching children to treat others with respect; building democratic classroom communities; helping children learn about different social identities and cultures; teaching children to believe in themselves and stand up for themselves and others; using equity pedagogy in the classroom; and holding high expectations for academic achievement. Other approaches evidenced a stronger degree of analysis of power and structure; these included: helping students learn about power structures in society and deal with the realities of injustice and fight for justice; engaging in community social action projects; teaching with multiple perspectives on knowledge, society and curriculum; and organizing most instruction around social justice goals.

Thinking theoretically across these distinctions and across the literature on teaching for social justice, leads to an analysis of three distinct orientations toward social justice. This analysis also holds implications on how one works for social change. The first approach is personal, fairly individualistic, and tied to what Sleeter and Grant (2003) term a Human Relations approach to multicultural education. This individual, humanist perspective is expressed by students as "hearing, respecting and celebrating differences." Here, differences accrue to individuals, rather than stem from systematic societal oppression. Material conditions are not recognized or

accounted for. This understanding of social justice, then, is fairly optimistic in that if we just all work to understand each other, the world will be a better place.

The second main grouping of social justice definitions that teachers expressed fall into what is known as a “distributive justice” orientation (Gale and Densmore 2000). Stemming from a Rawlsian notion of justice as fairness (Rawls 1971), this position is understood as equality of educational opportunity. From this perspective, people should have equal access to the goods of the society, and distribution of these goods should be proportional. Teachers from this perspective speak of access to knowledge, equity, and inclusivity. From this understanding of social justice, everyone deserves an equal share at the table, but the table itself is not critiqued. That is, the cultural and social norms that have created unjust conditions are not questioned. Instead, efforts to achieve justice are centered on everyone getting what is fair for them personally.

The third, and most rare, orientation that teachers expressed in their definitions of social justice can be understood as evidencing “recognitive justice” (Gale and Densmore 2000). From this perspective, inequities are understood not only as occurring to individuals, but because the individuals are constituted by their membership in marginalized or privileged cultural, socio-economic, racial, ethnic, gendered, and ability groups (Fraser 1997; Gale and Densmore 2000; Makler and Hubbard 2000; Young 1990). From this perspective, teachers must act to change not only who is at the table, and how much each individual is given, but question the table and the food itself. It includes determination to challenge essential power structures and demand that groups of people from the margins (and their allies) displace the center so that it no longer holds (Collins 1990).

We must acknowledge that preparing teachers with a social justice orientation does not in any way guarantee that the graduates themselves will take up the agendas of the teacher educators. (Nor would we really want education to function in such a way as it smacks of indoctrination, rather than transformation of knowledge.) Our preservice teachers may never share our passion and urgency: For school to be a place where justice is both learned and practiced, where racism and economic inequality are confronted, and where children are free of other forms of oppression such as gender conformity and ableism. Yet these matters of oppression and marginality, of identity and solidarity, circulate at all times through the curriculum and through classrooms. We must prepare teachers to know that even if they choose *not* to take up these struggles, they are still teaching political and moral values; that silence supports the status quo. There is no place of neutrality.

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