

CEE Position Statement

Beliefs about Social Justice in English Education

Preamble

The United States's first belief statement, the Declaration of Independence, asserts that all men [sic] are created equal; however, this promised ideal has failed. All people are not treated fairly, nor are they afforded the equality of opportunity that the Declaration implies. Instead, misuses of power and privilege have oppressed and marginalized people based on differences of ethnicity, age, gender, ability, social class, political beliefs, marital status, size [height and /or weight], sexual orientation, gender expression, spiritual beliefs, language, and national origin. While the American educational system is supposed to mediate differences and provide equal opportunities for ALL students, schools often reinforce and reproduce injustice.

Through a sustained commitment to social justice in all its forms, English education can contribute to disrupting these inequitable hierarchies of power and privilege. This document outlines specific beliefs and recommendations toward this end.

Structure and Scope of the Document

This document is designed to provide policy makers, K-12 English teacher educators and their students, and those impacted by them, with meta-perspectives for understanding the importance of social justice both in and out of school contexts. We provide our seven beliefs about social justice and unpack them to explain each in more detail. With each belief, we enumerate with K-12 activities and assignments (that can be adapted to meet grade level needs and standards), provide an appendix with teacher educator activities and assignments that scaffold social justice into methods, provide considerations for research, and offer relevant resources for teachers to use in their classroom practice. Although not comprehensive, we recognize this as a work in progress that can be expanded over time and into future contexts. A goal of this document and its related research is to prime and move social justice into policy in English education.

Seven Beliefs about Social Justice in Schools

We believe that social justice is:

1. A goal that evades easy definition
2. A grounded theory
3. A stance/position
4. A pedagogy
5. A process
6. A framework for research
7. A promise

The Beliefs Expanded

Belief 1: Definition of Social Justice

Social justice is definitionally complex; it ignites controversy, is not neutral, and varies by person, culture, social class, gender, context, space and time. In fact, when definitions are consensus bound, a consensus definition of social justice is not likely to satisfy the most open-minded of thinkers. Furthermore, social justice cannot be reified nor can it be traced to any one particular location because the definition localizes in the individual or in a collective, not in any governmental policy (Miller, forthcoming 2010). We recognize that many people committed to social justice live a life that extends the following beliefs to outside of school contexts and that we cannot write a belief statement that encompasses every person's experiences. We further recognize that a commitment to enacting social justice in schools is activist-oriented. This definition is, therefore, bound to the K-12 Language Arts and English teacher education classroom contexts. We believe that a disposition committed to enacting social justice enables teachers to teach all students more fairly and equitably. For social justice to exist in our schools means that each student in our classrooms is entitled to the same opportunities for academic achievement regardless of background or acquired privilege.

Although such a disposition will prompt various pedagogical responses depending on the context, we believe that social justice must be a central part of the rhetoric we educators use to conceptualize and carry out our work. Thus, it means that in schools and university classrooms, we educators must teach about injustice and discrimination in all its forms with regard to differences in: race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, age, appearance, ability, national origin, language, spiritual belief, size [height and/or weight], sexual orientation, social class, economic circumstance, environment, ecology, culture, and the treatment of animals. Again, although we recognize that while we cannot predict with certainty what kinds of teaching materials and methods might promote social justice across contexts, we believe that the following activities/assignments are a useful point of departure for students and teachers to explore what might be definitions and measures of justice in a given time and place:

K-12 Activities/Assignments

- Ask students what social justice means.
- Have students discuss examples of social justice or injustice in their lives.
- Ask students why social justice is important.
- Have students do research about issues relating to manifestations of power and privilege and how these have influenced their lives in their neighborhoods, counties, and states.
- Have students do reports on political rulings that have impacted human rights locally, nationally and abroad.
- Reflect on possible outcomes of living a life that dismisses justice as a priority
- Analyze language related to social justice: power, privilege oppression, myth, hatred, violence, peace, equity, inequity, access, academic standardization, and the language embedded within the definition of social justice.

Teacher Education Activities/Assignments

It is highly likely that students come to us at varying levels of awareness about issues relating to social justice. In this descriptive, non-prescriptive developmental model for scaffolding

social justice into English methods courses, the model accounts for a continuum of understanding of awareness. The model is nonlinear as people are likely to move back and forth quickly between stages. Therefore some activities can include various levels at once. Instructors would need to assess when students are ready to be pushed on to different levels. It is up to the instructor and student to select activities based on student need, to select the place at which begin the work. In fact, the developmental identity model for social justice can be individualized based on a student's awareness around social justice and her commitment to it.

As we work within this model, the curriculum we teach and how we construct our lessons will support and facilitate the cognitive, emotional and corporeal growth of our students. The first model, which is referred to as the meta-framework, comes from Nieto and Bode (2008) who provide a framework for supporting individuals through developmental stages in becoming multiculturally sensitive: (1) tolerance [critical reflection], (2) acceptance, (3) respect, and, (4), affirmation, solidarity, and critique. Instead of naming the first stage as "tolerance," which means to "put up" with something even though one's principles may malign with it, it will be called "critical reflection." The second model comes from a non-empirical model as described in *Narratives of Social Justice Teaching* (Miller, 2008), where the once called, 5 "re-s" but now referred to as the 6 "re-s," are introduced as what happens during the "critical pause time" when the preservice teacher can quickly reflect, reconsider, refuse, reconceptualize, rejuvenate and reengage in a manner of seconds.

The 6 "re-s", reflect, reconsider, refuse, reconceptualize, rejuvenate and reengage can be applied to the lessons and become practice for the possible social justice and injustice issues faced by preservice teachers in the field (Miller, forthcoming). This process can support preservice and student teachers develop these skills whereby they move from a potentially destabilizing moment into a restabilizing stance and articulate a response to the best of their ability. Such movement, albeit unseen to the audience, is a strategy to preserve and enhance social justice and other kinds of teaching in the classroom. The 6 "re-s" can exist with any of the four meta-framework stages. Building upon the amalgam of these two models, these proposed strategies can be appropriated into methods courses as we work toward scaffolding a social justice identity. *Reflection* can support a teacher to make a transition when something isn't going well or even when extensions can be made to other topics. *Reconsider* references that something might need to be changed to make a situation flow more effectively. *Refuse* allows for a preservice teacher to negotiate against ideas, to not actively participate, to disagree or even refuse and reject altogether. *Reconceptualize* enables students to understand that there is more than one way to do or respond to something. *Rejuvenate* becomes a sense of "My principles about social justice matter in the context of this classroom and I will not abandon them." In other words, the practice students have in methods classes should work toward stabilizing students' belief systems especially if they are not supported by the school environment. *Reengage* helps students stay present and involved in their teaching for social justice even when they may feel that the school system seems to be unsupportive of equity for all. Although the structure provided is a sample for how to scaffold social justice identity, it will have efficacy in the context of students' teaching lives.

See Appendix A

Researcher Stance and Research Questions

- How do we prepare preservice English teachers to meet the challenges that social justice will bring in schools?
- How do we foster a commitment to social justice?
- How can we support preservice English teachers to maintain a social justice disposition when schools in which they teach do not support teaching for social justice?
- Can a definition of social justice be neutral?
- How can social justice research benefit from assessing the effectiveness of the non-empirical model offered in this document.

Relevant Resources

- Apple, M. (2006). Interrupting the right: On doing critical educational work in conservative times. In G. Ladson-Billings, & W.F. Tate (Eds.), *Educational research in the public interest: Social justice, action, and policy*, (pp. 27-45). New York: Teachers College Press.
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- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Preparing teachers for diversity: Historical perspectives, current trends, and future directions. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice* (pp. 86-87). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Miller, s., & Norris, L. (2007). *Unpacking the loaded teacher matrix: Negotiating space and time between university and secondary English classrooms*. New York: Peter Lang.

Nussbaum, M. (2006). *Frontiers of justice*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.

Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Oxford: Clarendon press.

Wiedeman, C. (2002). Teacher preparation, social justice, equity: A review of the literature. *Equity & Excellence in Education* 35, (3), 200-211.

Belief 2: A Grounded Theory

A grounded theory for social justice presupposes that all students should be treated with human dignity, that all are worthy of the same educational opportunities, and that the contract they enter into with schools must honor their sociocultural advantages and disadvantages. It must seek to offer the same educational, sociocultural, and psycho-emotional opportunities to them in order to help them meet and obtain a [determined] basic threshold that is mutually beneficial to students and educators. Our theory also recognizes that students have different moral, physical and intellectual capabilities due to the historical inheritance of oppression and class status.

A grounded theory for social justice related to K-12 Language Arts and the preservice English teacher classroom translates and demonstrates theory into direct classroom practice as it accounts for inequitable histories, specifies them, and not only brings students up to their [determined] capability thresholds to meet minimums, but also prepares them to sustain and take on challenges in the future beyond. If any student is left behind, the system has failed, no matter how well some may have succeeded. Such a theory for social justice is not parsimonious nor does it leave any student behind, rather it extends altruism to all. A system for all, is implicit in its inception, *it is a system for all* (Miller, forthcoming, 2010).

Just as Nussbaum (2006) identifies her work as having moralistic implications, we, too, identify a commitment to enacting social justice in schools that is *highly moral* and *ethically evaluative*. We do want to create systemic change in education and we want to stop oppressive attitudes and political rulings from interfering with students' opportunities for success in schools. A belief about social justice as grounded theory recognizes and honors the relationships among language, knowledge, and power both in the teaching of English and in the preparation of English teachers, particularly recognizing those relationships that help foster and maintain uneven social and educational outcomes (Commission for Social Justice Mission Statement, 2009). We ground our work in the belief that English teaching and English teacher preparation are political activities that mediate relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and meaning-making processes. Such relationships, we believe, have direct implications for how we achieve equity and access outcomes in English classrooms. We feel it is impossible to prepare English teachers or to engage in serious English study and scholarship without meeting these goals. The challenge for our research is to sustain the critical dialogue, necessary for developing and uncovering theories and practices in the teaching of English that foreground and promote respect across multiple social categories, including race, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, national origin, spiritual belief, socioeconomic status, culture, size [height/and or weight], and ability. These subjectivities, or ways that individuals imagine themselves and their possibilities for action, function together to determine how teachers in English language arts position themselves and others in everyday interactions, in institutions such as schools, and in society. Further, the act of positioning delineates individual and collective opportunities for growth and social activism in the profession of English language

arts—opportunities we feel can have a transformative impact on society. To reiterate, such a theory must stay committed to being translated into direct classroom practice.

K-12 Activities/Assignments

- Have students reflect on the question where does oppression comes from?
- Ask students if there are any oppressive rules in school and unpack their impact on students' lives.
- Ask students what kind of changes might make schools more equitable for ALL students.
- Have students research the impact of First Amendment Speech rights while in school.
- Discuss with students whether they perceive some students are exempted from oppression and why.
- Discuss the meaning of being proactive and how social justice actions can manifest in their lives.
- Reflect on the social constructions of language, culture, economics, and binary relationships and how they inform policy.

Teacher Education Activities/Assignments

See Appendix A

Researcher Stance and Research Questions

- Should a theory for social justice embrace oppressive views?
- Through a theory for social justice, how can we, and do we, need to differentiate between oppressive actions and generative language (Freire, 1970)?
- How do we determine what is socially unjust?
- What other fields of study do we need to continue to draw from to help inform a theory for social justice in English education?
- How can a theory for social justice stay committed to being translated into direct classroom practice?

Relevant Resources

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Belief 3: A Stance/Position

The hierarchy of educational inheritance does not spare any of its K-12 and higher education constituents. Education-based policies are handed down from the government that impale universities to enact (with expectations for accreditation) and demand academics, to comply lest their students of education be “ill-prepared” for the demands of national and state standards. The education students then inherit whatever time-based policy is relevant during a given spacetime, pass on those values and expectations to their secondary or elementary classrooms. Consequently, a critical issue we face with employing social justice in teacher education is that ironically “promoting social justice in teacher education is anathema to the mission and traditions of the modern university, which is intended to foster an open intellectual atmosphere of free thought and speech” (Cochran-Smith, et al., 2009, p. 633). Social justice threatens the hegemonic pillars that have sustained national institutions. Social justice, which itnends to be about equality, access and redress, has motivated the moral majority and the testing community to create disjunctive and culturally insensitive tests, and disharmonious agendas that block access to equitable schooling practices. Social justice ceases to be extant relating to educational policy; instead we see educational policy in the United States exclusively dominated by accountability issues at the national, state, and local levels (Linn, 2000; Olson, 1999; Popkewitz, 2000).

Teachers have inherited from this politic of hegemony, albeit sometimes unconsciously, an intentionally socially constructed system of duality: that of the socially, economically, and culturally disadvantaged and that of the privileged. Because the “system” as we know it is dependent on a “language we never made” (Butler, 1997, p. 26) and the power (Foucault,

1980) that came before, the preservice teacher is vulnerable to repositioning (or even subordinating) the self, as a coordinate, at the center of this dichotomy. Preservice teachers' subjectivities are especially vulnerable to perpetuating social and educational inequalities if they aren't made aware of or are actively involved in recognizing the power they hold in co-constructing students' identities (Miller & Norris, 2007). However, if preservice teachers were made aware of the sociopolitical context of history and the concomitant inequitable schooling practices that have ensued, perhaps they would be more likely to address it in the classroom. However, social justice pedagogy alone cannot address the insurmountable depth of inequalities that will still linger in spite of changes in teacher education;—*no* policy must do that. (Miller, forthcoming)

Research on student achievement confirms that classroom teachers are directly relational to the “quality and equitable delivery of education and student academic achievement” (Ayers, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nieto, 2000) (Ukpokodu, 2007, p. 8). Fewer than 10% of teachers are non-white while over 40% of public school students are African-American, Latino, Asian, and Native American (Epstein, 2005) and the diversity of student languages, ethnicities, religions, and racial and cultural make-up continues to grow (Banks, 2004). Yet, teachers in the classrooms are predominantly white, middle class, and monolingual (Futrell, 2000; Kailin, 1999) and lack the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work within schools that have a predominantly urban population. Alarmingly still, Kathleen Brown (2005) tells us: “the evidence is clear that various segments of our public school population experiences negative and inequitable treatment on a daily basis” (p. 155) (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sheurich & Laible, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). Still, students of color and white students from low socioeconomic backgrounds experience lower standardized test scores, teacher expectations, and access to resources (Brown, 2005). In fact, over 4.4 million second language learners are enrolled in the United States public schooling system and are expected to take the same standardized tests and that are typically evaluated similarly to students whose first language is English (Arce, Luna, Borjian & Conrad, 2005).

Even more alarming, these trends carry over into teacher preparatory programs where, in a review of statistics from 2000, the RATE study revealed that teacher educators are predominantly white and fewer than 20% of all professors are non-white (Zimpher, 1989). The system is failing its students plain and simply. We need a democratic system that is more balanced around student needs.

We believe that English education can disrupt such inequitable hierarchies of power and privilege. As a field of process, practice, and research, we are committed to interrupting current practices that reproduce social, cultural, moral, economic, gendered, intellectual, and physical injustices.

K-12 Activities/Assignments

- Have students address a social cause that is important to them and consider ways to contribute or affect change.
- Have students research social, cultural, gender movements and unpack how they brought about change.
- Have a mock trial about an issue relating to social justice.

- Attend community events and forums.
- Invite students to have a social justice forum or school-wide event.

Teacher Education Activities/Assignments

See Appendix A

Researcher Stance and Research Questions

- How we can attract, draw and recruit more non-white educators and teacher educators to the English teaching profession?
- How do we create teacher activists and what would that look like?
- What does teaching for social justice look like in the methods classroom?
- How can teacher activists be supported in their schools when more traditional models of teaching and learning are in place?
- Social justice research will benefit from assessing the effectiveness of the non-empirical model offered in this document.

Relevant Resources

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Electronic Resources

- ACLU: American Civil Liberties Union: <http://www.aclu.org/>
- Amnesty International: <http://www.amnesty.org/>
- Disability Rights: <http://www.dralegal.org/>
- Human Rights Campaign (GLBTQ Rights) : <http://www.hrc.org/>
- National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF-for GLBTQ Rights): <http://www.transgenderlaw.org/>
- Native American Rights: <http://www.narf.org>
- Southern Poverty Law Center: <http://www.splcenter.org/>

Belief 4: A Pedagogy

Social Justice Pedagogy presupposes that all students are worthy of human dignity, that all are worthy of the same opportunities in an education, that the contract they enter into in schools must honor their sociocultural advantages and disadvantages, that it must seek to offer the same educational, sociocultural, and psycho-emotional opportunities to each student in order to help them meet and obtain a [determined] basic threshold that is mutually beneficial to each party who enters into the school space. Social justice pedagogy strives for equity for all students, supports the affective, corporeal, and emotional growth of individuals in relation to a descriptive and fluid definition of social justice, can become an embodied identity (through coursework), has efficacy in multiple contexts, and recognizes that students bring inequitable histories. And, in spite of inequitable histories, a social justice pedagogy strives to bring each student up to their capability threshold. Social justice as pedagogy embraces the paradox of its conflicting principles, that there is a simultaneous need to make a firm decision about how to promote justice while at the same time to critically interrogate (i.e. doubt or even refuse) those decisions—or at least leave open the possibility that we might be wrong. Social justice must also recognize that social justice to one person may not be social justice to another.

Applebaum (2004) reveals that, when we consider the political nature of social justice teaching, we cannot separate it from a moral position or an ethical stance. Research indicates that social justice (Miller, in press) is highly political because of its inherent ability to challenge the status quo and its potential to dismantle of hierarchy of privilege that largely goes unchecked—and which is further sustained by erecting politicized barriers that make it difficult to move social justice into policy. It behooves us to explore this idea of moral agency because it threatens to reposition our own morality as the “right morality” and privileges us over those with whom we might find oppressive. By eliding this struggle, we perpetuate inequities that we want to dismantle and reposition not only whiteness, but us as moral authority. Our research should not come across as moralistic but we must also understand how to draw a boundary between what is and isn’t socially just as we relate it to the spacetime of the rotating morals under any governing democracy. Therefore, there is a paradox inherent in social justice research.

In careful consideration of how to address moral agency with preservice teachers English educators must not exude a proselytizing stance. Applebaum (2004) says that, “moral agency must avoid assumptions of certainty” (p. 70) and moral agency must be a voluntary, non-forced or coercive act. She also explains that classroom teachers should encourage in their own students how their own moral motivations reposition whiteness. DeVoss, Cushman, and Grabrill (2005) concur the difficulty of such an undertaking not only has to do with governing principles but that it is also well-entrenched in the infrastructure of schools. These infrastructures are dependent on the inside and outside of other social structures, social arrangements, and technologies; on efforts which are far reaching; on a learned as part of the membership to the space; on a dependence of “human” inertia; on its spacetime genesis and exodus; and on linked conventions of practice. In other words, schools reinforce psychological, emotional, spiritual, educational and moral beliefs of whatever moral authority governs during a specific democracy. Unless teacher preparatory programs challenge these infrastructures, the same type of moral authority is likely to have long-standing efficacy.

*We also recognize that research on the constitution of a preservice teacher identity helps strengthen an argument about the validity of social justice as policy. A matrix of preservice English teacher research by Alsup (2006), Britzman (1991), Danielewicz (2001), Miller (2006), and Vinz (2006), each illuminate that belief systems impact identity. These studies articulate that belief impacts behavior and that behavior shapes identity formation. Such studies provide a foundation for reconceptualizing how we might consider teaching about social justice methodology and pedagogy which can facilitate the co-construction of a social justice English teacher identity through our methods courses.

K-12 Activities/Assignments

- Invite in guest speakers who can address issues related to social justice.
- Attend community events and forums.
- Have students conduct research about different social justice related- issues in their communities and then debate perspectives.
- Encourage students to read about current events from Amnesty International, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Human Rights Campaign, etc. and write, discuss or debate about them.

Teacher Education Activities/Assignments

See Appendix A

Researcher Stance and Research Questions

- How can we practice social justice pedagogy in our teacher preparation programs and what does that look like?
- How can we measure the enactment of social justice pedagogy in a K-12 classroom?
- How can a long term commitment to social justice pedagogy be measured and then moved toward policy?
- How can we demystify the importance of teaching for social justice?
- How can we generate socially just assessment tools for the English language arts?
- How can social justice research benefit from assessing the effectiveness of the non-empirical model offered in this document?

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Belief 5: A Process

When we talk about social justice as process, we liken it to a journey, which is neither about arrival nor finality, but it is constructed by inventive strategies that can generate movement towards enacting social justice all around us in school contexts. This process recognizes that while students have inequitable and/or privileged histories, a classroom process committed to social justice, seeks to create equity within the class context that can have efficacy in the out-of-school context of students' lives. We recognize that our definitions of and projects in pursuit of social justice must be context-dependent, responsive, open to direction from the “victims” of injustice (so that they're not victims, but agents), dedicated both to results and to just (and humble) processes of deliberation and reflection. In our pursuit therefore, process infers action, reflection and momentum (praxis), and patience, and that while our intended outcome is that ALL students experience social justice around them in schools, this will take time and necessitate a call to action. Therefore, we must recognize that while results may come, they are likely to morph as different democracies emerge, and as political rulings are handed down.

K-12 Activities/Assignments

- Have student invent a (board and or other) game with rules and discuss the importance of the process.
- Ask students to write out directions for making Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwiches for everyone in a classroom and then follow what they wrote, verbatim. Make a farce of the directions (emphasis on process).

- Have lengthy discussions with students on rules and laws and ask them how they enable or disable people from experiencing safety and protection.
- Ask students to reflect on school rules and consider what is/isn't working. Turn this into a "Dear Editor" moment and write the school paper or make a flyer.
- Ask students to reflect on your classroom and its resources to see if there are any items that cause discomfort (from lack of books, to posters, to desk arrangements, to resources...)

Teacher Education Activities/Assignments

See Appendix A

Researcher Stance and Research Questions

- How do we measure or understand if pedagogy, process/praxis is effective in literacy instruction?
- How can we determine what pedagogical change is necessary in the classroom?
- What observable moments or artifacts do we look for in the process of enacting social justice?
- How do we qualify an individual's right to object in the process of social justice, i.e., when a student or teacher perpetuates oppressive actions in the classroom context?
- How does process affect a student's understanding of social justice?
- How do we reflect on the symbiotic nature of student-teacher when examining process?
- How do we identify and the political, social, and moral obstacles that affect our teaching for social justice? How do we work with or around the obstacles? (e.g., NCATE, lack of equal rights for the GLBTQ community, the religious right, textbook companies, tracking practice, elitist attitudes about honors courses, scientifically driven data that determines school funding...).

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Belief 6: A Framework for Research

Research about social justice or injustice in schools should follow a similar but not necessarily identical trajectory to the qualitative and/or quantitative design of research in education. Unique to its design however, would be both its story and the purpose of the study. We advocate for social justice research in education to be grounded within a theoretical framework that has a historical understanding of the origin of the determined oppression in said story and how, through its narrative, the possible moments for change are revealed, and how agency and/or emancipation emerge. In other words, unique to social justice research in education is: (1) its ability to identify historical causality of an oppression,

(2) to reveal its oppressive mark or impact on an individual, group, or context, and (3) to generate potential outcomes for change.

A framework for social justice research is thus predicated in a grounded theory, which as we see it, is threefold: (1) Reflection, (2) Change, and (3) Participation. *Reflection* refers to unpacking personal truths from people, ideologies, and contexts to help explain how hegemonic hierarchies are oppressive. *Change* refers to becoming more socially aware of how power and privilege that arises from within institutions in relation to social class, ethnicity, culture, gender, religion, national origin, language, ability, sexual orientation, gender expression, political beliefs, marital status and/or education, can be oppressive. *Participation* teaches how action, agency, and empowerment can be used to transform ideas, contexts, and may even lead to systemic change. Based on our understanding of English education, Social Justice Theory (re) conceptualizes a critical review of literature that supports social justice methodologically both in the classroom and through research methodologies. It includes creating new and drawing from, current methodologies that speak to the literature and its juxtaposition with the counter-narratives of participants. It includes (re) conceptualizing data within a framework that draws from this literature and its' methods. It includes (re) representing data that values its constituents' perspectives as they challenge master narratives. And lastly, it includes the possibility of its efficacy becoming drafted as social justice policy for students. (Miller, forthcoming, 2010)

This brings us to a “crisis of representation,”-i.e., how (any) qualitative studies about social justice can qualify as valid research that informs policy. As we know, for any qualitative research results in education to be considered valid, there are norms that must be in place. The process of determining and setting up a study is anything but simple, for it is in the very set-up, that it can be misleading and faulty and attacked for its lack of veracity. For instance, if research examines power dynamics in schools, then the frame for the research must carefully reflect and show that the research is grounded within studies of dynamics of power and related theoretical studies in social spaces. Relating to social justice, the researcher must carefully and masterfully articulate the purpose of the research, design research questions and sub-questions, set delimiters, identify the type of qualitative research, reflect on prior research, establish a theoretical framework in order to determine possible contributions to the current research (noting its uniqueness), consider the characteristics of a pool of participants and the reasoning for it, determine the kinds of instruments that will be used to collect the data, determine the type and layers of analysis for the data, consider the mode of expression for the data, and discuss the data and then consider its implications and transferability for other studies (Merriam, 2001). There are also ethical considerations that must factor into the design of the study so that it is considered valid and reliable. To ensure the research(er) is trustworthy, s/he must lay out the mechanisms that guarantee its internal validity through triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, collaborative modes of research, and by revealing his/her positionality (Merriam, 2001). To determine its external validity, the researcher must discuss the study's generalizability and transferability to other research contexts through rich, thick description, typicality, or multisite design. Lastly, the researcher must also consider the ethics involved in the study. Stake (1994) reminds us that, “Qualitative researchers are guests in private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict” (p. 244). Researchers must therefore consider if they are honoring or breaking cultural barriers, reflect on how a story may make a participant vulnerable, or consider if transgressions might have occurred

that could impact the outcome of the research. Ultimately, researchers must be careful to not recreate hierarchies of power. *Social justice research must therefore be carefully considered, revisited, and negotiated with its interactants, throughout its entire tenure.*

K-12 Activities/Assignments

- Challenge students to think about language and how it affects people.
- Invite students to dialogue about ideas that oppress people and role-play scenarios.
- Provide diverse perspectives of issues relating to social justice in the media and share ideas on an ongoing basis.
- Explore career pathways with students relating to social justice.
- Have students investigate their own family backgrounds to observe if they have experienced oppression or privilege to discover whether how they have either benefited or been held back from experiencing a life of human dignity.
- Reflect on the social constructions of language, culture, economics, and binary relationships and on whether these constructions inform policy.

Teacher Education Activities/Assignments

See Appendix A

Researcher Stance and Research Questions

- How can we amass the unique studies, methodologies, data analyses, and representations for data that address social justice issues?
- What makes a methodology appropriate in framing social justice and what does that look like?
- How can a research framework for social justice have efficacy over space and time, moving from the university classroom into the K-12 classroom?
- How can a research for social justice inform policy?
- What do policy makers need to know that we know about the importance of a policy about social justice in K-12 schools?
- How do we prepare ourselves to confront oppositional perspectives while enacting social justice in schools?

Relevant Resources

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Belief 7: A Promise

A promise to embody and enact social justice in schooling is a lifelong promise that commits to upholding and honoring human dignity of ALL individuals impacted by the educational context. Through our thoughts, actions, 'pro-actions,' beliefs, and building of current and future alliances, ALL students will have equal opportunity for academic success. Revisiting Belief 1, we inscribe a promise that:

Each student in our classrooms is entitled to the same opportunities of academic achievement regardless of background or acquired privilege. It means that when in schools or in our university classrooms, we stand up for and teach about injustice and discrimination in all forms with regard to differences in: race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, age, appearance, ability, national origin, language, spiritual belief, weight [height and/or weight], sexual orientation, social class, economic circumstance, environment, ecology, culture, and animal.

Our promise presupposes that no student should be privileged over another and that our pedagogy, curricular choices, texts, spatial make-up of the classroom, posters, discourse, and our dialogues with others in the school environment (and even in out-of-school contexts) is intended to honor ALL students, ALL of the time. Even though we occasionally fail in this promise, recognizing that there is much to be learned about social justice and injustice, we must continue to be relentless in our efforts to collectively move forward and recommit to the longevity of honoring social justice in schools.

K-12 Activities/Assignments

- Ask students to discuss groups, causes, or beliefs that they are committed to.
- Reflect on what commitment looks like, feels like, and could be like.
- Have students role-play various scenes where peers do and don't come to the aid of an oppressed peer. Discuss consequences of action and inaction.
- Research the work and role of freedom fighters from multiple cultural lenses. Discuss what they were fighting for, what oppression they experienced and the results of their actions.
- Have students write a list of what's most important to them in the world. Ask them to write short stories, based on their lists about what would happen, if what was important was no longer there or accessible.

Teacher Education Activities/Assignments

See Appendix A

Researcher Stance and Research Questions

- How do we unpack inadvertent (teacher to student) oppression in the context of the classroom?
- How can we help teachers understand the manifestations and consequences of inaction?
- Can we measure the moment of enacting something socially unjust and how can it be remediated?
- How do we measure the impact of social justice pedagogy on students in the context of a classroom?

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Notes

- 1 In a related commitment to teaching social justice The Association for Teacher Educators, who generates standards for all teacher educators has created a standard related to social justice which reads:

STANDARD 2 Cultural Competence

Apply cultural competence and promote social justice in teacher education

One of the charges to teacher education is to prepare teachers to connect and communicate with diverse learners (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). To develop capacity among culturally, socially, and linguistically diverse students, teachers first need to know their own cultures. They also need to hold high expectations for all students, understand developmental levels and what is common and unique among different groups, reach out to families and communities to learn about their cultures, select curriculum materials that are inclusive, use a range of assessment methods, and be proficient in a variety of pedagogical methods that facilitate the acquisition of content knowledge for all learners. Establishing a closer fit between pedagogy and culturally different learning styles positively impacts students both socially and academically (Gay, 2002). Culturally relevant pedagogy “not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469).

Teacher educators share the responsibility of helping pre-service and in-service teachers to understand these concepts and to apply them successfully in their classrooms. They do not merely understand the concepts underlying the definitions of cultural competency but clearly demonstrate how those concepts are applied in their own teaching and in that of their students. (ATE)

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