

CONTRADICTIONS IN TEACHING: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS'
SOCIAL JUSTICE LITERACIES IN MIDDLE AND SECONDARY ENGLISH
CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

ASHLEY SUMMER BOYD: Contradictions in Teaching: A Collective Case Study of Teachers' Social Justice Literacies in Middle and Secondary English Classrooms
(Under the direction of Julie Justice and Jocelyn Glazier)

In recent years, discourse in education related to issues of equity has broadened to include an emphasis on social justice. This phrase refers to both a critical stance and a propensity to act for social change. As part of this movement, teacher educators strive to facilitate the development of teachers who are cognizant of their own backgrounds and those of their students, are critical consumers of knowledge, and are committed to culturally relevant pedagogies. Yet, the literature on social justice in discipline-specific areas, notably English Education, offers few models of effective social justice educators. This study uses a collective case design to investigate the social justice literacies of three individual teachers. Deductive coding is used to determine teachers' strengths in practice, including their conceptions of students and use of multicultural and sociopolitical content. Findings in each case present the contradictions that emerge within teachers' attempts to implement social justice in their classrooms, and these serve to complicate the image of how social justice appears in context. Findings across cases highlight the importance of teacher biography, particularly identity and experience, the struggle for authentic and critical collaboration in schools, and the challenges of cultivating students as change agents. Implications of the study suggest that teacher educators must find ways to uncover the myriad biographical experiences of preservice candidates and to

incorporate reflection on them in meaningful ways. Additionally, we must work to provide field experiences in varied cultural contexts so that preservice teachers can better work with students, especially those from non-dominant populations. Furthermore, we need to offer opportunities for critical collaboration both within field experiences and in the university context. Finally, for English preservice teachers specifically, we must model for both deconstructive and reconstructive pedagogies with classroom texts for preservice candidates, so that they can begin to discern ways to cultivate students as change agents. Ultimately, the findings from the study suggest that embodying social justice literacies is dependent on context, teacher, and student, yet the conclusions across cases also suggest vital spaces where English teacher educators can impact future practice in the field.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	xvi
I. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EDUCATION: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW	1
Why Social Justice in Education?	2
Theoretical Frameworks	4
New Literacy Studies	4
Critical Literacy	5
Types of Social Justice Literacies	7
II. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: SOCIAL JUSTICE IN TEACHING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN ENGLISH EDUCATION	12
Social Justice in the Context of Teaching	13
Social Justice in the Context of Teaching English	16
Social Justice in English Content	18
Social Justice in English Pedagogy	22
Social Justice and Teacher Preparation	27
Preparing English Teachers for Social Justice	29
The University-School Connection	31
III. EXAMINING SOCIAL JUSTICE LITERACIES IN PRACTICE: METHODOLOGY	35
Research Design	35
Participants	38

Data Collection	40
Classroom Observation	40
Interviews.....	42
Document Collection	46
Data Analysis	47
Layers of Coding.....	48
Critical Discourse Analysis.....	51
Combining Methodological Approaches	55
Credibility	56
Trustworthiness and Authenticity	57
Transferability and Dependability	57
Role of the Researcher and Positionality	58
Limitations of the Study.....	60
IV. BEING A TEACHER ALLY AND CREATING A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE: THE CONTRADICTIONS IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS AND CULTIVATING SOCIOPOLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS	62
The Context.....	62
Pacific High School	62
The Classroom	65
The Classes	66
Etta’s Social Justice: “I Can’t Turn it Off”	67
Illustrating Etta’s Social Justice: Focusing on Sexual Orientation: “Is Justin Bieber Dating a Guy?” .	71
Contradiction in Teaching: The Struggle to Connect to All Students	75
Building Relationships as a Social Justice Literacy.....	75

Etta’s Pedagogic Efforts to Connect with Students	76
Connection through Writing	77
Connection through Discursive Community-Building	79
Connection through Sharing Herself.....	80
Limitations and Challenges in Relationship-Building.....	84
Inability to Connect with Certain Students	84
Contextual Factors Affecting Student Relationships	87
Etta’s Critical Reflection on the Limits of her Literacy.....	88
Contradiction in Teaching: Fostering Critical Consciousness without Action.....	89
Building Sociopolitical Consciousness as a Social Justice Literacy.....	89
Developing Critical Consciousness in Practice	90
Using Content and Curriculum to Facilitate Awareness.....	90
Enacting Critical Pedagogy.....	94
The Trials of Sociopolitical Consciousness: The Struggle for Activism and the Feeling of Hopelessness.....	99
The Difficulty in Cultivating Students as Change Agents.....	100
The Feeling of Hopelessness.....	100
Contextual Limitations to Change	102
Concluding Etta’s Story	103
V. BEING A WHITE TEACHER WITH PREDOMINATELY MINORITIZED STUDENTS: THE CONTRADICTIONS IN CONSIDERING STUDENT CIRCUMSTANCES AND USING MULTICULTURAL CURRICULUM.....	105
The Context.....	105
James Middle School	105
The Classroom	107

The Classes	109
Beverly's Social Justice: "That Means Putting in the Extra Effort".....	110
Illustrating Beverly's Social Justice Focus: Students' Lives Outside of School and Socioeconomic Status: "The Kids . . . Have a lot of Stuff to Deal With".....	113
Contradiction in Teaching: Considering Student Circumstances and	115
Conceptions of Students as a Social Justice Literacy	115
Beverly's Views of Student Behavior and Academic Success.....	116
Explanations of Student Behavior.....	116
Students as Capable of Success	120
The Contradiction in Conceptions of Students: Deficit Discourse and the Struggle for Critical Reflection.....	125
Contradictory Discourse on Students and Parents.....	125
Reflecting on Being a White Teacher	128
Critical Self-Reflection	133
Contradiction in Teaching: Multicultural Curriculum without Critique.....	135
Focusing on Multicultural Content as a Social Justice Literacy.....	135
Beverly's Culturally Responsive Curriculum.....	136
Multicultural and Relevant Content.....	137
Media Content.....	139
Limitations of Content without Critique.....	143
The Spectrum of Multicultural Education	143
Concluding Beverly's Story.....	146
 VI. PLAYING THE GAME OF RESOURCES AND NEGOTIATING FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: CONTRADICTIONS IN CURRICULUM AND STUDENT CAPABILITIES.....	 148

The Context.....	148
Ivy Middle School.....	148
The Classroom	150
The Classes	152
Tate’s Social Justice: “Everybody Gets What They Need”	152
Tate’s Definition of Social Justice	157
Illustrating Tate’s Social Justice Focus: Race and Inequity: “It Just Kind of Comes Naturally”	159
Contradiction in Teaching: Engaging Content, Wavering Critique.....	161
Engaging Students with Content as a Social Justice Literacy	161
Tate’s Quest for Relevant Resources	162
Content and Curriculum.....	163
Inquiry Based Learning.....	168
Playing the Game	170
The Contradiction in Content: Walking the Line of Critique	172
Contradiction in Teaching: Inspiring Students to Succeed While Struggling to Act for Change.....	174
Believing in Students as a Social Justice Literacy.....	174
Tate’s Belief in Students’ Capabilities.....	175
The Contradiction: Struggling to Facilitate Student Agency.....	176
Concluding Tate’s Story	177
 VII. BIOGRAPHY, COLLABORATION, AND SOCIAL CHANGE: CROSS CASE ANALYSIS	 179
 The Importance of Biography to Teachers’ Practices: Limitations and	

Usefulness of Educator’s Backgrounds in Teaching for Social Justice.....	180
Teacher Biography as Limiting Social Justice Dispositions.....	181
Teacher Biography as an Impetus to Social Justice Literacies.....	181
Considerations of Race in Biography.....	189
Perspectives on Collaboration and Community: Checklists and Critical Colleagues.....	191
Administrative Expectations in Professional Learning Communities.....	191
The Reality of Professional Learning Communities.....	194
The Challenge to Work for Social Change: Social Justice as a Verb.....	198
Promoting Change as Part of Social Justice Teaching.....	199
Examples of Social Action in Practice.....	202
Individual and Contextual Limitations in Regard to Change.....	204
Stakeholders.....	204
Institutional Pressures.....	205
Structure of Schools.....	207
Concluding Cross-Case Analysis.....	207
VIII. IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS.....	209
Implications for Teacher Education.....	209
Navigating Teacher Biographies.....	210
Cultivating Skills for Collaboration.....	214
Incorporating Critical and Reconstructive Pedagogies and Social Action Projects in English Methods.....	218
Additional Considerations for Social Justice in Education.....	221
Social Justice for Whom: Issues of Access in Definitions and Implementation.....	222
Cautions and Possibilities.....	224

Directions for Further Research	225
Appendix A	228
Appendix B	229
Appendix C	230
Appendix D	231
Appendix E	233
Appendix F	234
Appendix G	235
Appendix H	236
Appendix I	237
Appendix J	238
Appendix K	239
Appendix L	240
Appendix M	241
Appendix N	242
Appendix O	243
REFERENCES	244

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Initial Participant Interview Guide.	43
2. Phase 2 Participant Interview Guide.	44
3. Phase 3 Participant Interview Guide.	45
4. Student Focus Group Guide.	46
5. Deductive Code List.	50
6. Timeline of Research and Data Collected at Each Site.	262
7. Cross Case Comparison: Approximate Percentage of the Total Number of Coded Instances for Code by Participant.	274

CHAPTER 1

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EDUCATION: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In our contemporary era, universities, religious organizations, and corporations espouse missions of social justice which connote commitments to respecting diversity, demonstrating fairness, and working towards equality (Greene, 1998; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). These varied inclusions have led to an overall ambiguity and a lack of “collective understanding” (Carlson, 2007, p. 1) of the phrase. Furthermore, some scholars report that these uses have diluted the original purpose of social justice (Cochran-Smith, 2008; Hackman, 2005) and fear that the appropriation of the label has led to misunderstanding, similar to the perversion of multicultural education in the 1980s which became a means to essentialize cultures and enact token celebrations (Nieto, 2000; Ramirez Wiedeman, 2002; Sleeter, 1996).

Instead of these nebulous manifestations, the version of social justice to which I refer throughout the remainder of this dissertation is grounded in a specific set of dispositions, and it implies both an overall orientation of raised awareness as well as collective commitment to action for a more equitable society with open access to opportunities. These dispositions begin with a belief that we live in a capitalist and stratified society plagued by inequity which is specifically supported by the distribution of economic and social goods including power, and that this status quo is upheld and reproduced through hegemony (Bell, 1997). This stance is opposed to the structures of domination that perpetuate privilege and injustice that stem from a

“possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipsitz, 2010, p. 79), where whiteness is “a system of ideology of white dominance that marginalizes and oppresses people of color, ensuring existing privileges for white people in this country” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 3). It recognizes that notions such as liberal humanism are often manipulated and constructed as ways to ignore structural oppression in favor of arguments for personal responsibility (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012) and that meritocracy is a ubiquitous myth in the United States (Barry, 2005). My viewpoint of social justice acknowledges that while there are individual expressions of discrimination, oppression is pervasive on a much larger scale (Young, 2010) and is often indistinguishable to both its perpetrators and victims (Bell, 1997; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). I limit this definition to social justice in the context of the United States, whose long history of racism, sexism, classism, and jingoism is beyond the scope of this work but is necessary to cite as the backdrop upon which disparities and cumulative disadvantages (Barry, 2005) have been built and naturalized.

Why Social Justice in Education?

The need for social justice in education arises out of two particular premises. First, the perpetuation of the unequal distribution of resources and resulting social structure in American society where poverty continues to grow and meritocratic ideologies are maintained necessitates interruption. I believe schools are an entry point, not a solution, to facilitating disruption of this systemic oppression. Schools, as complicated sites in which the dialectic of reproduction and resistance is continuously in motion (Giroux, 1983), are one institutional site where the goals of social justice can be realized because these structures uphold the system in a number of ways. For example, it has been well-documented how the process of ‘tracking’ provides differentiated access to knowledge based on students’ social class (Oakes, 1985), and vast inequities result from the perpetuation of valuing certain forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) over others

(Lareau & Horvat, 1999). However, students can be taught to critique these structures and become agents of change (McLaren, 2003). Schools thus have the potential to be places where students and teachers act in ways that resist the cycle of oppression, generate new knowledge, and work for a more democratic society.

Second, and looking more broadly to teacher education and the English classroom, we need theories for social justice that assist in discipline-specific teacher preparation. While pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) was developed as a crucial element of teacher education in the past, preservice students struggle today with how social justice pedagogies relate to their future classrooms (e.g. MacIntosh, 2007). Over the past thirty years, the discourse in teacher education has broadened to include social justice, shifting “the focus from issues of cultural diversity” toward “making social change and activism central to the vision of teaching and learning promoted,” (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009, p. 597).

In addition to the argument that teacher education should prepare future teachers to address structural inequity and oppression (Cochran-Smith, 2008) in discipline-specific ways (Kumashiro, 2004; Moje, 2007), many scholars have also cited the preponderance of white, middle-class females in teacher education programs as the need for social justice preparation to occur (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sleeter, 2001) because they are vastly different from their student populations. In fact, evidence that these candidates have few encounters with the cultures and families of their future students is alarming (Nieto, 2000).

Jones and Enriquez (2009) write:

Preparing teachers to teach across differences and work toward social justice has been a more recent pursuit in the study of teacher education as a result of the now overt acknowledgement of systemic disadvantages of particular groups of people inherent in a society where mainstream power operates through white, patriarchal, English-speaking, heterosexual, middle-classness and affluence that is explicitly and implicitly perpetuated in schools. (p. 148)

The continuation of those values is undoubtedly in large part the responsibility of the teachers who reflect that dominant group. The diversity in our student populations continues to grow while the faces of our teachers remain the same (Changing Profession, 2013). Thus, to continue to prepare future teachers who are oriented toward social justice in dispositions and actions, this research is needed.

The specific research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are novice teachers' interpretations of the meaning of social justice, and how do they view the role of social justice in their classrooms?
2. What are middle and secondary English teachers' social justice literacies?
 - a. How do they implement these social justice literacies, and what struggles do they experience?

Theoretical Frameworks

New Literacy Studies

In conceptualizing this research study, I draw upon the framework offered by New Literacy Studies (NLS). This paradigm allows a way to read the classroom as a text on social justice and also permits for seeing social justice as a literacy practice, thus it lends itself to both the methods used as well as the ability to theorize on actions observed. New Literacy Studies posits literacy, or rather literacies, as social practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Green, 2001). As a practice, literacy “varies with social context and is not the same, uniform thing in each case” (Street, 1997, p. 79). Additionally, “researchers working from an NLS orientation claim that literacy is socially constructed, ideological, multiple, and contextual” (Johnson, 2012, p. 149). Thus, students (and teachers) actually have multiple literacies (Gee, 1996; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Street, 1997) that occur in different domains, such as at home, at school, and in

the workplace (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). New Literacy Studies thus provides a way to read the manners in which teachers and students interact through their multiple Discourses (Gee, 1996). While social justice can be an ambiguous term, New Literacy Studies enables a way to see that social justice is “a lived practice that becomes operational in specific locations, in specific groups, with specific individuals” (Carlson, 2007, p. 1).

James Gee’s theory of Discourse (1996), a contribution to the field of New Literacy Studies, affords for an understanding of literacies as socially embedded. His conceptualization of literacies also provides scholars a mode through which to discern classroom practices. Gee (1996) explains, “Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes.” (p. 127). Thus, Discourses are tightly linked to identity, and through them people are able to make explicit the various realms in which they participate. Different literacy practices are aligned with different discourses, and this demonstrates how literacies, especially those associated with social justice, become performances that are politically charged and infused with ideological meaning. Furthermore, Gee (1996) differentiates between primary and secondary Discourses, where the primary Discourse is a person’s initial identity in the world and secondary Discourses are those into which human beings are socialized through the various institutions to which they subscribe. Gee (1996) defines literacy “as mastery of a secondary Discourse” (p. 143), as knowing how to fully communicate and gain acceptance within a given particular social realm, and he denotes “liberating literacy” as “a particular use of a Discourse (to critique other ones), not a particular Discourse” (p. 144).

Critical Literacy

Facilitating the enactment of a “liberating literacy” (Gee, 1996, p. 144) in which students use a Discourse to question and critique power relations is one of the main goals of critical literacy. Its emphasis on critique relates to social justice in that critical literacy is a notion which opposes views of literacy that are strictly and technically skill-based or rely on some form of cognitive achievement (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gee, 1996; Giroux, 1987; King & O’Brien, 2004; Myers & Beach, 2004). These types of definitions are limiting, and are what Giroux (1987) deems a “functional perspective tied to narrowly conceived economic interests” (p. 2). Street (1997) also labels these an “autonomous model” in which literacy “is the same everywhere and simply needs transplanting to new environments” (p. 80). Contrasting such characterizations is a form of critical literacy which recognizes the political nature associated with interpretation and analysis. A critical literacy approach to education expands what it means to ‘read’ texts, where a text is broadly defined to include, “cultural practices, rituals, dress and behaviour as well as the more fixed and ‘produced’ texts such as television programmes or advertisements” (Turner, 2003, p. 90). These texts are hence the materials of the contemporary world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Giroux (1987) explains critical literacy as a site for agency and critique, and it is more of an exercise in knowing, questioning, and transforming (Kelly, 1997) than a possession of static knowledge. It involves seeing the contextual significance of a text, including its “social, political, historical, cultural, and economic factors” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 133). Furthermore, when educators facilitate critical literacy, learners come to discern themselves as socialized beings, able to recognize and name both their experience and how their experience is shaped by larger entities (Giroux, 1987). Language also plays an essential role in critical literacy, as Freire and Macedo (1987) declare, “Language is packed with ideology, and for this

reason it has to be given prominence in any radical pedagogy that proposes to provide space for students' emancipation" (p. 128). Thus a central part of critical literacy is the deconstruction of texts and of accepted knowledge to uncover the ways that language is used to produce meaning. Once deconstructed, though, scholars who work for critical literacy in education note the importance of rebuilding. Luke (2000), for example, states:

The aim of critical literacy is a classroom environment where students and teachers together work to (a) see how the worlds of texts work to construct their worlds, their cultures, and their identities in powerful, often overtly ideological ways; and (b) use texts as social tools in ways that allow for reconstruction of these same worlds. (p. 453)

The goal is to work in classrooms to understand how our knowledge has been influenced by the predominant 'texts' of our world and then to use those texts for critique as well as to build our own that communicate new meanings. The emphasis in critical literacy is thus on reading texts as a signifiers of social messages. This connects to scholars' work in New Literacy Studies who provide the broadened view of texts because their work allows for the type of analysis performed through critical literacy. Combined, the two frameworks offer a way to examine how teachers' read texts in their classrooms in ways that promote critical literacy as well as a way to think of those teachers' classroom practices as literacies themselves.

Types of Social Justice Literacies

Johnson (2012) writes, "The pedagogic and strategic aspects of teaching for social justice are informed by evolving conceptions of literacy and literacies" (p. 148). Thus, building upon the theory of literacies set forth by the New Literacy Studies, Hines and Johnson (2007) created a taxonomy of literacy practices used in school spaces associated with English toward the aims of social justice. Instead of relating their work to pedagogical practices, however, the literacy strategies upon which they focus were those that "candidates use to work productively within and against systems to honor their commitments to social justice" (Johnson, 2012, p. 150).

Whereas they cited critical literacy as the pedagogical practice of English teachers for social justice and as an area which researchers had explored extensively, their work focused on the ways similarly-minded teachers navigated their relationships and school-related encounters. They assert, “Naming these forms of agency as *literacy practices* signifies that these are particular skills and practices that—while embedded in lived histories and experiences—can be cultivated in teacher education and professional development programs” (Johnson, 2012, p. 148). If secondary Discourses can be taught and nurtured for growth, and teaching and acting for social justice are literacies of a particular Discourse, then it follows that there is a need for further and holistic research on how social justice manifests in secondary English classrooms. The goal then would be to use the findings constructed from this Discourses perspective to consider the ways we might teach and facilitate acquisition of these literacies in the future to aspiring teachers.

In the context of this study, I draw upon the taxonomy offered by Hines and Johnson (2007) to assist in conceptualizing teachers’ social justice literacies in English education. Based on their analysis of independent case studies, they formed a theory of social justice literacies that differentiate between “systems literacies (articulated as knowledge) and strategic literacies (articulated as action)” (Johnson, 2012, p. 150). *Systems literacies* denote an understanding of structural inequity and of the systems that maintain oppression. Teachers with this acumen recognize “the ways things are in the school and in the culture are actually constitutive of the social and epistemological practices of white, middle-class mainstream culture and often stand at odds with those of linguistically and culturally diverse groups” (Hines & Johnson, 2007, p. 285). They understand the way people are positioned within larger structures and view issues as contextually situated, rather than as solely mediated by individuals in unique circumstances. Closely related to these are *strategic literacies*, which include “a broad range of specific

discursive practices that promoted and/or enacted social change” (p. 287). These can take the form of *coalition literacies*, which are fostering networks amongst others, such as collaborating with colleagues, and *opposition literacies*, in which “the agent speaks up, and does so in a message or tone of challenge, anger, alienation, or hostility, thereby creating distance between, rather than solidarity with, receivers of that message” (p. 289). While opposition literacies might seem to contradict the goal of supporting social justice because they distance the teacher from colleagues, Hines and Johnson (2007) find it was actually productive because they contend that it disrupts the normal flow of daily life and potentially deposits ideas for change.

The third category constructed in this paradigm is *resilience literacies*, which manifests when a person committed to social justice perceives a potential threat or tangible consequences to their actions and withdraws as a means of resistance. Finally, Johnson (2012) later added a fourth category for practicing social justice, *testimonial literacies*, which involves “bearing witness to students’ experiences and thus bridging the gaps based on power and privilege” (p. 153). This may be embodied by recognizing the value in students’ counterstories and refusing deficit perspectives, or by validating students’ narratives about crises that occur in their lives, as Dutro (2011) illuminates is a central aspect in teaching writing. Ultimately, Hines and Johnson (2007) call for “researchers, teachers, and students to join us, not only in naming the repertoire of skills, practices, and epistemologies of effective agents of change, but also in acting upon that knowledge, taking the next and necessary step into social action” (p. 291). My research answers that call by further describing the multitude of ways that social justice emerges in the English classroom and adds to the work described above on literacies by adding a series of other literacies to consider for social justice educators in English classrooms. While the taxonomy that Hines and Johnson (2007) create focuses on literacies exercised outside of the classroom, my

work examines teachers' practice more holistically and describes the ways that teachers are limited or struggle within those literacies.

Outline of Chapters

In what follows, I provide a detailed review of the literature on social justice and English Education. First, I discuss characteristics of social justice educators that scholars have developed in recent years of research. Then, I describe applications of social justice in the specific discipline of English, including the ways that both content and pedagogy appear in equity-oriented classrooms. Next, I report on the literature surrounding the university context and social justice educators in English focusing specifically on recent standards that include social justice as a goal for teacher accreditation. I also take into account the connections between social justice work in candidates' teacher preparation programs and their implementation in practice.

I then provide the foundation for the study, explaining the research design, recruitment of participants, and methods of data collection and analysis. I affirm the integrity of the research and offer its limitations. Next, I devote one chapter to each of the three teachers in the study, presenting how their known commitment to social justice manifests in their practice and reflections. I describe the context in which each worked, her interpretation of social justice, and the social justice literacies most central to her practice. I then complicate each teacher's literacies by noting the contradictions and struggles in her pedagogy. I present two literacies and their accompanying contradictions in each individual case study.

In Chapter 7, I examine the three teachers' stories across cases to construct outstanding themes common across the larger set. I illuminate the importance of biography to the teachers' social justice literacies and I delineate the areas in which they struggled most. In the final chapter, I offer recommendations for teacher education based on these findings and I provide

additional considerations that surfaced in my analysis. I conclude by posing future directions for research that would continue to inform this examination of social justice literacies in English classrooms, and I suggest how we can extend our thinking in teacher preparation to facilitate candidates who work for equity, critique, and social change.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: SOCIAL JUSTICE IN TEACHING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

Since the notion of working toward equity became central in the institution of public education, particularly after the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s and 1970s, scholars wrote prolifically on the characteristics and practices that distinguished such an approach in teaching. The era of the 1980s in the United States diluted multicultural education and saw its implementation as a sort of celebratory inclusion of diversity that was incorporated at surface level into curriculum. After this, researchers became more explicit in naming the methods to which they aspired as ‘social justice’ and took to describing them in detail. Their reaction illustrated an intentional shift toward action and social change in education and thus away from inauthentic and uncritical perspectives.

Some researchers frame arguments for social justice as a capacity that teachers possess, which reflects language from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. This organization relates teachers’ capacities to their “knowledge, skills, and dispositions” (NCATE, 2008). Building on NCATE in relation to social justice, Grant and Agosto (2008), write, “we come away with the idea that teachers’ ‘capacities’ suggests a kind of ‘package’ of understandings, skills, and commitments (or knowledge, skills and dispositions)—a much broader notion than just ‘what do teachers need to know?’ or just what ‘skill’ they should have”

(p. 188). After their review of the literature on social justice characteristics, Grant and Agosto (2008) affirm that a social justice approach to teaching is a broad toolkit composed of an array of strategies rather than merely the possession of knowledge or aptitudes. Furthermore, Walker (2003), borrowing from Nussbaum (2000), conceptualizes social justice from a “capabilities approach,” relying in part on this framework’s potential for seeing education as “social practice,” that is “about what we learn to be as much as about what knowledge we acquire” (p. 170). She emphasizes the notion that social justice is also the embodiment of an ethic. The limitation, however, in framing teaching as a set of capabilities in which people make choices has the potential to ignore structures of oppression and to overly herald individual autonomy. Ultimately though, Walker (2003) argues:

we need a theory or principles of justice which enable us to adjudicate between our actions so that we can say with some confidence this action is more just than that. Patchwork actions, the individual pieces of cloth, however bright and lively, are just that, bits of cloth. Only when we stitch the pieces (our actions) together to make a quilt do the patterns emerge and transform the pieces into something new; we need to know what we are trying to make and to be able to judge whether we have made it well (p. 169).

Walker’s emphasis here on being able to discern social justice in practice is exactly what my study does. Recognizing the pieces of the patchwork that Walker mentions is a prerequisite to any further theorizing on my part. Thus, in order to begin to do this, I first examine the host of both dispositions and pedagogical strategies referenced in the literature to form a body of characteristic beliefs and practices of social justice educators.

Social Justice in the Context of Teaching

The disposition component of a social justice educator generally begins with the teacher’s knowledge of self and her awareness of her cultural background (Haberman & Post, 1998; Nieto, 2000). Social justice educators recognize that their socialization is a unique experience and that

while it may share commonalities with others, it is not generalizable to others (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). They understand how they have been influenced by guiding structural factors and they are able to discern what privileges and opportunities they have been bestowed. As cultural beings, they distinguish their own positionality, including race, gender, and cultural norms, and they see how it impacts the way they interact in the world and particularly how they conceptualize students.

Nieto and Bode's (2008) paradigm offers a place from which to begin to describe education for social justice, and they delineate:

Social justice in education includes four components. First, it challenges, confronts, and disrupts misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes that lead to structural inequality and discrimination based on race, social class, gender, and other social and human differences. . . . Second, a social justice perspective means providing all students with the resources necessary to learn to their full potential. . . . a third component is. . . drawing the talents and strengths that student bring to their education. . . . a fourth essential component . . . is creating a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change.” (p. 11-12)

Their paradigm indicates both an overall disposition that teachers' working toward social justice should embody as well as specific practices involved in deconstructing dominant power structures.

One important disposition of a social justice educator is how she thinks about students. This conceptualization is one that regards students as capable of success (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas, 2007). They identify the myriad ways that students are inhibited in school contexts, including external factors such as poverty but also note the bureaucracy of school systems (Haberman, 1995). They value students' effort and view ability as a social construct. They realize that ability labels are often used to place students into tracks and subjugate non-dominant groups (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Oakes, 1985). Aware of these oppressive structures, then, they view student behavior as “symptoms, not causes” (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and thus not as

psychological limitations but as manifestations of externally imposed circumstances. They thus seek to dismantle deficit perspectives in light of viewing students through additive frameworks. Within such a model, they recognize what students bring to school and build these into the curriculum as “funds of knowledge,” (Moll, 1992) which refers to the stock of knowledge that students possess from their homes and cultures. Using students’ strengths to build relationships is a key piece for a social justice educator, who both shares of herself and genuinely cares for her students. In addition, such teachers are consistently reflective in this entire process, checking their own latent scripts and seeking better ways to teach their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Giroux (1992) affirms,

A social justice stance is, in part, a disposition through which teachers reflect upon their own actions and those presented by others. Rather than passively accepting information or embracing a false consciousness, teachers take a much more active role in leading, learning, and reflecting upon their relationship with their practice and the social context in which the practice is situated (p. 99).

Reflection thus informs teachers’ actions and is a crucial part of their position. They also admit their mistakes in authentic ways when reflecting. Instead of conceding to a mistake in spelling, for instance, they examine what can be done to repair a relationship with a student.

Pedagogically then, social justice educators construct a curriculum that attempts to mirror the interests of their students (Moje & Hinchman, 2004) and represents the subjectivities in their classrooms (Gay, 2002). Through an array of methods such as inquiry-based teaching (Peterson, 2007) and non-traditional assessments (Moje & Hinchman, 2004), teachers invite students to explore topics and present their learning in creative ways. These educators see that knowledge is not an objective entity (Ladson-Billings, 1994) but rather is open for critique, and they engage in critical pedagogy to facilitate students’ critical consciousness (Beyer, 2001; Freire, 1970). This is largely accomplished through dialogic teaching (Freire, 1970; Peterson, 2007), a pedagogic

style in which conversation between teachers and students as equals stimulates considerations of alternative viewpoints and acquisition of new knowledge. In this practice, students and teachers engage in meaningful discussions to build awareness, and through an open analysis of power students uncover the way that dynamics are present in local and global contexts.

Social justice educators also engage in practices beyond their classrooms. They are involved in a critical community of colleagues where working together for equity-related goals and challenging one another to think beyond oppressive school cultures are the norms. They work with parents and community members in authentic ways, tapping into the rich expertise of these figures and inviting them into their classrooms, bringing those spaces to life. Finally, the most central aspect across the literature on practices of social-justice oriented teachers is their working for change and being activists (Carlisle, Jackson, & George, 2006), both in regard to teachers themselves and in helping students see how they can be agents of change. Walker (2003) best explains this: “The struggle for social justice is hard work, but only through *doing* justice can we make justice. . . So social justice is and must be a verb (about doing and acting) as well as a noun (theoretical descriptions)” (p. 185). Thus, teachers who advocate social justice are involved in social movements themselves (Cochran-Smith, 2008) and are champions for the profession. They also design social justice action projects wherein students discern the ways that they can impact their environments and thus feel that can actively participate and create the world they want to live in (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005/2006; Simmons, 2012; Westheimer & Kahne, 1998).

Social Justice in the Context of Teaching English

Working within the framework of social justice and English Teaching, there is a plethora of literature written over the last fifteen years that illuminates connections between the two

fields. In much of this scholarship, however, social justice is cited as the foundation for the work, but the term itself is not clearly demarcated. Reflecting this finding, Chapman, Hobbel, and Alvarado (2011) note, “much of the literature on social justice education fails to define the concept or provide examples of practice” (p. 539). For example, Mahar (2001) claims to base the assignments in her language arts classroom on “the tenets of social of justice” (p. 107) but never presents those components. She later includes “prejudice, divorce, and personal challenges” (p. 114) as the social justice issues important to her students, creating further ambiguity in the phrase. Nonetheless, authors do refer to goals for their social justice teaching, such as Glasgow (2001), who suggests her work as a means for students to “become conscious of their operating worldview” (p. 54) and Christensen who avows, “social justice education really examines society to help students understand how things came to be” (Golden, 2008, p. 60).

Jones and Enriquez (2009) purport social justice educators as people who “openly and sensitively discuss social issues reflecting social injustices embedded in the classroom context and the curriculum with their students. . . and explicitly teach students practices of critique in text and society” (p. 150). They regard social justice in both the material included in teaching as well as pedagogical strategies employed. For that reason, in surveying the literature on social justice and English, I first separate approaches by those seeming to address more heavily content and those that focus on pedagogy. I realize that this is an artificial distinction, and that, when fully accomplishing a social justice approach, there is fluidity between the two and in many ways they are inextricable, as content became pedagogical when used for purposes of social justice. Furthermore, I argue for social justice as does Christensen, that “it’s not just *a* definition. It’s kind of what it means to be a social justice teacher and to create a social justice classroom,” (Golden, 2008, p. 60)—in short, teaching for social justice was a *way of being*. Yet, for purposes

of this review, I organize content and pedagogy in order to tease apart the complexity of a social justice approach to English Education, and then I look at approaches where content is pedagogy.

Social Justice in English Content

Perhaps the most fundamental place to begin when framing an approach to social justice in English Education is the content chosen by teachers for their classrooms, which predominately appears in the literature as the movement toward inclusion of multicultural texts. Some proponents feel that the literary works in a classroom should principally reflect classroom constituents in a manner of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002), while others advocate for exposing students to perspectives beyond those limited to their peers (Jordan & Purves, 1993), and still others argue whether these perspectives should be exclusive to race and ethnicity or should include a range of diversity that incorporates sexual orientation and class differences (Cai, 1998; Landt, 2006). Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) encourage a combination of standpoints, avowing, “English language arts teachers bear the tremendous responsibility of selecting texts that speak to their students’ cultural heritage and broaden their respect and appreciation of the heritages of diverse groups” (p. 478). Finally, other teachers choose texts that they believe would reflect universality in the human experience (Dietrich & Ralph, 1995; Ketter & Lewis, 2001; Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006) and some feel that English educators should highlight an acceptance of marked difference (La Belle & Ward, 1994).

While there is a continuum of use of multicultural literature from celebrating different cultures to intentionally focusing on disenfranchised populations (Cai, 1998) to paying particular attention to critiquing whiteness (Glazier & Seo, 2005), a social justice approach to text selection combines these and focuses on multicultural literature in an effort for social change. In his musings on the various approaches to teaching multicultural literature, Cai (1998) writes, “the

definition of multicultural literature points to a direction for choosing and using multicultural literature. Each definition reflects a different stance behind a different course of action” and each is concerned with “fundamental sociopolitical issues” (Cai, 1998, p. 311). While broader policies from states and districts as well as available resources may govern the institution of specific texts, the onus of responsibility for instituting this approach is ultimately centered on the teacher (Dietrich & Ralph, 1995). A teacher can seek to incorporate a text that stimulates prejudice reduction, as Glasgow (2001) advocates, writing, “once we see someone as a person in all their humanity, then we’ve reached beyond the stereotypes,” (p. 54) thus proclaiming that books have the capacity to promote empathy and contradict stereotypes. In a similar sentiment, Christensen asserts, “sometimes coming at it straight on is too harsh, and so coming at it through student lives, coming at it sideways, through pieces of reading, where students learn to empathize with characters and care about them” (Golden, 2008, p. 61) is a more productive approach. One angle, then, is the use of multicultural literature for the purpose of facilitating compassion, or sincere regard for the well-being of others and their circumstances.

There are, however, a few compelling arguments in text selection about the messages texts convey that are central to any consideration of multicultural literature used for social justice. Teachers are cautioned not to select works that essentialize groups (Godina, 1996), in which there is a danger of presenting an ethnic group as homogenous. Instead, these findings encourage teachers to utilize multiple texts from minoritized groups. In addition, there is also the threat of reinforcing stereotypes through literature selection (Godina, 1996), thus educators must be mindful of the characters in short stories and novels they elect to use. Furthermore, Yoon, Simpson, and Haag (2010), in a detailed study of multicultural texts, find that “the ideology of assimilation is often prevalent” (p. 109). Their research exemplifies how texts are

inherently pedagogical (Segall, 2004), and that teachers must devote careful consideration to the meanings transmitted. For example, Yoon, Simpson, and Haag (2010) describe one book which “depicts the dominant culture as the land of opportunity and glorifies the mainstream culture” (p. 114) even though to an undiscerning eye the work simply explicated immigration to the United States. Should an instructor use texts such as these, the researchers advocate they should employ them for the purpose of critique and with the goal of dissecting their ideological implication, which they affirm is “particularly helpful for mainstream students, as they may have grown up with certain ways of believing in the dominant culture and may not be aware of the presence of ideology in the text” (p. 117). When choosing multicultural texts therefore, mere inclusion is not the solution, but teachers must dedicate considerable attention and deliberation to those works they select.

Various teachers and researchers write explicitly about text selection for cultivating a social justice classroom. A caution here is that text selection occurs within the context of a school, which is affected administrative and local mandates. Thus there are varied levels of teachers’ autonomy in selection. Nonetheless, when teachers are able, they elect to use texts that are related to social justice. Some educators (Bean & Moni, 2003; Glasgow, 2001; Houser, 2001) specifically employ young adult literature to teach social justice. Glasgow (2001) allows her students to choose from a number of works that each separately addresses a different condition, including race and ethnicity, religion, disability, and class. Mahar (2001) incorporates picture books on social justice themes, such as *Carly* by Annegert Fuchshuber, which wrestle with homelessness and social ostracism, as an introduction to an assignment for students to create their own imitative texts. In an interview with scholar Linda Christensen, Golden (2008) finds that curriculum “should be rooted in the students’ needs and in their experiences. It should

be multicultural, antiracist, pro-justice” (p. 60). Working from an extended notion of ‘text,’ Christensen states that the three types of texts she chooses are those that relate to current events, such as teaching *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2000) in conjunction with the Iranian crisis; those that are “empowering, that turned pain to power” such as *The Color Purple* (Walker, 1982); and those “where somebody has come to a new understanding of the world and the way the world works” (Golden, 2008, p. 62) such as in *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2003).

Adding to this intentional selection, Thomas (2010) advocates selecting texts that demonstrate a range in the personalities of minoritized characters, such as LGBTQ figures, in order to avoid essentializing views and to begin to uncover “what subject position (s) are offered and how are gay characters represented for readers” (p. 77). Additionally, in Behrman’s (2006) review of classroom practices for critical literacy, he finds that teachers’ text selections involve a plethora of strategies. One is reading supplementary texts because “traditional or canonical texts are somehow deficient in helping students focus on social issues, and that supplementary texts may allow students to confront social issues glossed over or avoided by traditional texts” (p. 492). Another method is reading multiple texts on the same topic to illustrate “the subjectivity of authorship” (p. 492) and debunk any notions of fixed truth ascribed to a text. There are thus several crucial aspects to consider in relation to content for social justice in the English classroom, particularly when it comes to using multicultural texts or supplementing traditional literary works, and delving into teachers’ choices of texts for their classroom is one way to discern their social justice orientation. An important aspect, however, in text selection is that administrative requirements affect the works teachers select. Thus in evaluating a teacher’s choice of materials, it is crucial to do so against the backdrop of policies that impact that selection.

Social Justice in English Pedagogy

While teachers' selection of texts can be either strictly governed or autonomous and thus vary by context, teachers' pedagogic practices often have more leeway. I contend that it is necessary to think broadly of the term 'pedagogy' in conceptualizing social justice. This means it should include not only the *ways* that teachers instruct students, but also the relationships that teachers build with students and colleagues, their dispositions especially as reflected in interactions with students, and the way that teachers operate in their local and global communities. Social justice pedagogy then, is the *embodiment* of an ideal, "a way of being in the world, both an intellectual exercise and a moral stance" (Jones & Enriquez, 2009, p. 160). This is evidenced, for instance, as Christensen states, in a "fundamental belief that all students have the capacity to learn and to grow" (Golden, 2008, p. 60) and in the ways that teachers validate students' cultures and narratives in the classroom.

Chapman, Hobbel, and Alvarado (2011) lament, "teachers have been afforded limited successful models of the enactment of social justice pedagogy in English language arts classrooms" (p. 540). As one model, however, Christensen notes that her pedagogy is dialogic, creating space that is "participatory and experiential" (Golden, 2008, p. 60) as well as "academically rigorous" and "activist" (p. 60). Other forms of pedagogies that are social justice in nature take into account classroom structures and laud the creation of a "collaborative relationship between teacher and students as members of a learning community" (Behrman, 2006, p. 496). They invert traditional hierarchical classroom organizations or allow for an environment that welcomes a discourse not commonly associated with schooling (Mahar, 2001).

Critical literacy as the social justice pedagogy of the English classroom. Finally, much of the literature that purports social justice pedagogy in the teaching of secondary English

situates itself in the perspective of critical literacy. Although its theoretical basis is described above, there are a number of studies in the literature of English Education that report this framework as their basis. Reflecting on the state of critical literacy in Australia, Luke (2000) emphasizes several points that are important for thinking about critical literacy in secondary English classrooms in the United States. He asserts that the work of the literacy teacher is “about setting the enabling pedagogic conditions for students to use their existing and new discourse resources for exchange in the social fields where texts and discourses matter” (Luke, 2000, p. 449). Unlike many North Americans’ view of literacy as a skill for reading comprehension, Luke (2000) instead argues for a model that involves students in critique and reconstruction of the social milieu. He avows,

The practical aim is to generate vigorous classroom debates over what texts attempt to do, which ideologies are represented, and how students can use them in different social fields. The agenda is not about the imposition of a particular ideology; rather, it is about beginning from the supposition of the embeddedness of reading and writing, of all texts and discourses, within normative fields of power, value, and exchange. It also moves toward an explicit pedagogy of critical vocabularies for talking about what reading and writing and texts and discourses can do in everyday life (Luke, 2000, p. 453).

Thus, a pedagogy informed by critical literacy encourages students to read texts from a particular stance and engages students in conversation from that viewpoint. To delineate this pedagogical approach, Freebody and Luke (1990) outline that it involves four types of practices. *Coding practices* refer to examining the ways a text works, *text-meaning practices* investigate the “cultural meanings and possible readings” (Luke, 2000, p. 454) of a text, *pragmatic practices* how the reader constructs the text, and *critical practices* look at the audience that was targeted by the text, readers who would accept it as axiomatic. One element important to note in this pedagogy is that the authors affirm direct instruction in developing these practices, although they assert that this “needn’t be decontextualized, monocultural, and monolingual, run apart from a

critical literacy agenda” (p. 454). This instruction is the basis for facilitating critical literacy but is not the realization of it.

Janks (2000) outlines four different emphases in critical literacy pedagogy. In an approach that foregrounded *domination*, language is seen as a means of reproducing the structures of power and thus classroom practices were centered on deconstructing those methods. *Access* is the theme of the second approach, in which the question becomes “How does one provide access to dominant forms, while at the same time valuing and promoting the diverse languages and literacies of our students and in the broader society?” (Janks, 2000, p. 176). This strategy encompasses Delpit’s (1995) proposal to name the culture of power and render transparent the tacit practices and assumptions on which school is based. The third validates the *diversity* of students’ discourses and welcomes them into classroom practice. Finally, the fourth approach urges students in the direction of *design*, or reconstruction of that which is critiqued. Although some favor one approach over another, Janks (2000) avows that “we need to find ways of holding all of these elements in productive tension to achieve what is a shared goal of all critical literacy work: equity and social justice” (p. 179). Thus, this perspective on critical literacy for social justice promotes a pedagogy that deconstructs but is also careful to re-articulate that which it strips of meaning, so that students are not left feeling hopeless but see themselves as activists (Christensen, 2000). Of this sentiment, Downey (2005) notes, “On every occasion that I have taught about injustice, once students recognize the reality, they express feelings of helplessness and a sense of inevitability. To leave them in this state would be irresponsible” (p. 37). A pedagogy that incorporates Janks’ design aspect of critical literacy, then, illustrates a responsible approach because it takes students to the level of acting for a better society.

In Jones and Enriquez's (2009) four year study of two teachers from preparation into career teaching, they found that the teacher who embodied critical literacy, Brooke, "responded pedagogically" to questions about race in her classroom by "foregrounding books with powerful African American characters, books that explicitly discussed different skin tones, and science/arts-based activities on melanin" (Jones & Enriquez, 2009, p. 161). Just as important though, the researchers were careful to note that Brooke's pedagogy for social justice infiltrated all aspects of her teaching, and "she did not need a special book, a special unit of study, or a special topic to draw in her students; she was purposefully guiding her students to recognize multiple perspectives and critiques across everything they did in the classroom" (p. 161). This study exemplifies how a critical approach to pedagogy infiltrates all aspects of a teacher's practice.

Examples of social justice pedagogy in English classrooms. Approaches to pedagogy for social justice in English classrooms are primarily grounded in critical literacy, yet there are a few other ways that teachers' embody pedagogies for social justice that emerge in the literature. For instance, Downey (2005) described a performative pedagogy toward social justice, in which she used drama as a means to "sensitize students to the realities of injustice" (p. 33). She asked students to represent, through tableaux, major events from an assigned poem that deals with race and violence. As an extension of the activity, she mirrored the work of Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* (1979) by next prompting students to identify moments "when different actions could be taken that would result in a more positive outcome," (p. 37) exemplifying the notion that social justice connects to not only critique but also acting for change. Another method that incited students in the direction of action is Chapman, Hobbel, and Alvarado's work (2011), in which they described a writing pedagogy they used to answer: "How might we use social justice

education to allow students to reflect critically on their own lives and experiences *and* develop their writing skills?” (p. 540). As a response to this question, they assigned writing tasks that combined issues from students’ lives with larger structural themes, connecting students to community and global concerns such as poverty.

Using content for social justice pedagogy in English classrooms. As previously noted, the separation between content and pedagogy is a contrived distinction, and when social justice is fully realized, content becomes used for pedagogy that is socially just in nature. An example of this comes from the work of Gorlewski (2008) who affirms, “for multiculturalism to be effective, it must be perceived and conceived as a social movement, involving an understanding of power differences as well as concurrent ideologies and counter-ideologies, application of principles of change process, and development of action strategies” (p. 27). In her approach, Gorlewski (2008) used content from the English classroom, such as the censorship of references that might offend the Christian faith, to illustrate that classroom texts are socially constructed and influenced by outside powers. She then engaged students in using this knowledge to write the editors of the censored textbook with their response to this knowledge (regardless of whether the students agreed, disagreed, or were ambivalent) and they received correspondence from the editor in return. This illustrates how content, the material used for study in the classroom, can be used for social justice pedagogy in creative ways.

Another example was demonstrated by Brooke, an in-service teacher in Jones and Enriquez’s study (2009), whose “evolving practice in her own classroom informed by students’ experiences and critical theories offers insight into how embodied intellectual and moral dispositions toward critical literacies might produce situated pedagogical practices in response to children” (p. 162). While reading children’s books with her students, Brooke connected events

and perspectives from the books with readings of social issues, such as asking her students to think critically about white, middle class families presented in texts or the ways that readings about the Civil Rights Movement positioned African Americans. Perhaps most interestingly, she navigated mandates on curriculum from her district while infusing her own critical perspectives. She thus embodied what it means to use content for pedagogy.

Social Justice and Teacher Preparation

In my study, I examine not only how middle and secondary English teachers define social justice, but also if and how these teachers draw upon their knowledge from their teacher preparation for those interpretations. For this reason, I surveyed the literature on how teacher education programs broadly addressed social justice and then reviewed the limited writing that specifically addressed the preparation of English teachers for social justice.

After Civil Rights Movements in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s, there was a push for teacher education curriculum to better prepare teachers for meeting the needs of all students. Another result was that within public schools, more inclusive curriculum was also sought. This added to the demands of teacher education, and multicultural education became the focus for many programs. However, this focus often translated into a celebratory rather than critical approach, and in order to articulate more critical purposes, ‘social justice’ has arisen in educational discourse. Lamenting the attempts toward multicultural education that included only add-on courses (Ladson-Billings, 1995a), many universities have taken a programmatic approach to social justice. This heeded Nieto’s (2000) call for social justice that is ubiquitous rather than treated as an isolated exercise external to the daily work of a teacher. This is teacher education from a “social reconstructionist” (Zeichner, 1991) tradition, which “attempts to promote a disposition toward opposing inequity, not just celebrating diversity” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p.

749). Examples of programs centered on a mission of social justice include thematic alignments, such as those described by Hollins and Guzman (2005) where entire programs aimed for “prejudice reduction” (p. 485) or entailed “equity pedagogy” (p. 490). There were also those that effectively satisfied the lens of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1999), such as a design at the University of Wisconsin-Madison that was built on both social change and teacher reflection. When institutions take a programmatic approach to social justice education, collaboration and integration are key, not just for preservice students, but for faculty as well, who need to establish a shared idea of what is meant by social justice (Zollers, Albert, & Cochran-Smith, 2000).

The preparation program at Boston College was built on five essential themes: “promoting social justice, constructing knowledge, inquiring into practice, affirming diversity, and collaborating with others” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, p. 352). In a study of its impact on teacher candidates, researchers followed teachers from the preparation program, through their internship experience, and into their first year of teaching. Interview data highlighted that when asked to describe social justice, candidates highlighted “building relationships with students and also to respecting and working with parents” (p. 356). They connected what they were doing in their classrooms to students’ improved life chances. Findings also included that while students often referenced their capacity for change, this was often alluded to on an individual level but not through critique of larger structures or by activism on a broader scale. The teachers’ plans did not extend beyond their classroom walls to the macrolevel despite their commitment to making a difference with their own students. The researchers cited the individual level as a possible “starting point for new teachers” (p. 373), hoping that with experience, these educators could expand their focus.

Preparing English Teachers for Social Justice

Unlike the literature on general approaches to social justice in teacher education, writing that specifically targets the preparation of secondary English educators is limited. In 2000, NCATE labeled social justice a desirable professional disposition, but in 2006 this component was removed (Kumashiro, 2008). The Social Justice Strand of the Conference on English Education, a faction of the National Council of Teachers of English, lobbied to have the requirement re-instated, feeling that it was a necessary element in preparing English teachers. In 2012, NCATE approved NCTE Standard VI, which reads:

Candidates demonstrate knowledge of how theories and research about *social justice*, diversity, equity, student identities, and schools as institutions can enhance students' opportunities to learn in English Language Arts.

Element 1: Candidates plan and implement English language arts and literacy instruction that promotes *social justice* and critical engagement with complex issues related to maintaining a diverse, inclusive, equitable society [emphasis added]. (NCATE, 2012)

The standard reflects that students have to demonstrate knowledge of social justice and apply this knowledge of theory to their practice. NCATE is requiring this standard to be addressed in reports in 2015. The CEE strand on Social Justice is currently working on determining ways to assess students' understanding of social justice in teacher education programs so as to prove that it is a tangible entity with visible results not only for potential teachers but also for their impending students.

During this work for the re-institution of social justice in the standards, members of the CEE strand generated a position statement in 2009 on *Beliefs about Social Justice in English Education*. This statement included the group's seven major tenets of social justice, which were that it was: "a goal that evades easy definition, a grounded theory, a stance/position, a pedagogy, a process, a framework for research," and "a promise" (p. 1). These assertions acknowledge the

complexity in a definition of social justice and affirm the political nature of such work. The scholars then proceeded to outline implications for teacher education for each of their seven premises and included a host of example activities and assignments to accomplish their goals. In their recommendations for facilitating a social justice disposition in preservice students, they incorporated assessing and meeting students where they were in cultural awareness, paying keen attention to the development of a social justice aspect in teacher identity, and cultivating a belief in the assets of all students. In their proffering of a multitude of possible assignments for English methods courses, they included examining notes from field observations for how they related to social justice issues, specifically scrutinizing texts for equity related topics, and interviewing in-service teachers on the topic of initiating change.

In a later extension of the CEE Position Statement (2011), a faction of English methods instructors detailed their courses, which had the explicit aim of social justice teaching. George (2011) described his exploration of content and pedagogy that led to action, and he emphasized connection to the lived realities of secondary classrooms. One crucial element of his class was the joint study of a core novel “purposefully chosen to foster conversations around multicultural and social justice education” (Miller et al., 2011, p. 67). By modeling a pedagogy that included choice, focused on adolescent literature, and provided practitioner examples of practice, George (2011) offered a tangible example of how to prepare English teachers for social justice. In a similar vein, Miller (2011) recounted his use of a research project on an educational issue to engage preservice students in critique and expansion of social justice-related issues. Finally, Charest (2011) reported an approach that relied on “active engagement with communities and schools” (Miller et al., 2011, p. 72) wherein future teachers recognized the importance of the school-community relationship.

Focusing exclusively on critical literacy with preservice English teachers, Wolfe (2010) explicated her strategy for social justice, which entailed requiring students “to plan, implement, and upload a critical literacy unit” (p. 371). Throughout the process, students wrote in reflective journals, and Wolfe (2010) analyzed these documents for evidence of students’ understandings of critical literacy and the various ways her students enacted this conception in their student teaching, such as engaging in “resistant reading” (p. 377) or creating “opportunities for social action” (p. 378). What was most interesting was her inclusion of how students negotiated teaching their units with their cooperating teachers as well as how important brainstorming and planning collaboratively were to the overall enactment of the units. Thus, while research on preparation of English teachers for social justice has only recently begun to appear, it seems to be a growing field of interest.

The University-School Connection

While efforts to prepare pre-service teachers are developing, there is a lag still in how that teaching impacts them in the future classrooms. It is especially important to establish the influence of teacher education in regard to social justice because the consequences of whether or not in-service teachers work for equity are dire. There are some studies on university efforts to foster a social justice disposition and on classroom contexts in which theories operate, yet it is not viable to illustrate a *direct* link between preparation coursework and the practice of specific teachers.

Research that exists which examined the school context includes examples such as the study by Achinstein and Ogawa (2006), which reported that what happens once teachers enter into the school context depends on a variety of factors, including the cultures of schools and resources or supports. Frankenberg, Taylor, and Merseth (2010) conducted an inquiry through which they

followed students from preservice teacher education into the first years of teaching in order to examine how their commitments change across the two contexts. Specifically designed to address commitments to working in urban schools, the researchers administered a survey to teacher candidates prior to their entrance to the field and then correlated that with their tendency to work in and remain at schools with low-income, non- white students. A stronger commitment at the preservice level corresponded to staying in the field longer. While this may be the case, Johnson (2012) notes, “Dispositions alone are not reliable indicators of a candidate’s abilities to work effectively and empathetically in challenging settings” (p. 177) due to her finding that teachers assumed to have social-justice orientations in their preparation actually did not perform in aligned ways when in classrooms teaching. Hines and Johnson (2007) reported a similar finding, revealing that one teacher in their study who demonstrated considerable commitment to critique in the university classroom became a progressive teacher, not a critical one, once she was in the field.

Jones and Enriquez (2009) note that teacher education is only an entity with which teachers engage for a limited amount of time, and that aspects of this context are mediated by a multitude of factors, including students’ backgrounds and beliefs as well as their current associations. They write, “We don’t believe in causal relationships between pedagogy, content, and moral and intellectual dispositions. Rather, we see pedagogy in a university teacher education course as a point of contact and a point of departure, as something that may prompt a learner’s willingness to adjust his or her habitus—and thus his or her trajectory as a person and a pedagogue” (Jones & Enriquez, 2009, p. 164). Thus, while this provides hope that teacher education impacts the trajectory of a pre-service student’s career, it is difficult to develop direct relationships between the two, “to predict, as any experience in any one course becomes intertwined with personal,

social, political, and other formal education experiences” (p. 164). Expanding on Bourdieu’s work (1984, 1994), Jones and Enriquez (2009) outline the possibility for the construction of a new habitus, and Hines and Johnson (2007) avow that pre-service teachers can, in fact, be taught the literacies associated with social justice.

In examining how teachers connect to their preparation, then, it is important to observe this tension: teacher education programs coalesce with preservice students’ life experiences, and the practices that teachers’ enact in their careers are influenced by numerous elements, including their identities, experiences, colleagues, and burgeoning social perspectives. Yet, teacher education can affect teachers’ paths in reference to pedagogy and perspective (Jones & Enriquez, 2009). Thus, while I do not attempt to illustrate causal links and establish direct claims, I do wish to examine if, how, and in what ways the teachers connect their dispositions and methods to their preparation. Since all participants in the study are graduates of a particular program, and since I ultimately examine their stories holistically, including this aspect provides further insight on social justice in English Education.

The Body of Literature on Social Justice and English Education

In this chapter, I offered a review of the literature on social justice in teaching, social justice in English education, and teacher preparation of English teachers for social justice. I first outlined the broadly defined dispositions and practices of teachers who are oriented toward social justice, which included how they viewed themselves and their students, how they incorporated materials reflective of their students, and how they engaged their school and local communities in their practice. Then, I reported on literature from the English context related to social justice, which discussed both the use of multicultural texts for a variety of purposes and the specific pedagogic practices associated with social justice teaching. Finally, I examined

social justice education in the university environment, covering a number of approaches from assorted programs, and I offered recent shifts in standards for preparing English teachers. I stated the argument that although we cannot make a direct link from preparation to practice, there is a need to examine potential relationships between the two so as to better inform what happens in teacher education and to ensure that work for equity translates to school contexts. I now turn to the ways in which I investigated those connections.

In what follows, I build upon the knowledge gained from the literature to describe the study I undertook for this research. I lay out the particulars of the work, describing how I selected teachers and how I collected and analyzed data gleaned from observations, interviews, and artifacts. Then, I embark on the narratives of each teacher in the study.

CHAPTER 3

EXAMINING SOCIAL JUSTICE LITERACIES IN PRACTICE: METHODOLOGY

The main purposes of this study are to explore three middle and secondary English teachers' interpretations of social justice, to investigate their social justice literacies, and to analyze their struggles within those literacies. The specific research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are novice teachers' interpretations of the meaning of social justice, and how do they view the role of social justice in their classrooms?
2. What are middle and secondary English teachers' social justice literacies?
 - a. How do they implement these social justice literacies, and what struggles do they experience?

I relied on qualitative research and utilized a series of methods to assist in understanding. As Charmaz (2006) states, "Methods extend and magnify our view of studied life and, thus, broaden and deepen what we learn of it and know about it" (p. 14). Findings contribute to the broader discourse on preparing pre-service English teachers for social justice in the classroom and illustrate connections between theory and practice for the English classroom.

Research Design

Since I sought to understand how social justice occurred in the context of the classroom and how it was conceptualized by teachers, I employed qualitative data collection and analysis.

Merriam (1998) describes qualitative approaches as those “that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomenon with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5), and in reference to social justice, Carlson (2007) writes, “we can combat claims of generality by focusing on specific sites where teachers teach for ‘social justice,’” (p.2). Thus, in order to study social justice in the specific milieu of English classrooms, I conducted instrumental collective case studies, or an analysis of multiple teachers at different sites focusing specifically on understanding the element under investigation, social justice in English Language Arts education.

Although the case study is somewhat of an ambiguous entity and is used in both quantitative and qualitative research, I approached this qualitative study based on a set of particular design terms. A *case* is a bounded system that contains patterned behavior (Stake, 2005), and in the instance of this study each classroom itself constituted the perimeter of one case, although the context in which each was located was also included. In addition, a *case study* is “both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry (Stake, 2003, p. 136). *Collective* refers to the focus on multiple sites, or “a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon” (p. 138) and *instrumental* is the heuristic outlined by Stake (2003) wherein the purpose of the inquiry is to gain insight into an issue of “external interest” (Stake, 2003, p. 137). In multicas e research, this outside issue is the *quintain*, which Stake (2006) explains, as “an object or phenomenon or condition to be studied—a target, but not a bull’s eye” (Chapter 1, Section 1.3, para. 5). The quintain is the central focal point of understanding, and in the instance of this study, it was social justice in English classrooms which specifically included the appearance, intricacies, and operation of social justice in content and pedagogy.

I chose the case study design over other types of qualitative research because it afforded for a holistic, empirical inquiry into “a contemporary phenomenon with its real-life context” (Yin, 1994, p. 13) in depth and over time. The environment that I investigated--the classroom, the teachers’ experiences, pedagogical practice, and curricular choices--all occurred in a lived and ongoing context. I immersed myself daily in this setting over an extended period to be able to discern the issue of study. A case study necessitated this type of work.

In addition to these aspects, the multiple case study construct provided the ability to analyze the interpretations of participants, recognizing that each case was unique, while also conducting cross case analysis to understand commonalities and discrepancies (Mertens, 2010). This provided a more robust awareness of the topic, since social justice is a movement with various facets. It reflected Stake’s assertion (2006) on the *quintain* in multicase research, “To understand it better, we study some of its single cases—its sites or manifestations,” (Chapter 1, Section 1.3, para. 5). However, as the multicase design allows, I retained the unique circumstances of the study sites, and I honored each teacher’s individualized pedagogical instruction. Thus, I collected data on each case separately and analyzed findings independently, but the multiple cases then allowed me to scrutinize these cases holistically and explore common themes that emerged from the various environments (see Appendix A).

I recognize the tension involved in the use of collective case studies by social scientists to attempt generalization (Stake, 2003). Coming from a constructivist paradigm, I affirm the intrinsic value and particularity of each case as opposed to scientific generalization. I do not seek to generalize a holistic portrayal of social justice in *all* English classrooms, but rather to understand its manifestations in three specific arenas and to provide more information about what often confronts pre-service teachers as esoteric in practice. In allowing each teacher’s

strengths and challenges in their social justice literacies to emerge, I paid careful attention to Stake's (2003) admonition, "damage occurs when the commitment to generalize or to theorize runs so strong that the researcher's attention is draw away from the features important for understanding the case itself" (p. 141). To maintain the integrity of each case as a unique entity, I present a detailed breakdown of each teacher's practice before I move onto the cross case analysis and report.

Participants

Recruitment. I invited three graduates of a secondary English Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program, all of whom graduated in June 2012, to participate in this study. The intentional choice of middle and secondary English classrooms and teachers provided the bounded space of a case for study. These were participants whom I identified based on my knowledge of their social justice commitments throughout their preparation program in coursework, discussion, assignments, and student teaching. I was the instructor of their initial course in the program, supervised one of them, and worked with all three closely throughout their internships at a local high school. Additionally, based on their participation in a professional development program (in which I was also involved) during the 2012-2013 school year and the types of dilemmas and methods of problem-solving they offered their peers, I was able to discern that they continued to exhibit orientations toward social justice. They thus provided an ideal set of cases from which to study social justice in the English classroom.

I therefore engaged in a purposive sampling of cases (Stake, 2003, 2006). Stake (2003) affirms, "instrumental and collective casework regularly requires researchers to choose their cases" (p. 151) since the goal is to better understand a particular space in which one knows something to be happening, where the "*opportunity to learn*" is most apparent (Stake, 2003, p.

152). Knowing that each teacher was committed to social justice, I felt the potential to learn was present in each one's classroom. I emailed each participant initially and apprised them of the details of the study. I then contacted each school district and submitted all application materials required by the district for permission. All participants were licensed middle or secondary English teachers who were currently working in public schools in the same southeastern state.

Research sites. The research sites were two middle schools and one high school setting, which satisfied my effort to provide diversity across contexts and recognize complexity. The number of sites also allowed me to offer a rich depiction of each teacher's social justice literacies as they appeared in English classrooms (Stake, 2006). I provided thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the contexts of the school and larger community in which each case was situated, as "a local orientation . . . is an important step for relating the quintain to the situationality of the individual cases," (Stake, 2006, Chapter 1, Section 1.5, para. 3), which for this study meant that an understanding of how social justice operated in each context largely depended on the situatedness of each school. This local environment included the physical region of the school, key players who affected instruction, and general school culture. These were pivotal in the ways that social justice did or did not appear, and thus the site itself then was fundamental to the study. I also gained a broad view of the state standards, now articulated within the Common Core for English Language Arts, for each of the grade levels that the three teachers instructed, as well as collected curriculum provided by the county such as pacing guides (see Appendix H for example pacing guide), and I reported on the expectations in each school for the level of adherence to these regulatory materials as perceived by the participants. These curriculum guides were significant in how they communicated or limited approaches to social justice, and the expectation for adherence to them revealed the overall sentiment of the environment in which the teacher

worked. They were therefore also key elements in the overall study context, as they undoubtedly informed the teachers' practice.

Data Collection

Classroom Observation

As is the nature of qualitative research and case studies in particular, I was the predominant instrument in the study (Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 2010). I spent approximately five to six weeks with each teacher for a total of 17 weeks of observation, (see Appendix B). During the first three days of the initial week of observation, I attended full days in each of the classrooms selected. I then narrowed my focus to two to three class periods (depending on the scheduling of the school—block or shorter periods--and the teachers' preferences) for in depth analysis of content and pedagogy for the duration of the research. Although I often stayed for the full day to attend lunch, after school meetings, professional development sessions, and observe extracurricular functions, this depended on the access I was granted by the teacher and school and invitations extended to such events. I specifically focused on one of each 'prep' that the teachers taught and I wanted to observe each level of those courses she taught. For instance, in the second case study, I took extensive fieldnotes and observed the teacher's 'Advanced,' 'Standard,' and 'Inclusion' classes. While I focused on one of each, she taught six total classes in the day. I was flexible in planning according to the school calendar, and I heeded any events that occurred at the school that may have amended the daily schedule. Although teachers knew my observation schedule ahead of time, I visited the sites frequently so that my presence did not disrupt the normal flow of the classroom. I hoped to capture the environment as it naturally occurred and not to document teachers' practice as a performance related to the study.

In my field notes, I provided thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the classroom context (see Appendix C). I recorded the physical space of each classroom, how it was organized, what materials existed in the room and on the walls, and where students were placed for class instruction. As the physical space and structure of the classroom denoted the power relations embodied in the context, they were clues to a pedagogy that promoted social justice (Behrman, 2006; Mahar, 2001). For example, arrangements of students' and teachers' desk denote who is the central focus in the classroom, and they also indicate who holds the power most often in classroom talk. Next, I recorded classroom activities such as discussion, debate, and group work. The types of activities in the classroom as well as the specific details of these activities exemplify a teacher's commitment to social justice. From the vibrant, social space of the classroom, I took copious notes on teacher-student interactions and student-student interactions so as to assess the ways that teachers' dispositions towards students manifested in these encounters and how they reflected attitudes of equity and a commitment to teaching about topics related to social justice.

Within these observations, I also recorded patterns of behavior and the discourse used by participants in the classroom. This focus on Discourse (Gee, 1996) lent itself to later analysis of "embedded biases and injustices" as well as how power operated in the classroom, assuming "that how we use language in a specific social setting, and how we behave in that setting is laced, or informed by power" (Carlson, 2007, p. 2). Thus, I observed classroom practice and discourse because it illustrated the teachers' manifestations of social justice. I also attended to the things that did not happen (Mertens, 2010), such as approaches teachers took to particular texts or silences that occurred in reference to certain topics (Huckin, 2002), as these helped build the teachers' approaches and match interview data to observation notes. I also documented students'

reactions to classroom practices in the forms of perceived behaviors or verbal feedback offered in class, such as comments to classmates or the teacher. I recorded non-verbal cues and demonstrations of participation or disengagement, so as to gauge how the students responded to issues of social justice and teachers' pedagogies in relation to the topic of study. I included in my field notes the curricular choices made by the teachers, explaining plot lines, characters, and major themes or issues. These descriptions were crucial to the content aspect of social justice in the classroom. Teachers' choices illustrate their commitments, the texts communicated inherent messages (Segall, 2004), and the way texts are used, such as to foster critical literacy (Behrman, 2006), demonstrates a social justice approach in middle and secondary English courses.

Interviews

As a method of data collection, interviews afford “the opportunity to learn what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see” as well as a way to ascertain “opinions, perceptions, and attitudes toward some topic” (Glesne, 2011, p. 104). I employed both of these purposes in this study, interviewing participants to discover the intentions and choices behind their instruction as well as to understand their perception of social justice. I engaged each teacher in a total of three semi-structured interviews (Glesne, 2011), one in each of the research phases (see Appendix D). With permission, I audio recorded the interviews and transcribed them afterward.

At the beginning of the research period with each teacher, I conducted the first interview to gain a sense of the teachers' backgrounds and experiences that they brought to teaching. This included learning crucial information about their teacher education experiences, which informed their social justice pedagogy. During this interview, I also began to construct an understanding of how the teachers defined social justice and perceived its role in their work (see Table 1).

Stake (2006) writes, “Of course, the way the interviewee sees the case operating is essential knowledge” (Chapter 2, Section 2.4, para.7), thus it was necessary to resolve how the teacher saw the operation of social justice in order to satisfy the construct of the case. Furthermore, with the first interview conducted prior to classrooms observations, I was able to “conceive her conceptions, her thoughts about teaching for social justice before seeing it in action in her classroom” (Carlson, 2007, p. 5). Since I collected data on the local context of the school at the time of this interview, I also wanted to ascertain how the teacher viewed the circumstances, especially in terms of how she saw her opportunities to exercise autonomy in curricular and pedagogical choices.

Table 1

Initial Participant Interview Guide

Research Phase Phase 1	Teacher Interview Guide
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about where you grew up and the school (s) you attended. 2. Tell me about some of the people or things that influenced you growing up. 3. How do you think you became oriented toward social justice? 4. Why did you choose to enter the profession of teaching? 5. How do you see yourself as a teacher? 6. What is most important to you that students learn in your classroom? 7. How would you define your classroom philosophy? 8. How have your perceptions of teaching changed from coursework, student teaching, through 1st year? 9. What have you learned in teaching? 10. Describe your teacher education experience. 11. What did you learn in your teacher education that has helped you? 12. Tell me about the school where you teach-how you came to work here, what the school culture is like, what your relationships with colleagues are. 13. How flexible do you feel your curriculum is? On what do you base this assessment? 14. What does it mean to teach for social justice? 15. How do you see social justice relating to your teaching

specifically?

In the second interview, I hoped to ascertain more about how the teacher viewed the relationships between social justice, content, and pedagogy as I was watching it unfold in her classroom (see Table 2). I thus asked how she structured her classroom and chose curriculum in order to examine if and how social justice informed her work in regard to the curriculum. Furthermore, I probed specifically about the particular texts and activities I saw, asking about her intentions behind her choices of texts and activities to provide a fuller picture. Finally, I prompted her to reflect on specific classroom events to illustrate the ways she connected what happened in the classroom with her stated goals.

Table 2

Phase 2 Participant Interview Guide

Research Phase	Teacher Interview Guide
Phase 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do you structure your course overall? How have you structured the unit under study now?2. How do you decide what texts (including videos, music, etc.) to employ?3. Tell me about how you determine daily lesson plans.4. Why did you choose the texts you chose for this week's observations?5. What did you hope to accomplish by teaching these texts? (What did you hope that students took away from this text)?6. How did you determine the accompanying activity/discussion questions/etc.?7. How do you view the relationships between social justice, content, and pedagogy?8. How did you feel the students responded to this text?9. Would you teach this again? Why/why not?10. What might you do differently next time teaching this (if yes?)11. How do you see the students in the class (that I'm observing)?12. How do you see social justice in the work you are doing now with these students?

I used the final and third interview to ask additional questions about the school culture, social justice, and the teacher’s interpretations of classroom events (see Table 3). I also used this time to engage in modified member-checks, asking teachers about events that transpired in the classroom to make sure that I understood both the events and the way they interpreted them. I allowed the teacher to choose not to answer questions or to offer ideas not directly solicited (Mertens, 2010). I also engaged in numerous informal conversations with the classroom teachers, which I reported and discussed in field notes. Each day that I was present at one of the sites, I spent the planning period with the teacher if convenient for her and gained insight into her preparation for class this way. I logged these interactions in field notes as well.

Table 3

Phase 3 Participant Interview Guide

Research Phase	Teacher Interview Guide
Phase 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Modified Member checking 2. How would you describe yourself as a teacher now? 3. What are your goals for your students—what do you hope they leave this class knowing? 4. What are some things you hope to accomplish in your classroom/school in the remainder of this year in regard to teaching for social justice? 5. To what extent do you think the school culture matches your vision of social justice? 6. In what ways have you enacted social justice in your classroom in these past 5 weeks? What have been some successes from this? 7. How have colleagues and administrators reacted to your teaching for social justice this year so far?

In addition to these teacher participant interviews, I also invited students at each site to participate in a focus group to gain a perspective on their interpretation of the teachers’ pedagogy in the English classroom (see Table 4). I wanted to ascertain what they felt they had learned and

how they perceived the teachers’ emphases on certain topics. This helped to assemble how or if the artifacts that teachers were using related to students and promoted social justice goals, and it also allowed me to see how students constructed meaning from these experiences¹. I do not think an exploration of the phenomenon of social justice in the classroom as I have operationalized it (Mertens, 2010) would be replete without a demonstration of the students’ perspectives; thus, the students’ voices, along with the teachers, illustrated the complexity of the issue.

Table 4

Student Focus Group Guide

Research Phase	Student Focus Group Guide
Phase 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you feel you’ve learned in this class? 2. What are the texts from this class in which you find yourself most engaged? 3. What are the ways that you find yourself most engaged in class (activities, groupwork, etc.)? 4. How does your teacher communicate what is important for you to learn from English class? 5. Your teacher has said that ‘social justice’ is important to her and in what she teaches—what do you think this means? Why would this be important? 6. How do you use what you have learned in this English class outside of the classroom, in your community, etc.?

Document Collection

I also collected documents such as unit and daily lesson plans, assignments provided by the teachers, and written documents used in classroom instruction. These were clues as to the way the teacher employed texts in the classroom and were thus central to her social justice

¹ One exception was that for question number five (see Table 4), the third school district required that I explain the phrase ‘social justice’ to students before the inquiry.

pedagogy. In addition, I gathered artifacts that reflected the culture of the school, such as school report cards, published literature including handbooks and announcements, and relics located in the school hallways as they might relate to social justice. Vital to the study was the assemblage of teachers' text choices for the evidences they provided for social justice content. Many of these documents occurred in the form of print or audio texts, digital imagery, or photographs but were necessary to analyze in regard to the way the teacher embodied the culture of the school and/or instituted work for social justice in the classroom. They provided a holistic picture that I might not have seen while I was there that week, as "documents and records give the researcher access to information that would otherwise be unavailable" (Mertens, 2010, p. 373).

Data Analysis

Stake (2003) asserts that the "Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (p. 134), thus once I collected data from the various classroom sites, I applied a series of analyses to each case individually and then conducted cross-case exploration to determine the ties that bound them (see Appendix A).

Stake (2006) purports "invoking a 'case-quintain dialectic'" which he explains is "a rhetorical, adversarial procedure, wherein attention to the local situations and attention to the program or phenomenon as a whole contend with each other for emphasis. Each needs to be heard while the other is being analyzed" (Chapter 3, Section 3.3, para. 2). This means paying attention to the themes generated from the research questions of the overall study while also recognizing the situated findings from activities, content, and pedagogy in the cases. Social justice is better understood when studied in various situations because the researcher can gain a broader sense of the ways it can be accomplished, yet the particular context of each case lends to a nuanced understanding and the recognition of its challenges in context. This is the paradox of

multiple case studies: “Comprehension of the phenomenon of inclusion requires knowing not only how it works and does not work in general, independent of local conditions, but how it works under various local conditions” (Stake, 2006, Chapter 3, Section 3.1, para 2).

I transcribed all data verbatim, including audio recordings from interviews, teachers’ classroom discourse from observations, and written documents collected from assignments and school publications as needed. While qualitative research can encompass a number of different methods, I relied on tools of coding to build an understanding of teachers’ social justice literacies from field notes, transcripts, and documents. I then used critical discourse analysis to explore data from a cultural studies framework, paying particular attention to issues of power in language.

Layers of Coding

I initially applied a layer of open coding across all of the data. At this level, I noted topics, texts, references and ideas that arose (Gilgun, 2011). Informed by these codes, I then returned to the literature on characteristics of social-justice oriented teachers as well as English-specific socially just teaching and constructed a set of codes with which to return to the data. I applied this layer of deductive codes, paying careful attention to note any outliers. I refined and added to the deductive codes, illustrating the recursive nature of data collection in a case study. I thus established a final set of codes with which to approach the data from all three cases (see Table 5). As I applied the deductive codes, I coded for antithetical occurrences, such as “lack of relationships” instead of “establishes authentic relationships” in order to account for negative instances and maintain the integrity of the study. I was reflexive in the coding process, since these “can help us see *our* assumptions, as well as those of our research participants. Rather than raising our codes to a level of objectivity, we can raise questions about how and why we

developed certain codes” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 519). This reflexive process affected the questions I then asked in follow up interviews and in member checking.

I employed the qualitative software HyperResearch© to code all interviews, transcripts, and artifacts. As I coded, I conducted memo writing (Charmaz, 2000), which is designed to “tap the initial freshness of the analyst’s theoretical notions and to relieve the conflict in his thoughts” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in order to assist especially in cross-case analysis. Once the material was saturated with the deductive set and any antithetical codes for that case, I ran code reports that noted numbers of occurrences for each sub-code and code. I did this for each case individually and used those numbers as a way into the data. I examined in detail those themes most frequently coded to analyze *how* each attribute of social justice was happening. As I delved into each category, I quickly determined that quantity did not necessarily translate to successful social justice-related practice. For instance, the number of coded instances for the literacy in *Community and Collaboration* was high for each participant, but upon analysis I realized that these were not the critical relationships that characterized social justice practice in the literature. I then noted absences or lower numbers of coded material to examine where the teacher might have struggled most or experienced significant challenges in her literacies. I explored each of these as well to determine the quality of the instance and to consider contextual factors that may have impacted their low frequency.

I constructed a general code map template and used this to visually present the numbers of coded material for each teacher (see Appendix E) and I worked from these displays to delve further into each category. Once I probed each piece, I realized that the code map was not representative of each teacher’s narrative and the way her literacies fit together. The map presented each literacy as separately positioned from the teacher in equal parts, which is

inaccurate because some pieces overlapped with one another or were directly related to others, depending on the teacher. As a final step, then, I re-arranged the maps by individual teacher once her story emerged (see Appendices J, M, & O). This restructuring of the data helped to give coherence to the emerging analysis and allowed me to discern the contradictions in each teacher’s practice.

Table 5

Deductive Code List

Code	Description
Critical Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Analyzes ideology of texts b. Takes a critical stance on social justice issues c. Critiques knowledge d. Engages in dialogic teaching e. Practices and enhances students’ critical literacy
Community and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Collaborates with colleagues b. Collaborates with and builds a community of parents c. Engages in a community of practice d. Collaborates with the local community
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Admits mistakes in non-superficial ways b. Practices critical reflection for social justice c. Searches for better ways d. Views teaching as a process
Social/Critical Consciousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Is educated on sociopolitical issues b. Raises student consciousness c. Relates work to teacher education program
Social Change and Change Agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promotes education reform that promotes SJ in all of its components b. Expresses awareness that nothing is neutral c. Is an activists—make ideological commitment to combating inequities d. Participates in social movements e. Helps students understand that they have a position in society and are part of a democracy—can be change agents
Culture and Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sees social justice as a way of being that is not separate from who they are elsewhere b. Is aware of herself as a cultural being c. Understands how her teacher identity affects

	her ability to work for social justice goals
Analysis of Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Understands her own position of power and the effect of this has on classroom practice b. Learns with students c. Views power as affected by societal factors
Establishes Authentic Relationships with Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Demonstrates a connectedness with all students b. Develops a community of learners where students learn collaboratively and are responsible for another c. Learns the cultures of students but does not essentialize
Conception of Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sees students as capable of success b. Explains students' behavior with recognition of structural factors c. Values students' effort and not solely ability
Content/Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develops multicultural knowledge b. Uses students' lives and interests as official curriculum c. Relies on relevant texts/makes texts relevant to students d. Incorporates youth culture/media/pop culture as content e. Designs non-traditional forms of assessment that cater to students' individual strengths and needs f. Implements methods of inquiry/problem-based teaching

Critical Discourse Analysis

I used the tools of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1995; Luke, 1996), which specifically focus on the language used in a particular context, to hone in on teachers' specific social justice literacies and to examine what was happening in their classrooms.

Mertens (2010) explains that this implement can be employed for three purposes: analysis of text to study the structure of language employed; of discursive practice, "which involves how people produce, interpret, disseminate, and consume text," (p. 427); and of sociocultural practice which highlights the implications of power in language use. I utilized discourse analysis for all

of these ambitions, conducting levels of coding that noted topic and frequency across texts and classroom discourse as well as investigating specific discursive strategies used in interviews and classroom discussions to note discursive uptake (Tannen, 1989), interdiscursivity that demonstrated learning (Lewis & Ketter, 2011), how discourse was framed around specific topics, and where silence existed (Huckin, 2002). I paid particular attention to *in vivo* codes, or the participants' "specialized terms" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55), and I noted patterns and analyzed those patterns as to what they illustrated about the speaker's beliefs and actions. My reliance on the notion that people's thoughts, actions, and ideologies are largely constructed by and through language (Gee, 1996, 2004) led to the method of critical discourse analysis, which helped to make these aspects visible and provided a way to analyze them. Observation data from fieldnotes was used to fill in gaps in the discourse, to clarify moments when verbal data might have been insufficient, or to note inconsistencies. For example, Charmaz (2005) declares, "focusing on words or deeds are ways of representing people; however, observed contradictions between the two may indicate crucial priorities and practices" (p. 513). Thus, critical discourse analysis was one very important piece of the analytic process.

Applied to Talk. This choice of method stemmed directly from the topic that the research addressed. Lewis (2006) writes, "CDA, like any method of data analysis, should be used in the service of a set of research questions and purposes rather than as an end in itself" (p. 374). In reference to the questions of how teachers' define social justice and how they implement their literacies in their classrooms, then, I used CDA as a tool to understand these inquiries. A person's social justice orientation can be discerned fundamentally by the way they construct language around certain topics or the manner in which they express ideas. Even the smallest aspect, such as giving directions in the classroom, can contain clues about how and if

one teaches for social justice. Charmaz (2005) purports, “Sensitivity to social justice issues fosters defining latent processes as well as explicit actions” (p. 512). In this regard, I was examining “language-in-use” (Gee, p. 23, 2004) more than constructed responses, at how the subconscious appeared in discourse, not neatly packaged and politically correct. Furthermore, the act of teaching is a social practice, and Gee (2004) states: “language-in-use is always . . . constitutive of, specific social practices [which] always have implications for inherently political things” (p. 23). Zeichner, Grant, Gay, Gillete, Valli, and Villegas (1998) avow, “teaching and learning occur in socio-political contexts that are not neutral but are based on relations of power and privilege” (p. 166). The political charge connects directly with the investigation of discourse because this analysis allowed me to discern how the bearing of social justice manifested in the classroom context. Gee, Michaels, and O’Connor (1992) argue that an additional aspect to consider in “the text-making process is *ideology*” which involves reading social activities for their implications of “roles participants are expected to play” (p. 238) where each role contains an established hierarchical position and thus inherent power dynamics. Reading the roles in the classroom and social interaction in this way provides an additional and deeper perspective on the nature of social justice as a subtext.

I also employed CDA to examine one central aspect of the study: how these second year teachers talked about the events from their past and present. For instance, I analyzed how they reflected on their autobiographical experiences, how they constructed their narratives of their first year of teaching, and how they referred to their students. This builds on Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) work on narrative analysis of people’s renderings of everyday experience, as well as oral history studies, realizing that “when someone tells a story, he or she shapes, constructs, and performs the self, experience, and reality” (Chase, 2005, p. 657). Therefore, I

employed this approach to analyze interview data from the initial conversation in which teachers reflected on their preparation and any subsequent storytelling in interviews that recounted incidents from their programs. The teachers' accounts of their coursework, events from their personal histories, and anecdotes from their first year of teaching informed their perspectives on social justice and thus were fundamental to this research. Furthermore, I drew upon CDA to examine the ways that participants recounted classroom events from their current context. This method allowed me to recognize the unique aspects of each participant's discourse while also noting patterns across their talk. Critical discourse analysis thus fit with the collective case study design in that it permitted me to attend to the dialectic of teachers' unique stories while potentially generating common themes across those narratives.

Applied to Texts. In addition to applying CDA to talk, I also used the tool to analyze the choices of texts in each teacher's classroom. These were specifically "extant texts" in that "the researcher does not affect their construction" but they already exist in the research context (Charmaz, 2006). This included a study of the dialogic nature of the texts, meaning those with which they were placed in conversation or others that were implied by their use (Bakhtin, 1981). The teachers sometimes noted this aloud for students, referencing other texts they read in comparison to those were using, but I also noted texts related to those in the classrooms that were absent from the conversation or could have been included for purposes of critique or further analysis. Furthermore, Segall (2004) argues that all texts are inherently pedagogical, and the techniques of CDA were used to illuminate what lessons and ideologies were communicated through those in the study. Yoon, Simpson, and Haag (2010) illustrated in an exploration of multicultural texts the extent to which materials and resources contained ideological messages. How these were taken up by the teacher in the space of the classroom are crucial to molding a

picture of social justice. As Jones and Enriquez (2009) highlight, it is possible to use mandated texts in ways that promote critical literacy, thus in thinking about text selection and in data analysis, I analyzed how the text was used.

Combining Methodological Approaches

Interweaving the case study design, deductive coding, and critical discourse analysis allowed me to examine the data in detail and provide a portrait of each individual case as well as to generate themes across cases. Once I began the research study, I transcribed all interviews and field notes from classroom observation. I then began using critical discourse analysis as a tool to understand the teachers' perspectives on social justice as well as how social justice arose in the classroom context. I completed a first level of coding of all transcripts for topics or conversations related to social justice, and I then noted *how* these were referenced or discussed. Classroom texts, artifacts from the school context, and student interviews were components of these transcripts and this step of analysis also. I used data from student focus groups as evidence of the deductive codes and as triangulation points with teacher interviews and classroom observations. I used the findings from CDA to inform the qualitative assessment of the teacher's literacies, meaning the discourse approach helped to evaluate the substance of the theme beyond mere numbers. I did this for each case independently as I conducted the study, using the process of memo-ing (Charmaz, 2000) to note aspects for the cross-case comparison when I reached that stage of analysis (see Appendix A). Thus, adhering to the form of multicase study, I treated each case individually in these initial coding phases. Once each teacher's code map was pieced together (see Appendices J, M, & O), I then conducted cross case analysis to discern how each related to one another and where they were discrepant. I used code reports from HyperResearch© to inform this analysis. The final stage of investigation was the comparison of

codes across cases (see Appendix O), which built the story of social justice literacies and struggles within these three English classrooms.

Credibility

In order to establish credibility, I engaged with participants over an extended period of time, approximately 20 days at each site for a total of 17 weeks total (Mertens, 2010). I spent 3-4 days per week and roughly four hours per day. Glesne (2011) cites “prolonged engagement and persistent observation—extended time in the field so that you are able to develop trust, learn the culture, and check out your hunches” (p. 49) as a critical part of qualitative research. I believed that five to six weeks of observation allowed for saturation and thus the repetition of themes to emerge (Mertens, 2010). I illustrated triangulation (Glesne, 2011) across the sources of data: observations, interviews, documents, and artifacts, so that each provided insight for the findings. In reference to the multiple cases involved in this study, Stake (2006) explains, “We are also concerned about triangulation *across* case studies—that is, about the *credibility* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of descriptions and findings in the multicase study as a whole” (Chapter 2, Section 2.5, para. 12). I collected numerous types of documents across each case and attempted to gather the same types of materials from each to provide consistency.

I also solicited modified member checks (Mertens, 2010) from teachers in order to ensure that the way I observed incidents and transcribed interviews and classroom discourse was accurate, as well as to make certain that I understood their decisions for classroom content and pedagogy. For example, when I witnessed a teacher’s conflict with a student, I asked specifically about the episode in the second interview and offered my understanding for the teacher’s feedback. This safeguarded against my imposing a framework upon them and allowed

for transparency in their intentions. It also resulted in clear communication of their purposes in classroom decisions.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

In addition to extensive engagement and member checks to enhance trustworthiness, I paid particular attention to my subjectivity throughout the progression of this study; “continual alertness to your own biases and theoretical predispositions assists in producing more trustworthy interpretations” (Glesne, 2011, p. 211). I spent time reflecting on field notes and worked to mitigate my own critical perspectives on teaching. I was transparent with teachers about my purposes and I disclose my relationships with each participant in this chapter. I also considered, as I reflected on observation notes, how my own assumptions, ideology, and cultural position (Glesne 2011) might have been reflected in my recordings and I communicated these in writing and recalled them in future observations. I also disclose limitations of the study here in order to cultivate trustworthiness (Glesne 2011).

I attempted to foster authenticity (Mertens, 2010) through the construction of the teachers’ experience of social justice in the classroom as revealed in textual choices and classroom interactions and discourse. I provided a platform for both teacher and student voices through interviews, thus allowing for the representation of multiple realities in the classroom. These diverse perspectives provide a cohesive portrait of the intricacy of individual classrooms.

Transferability and Dependability

I established transferability through thick description (Glesne, 2011; Mertens, 2010) of each day that I observed and the lessons I witnessed, as well as through detailing the texts employed, the teachers’ interpretations of them, and how they were integrated into the classroom. The use of multiple cases and multiple contexts also enhanced transferability as

readers may be able to find pieces of each or all classrooms that relate to their own context; Mertens (2010) writes, “multiple case studies might be undertaken to demonstrate the range of commonality and diversity of a phenomenon” (p.430) and this is what I hope to accomplish.

I conveyed all stages of the research process and documented any changes that occurred in order to secure dependability (Mertens, 2010). By providing full disclosure of the progression of the study, I assure readers that the study is dependable. I kept all data and text documents organized according to research site and these documents are readily accessible to illustrate findings or validate participant information, thus providing confirmability (Mertens, 2010).

Role of the Researcher and Positionality

The qualitative paradigm recognizes the role of the researcher as an active participant in the study itself. In this project, I fully embraced the notion that research is never neutral, nor is the researcher a blank slate, but I instead took “a reflexive stance on modes of knowing and representing studied life” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509) and understood that “what we know shapes, but does not necessarily determine, what we ‘find’” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 510). Thus, I realized that I played a fundamental part in the performances in the study, the representation of data, and the analysis for findings.

As a former English teacher of five years in a public high school in North Carolina and a graduate of the MAT program of which the participants were also alumni, I had strong connections to the sites in the study and an interest in learning from participants. A significant portion of my pre-service coursework encouraged social justice in the classroom, and I explored various ways of implementing this in content and pedagogy throughout my public school teaching career. However, I struggled to mediate this style of teaching within the confines of standardized testing. Despite this history, I do believe in the necessity for working toward social

justice and thus I locate myself in a post-critical research paradigm informed by a cultural studies framework, which promotes examining relationships of power and reading the various texts in a situation for their ideological messages. I was interested in analyzing classrooms as texts and observing other educators' methods in hopes of providing some contextualized instances from which readers can learn.

Beyond my position as a former critical educator, I am a white female who was raised in the state where the study occurred. My interest in and learning about social justice theories and issues led to my constant questioning of the normalized assumptions into which I was socialized throughout my formative years, and developing a critical outlook on the axiomatic operation of everyday society has been crucial to my academic work. Nonetheless, my background often affords me rapport with pre-service teachers who, reflecting the make-up of the larger teaching force, are generally white, middle-class, and heterosexual. This most likely played a central role in my accessibility to the teachers and to the research sites as a whole.

In addition to this background, I also instructed one of the courses in the MAT program in which these participants were enrolled in the 2011-2012 year. Although the course, entitled *Introduction to Teaching in the 21st Century*, did not specifically target social justice, concerns for equity and oppression permeated my approach. Furthermore, at the time of this course, students were concurrently enrolled in *Diversity in Education*, which explicitly addressed issues of racism, sexism, classism and diversity. Thus, having a sense of familiarity with both these students and their program afforded me the opportunity to understand and delve into their narratives on their preparation as it might connect to their practice.

Finally, as previously mentioned, one additional element is my work as a teaching assistant in the fall of 2012 and fall of 2013 in a *Social Justice in Education* course for all pre-service

teachers ranging from those enrolled in early childhood, middle grades, and MAT programs. In this role, I was struck by students' desire for concrete understandings of social justice theory and the lack of available resources that distinctly offered specific practices for social justice in English education. The perceived gap led to my pursuit of this research study.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations in this study exist in the fact that I was only able to provide a sense of social justice in the classroom based on the time I was able to observe and the amount of interview data I collected, which was from 17 weeks total of observations, interviews, and artifact compilation. If issues pertaining to social justice occurred outside of the days during which I was present, I was only able to document it through interviews with teachers and the documents or artifacts I collected. Having been a classroom teacher, I am well aware that certain actions occur on certain days and not on others, thus I may have missed some lessons or interactions that could have augmented my portrayal. However, the time I was able to spend ensured saturation of codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Mertens, 2010) and the development of patterns. I was able to sufficiently witness accounts that provided a detailed picture.

Also, a limitation exists in the fact that the definition of social justice is not a fixed entity (Zollers et al., 2000) and that a “standard, or universal, view of social justice is dubious” (Carlson, 2007, p. 4). A teacher may define social justice in a manner that is discrepant from what the literature states or may limit their definition to one facet of social justice, such as working toward gender equity but not recognizing racial disparities. Although my study reports these different opinions and complexities of definition, it may be a limitation in terms of fully defining and studying the targeted phenomenon.

Finally, there are limits to the case study construct, which apply here as well. Guba and Lincoln (1981) warned researchers that the case study could offer readers mistaken conclusions if they “oversimplify or exaggerate a situation” (p. 377). There is also a tendency to treat a case study as representative of a whole. With three case studies, the intent is not to generalize to all English classrooms, although there is a danger in this. Yet, with the small number of cases presented in this study, as well as its focus only on upper level English classrooms, the results only describe the experiences of the three teachers involved. I must rely on readers to interpret its applicability to additional contexts.

In this chapter, I constructed the foundation for the study. I described how participants were recruited as well as the various types of data collected. I discussed my approaches to data analysis, including the specific codes that I applied across the cases. I then offered my own position in the study as well as its limitations. I now turn to the teachers individually, and in the next three chapters I present each as a bounded case.

CHAPTER 4

BEING A TEACHER ALLY AND CREATING A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE: THE CONTRADICTIONS IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS AND CULTIVATING SOCIOPOLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The Context

Pacific High School²

Pacific High School was located in Pacific County on the coast of a southeastern state. Students attended the school from three clustered towns: Riverview, Bankston, and Tall Oaks. Riverview and Bankston had 2,350 and 6,500 permanent residents respectively and both largely depended on tourism as their main industry, boasting roughly 40,000 visitors in the summer months. They were charming and small towns, full of shops and restaurants located directly on the scenic waterway. Tall Oaks, the area immediately surrounding the school, was populated by 2,972 residents and had a more rural feel. Taken together, the population of the region was predominately white (>75%), yet there was a wider discrepancy in social class as the fishing industry intersected with local power plant workers and commuters who made the 30-45 minute journey to the closest metropolitan area where they worked in hospitals, law firms, and similarly

² All references to schools, staff, students, cities, and districts are pseudonyms.

situated occupations. The median income for a household in Bankston was \$40,496 and for Riverview and Tall Oaks \$32,399 and \$28,406 respectively³.

Pacific High School reflected these demographics. In a county with only two other high schools, the student body at Pacific was approximately 1,100, with a population that was 78% White, 19.5% Black, 2% Hispanic, and .5% Native American. There were 77 classroom teachers in the school, and with the exclusion of the teacher in this study who identified as mixed-race, all of the remaining teachers were white. Of the four school administrators, three were white women and one was a white male. Although the school had a few teachers of color over the last few years, many went into administration both in Pacific and other counties. The school was left with a student body that was somewhat diverse and a teaching force that was completely monolithic and monocultural, which is reflective of the population of teachers at large across the United States (Changing Profession, 2013).

While observing at Pacific, I had many occasions to witness various elements of school culture. For instance, during Homecoming Week, the student council selected themes for each day and students were encouraged to dress accordingly. The days of the week included “Merica [America] Day,” “Camo [camouflage] Day,” “Team [sports affiliations] Day,” Decade Day,” and “Class Day,” the last of which was a day each grade was assigned a particular color to wear. It appeared that more students participated in “Camo Day,” than any other, and I was surprised by how many students donned their camouflage gear on the assigned day, which included hunting suits, ball caps, and boots.

³ Sources for demographic, population, and income data would reduce anonymity and are not cited.

The influence of local churches and businesses at the school was also apparent, as religious organizations donated gifts and supplies for teachers throughout the year and sponsored lunches for school staff. I noticed a flowerpot on the desk of the teacher in this study with a paper attached that read: “Welcome back 2012-2013. We love you and we support you! Cross United Methodist Church.” There was a huge billboard that contained advertisements for sponsors who donated financially to the school’s athletic teams which was visible from the road where the school entrance was located. Thus there was a genuine sense of community support and involvement in the school.

Aside from these elements of student and community culture, there was also an element of pessimism in the culture of school staff. Teacher turnover was at a high with at least ten teachers having left to seek employment elsewhere, often as a result of low payment and the need to support families, or when opportunities arose that were more lucrative and lured educators from the profession. In fact, as mentioned above, on my first day of observations a teacher who was a finalist for State Teacher of the Year had resigned to take a more profitable position in education. A local news outlet generated a story on effective teachers leaving the profession while I was there and this left many of the teachers at the school feeling downtrodden. As a whole, state policies were not favorable for education in general and teachers’ salaries had increased in several years. This school was undergoing a shift in administration to its second new principal in three years. The transference fostered new local procedures and dismantled former practices that the teachers found efficient. Thus, the overall attitude seemed to be one of uncertainty, and teachers met the changes with reluctance.

The Classroom

Despite this general melancholy, walking into Etta Swan's classroom felt like being embraced in a warm, accustomed hug. It was a friendly place, bustling with action and humming with the chatter of adolescence. As would often be the case, I found it difficult to locate Etta amongst her students. She was barely 5 feet tall with a petite frame. Her long dark hair, youthful clothing, and trendy glasses caused her to blend in amongst the crowd, and her generally soft-spoken demeanor did not draw immediate attention. And yet somehow, once spotted, she filled the large room with her caring presence.

In her classroom, the desks were aligned in a sort of semi circle, a large U, divided in half by a technology cart in the middle of the room. All desks were facing the front of this massive rectangular room, which sat on the perimeter of the courtyard where students were allowed to eat lunch. Before even entering the room, I noticed Etta's "Safe Zone" sticker on her door, which was a visible signifier of her commitment to provide support for individuals who identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer. It also denoted that she had participated in a training session at a university to receive this signage. This program is:

designed to create a network of visible allies who are knowledgeable about the impacts of heterosexism, strategies to disrupt heterosexism, and resources for people on topics related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. ("LGBTQ Center", 2013, Education section, para. 1.)

Thus, by displaying the badge on her classroom door, Etta associated herself with the above causes and affirmed herself as an advocate for students or staff who identified as LGBTQ.

The walls in Etta's classroom contained teacher-created posters and ones that were produced professionally. One poster on the wall above the recycling bin contained two columns, one labeled: "Yes," with a list of items that could be recycled, such as paper, aluminum, and

glass, and another labeled: “No,” with another list of items such as cloth, wood, and food wrappers. Another teacher-created poster read, “Before you speak, think” and then listed beside each letter: “T-is it TRUE? H-Is it HELPFUL? I-Is it INSPIRING? N-Is it NECESSARY? K-Is it KIND?” I later learned that this theme of kindness was central to Etta’s classroom.

Beyond these posters, I was immediately struck by the nature of those that were likely purchased. These included lists of words to serve as substitutes for offensive uses of the words “gay” and “retarded.” The posters read: “That’s so. . .” then illustrated a collage of synonyms under the phrase including “absurd,” “uncool,” and “dull,” followed at the bottom by “. . .and you choose retarded? Buy a dictionary.” The poster for the word “gay” was similarly designed, with words such as “ridiculous,” “foolish,” and “silly” as replacements. At the outset, then, the classroom artifacts seemed to promote environmental, social, and political awareness. Outward appearances reflected the goals and attributes of Etta’s social justice pedagogy, which then also became apparent after observations, interviews, and analysis of her classroom practices and interactions with her students.

The Classes

Etta taught two classes of English I, which was a survey of various literary genres, to high school freshmen in the ‘Standard’ track, and one class of English II, which was a world literature course, to sophomore students in the ‘Honors’ track. For the study, I focused on Etta’s first and second period classes, which were Honors English II and Standard English I respectively. The Honors English II class was composed of 21 students, 16 of whom were White, 4 Black, and 1 Asian Indian. The Standard English I class contained 13 students, 7 of whom were White and 6 were Black. This class was much smaller than the average, but generally speaking most English classes at Pacific averaged 25 students.

Etta's Social Justice: "I Can't Turn it Off"

Having worked with Etta Swan throughout her preservice teacher education program, I knew that she openly expressed a commitment to social justice. As the instructor of her first course in the program and later as her student teaching supervisor, I witnessed Etta's growth as she progressed from student to teacher. In coursework, her responses to assignments were consistently critical of traditional schooling and expressed a desire for alternative styles. She was passionate about issues of equity and experienced a profound shift in thinking from a 'white savior' mentality to a more critical and practical stance through our class discussions and course readings. Once she entered the field, she negotiated her viewpoints with the reality of students' lives and the demands that came with having a multitude of students. She completed her first year of teaching also at Pacific High School, during which she participated in a professional development program for practicing teachers. I was also involved in this program, and there I learned that her commitment to social justice remained strong. She shared her constant battle to sponsor a Gay-Straight Alliance for her students with her group in these sessions, and she and I conversed frequently about the risks she perceived as a new teacher attempting to institute change in a conservative school.

Etta's reasons for working for social justice stemmed largely from her ethnicity and biographical experiences. Through interviews and casual conversations with Etta, I learned a great deal about who she was and how she saw her teacher identity related to her commitment to social justice. Etta was born to a white mother and an Iranian father, and she lived the early part of her life in a metropolitan area in North Carolina where she attended ethnically diverse schools. In December of 2001, in the wake of the tragedy of September 11, she moved from urban Lee City to rural Pacific County. She described this change, stating:

It was an interesting transition from being in a diverse population where my background wasn't really a big deal and then moving here where it very much was a big deal. So that was the biggest difference was just um (long pause) I was pretty terrified the first day of school because I had never seen so many people that were all of the same race. And that was hard. Which I know, I feel like most people talk about that with a flip to it, but yeah.

Once her family moved, Etta became painfully aware of her own ethnic make-up and, as she shared, gained a “clear concept of what my race meant.” Etta was subject to discriminatory remarks about her ethnicity that were hurtful. She relayed a story about a teacher who introduced her sister to her new classmates as Iranian, “but not a terrorist.” However, once she reached high school she described several teachers who sensed the way she was treated by peers and disrupted this negativity. She was deeply affected by those teachers, and a combination of her middle and high school educators inspired her to choose their profession as her own. She explained, “I had already been thinking about being a teacher in part because I wanted to be a different kind of teacher than what I had gotten, but then when I got to high school it was like no this is the type of teacher that I could be. And that was really cool.” David Kirkland (2008) captures the sentiment that Etta experienced, writing:

It does seem clear to me that pain defines social justice, as passion may define a reaction against it. Without a clear understanding of what is unjust, however, one cannot truly define what is just. Hence, if social injustice is associated with pain, then social justice—in opposing it—must deal with the passion in healing both as an act and as a process. One aspect of social justice teaching must then be an act of healing, internally and externally, the pain that each of us uniquely and collectively witnesses and experiences. Social justice teaching seems to acknowledge a responsibility to others. (p. 61)

It was clear, as Kirkland (2008) here cites, that Etta's social justice manifested from her own pain as a student. Etta's sense of injustice came from her own experience with discrimination, and teaching was her avenue to heal her personal pain as well as to protect others from experiencing similar agony. She took it on as her role to safeguard others, particularly her LGBTQ students, from prejudices. In talking with Etta and observing her classroom, I learned

that much of her identity hinged on this background, and it affected not only the way she taught, but also the materials that she used and examples she provided in class.

In addition to these experiences surrounding her ethnicity, Etta attributed her social justice beliefs to other aspects of her life. As a self-proclaimed feminist, she felt that this part of her identity originated from the models of dependent women she had witnessed growing up. She thus felt that her critical consciousness began at a young age, stating:

When I was a little kid, when I was a little girl, I really liked the idea of girl power but I think I took it a little bit more seriously than my friends did and I learned that very quickly. I always had a sense that something wasn't right, but I couldn't figure out what it was. And for a long time I thought I was just crazy. I thought I just saw things that, to me they didn't seem right but they were normal.

However, once she attended a summer program for gifted high school students, she acquired a vocabulary for her thoughts, particularly the concepts related to feminism, and returned home with a newfound sense of confidence and place from which to speak.

As Etta continued her educational career to college and began her double major in Women's Studies and English, she said she was "hooked."

Women's Studies just opens you up to all sorts of things. I mean . . . you're sort of looking for what's problematic and what's working and systems of power and oppression and all of that. And so then my brain was just turned on and now I can't turn it off. Yeah, I don't know how to turn it off.

Following her Women's Studies and English undergraduate coursework, Etta entered a master's in teaching program. She praised the program, affirming that it:

gave me a really good lens for seeing my students as more than just students. And I felt like the little bit of ESL, like the ESL discussions that we had or discussions about LGBTQ students or just race and gender and how I, just by being whoever I am, bring that baggage into my classroom and you know unpacking that invisible knapsack and all that stuff. I feel like the MAT gave me a way to think about my practice, that just being a

teacher wouldn't automatically let you have. Because there's just no time. So I think that really benefitted me, a lot.

Beyond her courses, Etta shared that her cooperating teacher in her internship was “completely on board with social justice, with questioning things” and that she had opportunities to implement her ideals of social justice while in this phase of learning to teach. Both the critically reflective capacity that Etta alludes to here as well as the lessons she mentioned, which she attributed to having been cultivated and created in her Master's program, carried on in the teaching I observed and the conversations I had with her throughout the study as will be illustrated.

Etta translated both the experiences from her upbringing and the knowledge and skills she gained in her undergraduate and graduate experiences to her teaching at Pacific High School. When asked generally how she saw herself as a teacher, she emphasized, “I don't want to teach them *what* to think and I tell them that a lot. I just want to teach them—that sounds cheesy—but I just want to teach them *how* to think. And I just want to teach them how to question.” She focused on the fact that many of her students in this rural area did not have experiences with people unlike them, and that she wanted them to learn:

first and foremost . . .to be kind. . . and how to have a conversation with somebody and share what you think and to be a critical thinker. . . So I think the most important thing is just to help them see that there are different opinions and there are different you know contexts outside of their little world. And helping them communicate within it and question.

While her responses on questioning and critical thinking resonate with the tenets of social justice, when asked specifically what it meant to her to *teach* for social justice, Etta affirmed, “I think, [slowly] providing students with a language that they can use and also, I'm just giving them a safe space to learn.” For her, social justice was both curriculum and pedagogy. It was

giving students tangible terms they could use but it was also constructing a community of learners.

Also noteworthy is that consistently throughout this conversation, Etta referred to her experiences as a student as the reason behind much of the way she felt about teaching. In fact, she brought up the phrase that as a student she had “felt crazy” or “felt like I was insane” at least eight different times in the dialogue. By this, she meant that she discerned injustices in the world at a young age which were treated as axiomatic and that she did not possess the language at the time to adequately critique these wrongs. Thus the manner with which she approached social justice in her practice was personal for Etta, and this became evident through the patterns that emerged in the data.

Illustrating Etta’s Social Justice: Focusing on Sexual Orientation: “Is Justin Bieber Dating a Guy?”

When I asked her how she saw social justice relating specifically to her teaching, Etta described an exercise she created for students:

I also have them choose a preferred gender pronoun on the first day and I always say if this changes, let me know. If you have a preferred gender pronoun that you don’t want me to say out loud and you just want me to know that that’s your preferred gender pronoun, I do that. The kids who have one usually know, but I think in every class someone has said ‘hey Ms. Swan what’s a preferred gender pronoun?’ and then we can have a conversation about it. And we talk about that.

In addition to beginning this conversation on gender expression, her syllabus included a “Policy of Peace,” that she asked students to sign. This promise read:

My main goal as a teacher is to create a safe and welcoming learning environment for ALL of my students [underline in original]. I cannot do that without a commitment from the entire class to strive for the same goal. I do not tolerate bullying of any kind. If you suspect bullying, please let me know. As a class and as individuals, we will respect and

learn from our differences on all levels, including race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, creed, sexuality, gender expression, and belief system.

These two examples reflect central tenets of Etta's social justice practice. As a whole, her pedagogy centered on respect for individuals of all kinds from all parts of the world. She engaged students in critique of their perspectives and taken-for-granted opinions in order to foster that respect, uncovering how their own socialization may have led them to think in a certain way about others who were different from them.

Working to promote acceptance in her school context. Etta's social justice focus was predominately on issues surrounding her LGBTQ students and in support of these communities. This was evident in her work in the classroom and in the larger school context. A significant part of her story was her attempt to secure a Gay-Straight Alliance at her school, which is a national youth organization committed to creating "safe environments in schools for students to support each other and learn about homophobia, transphobia, and other oppressions," as well as to "educate the school community about homophobia, transphobia, gender identity, and sexual orientation issues," and to "fight discrimination, harassment, and violence in schools" ("GSA Network," 2009, Mission section, para. 1). After having taught Ramon, a transgender student, and having several students request the Alliance, Etta began asking her administration for permission to sponsor the group. The former principal of the school consulted the district's central office, which acquiesced under the agreement that the club be titled a "Diversity Club." This, Etta felt, was not true to the purpose or original intent upon which the national organization was founded. She strongly expressed loyalty to the mission, charter, and specific goals of the alliance and refused to dilute it with this euphemism. Upon the assignment of a new principal to her school, she re-introduced the idea but then experienced delays in more subtle ways. Although the School Improvement Plan for the year boasted a "Safe Zone Certified Staff" (see

Appendix G), no action was taken towards this goal. To Etta, it seemed that the principal wanted to offer stickers to teachers to place on their doors without legitimate certification. In terms of the club, Etta stated in an interview that it seemed “No one is saying no, but no one is saying yes, either,” thus resulting in her powerlessness to move forward.

Making her position visible. Despite these challenges to instituting a school-wide Gay-Straight Alliance, Etta’s teaching and work surrounding sexual orientation and social justice continued to shine in other avenues. Her “Safe Zone Trained” sticker on her classroom door was illustrative of her explicit commitments, and she seldom failed to challenge students publically when they offhandedly called something or someone ‘gay.’ She rarely ignored such remarks and often engaged students in conversations about what that term meant and why it was insulting to use it in a derogatory manner. For instance, when students were choosing lyrics for their *Music as Poetry Projects*, one white male student offhandedly commented that Justin Bieber, a popular teenage musician, was “gay”. Etta asked nonchalantly, “Oh, is Justin Bieber dating a guy?” and then led a short conversation with the student about insulting others. While in this occurrence, Etta talked only with the individual student, she also facilitated whole-class discussions on the topic when they arose during large group instruction time. When a white female student used the term “gay” as an insult, Etta took the time to engage students on the topic. She told students, “Your language might not reflect what you think, but nobody else knows that except for you. If somebody was in this classroom or if I were gay and you’re using this language, it wouldn’t feel very safe.” Here the echoes of Etta’s Policy of Peace and her consistency in championing against discrimination around LGBTQ issues were evident.

She returned the day following to this discussion and showed students a spoken word poem called “A Letter to the Playground Bully, from Andrea, age 8 ½ “ by Andrea Gibson, a feminist poet and activist (Kallous, 2011). The lyrics include the stanza:

but on your bad days couldn't you just say
'hey I'm having a bad day,'
instead of telling me I'm stupid or poor,
or telling me I dress like a boy
'cause maybe I am a boy AND a girl
maybe my name is Andrea Andrew.
so what.

In this way Etta continued to address her lesson on how using “gay” as an insult not only replicated language that was unacceptable, but was also a form of bullying. In her quest to support this social justice issue, she illustrated an example of *literacy in advocacy*, wherein she both took opportunities to educate all of her students *and* extended various supports to students who identified as a part of LGBTQ communities. This literacy was one that I generated from Etta's case, and while not one of the overall themes from the literature or the deductive codes for the whole data set, it was important to her story and embodiment of social justice.

Advocating for LGBTQ students. One illustrative example of this advocacy literacy was in regard to Etta's transgender student, Ramon. In a number of situations, such as when ze (here I intentionally use the gender neutral pronoun preferred by the student) was being bullied on the bus and in the courtyard, school staff came to Etta to get her insight and mediate the situation. She was seen as the adult figure in the school who could assist them in understanding Ramon and negotiating proper punishment for the parties involved, including Ramon, when necessary. When other students questioned ze's voice or dress, Etta was ze's protector. In one classroom discussion, she told the students she would not allow students in another class to talk

about them, so she would not allow them to talk about Ramon. Even though Ramon was no longer an actual student in Etta's class (but had been in the year prior), ze stopped by almost daily. I witnessed many interactions where ze came to the classroom to say hello, ask for supplies, or to report on an incident from the day. Each time, Etta was warm, friendly, and helpful in whatever Ramon needed. Thus, while not actually in the class, Ramon became an integral part of Etta's interactions with students because ze was physically present and because ze was often part of classroom discussion at Etta's current students' discretion. It was thus quite evident when considering Etta's views on social justice that this area was crucial to her ideals and pedagogy.

Contradiction in Teaching: The Struggle to Connect to All Students

Building Relationships as a Social Justice Literacy

Building relationships with students is perhaps one of the most basic premises of any 'good teaching,' as this implies that teachers show a genuine interest in students that is reciprocated and cater curriculum to the individual interests and needs of students. In teaching that is social justice-oriented, however, there are more specific elements of these relationships. Their point of origin is basic rapport, as Moje and Hinchman (2004) report, "culturally responsive pedagogy should begin with the formation of relationships between teachers and students" (p. 339). Yet, the features involve teachers getting to know their students across boundaries and in terms related to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. These relationships also involve using that knowledge as a means upon which to build classroom instruction. Haberman and Post (1998) report that effective teachers are known for "using the lives of children as a rich source of study. Star teachers are constantly involved in learning more about

their children, their families and communities, and what it means to grow up in particular settings” (p. 100). In addition, arguments for relationship-building by getting to know and using the strengths of students abound in literature that promotes teaching from a social justice perspective, including ascertaining the funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992) of students and their families as well as learning this in order to better teach students based on their practices in their home cultures (Delpit, 1988).

Clearly, as illustrated above, Etta engaged in this relationship building with Ramon. In fact Etta made multiple explicit moves in her practice to bond with the youth in her classroom. Throughout the observations, I coded 58 instances as examples of connectedness with students. Etta strategically employed writing assignments, used discursive strategies, and shared of herself as ways to cultivate attachments. In what follows, I describe each of those tactics. Then I examine the contradiction that arose within these wherein analysis of the data revealed that while Etta exhibited an effort to make connections with students and shared herself with them, this did not occur for *all* students.

Etta’s Pedagogic Efforts to Connect with Students

Etta made a concerted effort to associate with different types of learners. For instance, in examining this section of data, I found that her relationships spanned one student who had suffered tremendous anxiety and had re-entered public school, a group of student athletes from whom she knew she had different beliefs, a transgender student who struggled to fit in, and a student who was viewed by peers as exhibiting behavior that did not conform to traditional classroom standards. With the latter student, for example, Etta allowed her to sit on the floor under a table where she felt most comfortable while the class was reading the play *Cyrano de*

Bergerac (Rostand, 1897) aloud. When I asked Etta in a follow-up interview about this student's behavior and her reaction, she stated,

It was this moment of—the same qualities—the qualities that Megan possesses that I love so much are the fact that she's so energetic, that she brings that positivity to my classroom, she is funny, she is engaged. Those are all positive attributes. And those are all the same qualities that made her sit under the table, in the middle of class. Because she is funny and she is energetic and she was engaged. . . I think she knows when she can and when she can't.

By allowing this student, Megan, to be who she was and appreciating her for her strengths, Etta showed her effort at establishing a relationship with her. This same student later reported that she read *The Book Thief* (2007), an assigned reading for this English class, over one weekend and recounted a story about not being able to put the book down even in church. It was observable then that she was invested in Etta and the class, and this relationship was reciprocal. In the focus group, students supported this finding of Etta connecting with students' of various personalities. One stated, "I just like her teaching method. It's like so, she relates with the students more." Thus, Megan was only one model of the ways that Etta accepted and welcomed students in order to construct links with them.

Connection through Writing

Etta's genuine caring and ability to connect with most students was evident not only in informal interactions with students as identified about but also in her pedagogic strategies. Not only did she emanate a compassionate persona, but also there were many incidents in class in which she employed specific methods that afforded her access to her students' personal lives. These included journal prompts such as: "Have you ever hurt someone you love? How did you hurt them? How did it feel?" and she used these journals daily to connect the texts being studied to students' lives. They served as a starting and sharing point almost every day in class, and then

Etta moved students into curricular material. With this prompt, for instance, a student shared that she had once tricked her grandmother, with whom she lived, into thinking she was sick because she held a thermometer under warm water. Her story concluded with how she felt after her grandmother learned what she had done.

In addition to daily journals, Etta shared that she began the first unit of the course by requiring students to compose memoirs, an assignment she employed as a way to “build classroom community.” These memoirs were then published and students received a personal copy of the text with funds Etta secured through a grant. Students read their own stories aloud in class with their peers and they were also available online. The tales included heartbreak, the death of a family member, experiencing illness, and other tragedies. By sharing their experiences, Etta felt that not only did she begin building relationships with her students, but they also formed bonds with one another. In *Writing Wounded*, Elizabeth Dutro (2011) expounds upon the potential of such work with adolescents, writing that it “might foster the kinds of relationships and stances necessary to challenge entrenched inequities and privileged assumptions about Others’ lives and facilitate engagement and intellectual risk-taking for students and teachers” (p. 194). Thus, through having students write about their personal experiences, Etta not only built relationships with students but as part of those created a space with the potential to realize the goals of teaching for social justice. This pedagogical practice also exemplified Johnson’s (2012) fourth category for practicing social justice, *testimonial literacies*, because Etta was “bearing witness to students’ experiences and thus bridging the gaps based on power and privilege” (p. 153) as well as validating students’ narratives about crises that occurred in their lives.

Connection through Discursive Community-Building

In addition to writing assignments, Etta employed discursive strategies that constructed a ‘we’ mentality in the classroom, rather than one in which the adolescents were seen as separate from the teacher. When a female student, Leslie, used the word ‘gay’ as an insult, instead of chastising her in front the class, Etta took this as an opportunity to empathize with her and discuss the term. She told the class it was “a word that’s used in our language as habit. It’s not Leslie’s fault, it’s habit,” and went on to say “this could have happened to anybody.” In this sense, she positioned herself as alongside her students, saying, in other words, ‘I also could have made this mistake.’

Etta’s positioning of herself as someone who was capable of making mistakes detracted from students perceiving her as ‘expert.’ This served to shift power from the traditional manner in which it is embodied in typical classroom discourse (Cazden, 1986) where the teacher assumes the role of control and maintains a status of power above her students. Etta’s attention to authority is another element that characterizes social justice teachers (Grant & Agosto, 2008). Recognizing that they possess a majority of the power in the classroom because they are likely the only adult figure present and being vigilant about how they use that power in both positive and negative ways (Cooper, 2003) is crucial. Although the very nature of schools places teachers in these positions, it is up to the educator to uncover and mediate that role.

Continuing along this premise, Etta’s use of inclusive language beyond the pronoun ‘we’ included the ways she referenced and spoke to the class. On numerous occasions, I heard her refer to each of her classes as “team,” and I rarely if ever heard her use the term *class*. Furthermore, when calling students back to attention from group work or activity-based classroom time, her cue was “bring it in.” There were 45 instances of a version of this phrase

coded in the data. The phrase was often accompanied by a hand-swirling motion that appeared almost as if Etta were stirring something in a large pot. Taken together, the phrase and accompanying gesture symbolized a coming together as one and served to enhance the sense of community in the class. It was almost as if to say ‘you’ve all been off doing individual or small group tasks, and I want us to reconvene as a family.’ The students generally responded quickly to the summons, and it was clear they were accustomed to it by the time I arrived to the site. When I asked Etta about the practice, she admitted that at first it was not intentional, but once it was pointed out to her, she shared, “I started thinking about it and what kind of message it sends and then I realized that I think I like it.”

Finally, Etta often began class by asking students for “highs and lows.” In this exercise, students offered the best pieces of what was going in their lives or something that happened over the weekend and, if needed, things that were not going well for them. I also heard her refer to this as “Happies and Crappies” and again, it was a custom with which students were familiar. As soon as she mentioned the phrase, students began verbally sharing. Most often students shared events such as succeeding in *Grand Theft Auto*, a game for Playstation 3, and going to parties. Incidents categorized as “lows” were those including fights with guardians or getting in trouble at school. In this pedagogic practice, Etta demonstrated the social justice literacy of showing care for her students’ lives.

Connection through Sharing Herself

Another way that Etta exhibited the notion of connectedness was by sharing parts of herself with her students. In this sense, the relationship became mutual and “when students know that someone cares about them, they more easily empathize with and even become excited about the interests of that person; as a result, students are more likely to believe or buy into a

teacher's assertion that it is important to know some particular content-related generalization or a particular process" (Moje & Hinchman, 2004, p. 339-340). This sharing occurred in a number of ways.

Etta generally shared her interests with students through personal stories that related to topics of discussion or commentary on popular films. She shared her interest in theater both by having English I students analyze a portion of the musical *Legally Blonde* (Hach, 2007) for indirect and direct characterization and by teaching students who were acting out *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Rostand, 1897) for the class certain techniques and terminology in dramatic acting. She referenced her college experiences, her husband, and her friends often. She answered students when they inquired about her *Harry Potter* tattoo, and she joked with them about her allegiance to her alma mater when they wore her rival team's logo. These examples were woven seamlessly into classroom discourse. Two patterns in Etta's sharing, however, are particularly salient to her being oriented toward social justice.

First, Etta frequently provided examples for students that related to her Iranian roots. For example, in her unit on Human Rights, Etta led a discussion on diplomatic solutions for countries that violated the human rights of their own people. The conversation spanned Rwanda, Syria, Iran and referenced back to the students' reading of *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2000) earlier in the year. In the discussion, she articulated:

I'll tell you what my Iranian family thinks right now. They're questioning their president because they've had a lot of unrest. They are super pessimistic right now. They are fed up and don't know what to think. But at the same time they are excited about the prospect of diplomatic relations. You have to remember that the government doesn't always do what the people want it to do.

In this instance, she communicates to the students her claim to her ethnicity and then makes known the fact that she communicates with her family in Iran. She used her kinship to educate

her students, but does so in a way that is personal. Another related conversation occurred while students were reading Peggy McIntosh's (1988) *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. This text, written by a White female, included a catalogue of privileges the author was bestowed simply because of the color of her skin. These were all things commonly taken for granted for members of dominant culture, such as how prevalent members of their race were in presented in magazine outlets or how easy it was to find Band-Aids that match their skin color. Etta used her background to explain to students what it meant to generalize to a whole a group of people. She rationalized that doing such a thing was similar to how people asked her if her parents got divorced because her dad was Iranian, if it was due to his culture. She went on to say it would be comparable to making a statement that all teachers wear red pants because she was wearing red pants that day. By mentioning her father, however, she reiterated her own cultural awareness and used herself as an example for students. Again, not only did students potentially learn something new here, but they learned about their teacher simultaneously. She demonstrated the point that in education, "We teach what we are far more than we teach what we know" (Belmonte, 2003, p. 46). In this case, Etta's Iranian identity and cultural awareness was clear for students.

In addition to her ethnic identity, Etta also used one particular interest as an entry point for teaching. Haberman (1995) writes:

Star teachers are typically involved in some life activity that provides them with a sense of well-being and from which they continually learn. . . . Inevitably, they bring these activities and interests into their classrooms and use them as ways of involving their students in learning. It is quite common to find teachers' special interests used as foci that generate great enthusiasm for learning among the students. The grandiose explanation for this phenomenon is that people who continually experience learning themselves have the prerequisites to generate the desire to learn in others. A more practical explanation would be that we teach best what we care most about. (p. 779)

In other words, teachers bring their own strengths and hobbies into their classrooms to help students learn. In Etta's case, this aspect materialized in her love of theater and her interest in the musical artist Macklemore. She incorporated both into her instruction. For example, Etta used clips from *Legally Blonde: The Musical* (Hach, 2007), which she had seen onstage, to help students gain an understanding of the literary concepts "direct and indirect characterization." When students read *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Rostand, 1897) as a class and acted out parts, she taught them theater techniques such as 'blocking,' which she knew from her past and current involvement with a local theater in which she held parts in plays throughout the year.

On a number of occasions, Etta used lyrics from Macklemore songs as content for analysis, to draw a parallel to a character in a literary work, or to illustrate a point related to the topic of study. What is noteworthy to her use here is that Macklemore was a highly controversial figure at the time of her teaching and that his lyrics might not have been considered appropriate for a school context. Yet, instead of shying away from him, Etta embraced these elements, acknowledged them in class, and continued to employ his music as a vehicle for teaching. Her keen interest in his music and diligence to studying his lyrics afforded her an opportunity to share him with her students and use his songs for educational purposes.

For example, Etta used Macklemore's song "A Wake" (2012) to introduce the concept of white privilege to students. She distributed copies of the uncensored lyrics and played the song aloud two times. The lyrics include:

Why you out here talkin race, tryin' to save the fuckin' globe
Don't get involved with the causes in mind
White privilege, white guilt, at the same damn time
So we just party like it's nineteen ninety nine
Celebrate the ignorance while these kids keep dying

In the song, Macklemore acknowledges his own privileges and offers a commentary on the music industry's reaction to his work. He believes this treatment is discriminatory, because as a white rapper he is praised for being poetic and "so well spoken" while other, predominately Black rappers are condemned for the material of their songs. Etta's students were particularly engaged in this portion of the lesson and analyzing the lyrics. She showed them the website *Rap Genius* (2014) which elucidates lyrics and explains allusions. The classroom conversation spanned renderings on teenage pregnancy, Trayvon Martin, Reaganomics, and our culture's reliance on cell phones, all of which was an addition to a unit on human rights where Etta felt "we can't talk about human rights without talking about our rights in this country." By using her interests in Macklemore, she not only offered her side of the relationship building wherein students got to know her interests, but she was able to connect to classroom material and promote social justice content.

Limitations and Challenges in Relationship-Building

Inability to Connect with Certain Students

Although this unwavering attention to connecting with students was praiseworthy, especially where Etta was able to share her own socially-just ideals with students in a manner that made them content for study, there was a noticeable pattern in instances where Etta struggled to connect. In particular, she faltered in building relationships with the only two African American male students in her English I class, both of whom reflected traditional gender expressions. One of the young men, Nate, completed all of his work and earned good grades. The other, Jeremy, did not. In the first few weeks of my observations, the two boys sat in the back of the room together talking quietly for most of the class period.

Discursive mismatch. An example in which this disconnect was discernable was one incident in which students were discussing their journal entries about having hurt someone they loved. Jeremy shared with Etta that he hurt someone because he was hanging with a “thot.” Etta followed up by asking him if he felt badly, but it was clear that Etta (and perhaps some other members of the class) were unfamiliar with this term, which, according to *Urban Dictionary* is a word that means “hoe” (thot, 2013). Seemingly afraid to ask, Etta moved on to another student to share. After this next student, Nate chimed in as well saying that he had also hurt his girlfriend by messing with other “thots.” For the duration of this short conversation, the two young men kept repeating the term as much as possible and Etta’s response was “ok,” and she asked them how they felt, and moved on, but the divide was palpable. The two were giggling to themselves and Etta’s face displayed a look of confusion. Her cursory response and quick transition to another student illustrated that she wanted to avoid further conversation on the topic with Nate and Jeremy.

Open conflicts. There were three instances in the data in which Jeremy and Etta openly conflicted. Because they were the only clashes of their nature between Etta and any students that I witnessed during my observational period, they stood out as significant. Once, Jeremy asked Etta to turn off the air conditioner off because he was cold. The students had been instructed to read silently and Etta’s response was a sideways scowl to remind Jeremy of this. Their verbal sparring including Jeremy’s reminding her that his request included “please” and Etta’s stating that he should not yell over the class while his peers were working. The two other instances involved Jeremy asking to do something he felt others would be allowed to do and being denied and his resulting verbal expression of his frustration when he thought he was being treated

unfairly. The things he wanted to do included going to the library and attending tutoring on a day that Etta had not officially designated as such.

Pattern of permissiveness. On other days, I observed Jeremy and Nate doing little of their assigned work in the back of the classroom. This seemed, however, to go unnoticed. Often, Etta gave the class individual or group work to complete and she circulated the classroom to stop and help students. When she stopped at Nate and Jeremy's desks, she prompted them to complete work and continued circulating. There were no verbal consequences when she returned if their pages remained empty. With other students, Etta issued quiet reprimands or reminded them that they needed to have something written down when she came back around. With Jeremy and Nate, she usually continued circulating after glancing at their blank pages. Another time, Jeremy charged his phone in the back of the classroom (which was not allowed) and when he walked to retrieve it Nate made a noise that alerted him Etta was nearing their desks. He quickly scuffled back to his seat and thanked Nate. Later, he was able to recover the phone, all of which was unknown to Etta.

This pattern of permissiveness pervaded classroom discourse as well. When reading a short story, Richard Connell's (1924) *The Most Dangerous Game*, Nate made several comments aloud that Etta either did not hear or ignored. For instance, at the line "Rainsford's first impression was that the man was singularly handsome" (p. 17), Nate said, "dude is gay." This comment went unaddressed. It was not clear if Etta did not hear Nate or chose to ignore it. Either way, her inattention given the ways she had responded to other students using the word this way was striking. As a further example, during a class seminar neither Jeremy nor Nate contributed to the structured discussion, but instead stayed silent and were allowed to do so. Finally, when Etta instituted a seating chart and separated the two later in my observation period,

Jeremy audibly said “fuck,” and Etta asked “huh?” making it clear she heard him but was giving him an opportunity out of the situation. He did not repeat himself. Etta’s leniency precluded her from building authentic relationships with these two students.

Contextual Factors Affecting Student Relationships

There were, however, moments that countered these examples, and I do not wish to portray a wholly negative picture of the interactions between Etta and the two young men. Etta once used Jeremy’s writing as a model for his classmates and projected it on the document camera to illustrate the strengths of his arguments. Nate submitted a stellar product for a Character Project assignment, which he verbally expressed that he enjoyed completing. Yet, while the instances of conflict may seem trivial in isolation, it was the overall pattern in lack of relationship building that formed based on the permissiveness in regard to the two’s work in class and the discernible struggles that I found significant, especially in light of the previous finding on how much Etta seemed to care about her students’ lives and shared with them.

That African American male students have a difficult time in the current structures of schools is not a surprise. Research has documented how Black males are most often assigned to lower track courses (Oakes, 1985) and are punished most frequently in schools (Sandler, Wilcox, & Everson, 1985). Reflecting on this, Noguera (2003) writes, “Students can be unfairly victimized by the labeling and sorting processes that occur within school in addition to being harmed by the attitudes and behavior they adopt in reaction to these processes” (p. 442). He highlights how the damage done to Black males can be multidirectional: Students react to the way they are treated. Davis (2003) notes, however, that teachers are often discounted from conversations and education on Black male students. He declares,

Although teachers are blamed for many problems Black boys face, ironically, most of the proposed solutions aimed at remedying the educational plight of African American boys have excluded teachers. . . Teachers' influence on Black boys is too important, however, to silence them and reduce their contribution to this national conversation. Black males in general share this desire for a more personal connection with teachers. (p. 531)

Thus, there is a broad scope to consider when examining the ruptures between Etta, Nate, and Jeremy. Also, it is important to consider the implications of Etta's position as a teacher more broadly and not just her personally.

Etta's Critical Reflection on the Limits of her Literacy

Perhaps most interesting was that this lack of connection was a limitation of which Etta was well aware. In Etta's critical reflection on social justice issues that occurred during interviews, it was apparent that she knew the challenges at hand. When I asked about these two students specifically, she said, "It's so intriguing and it makes me feel like a horrible person and I absolutely hate it. I'm miserable." I pushed her to expound upon why she had such a reaction, and she explained:

I feel like I can't *understand* them [emphasis original]. I can't understand what is going on, I can't relate to them. I have no relationship with them at all. I feel like it's exhausting. And I feel like they don't trust me, or like me. They don't trust the words that I use with them. And it's so negative and it's so frustrating. I just want to sit down with them and say I . . . think. . . you are awesome. I want to help you. I want to hear you. . . . But then, you know there's so much going on there..

She went on to say that she worried that they might have felt she was attempting to emulate Erin Gruwell, the teacher whose story of inspiring her students was glamorized in the Hollywood film *Freedom Writers* (Devito, 2007). Etta's critique of the film alluded to an exercise from her teacher preparation program in which she dissected the superficial connections that Gruwell

attempted by using rap music with her minoritized students. Etta feared that her own students might “have an idea of what they think of me [other] than what I really am.” Thus, Etta was critically reflective on her inability to connect deeply with Nate and Jeremy. She said, “It’s the weirdest thing I’ve ever experienced. I don’t know. I can’t tell. They just like laugh uncontrollably.” And in fact, my observations supported Etta’s assertion here. I recorded almost daily in my field notes that Nate and Jeremy were in the back of the room laughing or chatting while others were more actively completing assigned tasks.

The implications of knowing this, however, and Etta’s paralysis in addressing it, are what are outstanding and result in the tension surrounding building relationships with students. While she practiced some types of social justice literacies, such as testimonial literacies (Johnson, 2012) to witness her students’ tragedies and advocacy literacies for her LGBTQ populations, she struggled to meet all the demands of social justice literacies. These limitations help us to discern that there is not a perfectly packaged ‘social justice educator’ that subscribes to or fully embodies every quality. Rather, some are apparent and some are negotiated.

Contradiction in Teaching: Fostering Critical Consciousness without Action

Building Sociopolitical Consciousness as a Social Justice Literacy

Another central tenet of teachers’ practice oriented toward social justice is working to enhance students’ sociopolitical and critical consciousness. This begins with the teacher’s own raised consciousness (Freire, 1970) whereby teachers devote their attention to the recognition of injustices in society and its relationship to inequities in school (Ladson-Billings, 2006). They then use this awareness to foster a similarly critical disposition in students (Grant & Agosto, 2008). And yet, this does not mean that teachers impose their own agendas on students. Rather,

as Ladson-Billings notes (2006), “The task here is to help students use the various skills they learn to better understand and critique their position and context” (p. 37). Thus, teachers assist students in understanding their place in society and help them to articulate their positions in relation to power. Other scholars also include in this enhanced consciousness the propensity for students to apply their capacity for critique to the world at large and to dissect various texts, such as global and national practices and issues, for their reflections of dominant ideologies (Luke, 2000). By heightening students’ sociopolitical consciousness, teachers lead students to become more knowledgeable and analytical.

Developing Critical Consciousness in Practice

Etta worked extensively in her classroom to cultivate her students’ social and critical consciousness, and this theme became evident after data analysis. The ways she accomplished it were also vital, as she relied on content that was sociopolitical in nature and communicated through a variety of mediums in order to facilitate students’ questioning and analysis. She also employed strategies of critical pedagogy, including dialogic teaching and the sharing of power with students. In what follows, I will describe those components of Etta’s practice that she used to invite her students to develop critical consciousness.

Using Content and Curriculum to Facilitate Awareness

Etta’s course content was intentionally selected to enhance her students’ knowledge of the global context and to provide points for debate. She relied heavily on current and historic events, which included recent happenings in Syria, United States’ relations with Iran, and the dropping of atomic bombs in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Even when content did not necessarily center on such events, Etta found a way to incorporate them, such as pairing a discussion of the

Steubenville High School rape case with her English I students' reading of the novel *Speak*, or focusing on racism in the short story "Blues Ain't No Mockin' Bird" (Bambara, 1971) instead of just dialect as suggested by the established curriculum guide.

Perhaps it is not unexpected that Etta's texts for her sophomore class included a study of the Holocaust, as literature related to that event is now typically included in English curriculum. The district provided Etta with a pacing guide that included this topic and indicated the major works she was to use for the unit. What is striking, however, are the connections she then drew between this material and additional items she selected for study as well as the variety in types of texts employed, particularly the use of media. After students finished reading Elie Wiesel's (1955) *Night*, Etta began a series of lessons on the historic genocide in Rwanda. She disclosed to her current students that her motivation for crafting this portion of the unit was due to sentiments shared by students in previous classes, which assumed that mass killings were no longer possible in today's era. In this section of her teaching, students read news articles and watched informational clips from the *History Channel* on the conflict between the Hutu and the Tutsi populations. They then spent class time viewing, discussing, and debating the film *Hotel Rwanda* (George, 2005) in its entirety. Etta drew parallels between themes established with *Night* (Wiesel, 1955), particularly between the challenge of being forced to be a bystander to save one's self and the complicated nature of power, to specific examples in the film. She then connected these broader similarities to the current situation in Syria and shared NPR broadcasts with students. Specifically, she exposed students to debates on what constituted an event being deemed 'genocide,' and had them consider this in relation to all three events--the Holocaust, Rwanda, and Syria.

While this consideration in her English II class addressed exclusive moments in time, Etta engaged her English I students with content that tackled another area of social justice that is often overlooked: eco justice. She accomplished this creatively, by having students view the film *Wall-E* (Morris, 2008) and analyze the commentary that the film offered in terms of social, political, and environmental themes. In their discussion of eco justice, Etta used *Google Earth* to show students images of the garbage in the United States and led a discussion on the amount of waste that we generate. This was a vibrant conversation in which students began brainstorming alternative dispensation methods and questioning their own generation's carelessness. An outstanding aspect of Etta's content was not only its sociopolitical nature, but also its medium. I coded 20 instances in the data of relevant content and 34 of media/youth culture as content. Almost all of the texts used in these examples were pieces of media, digital projections, or audio recordings. Thus, the content that Etta used to build her students' sociopolitical consciousness was current, related to their lives, and was presented in an engaging way.

What is crucial to include also in this discussion is the extent to which Etta's content was mandated yet flexible. The district provided a pacing guide separated into units for both Etta's English I and English II courses. The English II course heavily focused on world literature and was divided into thematic units, one of which was the *Human Rights and Responsibilities* unit that occurred during my observations. For each unit, pundits from the district created and distributed to teachers a matrix with a list of Common Core Standards, Learning Targets, Formative Assessments, and related texts as well as vocabulary and grammar skills to be included (see Appendix H for example of Unit Pacing Guide). All English II teachers, for example, were expected to cover the same unit at the same time for a similar time period (e. g. one unit lasted 4 weeks). Yet, within each unit, teachers chose the major texts they wished to

study from the list provided and could include material as they deemed appropriate. This flexibility allowed Etta to include the mini-unit on Rwanda and other topics. Also, because of the nature of the course as focused on world literature, Etta felt that it lent itself more readily to social justice. Furthermore, Etta sensed general support from her administration in teaching content that could be questioned. She shared one instance where a parent raised a concern with her principal about her teaching *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007). The administrator came to Etta, asked her for a justification, was satisfied with her reasoning and returned the parent call for her. Although she knew at times the material she integrated might be interrogated by parents or her colleagues, she proceeded anyway. This was especially salient when she included *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* (1988) for her tenth graders. And yet, Etta felt it was a necessary piece of discussing human rights.

In contrast to English II, the English I pacing guide was organized by genre, and as Etta felt, was “not inherently designed for social justice,” but instead she used the content for her socio-cultural purposes. She explained:

You have to sort of be the type of teacher who is asking those questions anyway. So I tie it into Romeo and Juliet a lot. Because there’s that line where Mercutio turns to Romeo and says ‘ah now though are sociable though art Romeo’, right? And it’s right after he makes a penis joke. (laughing). I’m sorry that that is what I (laughing). And we talk about why is it that that is what it means to be sociable. Why is it that Romeo goes from being this eloquent speaker to all the sudden making a joke that’s hurtful. Why does that mean about being a man? So in that we talk about gender roles and then. . .how it is dangerous? . . . So it’s there, maybe just not as explicit as English II.

Here, Etta’s comments show that although she often intentionally included nontraditional material to enhance her students’ critical consciousness, even when teaching canonical works she found a way to facilitate her students’ critical dispositions. As Kumashiro (2004) writes, “the ‘classics’ are not inherently oppressive: They can be useful in an anti-oppressive lesson if

teachers ask questions about the ways they reinforce the privilege of only certain experiences and perspectives,” (p. 75). Thus, Etta’s pedagogy, the *way* that she taught, was essential to reaching her goals.

Enacting Critical Pedagogy

Once Etta exposed students to this sociopolitical content, it was what she then *did* with the material that made her practice powerful in regard to social justice. Out of the 623 total instances of data coded, I noted 120 occasions in which she employed a form of critical pedagogy. Within her embodiment of this teaching style, she lit her students’ path toward becoming critically literate, or able to analyze texts for their inherent ideologies (Luke, 2000) and to dissect practices of articulation (Hall, 1997). She told me that she wanted to: “Get them to critique everything that they’re seeing and critique the world around them and the decisions that are being made and the decisions that they make.”

Etta facilitated this critical disposition predominately through constant questioning that prompted students to wrestle with difficult moral dilemmas. She asked questions such as: “What about people who have power and don’t do anything?,” “Who is supposed to look out for the human rights of the world?,” and “Whose job is it to look out for the rights of others?” And she allowed students the space to grapple with these questions through large and small group tasks and discussions. And although she asked them to think critically, she always acknowledged the difficulty of the work, affirming: “Things are not just right or wrong, or set in stone, there is a lot of grey area, this stuff is complicated.”

Reliance on dialogic teaching. Her use of dialogic teaching was apparent in many of my field notes, and I coded 40 occasions where she employed this method. Freire (1970)

explains that dialogue “requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human” (p. 90). It involves having the power to name the world for ones’ self. This notion of dialogic teaching helps illustrate how teachers, such as Etta, can show this ‘faith’ in their students. Parsons (2006) outlines dialogue also as a component of culturally relevant caring because “it is a vehicle for the caregivers and the cared-for to express their needs, desires, and aspirations, and to achieve a greater and more enriched understanding of one another” (p. 30). When educators allow for dialogue, it shows that they believe adolescents have something meaningful to say, and when they push students to further their thinking through dialogue, they avoid the banking model that Freire (1970) warns against. Important to this conception of dialogue is mutual trust and an attitude of working alongside one another, where learning occurs ‘with’ rather than done ‘for.’ This connects to social justice in that dialogic teaching reflects a notion of shared power between teachers and students and facilitates students in control of their own thinking rather than being told what to think.

In Etta’s case, the dialogue in her classroom was often a way to open students up to considering multiple perspectives on any one issue by presenting that multiplicity and asking them to “just listen” instead of always talking. Of this teaching performance, she said, “I’m not trying to change what’s already there or change what’s, you know, I’m just trying to open another door, like open another possibility. Like here’s another way of thinking about this.” An example of this occurred when Etta pushed her students to consider what constituted genocide and where the limits were in terms of war and retaliation. She specifically engaged students in considering the United States government’s decision for the atomic bombings of the cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The classroom conversation included Etta asking:

I'm hearing Scott say that the decision to bomb, where they bombed was purposeful, and was done to make a point. But my question is does that change whether or not it is genocide? Even if it's purposeful.

Students, particularly Whit and Jenni, retorted that they did not think it was fair to call the bombings genocide because the country was the target, not a specific group of people. To their point, Etta again pushed their thinking, stating:

Ok, we've got the claim that because it was not a specific race or a specific group of people then it's not genocide. Specific race. And that it wasn't done because they were Japanese, because this is who were at war with at the time. Ok, so my thought on that is, and I am playing devil's advocate, know that. I am pushing on purpose. My thought is, does that not count as a group of people? Does that not count as a specific group of people? And then my second thought is---

She was then interrupted by a student who disputed her claim, saying that Japanese people live in Japan so the bomb was inevitably going to kill them. Again, Etta pushed back, asking: "Right, so in that, in that sense, is that not targeting a specific place, specific groups?" to which the students continued issuing their arguments that it was not the nature of the people that caused the killings, but the political proceedings.

In regard to dialogic teaching, there are a number of interesting moves in this conversation. First, when Etta pushed her students, she was transparent about her purposes, telling them that she was offering a different opinion for consideration intentionally. Interestingly, her students recognized her deliberate efforts to complicate their outlooks through dialogue. When I interviewed them, Caroline stated that Etta was always "playing devil's advocate or something. Where she tells you both sides to the argument." What is important to note here is her use of the phrase "devil's advocate," which is the same phrasing that Etta used in the classroom exchange. This repetition affirms that the students heard and remembered her goal.

Also significant in this conversation was the shared power between Etta and her students, which is illustrated discursively. There were several instances, for example, where Etta was interrupted while sharing her thoughts and the dialogue continued to flow as it might in a typical charged conversation. This contradicts traditional classroom structures in which the teacher holds the floor (Edelsky, 1981) and students are allowed to speak in turn. That students are excited enough to talk at once indicates not only their involvement but also their feeling of discussing ‘with’ their teacher. Tannen (1989) writes, “overlapping talk can be cooperative and rapport-building rather than interruptive” (p. 94), as is demonstrated here. Furthermore, Etta’s uptake and repetition (Tannen, 1989) of specific student points, such as the reference to Japanese internment camps, exemplified her efforts to validate their opinions in the dialogue and to use their words to build on for classroom learning.

Students as critical consumers of knowledge. Freire (1970) writes, “The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades” (p. 124). By continuously questioning what her students thought, Etta forced them to become responsible for their own ideas. Part of this involved unearthing the origin of their opinions and critiquing the mass media outlets that influenced their thinking. In a classroom dialogue one day I witnessed her telling students, “But our media is biased, our history is biased. We have to know that—because it’s written by humans.” This constant insistence on expanding students’ thought not only referenced the media but also the United States and our position in global affairs.

Etta wanted to expose students to considering how issues are constructed by those with power in the United States, to what Kumashiro (2012) describes as framing, wherein “frames

have the power to obscure the bigger picture, to narrowly and misleadingly define the problem, and to make imaginable only certain solutions” (p. 43). In discussions of current and historical events, Etta made sure not to gloss over United States’ culpability. She told her students, “What you’re not seeing on the news is how the US is related in a lot of these ways. Did you know about US involvement in Iran until we read *Persepolis*? So see there’s a lot of US involvement being left out.” One student admitted that he had not heard of the massive deaths in Rwanda until Etta’s inclusion in this class. She then engaged her students in considering why this might have been the case and the conversation circulated from “it doesn’t really matter to us” to “we’re always the guys who have to help,” and “we need to help too,” thus showing the evolution of student thought that occurred through dialogue. Etta reminded them as they talked that the United States is a superpower and prodded them to consider, aligning with the unit theme, what our responsibilities are with the power that we have. Her engagement in critical dialogue was the method through which she accomplished the social justice goal of heightening students’ global awareness and analytic dispositions. Thus, it is a central classroom tool for education that is focused on social justice.

Transparency in teacher’s position. Etta was also explicit about her position in these conversations. I noted several times during lessons that I was impressed with how brave she was, tackling oft-perceived controversial issues head on. Sometimes students asked, and sometimes she offered, but nonetheless she did not stray from offering her own opinion. In a conversation about Rwanda, she told the students that she thought the United States was hesitant to become involve because the situation was in Africa and alluded to the racism that has plagued the United States. Cochran-Smith (2008) supports this position in education, reminding us that all acts of teaching are political and that nothing is neutral. Embracing their ideological

commitment and expressing it occurs in a variety of ways for social justice educators, such as teaching about activism (Peterson, 2007), being involved as social activists themselves (Cochran-Smith, 2001), or, as in the case with Etta, having critical conversations with students about political issues (Freire, 1970). Even if one was to make that case that Etta should have refrained from sharing her opinion here, the fact that she showed the film *Hotel Rwanda* (George, 2005) already has dogmatic implications, and staying silent on the issue would also communicate values. Thus, the overt naming of her viewpoint aligns with teaching for social justice.

The Trials of Sociopolitical Consciousness: The Struggle for Activism and the Feeling of Hopelessness

One well-documented caution in the literature of teaching for social justice is the tendency for this kind of pedagogy to place students in a state of helplessness. Sometimes students are overwhelmed with guilt (Bettez, 2012) and other times problems seem so broad that students feel paralyzed to effect change (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). When exposed to inequity, power differentials, and injustice in the world, these students feel there is nothing they can do. In addition, teachers are generally only allowed jurisdiction over what happens in their classrooms, so considerations of projects or activism outside of that space can be restricted by school structure as well as community approval. All of these constraints are evident in Etta's case. I found only 19 instances coded for her work to prompt her students toward social change. Of the practices that characterize social justice teachers, this is one of the two with which she struggled most (see Appendix I). In the next sections, I outline the setbacks that comprise this major contradiction in Etta's literacy for raising students' consciousness.

The Difficulty in Cultivating Students as Change Agents

While Etta may have employed strategies to raise her students' sociopolitical consciousness in a manner that aligned with her social justice orientation, in a sense she fell short of fulfilling a crucial piece of this pedagogy, which is helping students discern how they can take *action*. Hence, a tension ensued in her social justice pedagogy between educating students on the injustices of the world and taking the next step of having them redress those wrongs. Of the 19 instances under the coded material for social change, ten related more to Etta's ideological commitment and her own participation in social movements such as working for the Gay-Straight Alliance. In terms of facilitating *students* as change agents, these were even more limited, with only five instances coded. These arose when students questioned one another in the classroom, such as when peers monitored one another with the use of the phrase "that's gay" and pointed to the posters in Etta's room with alternative wording. Social change and activism did not appear beyond her classroom walls.

The Feeling of Hopelessness

Both Etta and her students felt this limitation. One student summed up her feelings by saying, "There's nothing you can do, as kids," which showed both her reaction as being one that lacked confidence in action and also her feeling of powerlessness given her age. This comment came directly after the students viewed a scene in *Hotel Rwanda* (George, 2005) in which the dialogue between the hotel manager (Paul) and the reporter (Jack) issued a potent social commentary:

Paul: I am glad that you have shot this footage and that the world will see it. It is the only way we have a chance that people might intervene.

Jack: Yeah and if no one intervenes, is it still a good thing to show?

Paul: How can they not intervene when they witness such atrocities?

Jack: I think if people see this footage they'll say, "oh my God that's horrible," and

then go on eating their dinners.

Etta paused after this conversation to engage her students in thinking about the message exhibited here. She asked her students, “How do we get people to care?” and the general reaction was that it was difficult because most citizens today are desensitized to such issues, and while they might agree that current atrocities need attention, they do not respond. In a similar conversation in another lesson, Etta told her students, “I’m interested to see what you think because to do nothing feels kind of crappy,” and again students brainstormed ideas about raising money or increasing awareness but did not take any action. Thus, while Etta broached the subject of students as change agents, there was never a class-wide effort or implementation of ideas for this goal to be realized.

To be clear, this did not manifest as student apathy. The students seemed genuinely concerned for the well being of others in the world and the more they learned, the more they sympathized with others in, for example, Syria. And yet, because of the prodigious weight of the situation, they did not perceive any power to disrupt these events. When the students expressed this inability, Etta immediately responded with options that included raising money, voting wisely, and contacting elected officials. There was no uptake (Tannen, 1989) of these ideas, however, and Etta felt as though she had no tangible way to get students directly involved with the cause. Part of the students’ feelings of inadequacy likely came from the fact that they were thinking on a broad scale, as a country, because that had been much of the focus of class discussions. For example, a portion of the focus in fostering students’ critical literacy (mentioned above) had been the United States involvement in other countries’ uprisings, so it is possible that students were thinking about what the country could do, and even if it should, rather than how they as individuals could do something, even if on a small scale.

Contextual Limitations to Change

It is laudable that Etta broached these topics with her students. And perhaps because she was a novice teacher struggling with social justice pedagogy we can understand that taking the next step seems both daunting and uncertain. This finding is curious in regard to her individual fight outside of the classroom for a Gay-Straight Alliance. It was almost as if she had realized the need to take action for a cause but this did not yet translate to helping *students* take action.

In addition, when asked about her school's culture in regard to supporting social justice, Etta responded:

I don't know that my school even, I don't know that that's on their map, you know? I think when they think of safety in schools, they think of legitimate physical safety in such a general way that they're not thinking about emotional safety of kids. . . I think it's so focused on the tangible, you know what's going to get us here, what's going to get us this recognition or what's going to get us this set of test scores. . .

Perhaps without the support of the school, Etta felt constricted in how far she could go with students. Additionally, she did name a few allies in her school, teachers who held a similar outlook on social justice issues, but stated of her colleagues:

I think that they think that good intentions is the same as social justice. Or that being nice to a kid is the same as social justice and it's not. Yeah. I see that a lot. I see a lot of like oh "I love this kid" who is gay, lesbian or whatever, but they're not, I don't know.

Her differentiation here between intention and action is crucial and further exhibits how complicated it is to foster critical consciousness and have individuals act on it. Despite Etta's devotion to enhancing students' awareness, a crucial element of teaching for social justice is the action component. If the goal of students as change agents is to be realized, educators need avenues for assisting students in social action projects or determining ways to affect their social milieu. Walker (2003) writes, "The struggle for social justice is hard work, but only through

doing justice can we make justice . . . So social justice is and must be a verb (about doing and acting) as well as a noun (theoretical descriptions)” (p. 185). She confirms that action is an immutable element in social justice pedagogy.

Concluding Etta’s Story

While it was unmistakable that Etta expressed a discernible commitment to social justice through her literacies in advocating for students, building relationships with them, and enhancing their sociopolitical awareness, there are also notable tensions in this work where each aspect is pulled in another direction of sorts. In her work to get to know her students she employed various writing assignments that afforded them a space to share their stories with her and with one another. Additionally as a way of building connections, she exercised strategies of discursive community building, meaning she utilized inclusive language and communicated her desire to learn alongside her students. As a final component to her relationship-building literacy, Etta shared her own interests in media, music, and theater with her students, and through nontraditional texts was able to solicit their engagement. And yet, despite these social justice oriented pedagogical practices, Etta struggled to build relationships with two Black male students. She was not able to foster personal connections with them and this, combined with the larger structural barriers that already affect Black males in schools, resulted in conflicts in her classroom. Although she was aware of this limitation, she was uncertain of how to adequately address it. This resulted in the first contradiction within Etta’s teaching.

The second contradiction occurred between Etta’s steadfast commitment to cultivating her students’ sociopolitical consciousness and helping them act for social change. She was adept in her implementations of critical pedagogies and dialogic teaching, assisting students in

becoming critical consumers of knowledge and working through conflicts and ideas verbally. Yet, once her students became aware of global injustices and expressed their burgeoning analytical skills, Etta grappled with following through and aiding them in seeing how they could actually act to alter their worlds. Also a key factor in this was the low level of support Etta felt from colleagues and community, without whose help she was uncomfortable pushing the boundaries with her students. Taken together, Etta's story illustrates how teaching for social justice is a difficult endeavor and how, even strong social justice literacy practices can contain ambiguities.

CHAPTER 5

BEING A WHITE TEACHER WITH PREDOMINATELY MINORITIZED STUDENTS: THE CONTRADICTIONS IN CONSIDERING STUDENT CIRCUMSTANCES AND USING MULTICULTURAL CURRICULUM

The Context

James Middle School

James Middle School was located in metropolitan Apple County in the southeast region of the United States. The school consisted of a population that was a mixture of students who attended for its dual magnet program based around arts instruction and an International Baccalaureate (IB) track that boasted interdisciplinary learning, inquiry-based teaching, and global awareness. Combined with these students who applied and were selected for the magnet programs were those who had been assigned to James Middle because of their location in the district. Thus, in one sense the school pulled from a variety of areas, and in another the local, urban community was reflected in the school. Students in the classes observed for this case study were predominately from the latter situation, having been appointed to the school from the local area.

A school with 1,214 students, the population was much larger than the state average of 648 and the national average of 575 in 2010. Student demographics were approximately: 58% Black, 21% White, 15% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and less than 1% Native American. Despite this diversity in student body, the 76 members of the instructional staff at the school were predominately white. Located in a large county, the estimated enrollment for the district in the 2013-2014 school year was 153,00 students in their 169 schools.

This study occurred a short time after a highly controversial battle over efforts to integrate schools that drew national attention. In a movement to create equitable schools across the district, officials in the county mandated a policy that no more than 40% of a student population could contain students from families with low incomes. Students were often transported to magnet programs in areas of lower socioeconomic status and students of lower socioeconomic status moved to schools in wealthier districts. James Middle's magnet programs reflected this effort. Opponents of the endeavor claimed that it led to long bus rides for students, caused consistent transference of youth between different school sites, and inhibited local community engagement in schools. In 2010, the Apple County school board voted to return to a neighborhood school scheme, thus dismantling prior efforts to mix students according to family income. Conflict ensued, and tensions ran high around the likely outcome that this would re-segregate the district's schools. The county persisted in negotiating compromises; hence the school continued to be in transition.

James Middle advertised a very direct and specific mission. Posters lined the hallways with the slogan: "The Way We Do Business at James Middle School," and teachers were expected to instill the components of this vision in their students throughout the year. This began with the delivery of a PowerPoint presentation in the first week of school that outlined the

expectations of school rules and set the tone for the school culture. The two major campaigns were: “Oh, the places you will go if you dare to,” and “Make it right don’t fight.” There was a sharp intolerance for bullying and gang activity at the school. Specific components of the behavior regimen in the school literature included what to do when an adult spoke in front of the room, which stated that students should “stop talking and moving” and raise their hands until they “see the speaker drop their hand and begin talking”. The school provided students with agendas in which to write their homework daily and teachers were expected to sign these each day as a way to document homework and communicate to parents. There were rules and procedures listed and posted in the school as well as in the introductory PowerPoint for the cafeteria, media center, bus loop, bathrooms, hallways, and after school activities. No food or drink was allowed in classroom spaces. As whole, the school presented itself as unified in a strict approach to student conduct.

Similar to Pacific High School, there was a high rate of teacher turnover at James Middle, and the teacher in this case study reported that the entire 7th grade English Language Arts team of teachers was new this year. I interacted with the assistant principals and student resource officer, and the general sentiment at the school seemed to be one of genuine care for student success. This was balanced with a high level of expectation for student behavior based on the strict policies previously mentioned.

The Classroom

A teacher’s philosophy and style can be read in the aesthetics of her classroom, and the sense of care matched with expectations from the broader school culture was mirrored in Beverly Mitchell’s space. Her walls were lined with posters, quotes, and charts that mostly related to her course content, almost all of which she made. For instance, she posted the letters to construct the

quote: “A word after word after a word is power” by Margaret Atwood, meant to inspire students through an emphasis on speaking and writing, which they did daily in her class.

Desks were arranged in groups of four where students sat facing one another. Thus, the set up seemed designed to promote interactions amongst students. Four computers lined the back wall, but none were in workable condition and all possessed signs noting their broken state. There was a small bookcase in one corner that contained a number of texts written for adolescents, and this partitioned off a student desk facing the wall in the corner of the room. The desk was used for students who were sent from other classrooms or students whom Beverly felt needed to be separated from their peers. A long row of shelves leading up to the library case held bins for each class period where students filed graded work. Above those hung colored paper balls for decoration.

In addition to these elements, the whiteboards in the room illustrated Beverly’s conscientious organization as well as the various components of her pedagogic strategies. For instance, Beverly’s units were guided by an “Inquiry Question,” which was written on the board and was a broad query to which class readings were directed. At the time of my observations, the question read: “What does it mean to come of age?” In addition to that element, her board reflected the school’s IB mission to promote a “Global Context,” the heading under which the words “Fairness & Development” were written. I did not gain a sense of what this meant during my time at the school. Students’ scores on weekly quizzes on sets of morphemes, averaged and differentiated by class period, were recorded on charts that hung above the board. Finally, the homework was written on the right section of this board as well as the procedure for “give me five,” (what to do when an adult was speaking) that hung above the main board. These

illustrated how Beverly supported the school's mission of student accountability through the agenda notebook system and their notions for how students should treat adults.

Beyond these, another section of the wall contained the classroom rules, which again supported school policies and clearly communicated student behavioral expectations. It was thus clear from the composition of the posters and classroom decorations that Beverly put a great deal of effort into creating these. It was also evident from these artifacts that she maintained specific conceptions of students as capable of conducting themselves in the ways mandated by school staff.

The Classes

Beverly taught six class periods of eighth grade English Language Arts. These ranged two classes labeled 'Inclusion,' in which a specialist joined her for instruction and behavior management, two classes labeled 'Academically and Intellectually Gifted', and two classes labeled 'Standard.' I focused on one of each of these preps for a total of three classes for detailed observation. Although the numbers of students fluctuated in each class even in the short time I observed, Beverly had 21 students in both her AIG and Inclusion class and 16 students in the Standard class. The students in all of her classes were predominately African American or Latino. Eight out of 21 in the AIG class were White. Despite the variation in tracks, Beverly implemented the same lesson plan and taught the same texts across all classes. In some instances she instituted minor variations for the AIG classes, but as a whole her instruction was the same throughout the day.

Beverly's Social Justice: "That Means Putting in the Extra Effort"

Beverly Mitchell's belief in social justice developed as she grew up both in diverse schools and with parents who openly discussed and supported related issues at home. A White, 31 year old female, she was born in what she characterized as a diverse city, and she attended a public elementary school that she felt was equally diverse. Her first high school, however, felt less socioeconomically stratified, and her family moved before she entered 11th grade to a different city where her new high school was less racially diverse but was more so in family income levels. These experiences culminated in an overall exposure to a variety of people. She noted that she attended high school in the era of celebratory multicultural discourse in education. She stated,

That's the time period when talking about issues of race was all about like you should not acknowledge race or be aware of race and it's like all colorblind kind of stuff. So you know, I always, I always liked to think about that and struggle with that as a kid and I'm glad that was a ridiculous thing to try to deal with because it's impossible to do, right?

Here Beverly shared her belief that colorblindness in regard to race was a false premise and that, although multiculturalism in education attempted to promote this philosophy, Beverly realized in her youth that it was impractical to pretend that a person's race did not exist.

Her awareness of race despite the dominant narrative generated from personal experience. She told the story of an African American friend she had as an adolescent whose parents did not allow her to attend Beverly's birthday party. While she had friends of different races in school, then, she said they did not "hang out outside of school because we lived in different neighborhoods and one of them wasn't allowed to hang out with me," referring to the birthday party incident. This affected her, she said, and the perceptions of difference she built thus began at a young age.

Coupled with these experiences were those that her parents intentionally cultivated for her. Having grown up in rural Mississippi during the Civil Rights era, Beverly's parents ascribed to liberal politics based on what they witnessed in their own youth. As a result, they involved Beverly in activities that would promote her growth and critical outlook. She shared:

Well, my mom is, I don't know, my mom was a teacher and now works as a religious educator, but is just really concerned with social justice in general and does a lot of volunteer work. Like as a kid we would go to the battered women's shelter and I would hang out with the kids and she would like watch them while they were having their group meetings and stuff like that. So those kinds of things. And I felt like very comfortable talking about those issues at home.

Beverly attributed the formation of her social justice beliefs largely to her experiences with others as she grew up.

Another part of her story was that teaching was a second career for her; she earned a Masters Degree in Creative Writing and worked in the publishing sector prior to completing her Master of Arts in Teaching. Again influenced by her mom, who taught her that "doing something that's good for society versus making a lot of money" was more important, she decided to become a secondary English teacher. She felt that her work in publishing was "boring" and that she was not "doing anything," which she contrasted with teaching which offered the "autonomy of the classroom" and "feeling like I was doing something every day." For her, teaching was a way to make "the world a better place." Her reasons for teaching were for the autonomy she saw that the profession offered as well as her interest in making an impact on students' lives.

When I asked how she saw herself as a teacher, Beverly responded that she thought of herself as "quirky and fun for the kids, which is different than a lot of other people who are

maybe stricter or a little bit older.” The students in the focus group echoed her response. They referred to her unorthodox style of dress and one student, Abbie, shared:

It seems like it's like she's showing that's it's ok to not be mainstream. That it's ok to be different. Cause she's not like other teachers I've had. Um, she's a lot more fun than a lot of the teachers I've had and she knows how to, well it seems like she knows how to make you want to learn.

While Beverly proclaimed that she was eccentric, the students read this as a lesson for them in what it meant to defy mainstream expectations. From their perspective, Beverly's *Vans* (shoes), funky glasses, and tattoos told her students that it was socially acceptable to be unique.

Beverly affirmed that for her, the most important lessons for her students were not content related, but were about working through the system of school and gleaning “life lessons” about “the bigger picture.” She said that teaching for social justice meant:

That every kid will get the same thing from the class. In the sense that a kid who needs more will get more from me. Equity. And a kid that doesn't need as much will get everything that I should give them and like I still have a relationship with them, but I think a lot of times that means putting in the extra effort with kids who need it.

In this regard, Beverly referred to a cognizant favoritism of sorts (see DiTomaso, 2013), an effort toward equity with the knowledge that this was not the same as treating all kids equally. She also recognized that she had to work harder to interact with adolescents in this manner, as it was easier for her to connect with students who were similar to her or the people in her home community. She said, however, “the relationships with the kids who you don't bond with right away are more beneficial to you and to them because you're learning how to deal with people who are different from you.” In this way, she exhibited the social justice practice of growing

from interactions with students, and her teaching was not only about what she was doing for them (Nieto, 2000).

It is crucial to note that Beverly identified her colleagues as also disposed toward social justice and saw the whole climate of her school as centered on related issues. Although she described James as “a hard place” to teach on multiple occasions and referred to the teachers as being “overwhelmed and exhausted,” she also was emphatic that the people who worked there genuinely cared about the students and their success and would not have chosen this environment if they thought otherwise. With regard to colleagues and collaboration, then, Beverly perceived a supportive context and felt that all were congruent with the fundamental mission of the school.

Illustrating Beverly’s Social Justice Focus: Students’ Lives Outside of School and

Socioeconomic Status: “The Kids . . . Have a lot of Stuff to Deal With”

Beverly’s social justice emphasis revolved around the fact that her students came to school with a number of structurally imposed disadvantages. Many of her students were part of families of low socioeconomic status. Beverly relayed stories of students who had been neglected by parents, did not have food to eat at home, or were abused by adults in their lives. In fact, she said that many of them experienced “messed up stuff that I couldn’t even deal with at that age” and referenced that many of her students in one particularly difficult class had “some pretty bad stuff happen.” One of her students, for example, witnessed his father’s death in a shooting in New York City before he moved to join another family member and attend James Middle. Beverly thus recognized that her students led trying lives and focused her efforts in the classroom on understanding that and working to build relationships with students based on this knowledge.

In addition to her awareness of students' family circumstances, Beverly also discussed students' involvement with drugs and gangs. She stated:

I know that one of my students from last year, she's affiliated with this gang so she walks around town behind these guys and I don't like that, but I don't really know what to do about it now. There's a lot of drugs and I think that if you see (pause). . . I don't know, I don't know. I don't know if they see drugs at home and then they do drugs or if nobody's watching at home so then they do drugs. I don't know.

As she mentioned here, Beverly felt that many of her students were without a positive adult influence in their lives. She saw as part of her job, then, to provide this for students so that they could navigate the world in which they lived. When I asked her how this related to the school as a whole and to other teachers' perspectives, she affirmed that the expectation for teachers was "to be consistent and almost to be like the adult, not force, whatever the word is. Adult influence in their life."

She often referenced other schools or wealthier districts in comparison to her students and noted the resulting injustices of differential access. For instance, she felt that her activities and instruction were based on what her students were accustomed to or to what they had previously been expected to do. She recognized that students had been treated a certain way by schools, often restricted and controlled, and thus acted accordingly. And, although she said that while in her teacher preparation program she had felt it was wrong to be an authoritative figure, after having worked with her population she changed her approach. This was particularly based on the successes of teachers she saw around her. She said it would not work with her current students to be a

Community like a friends school circle or something. Especially with. . . a class that size or kids that age or with people how have not experienced that already in their lives. That's not like, you know, if you um, grow up somewhere where you sit around the table

and debate with each other, then fine, that will be good, like my 2nd period [class labeled academically gifted] can maybe do that, but I don't know. . .

Beverly hints here at the fact that schools value skills associated with the dominant culture and that students who enter school without those are often labeled as deficient (Delpit, 1995). She specifically told me that her advanced students were “good at school,” because they held the knowledge that was esteemed upon entering. She thus attempted to work within that structure that had been in place throughout her students’ schooling. Beverly Mitchell’s social justice focus then was on knowing her students, establishing relationships with them, and working within this framework to help her students achieve success in society at large. I now turn to her literacies in each of these areas, then I describe the contradictions that Beverly exhibited within them.

Contradiction in Teaching: Considering Student Circumstances and

Conceptions of Students as a Social Justice Literacy

Teachers who work for social justice hold a certain conception of students as valued individuals. They see their students as capable of success (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) and view their charges through additive models (Moll, 1992), wherein students’ voices and strengths are valued. In their practice, these teachers “recognize that the outbursts and off-task behaviors are symptoms, not causes” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 34), meaning that teachers who practice social justice-related pedagogy recognize that students internalize structural oppression and react to those stimuli. In this way, they avoid psychological explanations of behavior or discourses of blame. They recognize that microaggressions, “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile,

derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward members of oppressed groups” (Nadal, 2008, p. 23), have serious effects on students, the results of which might appear in their classrooms. They are sensitive then, to student behaviors in light of this awareness. As a result, they practice culturally relevant caring wherein they consider “responsiveness to others and the nurturance of interpersonal relationships as paramount in determining action” (Parsons, 2006, p. 26) and thus base their reactions to students on their individual positions.

Beverly’s Views of Student Behavior and Academic Success

Beverly exhibited a perception of students aligned with these of social justice educators in her practice. With over 90 instances coded that illustrated Beverly’s conceptions of students, this theme was the most outstanding in her case (see Appendix K). Although this was somewhat reflected in Beverly’s aforementioned focus on her students’ family lives and socioeconomic status, it manifested prominently in the data not only in how she explained student behavior, but in how she translated the way that she saw students into her expectations for them. The resulting tension, however, exists in the controversy of these expectations and the challenges of Beverly’s own critical self-reflection in her implementation of them. In what follows, I highlight the strengths of Beverly’s social justice literacy for regarding students, and then I present the contradictions within that capability.

Explanations of Student Behavior

One element of social justice educators’ conceptions of students is how they explain behavior of those in their classrooms, and Beverly reflected this premise. The majority of students at James Middle led socially and emotionally taxing lives by most measures. Keenly aware of this, Beverly often theorized students’ behaviors in her classroom as by-products of

what they had previously or were currently experiencing outside of school. Although not all of her students communicated to Beverly what was happening beyond events in her classroom, she nonetheless sensed or had heard from colleagues and always adjusted her interactions with students based on this knowledge. Beverly attributed the many labels ascribed to her students for behavioral issues to various events in their backgrounds. This was seen in her words:

They're not being bad because they are bad kids. They are just misbehaving for some other reason and I think I may not have noticed that if I were teaching at like one of those schools in Ridgeview [wealthier school district] or something like that. But I think that that's such a good lesson to learn. And like, you know if they're upset, just put your head down today. Like it's ok. I don't know.

Her reactions to student eruptions were to allow students the time they needed to recuperate by, for instance as she mentioned here, taking time to rest their heads on their desks or to leave the classroom to gather themselves and return when they felt ready to participate in class. On one particular day that I observed, there were four different emotional episodes with students with which Beverly was involved. While this number was unusual, at least one was not an uncommon part of her day. One such affair involved Michael, an African American male student, who put his head down for the entire class period and refused to complete his work. She said that in a situation like this, "I do think about why they do something and then I, I interact with them based on that. Which maybe makes me not completely fair or consistent but I think it's more equitable." The theme of equity and treating students based on their life situations pervaded Beverly's discourse. She not only knew that he was in transition between homes at the time and was unsure with whom he would live, but she also recognized that the football season, which had been a solid outlet for Michael, was over. Thus, Beverly allowed his comportment

and drew little attention to it other than to make him tell her that he was ‘ok.’ She demonstrated the social justice practice of knowing students’ circumstances and caring about their well-being.

Reactions to student behavior. She later told me that she knew when students were upset they most likely did not want to be beleaguered and forced to share, thus her response to Michael’s behavior was premeditated. Normally, she disclosed, she could sense if students in such a state were generally stable, and she left them alone with the assurance that they could talk to her if they desired. In another incident, an African American male student named Brandon returned from lunch sobbing. Beverly took him out of the classroom to a conference space down the hall to talk with him and give him the opportunity to collect himself. Her neighbor, Mr. Troy, came and stood in her doorway while her students began their work. Although I never learned what happened that upset Brandon, her response showed that rather than ignore or dismiss students’ emotional distress, she searched for ways to assuage their trials. Furthermore, as she mentioned in Michael’s predicament, she connected students’ behavior to what was happening in their lives outside of school. In reference to this general outlook, Beverly affirmed, “I think if I were somewhere else I would assume you’re doing this because you’re being a jerk today, but a lot of times they’re doing that because they didn’t have breakfast or like somebody beat up their mom.” She was able to think beyond blaming the student, therefore, for his behavior and to consider other factors that played a role.

Recognition of structural factors that affect students’ lives. In addition to understanding students’ family circumstances, she also recognized other externally imposed obstacles as explanations for student behavior. For example, she linked drop out rates with middle school promotion procedures, feeling that her institution did her students a disservice by passing them to the next grade level when they had not mastered course material. I asked if

students were promoted even when they did not pass the class or the end of course test, and she said yes. Her perspective was that this system hurt students later in life, declaring,

Then they get to high school and they drop out because they've never had to do anything to get it. Like, *it's not really their fault completely* because it's very awkward [emphasis added]. It's completely ridiculous how they are always promoted. And then they get there and they have to pass a class and they're like what, pass a class?

Beverly refers here to the trend of social promotion, which is “advancing a student to the next grade level when she or he has not mastered all of the content for the previous grade” (Frey, 2005, p. 340) as a remedy to student retention rates leading to high school drop out. Her argument, however, is different in that she believed promoting students also hindered their long-term success. While most research in this area has focused on the negative effects of retention, there are varied results from scholars who have researched Beverly's theory (Frey, 2005) on social promotion actually leading to drop out. Nevertheless, her awareness of student actions in light of various institutional aspects is powerful.

Caring for students. Her active demeanor toward students also revealed Beverly's ability to consider the accumulating challenges in their lives. She may have been shocked or saddened by their stories, but Beverly did not openly pity her students. Parsons (2006) describes that within “culturally relevant caring,” “caregivers receive without judgment the cared-for” (p. 26) which Beverly demonstrated. A student, Gretchen, one day during casual conversation in class said that she did not understand why her mom kept having kids because she currently had 13 children. Beverly responded by asking Gretchen what number in birth order she was and when Gretchen responded number 6, Beverly continued in conversation about the topic at hand, which was related to the short story the students were reading. This was in contrast to what she shared with me in interviews, wherein she shared her dismay. For instance, she learned about

her students through writing assignments, about which she expressed, “I learned like all kinds of fucked up family stories. And like awful stuff and neglect and . . . we didn’t have electricity for two months and stuff like that and I’m like Jesus Christ, I’m surprised you’re here. You know? Like, good job.” While she thus admitted to being stunned by some of their stories, she here enacted “engrossment,” which Parsons (2006) describes in her theory of caring for students of Color, wherein “caregivers receive black students by accepting the students’ realities as their own” (p. 27). Beverly’s quote above revealed that she sympathized with her students’ and maintained a level of quiet respect for her them. She thus conceptualized their behavior in relation to what she knew about them as well as maintained a level of expectation for their success despite these circumstances.

Students as Capable of Success

Beverly’s notions of many of her students as having experienced tragedy did not hinder her from maintaining high expectations for them, which is another important practice of social justice educators. She saw students as capable of success with explicit instruction on how to conduct themselves in the social as well as academic milieu, and there were 50 coded instances that revealed she saw students’ potential. These expectations mostly manifested in how she wished students to act in the classroom and the fact that she believed her students were capable of such behavior.

Transparency of expectations. In her classroom, Beverly gave very clear directions and expected students to follow them in order to achieve. During one entire week of observations, students were tasked with learning a new type of folklore at a different station each day. Before they began the project, however, Beverly shared a PowerPoint with specific directions for the activity. These included following the rules for stations, which were “non negotiable,” and if not

followed, would result in a zero on the assignment. In addition, she told students to remain at their stations for the entire class period, to ask for permission to get supplies, to keep their “voices at a low level,” to speak only to their group members, and not to disturb other students. Each station involved the creation of a product (sometimes as an individual, sometimes with a group) and the culmination of all five stations was graded as a “major assessment grade.” These very explicit directions illustrated that Beverly wanted her students to succeed and believed they could under specific directions. They also echoed the PowerPoint presentation from broader school policy on “The Way We Do Business at James Middle.” By rendering her expectations transparent, Beverly set her students up for success. Another example of the teacher wanting students to achieve high scores and encouraging them to do so was through her posting of class averages on charts in the classroom and using those to motivate students to earn better grades. Before one quiz, for example, I saw Beverly point to the wall and tell students that the average on the quiz prior was a 90, and she followed that with “let’s get an A this time.” This encouragement of students communicated that they were capable of growth and that she expected it from them.

High standards for student behavior. It appeared that Beverly also held students to high standards in regard to her classroom policies. Once, a student was eating crackers in class and Beverly instructed the student to discard the item because food in classrooms was against school rules. When students were tardy, they were required to sign-in on a clipboard by the door and the established policy was that they would receive detention after three offenses. When the bell rang, no one was allowed to leave the room until all students were seated and quiet, and I witnessed several occasions where a student who was up walking around made the entire class late in exiting for the next class. On my first day of observations, a major assignment was due;

students who did not submit these main assessments had to join the line that formed at the classroom phone to call parents or guardians and notify them of their transgression. They were required to record the name and phone number of the person with whom they spoke so that if needed, Beverly could follow-up on the phone call. Furthermore, every day in class began with “Bellwork” which was generally a journal or questions based on the prior day’s activity. Students entered and immediately began working quietly. This spoke to Beverly’s strict presence as well as her clear communication to students what was expected of them.

Part of the reason that Beverly maintained these firm guidelines was because she wanted her students to become respectful young people, independent learners, and productive members of society. When asked what was important to her for her students to learn, she articulated, “ultimately I hope that they learn how to respect um, themselves and other cultures.. . and maybe just to appreciate reading literature which I don’t know is going to happen for everybody but the other one is ultimately more important.” Her emphasis on mutual respect was clear. She wanted them to respect themselves and others, which she viewed in terms of social justice, stating: “Really I think that social justice is like getting them to respect each other and interact in a way that is reflective of the kind of society we want to be in.” She reciprocated this respect in instances as mentioned above, wherein she treated her students and their situations with gentle respect, a common characteristic of social justice educators (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

In the classroom, she regarded students in a way that illustrated her goals of fostering independence. For instance, one of the stations activities involved students working on an iPad, which belonged to the school. Beverly furnished this for each group during their turn at the station so that they could research information about Blackbeard and locate images of him for their product design, which in this instance was a magazine cover. That she allowed students full

access to the iPad illustrated her confidence in their appropriate use of the device. In the focus group, the students recognized this faith. Abbie commented, “Most teachers probably wouldn’t trust us with an iPad (laughing) but Mrs. Mitchell trusts us which I like.” They thus sensed that she regarded them as capable adolescents. In addition, her directives issued in class communicated her goals for student autonomy. She told Jones, a student, at the beginning of class one day, “I’m not going to hold your hand today. Get up and go to your stations and find out what you’re supposed to do.” At another time, she announced, “It’s time to clean up. I’m not going to tell you how to do that so figure it out.” Her language in these directives indicates that she wanted students to take initiative and responsibility for themselves.

Continuing this theme of personal accountability related to student success, Beverly shared with students Anne Frank’s quote, “The final forming of one’s character lies within one’s own hands,” and involved them in a class discussion about its meaning and significance relevant to them. She asked students to first respond in writing and then engaged them in discussion on its message and their opinions. They were divided in their reactions. While some students felt that people reaching their aspirations depended on their own choices, others noted exceptions such as being born with a disability or being treated unfairly. Beverly, however, noted that the quote’s topic was *character*, and that even if a person possessed a disability, or had to overcome an obstacle, they could still be a good or a bad person. This stood as a metaphor for how Beverly saw her students; thus, this conversation spoke to the potential for success Beverly believed her students to have.

Although these aspects of Beverly’s class, such as her directives, may seem overly authoritarian, her style reflects not only what was expected at her school, but it also illustrates what researchers have found to be effective practice of White teachers with students of Color.

Cooper (2003) differentiates authoritative from authoritarian, noting that the former uses “*power for the student’s good* [emphasis in original] and never as an end in itself or aggrandizement of the teacher’s position” (p. 421). Also, Beverly enforced her directives often with humor and had a distinct mannerism in delivery that seemed to work for her. In their report on ethics of culturally responsive teaching, Shevalier and McKenzie (2012) found that teachers used similar strategies to achieve their purposes. They write, “In the case of minor behavior issues, teachers used culturally appropriate humor, provided clear redirection, and moved on” (p. 1099). Thus, Beverly’s wit exhibited a piece of her social justice practice.

As an example of this classroom discourse, I often heard Beverly openly address her students as “crazies,” such as in “alright, sit down crazies,” and although I was surprised by this language, her students’ nonverbal and verbal reactions illustrated that they found it comical and accepted her words as endearment. Other aspects of her classroom talk illustrated that while she was imposing behavioral expectations on students, she did so in a lighthearted way. As an example, one student, Jones, sat alone at a table (by his request) and often took a while to begin his work. She explained one of the stations to him in detail and then said “Alright? Knock it out.” And after she walked away I watched Jones read the short story to himself quietly. On the following day, she described the next installment in the stations activity, but when she perceived Jones was not listening, she said, “Are you listening? Cause when you’re listening you look at somebody.” These words illustrated that she was attempting to teach Jones a specific mode of being in the world. Her tone, however, in this delivery was strict yet funny, and Jones responded by nodding and smiling. He then asked if he could use his phone for the research portion of the station and she affirmed his request. Cooper (2003) also noted in her research on effective White teachers of Black students, “the teachers’ use of an authoritative approach to discipline and

classroom management was often accompanied by a firm, if not loud, and what to some ears might sound like unfriendly tone of voice” (p. 421). Thus, the language that Beverly used may have seemed questionable to outsiders, but her style has been characterized as social justice practice. It was clear that she possessed and communicated clear expectations for behavior and the students’ responded to this.

The Contradiction in Conceptions of Students: Deficit Discourse and the Struggle for Critical Reflection

Although in many ways Beverly’s pedagogic strategies were laudable and her conception of students involved maintaining high expectations that would teach them how to navigate society, her discourse teetered on deficit thinking and was often loaded with contradictions. Not only did this appear through her notions of students, but the lack of coded instances for critical reflection also illuminated this strain. In fact, the conflicts were personified in situations between Beverly and one particular parent and between Beverly and her inclusion teacher, and these provided tangible examples of the challenges of her teaching context. In the next sections, I provide detail on the contradictions within Beverly’s discourse and then tie those to her struggle with reflection on both being a white teacher and on her follow through with students’ behaviors.

Contradictory Discourse on Students and Parents

In her references to students’ homes, Beverly often focused on what was *lacking*. She said, for example,

No one is taking care of them or treating them or telling, you know, making them act respectfully at home because there’s nobody at home so if they don’t get it from us then they’re not going to get it from anyone. At the same time, I’m not their parent.

Here she pointed to the absence of parental involvement in her students' homes and the duty she then felt to fulfill the role of being a moral guide. She mentioned this deficiency often when lamenting her students' lives outside of school. When I asked her pointedly about relationships with parents, she responded that she "didn't have that many" and that "parents aren't as involved" at her school as they might be at others. She also did not perceive that parents affected their students' education based on what she had experienced, noting:

I would say one out of the 30 [conferences] that we have a year with parents results in any kind of change. And otherwise it's like, the mom comes in and she's crying and she's like—or hitting her kid in front of us and I'm like don't do that—or like 'I can't believe you did this, you're a liar and all this stuff like you're going to live with your dad. And, nothing happens.

Her perception of students and parents thus at times was unfavorable. The depiction above painted parents as ineffective and absent, and her expectations did not match parents' beliefs in the position of the school. Laureau and Horvat (1999) document this clash in a study that demonstrated teachers' projections for parents were fixed by mainstream norms of deference and cooperation.

In Beverly's case, her team of all white teachers experienced an ongoing conflict with the mother of an African American male student who solicited the help of an advocate from the state to speak to the school on her behalf. The teachers felt that the student was failing because he refused to work and in part blamed the parent for not checking his agenda (which they signed daily) and mandating the completion of homework. The parent advocate, however, communicated that the mother's role was to feed and clothe the student and the teachers' jobs were to educate him. Hence this disparity in assignment of responsibilities placed the parent and the institution *against* one another and the two as separate. Beverly was highly upset over this

situation and felt that it was racially charged. She disclosed to me that she sensed the parent was defensive before she ever met the teachers, which Beverly felt was unfair. According to Beverly, the assistant principal, who was a Black female, shared that the parent was “always really, really nice to her and sweet.” However, she said that the assistant principal could “see a difference in the tone of her emails” to the teachers, which were a reflection of her aggressive nature towards them. Beverly felt the situation and the parent were “a little racist.” The discourse to which she subscribed here was one that precluded her from seeing the parent’s point of view or from understanding why the parent might mistrust the school. Instead, she viewed it individually from her point of view and took personally the parent’s wariness of school staff.

While these perspectives on students and parents were clearly communicated, they stood in contrast to Beverly’s earlier conceptions of student behavior and seeing her students as capable of success. In her notions of students, she viewed their lives from a place of understanding and seemed to believe they could be successful despite their circumstances. Hence the contradiction within conceptions of students is notable. Furthermore, her discourse around these topics often contained hesitation or an attempt to retract statements once she had made them, thus resulting in further incongruity. For instance, in the aforementioned statement, “If they don’t get it from us then they’re not going to get it from anyone,” she followed directly up with, “At the same time, I’m not their parent.” In a different interview, she repeated this sentiment, stating:

It’s not like I’m trying to be their mom because a lot of—even though a lot of them don’t have that at home—it’s just. I think that that is missing from a lot of their lives, so it’s good. But I think you can teach that to any kid even if they have the best parents ever.

Here she again stated what students did not have at home, but then made an effort to add that her teaching could be for any student. This seemed an attempt to nullify or lessen the impact of what she felt was her role. It was as if she struggled herself between filling in the gaps she perceived and then recognizing her framing of ‘gaps’ as problematic. This was a difficult line to navigate, and the pressure she felt was exhibited in her language. Her use of the ambiguous pronoun “it’s” without an antecedent was combined with the word “just” and an abrupt end. This implied that there was something additional she wanted to say, yet she herself was not sure exactly that was, or rather she did not wish to verbalize her thoughts. In a different but related context, Wagner and Herbel-Eisenmann (2008) note that the word “just,” “is part of the language repertoire that can be used for excluding contributions that differ from the established norm” (p. 151). Beverly cut herself off in the talk above, ending her thought after “just,” perhaps as an avoidance of stating an opinion she did not feel was acceptable to express. Finally, her use of the discourse marker “but” (Fraser, 1999) signaled a contradiction to her prior statement and served to recant what she said about what students were missing. In this way, the tension in her discourse was apparent.

Reflecting on Being a White Teacher

In the example with the parent advocate, it was obvious that Beverly’s race came into play in her teaching context. What stood out most in relation to this was the limited reflection on social justice issues and critical consideration of how her race affected her perspectives and conceptions of students. Although she did acknowledge race and said that she was “always aware” of her own and that “it affects the way that I interact with them and can interact with them and will interact with them,” in reference to her students, this did not seem to intersect with

or translate to an understanding of her strict expectations for student behavior. Nor did she make explicit *why* she had these expectations--to me or to her students.

Beverly recognized that the mostly white teaching population at James Middle was disparate from the student make-up, and she affirmed, "I think it would be great if they had more teachers of color and I think that teachers of color can interact with them in a way that I'll just never be able to and that's ok." She perceived that teachers of Color had an advantage over her in their relationships with students. And, as Delpit (1995) notes, there may have actually been a differential schema for teachers' authority at play. She writes, "Black children expect an authority figure to act with authority. . . . Some members of middle-class cultures, by contrast, expect one to achieve authority by the acquisition of an authoritative role" (p. 35). Beverly may have felt this dynamic at work with her students, which was revealed in her statement about a colleague:

Mrs. Logan, who's in my PLT [professional learning team], she's African American and she can just talk to them differently. Like she can be mean. Cause they respect her. In a different way. Or like in a more, I don't know, it seems like an automatic way. Which is fine, and I get that, like I don't have a problem with that. But it's different.

Her use of the word "mean" correlates to Delpit's (1998) assertion that a teacher's meanness can equate to "the ability to run the class and pushing and expecting students to learn" (p. 37). What is interesting, then, is seeing Beverly attempt to implement a persona that could also be perceived as stern. While I think her enactment was related to these racial aspects of teaching, she did not make that connection explicit, frame it in such terms, or actually follow through consistently with rigor. It seemed that Beverly attempted to 'be mean' in her classroom, but she did not feel she was strict enough. In her reference to Mrs. Logan above, she positions Mrs.

Logan in opposition to herself, which was presumably not as strong and not as instinctively respected by the students.

As a consistent observer in Beverly's classroom, I was surprised by her self-image; I evaluated her as rather strong, such as in her directives mentioned previously. Despite this assessment, Beverly told me, "I feel like I'm constantly trying to get, to be more consistent and firmer but I don't want that to backfire and have them not feel like they can trust me and tell me stuff." Parsons (2006) research serves to show that Beverly's fear may have been unwarranted. She noted that Beverly's fear did not come to fruition in her examination of an effective White teacher of Black students, stating: "Sometimes strict expectations can lead to stifled relationships, but this was not the case. . . strict expectations did not preclude fluid communications and interactions with students" (p. 30). Thus, although Beverly's apprehension was real to her, research has shown that high expectations for behavior and follow-through are actually beneficial to relationships between White teachers and their students of Color.

The struggle to recognize dynamics of caring. Herein existed one of the main conundrums of Beverly's teaching: on one side, she wanted to be strict and cultivate a certain type of behavior in students for their success in a manner similar to her African American colleagues. Research on successful Black teachers has catalogued the types of teaching to which Beverly wanted to subscribe. For instance, Vasquez (1988) describe teachers of students of Color as "warm demanders" (p. 249) because they do not lower their standards for students but are willing to offer assistance to help students succeed. Beverly also felt that the pedagogy she sought was what her students needed. On the other side of this dilemma, however, she wanted to understand and accommodate. She made exceptions for students based on their home lives in a way that allowed them to opt out of completing work. In their work conceptualizing *critical*

care, Antrop-González and Jesús (2014) describe practices such as Beverly's as "soft caring because it is characterized by a teacher's feeling sorry for a student's circumstances and lowering his/her academic expectations of the student out of pity" (p. 411). They placed this along a continuum toward "hard caring," which was characterized by "high expectations for academic performance" and "instrumental relationships between students and teachers" (p. 423).

Ultimately, they affirm that teachers who practiced hard caring "recognize that *students of color will not benefit from forms of caring that are not tied to the expectation of academic excellence* [emphasis added]" (p. 424). Thus, while Beverly may have exhibited a sense of caring about her students' circumstances and made modifications for those, she did not recognize how those might have impacted student achievement and actually reified the system she wanted to dismantle. Particularly in working with students of Color, continuing to promote academic achievement must be a central part of social justice pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

In the way that she cared about students and conceptualized them, Beverly struggled to see how her enactments related to her whiteness and experiences. Without this critical recognition, she upheld a colorblind notion of caring. Although she had criticized notions of colorblindness in education previously in an interview, nonetheless it arose in her context of caring. Thompson (1998) expounds,

Caring theories are colorblind insofar as they fail to register the Whiteness of the problems and situations to which caring is enlisted as a response . . . The universal character assumed for these needs is underscored when the non-universal needs . . . are acknowledged only on the periphery of the main discourse. (p. 528)

By assuming that her students needed to be cared for based on what they were lacking, Beverly enacted the sort of caring to which Thompson (1998) here refers. Her limited instances of reflection around such issues revealed that she was not fully aware of how her own whiteness

played out in her classroom. As Eslinger (2013) contends, “an ongoing self-examination of how racism operates and how it benefits them—is crucial if White teachers are to work effectively with students from racialized minority groups” (p. 2). White teachers such as Beverly, must reflect on why they do what they do.

Thus while Beverly accomplished some parts of culturally relevant caring by illustrating ‘engrossment’ (noted above), Parsons (2006) posits that this type of pedagogy must also be accompanied by “some understanding on the teacher’s part of systemic, political, economic, and social structures that disproportionately appropriate opportunity according to race and a commitment to challenge and alter them” (p. 26). It was this racial element in her conception of students with which Beverly struggled.

The contradiction personified. This struggle in her teaching was embodied in Beverly’s relationship with an inclusion teacher, Mrs. Lucas, who worked with her in third period. Mrs. Lucas was an experienced African American educator who did not perceive Beverly’s management as stringent enough, and she shared this openly with Beverly. From Beverly’s perspective, Mrs. Lucas wanted her to be tougher on the students, but she rarely offered to help. Instead, she generally sat at a table with one particular student and prompted him to complete his work. During my time at James Middle, Mrs. Lucas was disgruntled with the way Beverly dealt with Michael, the student who was in transition in his living situation. After one day that he was especially disruptive in class, Mrs. Lucas sent Beverly an email in which she wrote that Michael’s behavior in class that day was unacceptable and needed to be addressed. She suggested creating a contract for him to outline expectations for class conduct. Beverly was frustrated and felt like Mrs. Lucas was patronizing her. Despite her attempt to “be the bigger

person,” she resented being treated like she was “2 years old.” Even though she knew she was a beginning teacher, she still felt that Mrs. Lucas infantilized her.

This conflict reappeared numerous times and in different ways, such as when the two attended a conference together during which Beverly said that Mrs. Lucas, “would occasionally tell me how I should make my third period better and I was like kiss my ass.” Although there were several scenarios in which it arose, the crux of the disagreement was always that Mrs. Lucas felt Beverly should be doing things in her classroom in a certain way. *However*, despite her voiced frustration, when I asked Beverly about Mrs. Lucas’s expectation to treat students firmly, she said “I kind of agree with her, because that is more beneficial to them,” and then returned to the idea that they may not receive this treatment elsewhere, such as at home. This reiterates her desire to be a certain kind of teacher despite her inhibitions that followed—allowing students to avoid schoolwork because of their difficult circumstances. Again, as with the parent example, this conflict exemplified the difference in perception on how students should be treated in schools and what the role of the institution of school should be.

Critical Self-Reflection

While the tension in Beverly’s teaching was obvious from the data analysis, the lack of accompanying reflection illustrated that it was a lived contradiction about which Beverly was only minutely aware. Surprisingly, there were only eight instances in the data coded under reflection, and this shortage of critical self-reflection undeniably related to the conflicts noted above in wanting to be an authority figure but also wanting to be sensitive to students’ lives outside of school. As a White teacher with a population of mostly minoritized students, Beverly was in a delicate position. She seemed to understand that it was her job to provide her students “with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes” (Delpit,

1997, p. 29) that would ensure their success, but at the same time her often well-meaning actions limited her.

Beverly acted on what she felt was best in regard to what she knew about her students. She gave them breaks based on what their circumstances at home might be, such as allowing them to disengage in class or giving them multiple opportunities even when they acted out. For instance, when Michael walked out of class one day despite Beverly's instructions, she followed him into the hallway to speak with him and then, when he attempted to return, she told him to leave--*unless he wanted to do his work*. This gave him an opportunity to return despite the fact that she had dismissed him right before. She recognized this fluctuation, saying "My problem where I fail is at follow up and consequences. Cause I'm just like, ah, that's ok, you said you're sorry," and thus admitted to sometimes not administering consequences when she said she would. McLaren (2003) labels this "liberal pity" (p. 222), which he also admits to having practiced. His explanation of this tendency is powerful and I quote at length to give a sense of the concept and its results:

Throughout my days in the classroom, I had unknowingly ascribed to the pedagogical mainstay of many liberal educators; I felt sympathy and compassion for my students while employing a pedagogy geared to 'compensate' for the deficiencies of society's young victims. Because mine was the 'stronger and super culture,' I felt I could penetrate and give shape, meaning, and hope to the mystery of the deprived. My pedagogy was bourgeois populism spiced with a liberal dose of humanism; it rendered me ineffective in educating community members about how power relations in society work under dominant regimes of truth. This was an index of how far I had succumbed to the power and pervasiveness of the dominant culture. (p. 222)

What was tricky about these issues for Beverly was that she did not explore the underlying foundation of why she wanted students to behave in a certain way and why she wanted to cultivate a certain social and cultural capital that would allow them to succeed in "the culture of

power” (Delpit, 1997, p. 24). McLaren (2003) and Beverly shared this; he wrote that what he “camouflaged in my language of moral outrage” was his complicity in an oppressive structure and subscription to “liberal theories” that were “ideologically loaded” (p. 223). Although it may have been, however, that Beverly believed in explicit instruction for students to succeed in dominant society’s ways, she never overtly said this, nor did she tell her students why she wanted them to act in certain ways. She thus fell short of realizing fully the social justice purpose of providing access accompanied with transparency. The ultimate goal in this type of work is of facilitating skills while at the same time cultivating a language of critique. As described above then, the first contradiction in Beverly’s social justice literacies is that while she held conceptions of students as capable of success and explained their behaviors in structural terms, she contradicted those positive aspects with deficit discourse and struggled to recognize the implications of her whiteness in the standards she held for students. I now turn to the second major tension in Beverly’s teaching.

Contradiction in Teaching: Multicultural Curriculum without Critique

Focusing on Multicultural Content as a Social Justice Literacy

The content that social justice teachers employ in their classrooms is often characterized by “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Teachers thus use students’ subjectivities not only as resources to build on, but they also locate texts by authors who reflect that diversity as well. After the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s in particular, there was a general push in education to include materials in schools that offered multiple and diverse perspectives. This includes multicultural texts in English classrooms that reflect

literature written by and about people of various backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and genders (Christenbury, 2000). However, some implementations have taken on what Banks (1993) deemed the “heroes and holidays” approach, wherein figures from particular groups are merely celebrated without genuine integration into the curriculum. In a further investigation of how this teaching manifests in practice, Moje and Hinchman (2004) describe three versions of culturally responsive teaching in literacy instruction. In the first, the pedagogue uses “students’ experiences as a bridge to conventional content and literacy learning” (p. 323). In the second, students learn and apply skills for traversing discursive communities. And finally, the scholars advocate for a third level in which “culturally responsive pedagogy should also draw from students’ experiences to *challenge and reshape* [emphasis in original] the academic-content knowledge and literacy practices of the curriculum” (p. 323). These levels indicate the importance in the nature of application of multicultural content and the accompanying skills used with it.

Beverly’s Culturally Responsive Curriculum

Beverly Mitchell’s literacies in choosing multicultural texts and using relevant content were strong. I coded 73 instances in the data that reflected her use of multicultural and relevant content, and it was clear that Beverly attempted to feature texts that not only reflected the backgrounds of students in her classroom but she also sought to use specific material and references to historical figures that would motivate students. Her effort for culturally responsive teaching is notable. I categorized her as achieving the first level of Moje and Hinchman’s (2004) paradigm described above, as she used content often to draw links to traditional skills and learning. There was, however a lack in a critical aspect in Beverly’s instruction. This was revealed in the scarcity of coded instances for critical pedagogy, social change, and analysis of

power. I will describe Beverly's use of varied texts in the following segment, and then I highlight the resulting contradiction of using content without critique in a social justice classroom.

Multicultural and Relevant Content

Beverly endeavored, when able, to incorporate multicultural texts in her teaching. She noted on multiple occasions the discrepancy between material that was prescribed by the district and what would actually interest her students. For example, when I asked her about the pacing guide for eighth grade English Language Arts, she stated:

Like it's the worst thing ever. It's written by this, um, god I don't know, like this obnoxious white lady. And she's the worst. And the first unit is like American settlers, like Columbus and Yankee Doodle Dandy and I'm like that's bullshit, I'm sorry. Nobody cares about that, these kids have no connection to that, it's not social studies. I understand if you want to connect the two then you make a paideia class out of it. But I'm not teaching social studies. I am teaching like activism and stuff like that that I think is important but I'm not going to sit there and have them read Yankee Doodle Dandy cause they're not going to be interested in it.

As she mentions here, then, Beverly was committed to incorporating texts that appealed to her students, not elements of a whitewashed past to which they had no relationships. This was observed also in her inclusion of an 'Article of the Week' that students were required to read and respond to or annotate. They were generally about current events or popular and historical figures that would appeal to students. One included an article about Malala Yousafzai, the young girl who was shot and wounded by the Taliban in Pakistan for championing her rights to education. The students in the focus group highlighted this assignment as one they enjoyed, and one student, Amy, described topics of various articles they had read as:

One about clothes and how a lot of companies make it in developing countries because it's cheaper you know like it's not that great here. Like the working conditions and there

was one about bullying which I really liked. And the last one was about the Holocaust cause that was what we are doing.

Abbie, another student, followed this up by sharing that she liked the articles because they helped her: “keep up to speed on what’s going on since I’m not, I’m not the kind of person who sits around watching the news or reading the newspaper on a regular basis.” Thus, the students appreciated the topics selected as well as recognized Beverly’s purpose of fostering them to be informed young adults.

In another unique addition to the curriculum, Beverly planned ahead for the year to highlight an ‘Activist of the Month’ in each unit studied. She matched the activist with the theme of the unit, which was assigned by the district. For the “Coming of Age” unit, she interwove Nelson Mandela, his narrative of growing up, and his experiences with helping to dismantle apartheid. I observed the day that Beverly introduced him to the class, and although some of the students knew a few aspects of his life prior to her teaching, the session about Mandela’s life and work included a short documentary clip, a children’s book, the film trailer for *Long Walk to Freedom: Nelson Mandela* (Thompson, 2013), and a journal prompt asking students to connect the activist to the unit theme of maturation. During her read-aloud of the children’s book *Nelson Mandela* (Nelson, 2013), Beverly solicited students to point out similarities between the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa and the struggle for Civil Rights for African Americans in the United States.

One point to mention here was that this lesson occurred before the passing of Mandela and thus was not an effort to commemorate a lost international hero, but rather to herald a Black man whose efforts Beverly found inspirational for her mostly Black students. And many of them did indeed seem to have their curiosity piqued by the various parts of this instruction. She

revealed that she relied on the Activist of the Month because it was part of her own individual professional development goals to incorporate global perspectives. She also stated that it fit her larger purpose of wanting students:

Just to care about things. . . You know whenever we read a story I try to, well you know there's a reason why we're reading this, it's not just cause it's a story you're supposed to read but you need to learn some kind of life lesson from this. . .

She thus wanted students to identify the broad scope in the literature they studied. This arose again in the folklore unit. As Beverly introduced the types of folklore to students prior to beginning the stations activity, she told them, “We are of so many different backgrounds and different places a lot of our myths may come from our families and histories.” This was her way of acknowledging the multiplicity of perspectives in her classroom and reinforced to students that multicultural content was worthy of study.

Media Content

In addition to using print texts that reflected the diversity in her classroom and connecting current events specifically to youth, Beverly also relied heavily on media as a way to secure student attention and to help them draw connections with topics being studied. This was seen, for example, in the showing of the movie trailer for the upcoming film about Nelson Mandela, but also in more creative ways. One such instance was prior to reading “The Lady or the Tiger” (1882) when Beverly showed students clips of coliseums and arenas from BBC productions so that they would have an idea of ancient customs similar to which the events of the story occurred as well as a visual schemata in which to locate the characters and plot.

One of Beverly's students even commented in class, “I feel like we watch something in here everyday” and the teacher's quick-witted response was, “You're welcome.” In an interview,

I inquired if her use of media was intentional, and Beverly confirmed that in fact it was. This was in part due to her being involved in a Teacher Leader program for the county in which technology use was an expectation and main objective, but also because, as she said:

I just think it's a good way into it because they do not like to read and they'll tell you that first off. So if you can like put the Mandela clip on, the preview was really good, so then they are interested in that. I think, it seems to work, it's effective, and I think it sticks in their minds more.

When I mentioned that viewing and discussing a visual text was a type of reading, she confirmed that non-print text was “definitely part of our standards for this grade. . .like comparing form and text and stuff like that” and went on to talk about the various sources, media and print based, that she would use to teach *The Diary of Anne Frank*. In this way, it was clear that Beverly held tightly to the standards and mandated curriculum she was expected to teach.

Students also noted Beverly's media pedagogy in my discussion with them. They reported in the focus group finding her use of one media outlet, *Flocabulary*, highly effective. This online library of educational hip-hop songs and videos taught or reviewed concepts, vocabulary, and events (Flocabulary, 2013). Each video was accompanied by lyrics and other elements, such as flashcards and tests, to help students remember the information communicated, and the organization touted connection to *Common Core State Standards*. In addition to this outlet, Beverly also created several of her own videos in a venture to ‘flip’ her classroom, a recent pedagogical trend in which students learn material from media sources and then complete practice or work related to that material in class with individualized assistance from the teacher. The idea behind this strategy was that students received the lecture that would have been delivered in class at their own pace of understanding at home (e.g. they could rewind, listen multiple times, take notes) and then engaged in the hands-on portion under the direction of the

educator, who then served as a facilitator rather than a static figure. Intrigued by this method, Beverly took on the goal of working toward a flipped classroom and, in the summer prior to the school year, created over forty minutes of short videos on literary concepts such as ‘theme’ and ‘dialect.’ These were posted to her website and she used them throughout the school year. She shared with me that they were quite time-consuming to produce but that she found them successful. In the focus group, her students referenced these and shared that they “like the videos she made herself that she showed us.” Thus, Beverly employed a host of media to work with her students.

Factors that Influenced Content Selection

What is important to this discussion, however, is that Beverly perceived herself as quite limited from multiple angles including district pacing guides, administrative policies, and her professional learning team. The district pacing guides were organized into pre-established units and for each, her team had to administer the same assessments to their students. So, she explained, “we have to teach certain things in the same way and like I don’t think that even makes sense.” When I asked her about relating the curriculum to social justice specifically, she expressed:

I would like to get, I would like the themes not to be the themes that . . . we are required to use. And I could do my own themes. I think they would be more interesting and more social justice based and I think I could ask more interesting questions and tie it throughout the unit more cause I’m like ‘Coming of Age,’ that’s boring.

Being forced to work in this way with her colleagues led Beverly to become somewhat resentful, feeling that this “takes away all of your freedom as a teacher.” It also led to negativity towards

her eighth grade Language Arts team of teachers who on one school holiday sent multiple text messages in a group chat with Beverly in an attempt to plan for the upcoming unit. Beyond frustrated with what she saw as an invasion of her personal time, Beverly expressed that this level of mutual planning was “just too much.” She also divulged later, “I like interacting with kids, but not adults. I really don’t like interacting with adults.” Part of the reason that she liked teaching was “because people leave me alone and I’m in charge.” Her desire for autonomy was evident, especially in her statement: “I wish I could just teach what I wanted to, do the standards but do what I wanted with them and not have a PLT.” Therefore, although she saw her colleagues as caring and discerned the school culture as one focused on issues of equity and promoting student achievement, she preferred to work in isolation.

Finally, beyond the confines of her colleagues, Beverly’s administration also exerted a certain level of influence over material she brought into the classroom context. For instance, one of her assistant principals communicated to her during her study of Anne Frank that learning about the Holocaust in the eighth grade should not be “too graphic.” Although Beverly found this senseless in light of what students were likely seeing in their real lives, she abided by the school’s wishes. Thus, while she brought in content that was multicultural and relevant, she was restricted in the degree to which she was allowed to choose actual texts for study for her students. It seemed then that the ‘Article of the Week,’ the ‘Activist of the Month,’ and the media pieces she employed were her way of subverting an already established canon and incorporating texts that she felt would entice her students to learn. These were therefore evidences of Beverly’s literacies in choosing multicultural and relevant content.

Limitations of Content without Critique

The Spectrum of Multicultural Education

While Beverly infused multicultural and relevant texts as she could in her curriculum, they nonetheless felt to me as though they were “additive content rather than . . . structural changes in content and process” (Nieto, 2002, p. 7). Although the material was present, it did not fully achieve the intended goals of multicultural education as scholars in the field describe it. Nieto (2002), for example, provides a model for levels of multicultural education that spans schools that are “monocultural” to those that promote “tolerance,” then those that progress toward “acceptance,” “respect,” and “affirmation, solidarity, and critique” (p. 8). What is striking in the comparison to Beverly’s case is that the school that Nieto constructs as mirroring the “respect” level very much aligns with James Middle School in a number of ways, including size and make-up of student population. The English department in Nieto’s (2002) school organized themes through which to read multicultural literature, one of which was actually “coming of age” and the students read *The Diary of Anne Frank* at the school, the same two that were present in Beverly’s context. Echoing this point, Beverly even shared with me, “Maybe ultimately I hope that they learn how to *respect* um, themselves and other cultures.” Yet Nieto (2002) cautioned, and as I found in this case, “multicultural education without critique may result in cultures remaining at the romantic or exotic stage” (p. 15). This seemed to be the paradigm at James Middle as well, where a multitude of cultures were celebrated and included, but issues related to ethnicity and race in regard to inequity were avoided.

A celebratory approach to Black leaders. In reading and discussing Nelson Mandela, for instance, the students related his work to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. In one scene in the children’s book, an image showed a sign that labeled a “White

Area” at a public beach. When Beverly asked her students what this recalled for them, they quickly responded “segregation.” She then kept reading from the text of the book. The institution of racism or apartheid was absent from conversation, but rather the approach centered on individual acts of racism and an individual hero, Mandela, who overcame this. Banks (2010) labels this method a “contributions approach” wherein:

The success stories of ethnic heroes. . . are usually told with a focus on their success with little attention to racism and other barriers they encountered and how they succeeded despite the hurdles they faced. Little attention is also devoted to the *process* by which they became heroes/heroines as well as about their status and role as heroes/heroines” (p. 239).

This was found to be true in Beverly’s case. There was no mention of the African National Congress party or the brutality of the movement in South Africa. This was likely because, as previously mentioned, Beverly sensed that she would not be supported in broaching such topics with eighth grade students. However, there was also no critical discussion of the topic of racism or dialogue about how it might continue today, despite the irony that almost every student in the class was a person of Color. There was no reference in the inclusion of this activist to his tenuous relationships with the United States, such as his being labeled a terrorist by the US government or his controversial and very public lack of agreement with President George W. Bush’s administration’s invasion of Iraq.

In addition to this celebratory approach, the texts Beverly incorporated and the traditional works imposed by the district were used minimally in a pedagogy of critique. I found 20 instances of critical pedagogy in the data, which often occurred in fleeting moments such as a student asking about the absence of female criminals in “The Lady or the Tiger” or Beverly telling a student as he exited the classroom that his shirt which read, “Cool story babe, now go

make me a sandwich” offended her. There was even less coded material for analysis of power and social change, for which there were three and four instances respectively.

Limited instances of critical pedagogy. It is significant that Beverly attended steadfastly to what would appeal to her students. She tried to interweave outside sources with expected content and put her unique spin on her lessons. However, she said, “we do all of the terms and most of the standards that we are supposed to do,” thus illustrating that the teachers she worked with adhered to the dominant frames of knowledge they were entrusted to impart to students. Within this, Beverly’s only critique was that these likely were not stimulating for students, but she had not yet, as the sub-coded material for critical pedagogy demonstrated, engaged students in critical literacy wherein she used texts to examine larger narratives or question axiomatic knowledge structures. In fact, there were *no* coded instances for critiques knowledge. There were few occurrences of dialogic teaching; rather, Beverly was generally the expert in the room who issued directives and assigned work for completion. This was not communicated as a disrespect of students, but instead in such a way they, as a class, had business to accomplish. This business was mandated by the district and agreed upon by Beverly’s team of English teachers, and in turn, Beverly.

In regard to the various other literary works and content in Beverly’s classroom, I also saw limited occasions of critical pedagogy. She taught a version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* that had been adapted to a drama and was included in the students’ textbooks. Her strategy for this text was to assign students reading parts, and on some days they engaged in performative readings from their desks and on others they took the classroom floor. The students very much seemed to enjoy this, but there was very partially a critical lens employed. This was not to imply

that Beverly did not attempt to make the reading exciting for students; she took them on a 3D tour of the place where the Frank's family hid and she told me:

They were really into that. And then we watched clips of the film but it was like a really intense part where the police came in and they were like 'OH MY GOD' like 'THAT CAT DID NOT DO THAT'. Cause the cat made noise. Like oh my god, Max was like nope, I woulda killed her and I woulda killed that cat. It's like alright, let's not kill anybody.

Her animated and comic account makes clear the students' engagement with the assortment of texts she used. She also told me that she used their youth to connect with them in teaching the text, explaining, "I emphasize she's your age and that kind of stuff," such as using a character in the text, Mr. Dustle, to draw connections between people in their lives who annoy them by telling them what to do. She half-jokingly shared, "I really did hate that when I was their age so I kind of connect it to something that they are irritated by cause irritation is the best way to remember something I think." Her empathy with the students in her class, though, led her to draw parallels with the text in meaningful ways. Thus, while her instruction was not dry, it also was not extensively critical in the sense that a social justice approach would be. Hence, the resulting tension is that while Beverly incorporated texts that she perceived as culturally responsive and relevant, what she did with them did not challenge her students to think beyond their own positions. As already mentioned, this is likely because of her perceived administrative and peer constraints, yet nonetheless it poses a real challenge to education that aspires to be social justice in nature.

Concluding Beverly's Story

Beverly Mitchell's documented biographical experiences led her to a social justice disposition. These included both her growing up with diverse friends and the encounters that her

parents intentionally cultivated for her, such as assisting in a women's shelter. She chose teacher after a first career because she saw education as a way to effect change and make a difference in the lives of students. She worked to promote an atmosphere in her classroom congruent with her school's strict policies, and her practices revealed her regard for student success and her concern for multicultural content.

In her story, two major tensions emerged in her social justice literacies. The first was the contradiction revealed when her positive conceptions of students, views of them as capable of success, and explanations of their behavior were read against her deficit discourses, her struggle to realize how her whiteness informed her caring, and her limited instances of critical reflection. As a White teacher, she struggled to follow through with the kind of teaching she saw her colleagues accomplish and showed difficulty in negotiating this in light of the hardships her students face. The second contradiction that surfaced in Beverly's pedagogy happened between her use of multicultural, relevant, and media content and the limited instances of critique applied to those materials. While she strove to incorporate material that reflected her students, she struggled to push them for sociocultural and ideological analysis of those resources. As in Etta's case, Beverly's enactment of social justice illustrates the complicated nature of pedagogical practices for equity and the challenges that contextual factors, such as colleagues and districts mandates, pose.

CHAPTER 6

PLAYING THE GAME OF RESOURCES AND NEGOTIATING FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: CONTRADICTIONS IN CURRICULUM AND STUDENT CAPABILITIES

The Context

Ivy Middle School

Ivy Middle School was located in the city of Harpersville in a state in the southeastern region of the United States. It was an urban area with a population of 228,330. According to 2012 census data, the area's demographics were approximately: 47% White, 38% Black or African American, 5% Asian American, 0.5% Native American, 8% other, and 3% multiracial. 13.5% of the total population of the area identified as Hispanic.

Although the large school district boasted a host of magnet programs and specialized schools, this middle school housed traditional courses and standard curricula. The school contained a significant population of students labeled as having special needs and employed the accompanying support staff to serve them. Administrators organized the grade levels into teams of teachers with specific teams designated for students with special needs. The school also offered classes solely for second language students and students who did not speak any English. The teacher in this case instructed eighth grade reading, whose test scores in the previous school

year were 61.5% passing. The mission at the school was focused on global connections with an emphasis on maximizing students' potential with the goal of becoming productive members of society. The cafeteria and the library were lined with flags from countries all over the world in an effort to demonstrate this global emphasis, and bulletin boards in the hallway also promoted this purpose.

Even larger than the middle school in Beverly's case, 1,320 students attended Ivy Middle. The school somewhat reflected the diversity of the larger population of the city of Harperville with a student body that was 52% Black or African American, 32% White, 13% Hispanic, and 2% Asian. There were approximately 73 teachers, who were, as the teacher in the case described, overwhelmingly White and female. Although the general education teachers were mostly white, the teacher also noted that almost all of the elective teachers, such as those who taught dance, chorus, or art, were women of Color. There were four administrators, all of whom were African American. The principal and one assistant principal were African American females and the other two assistant principals were African American males.

The teacher in the study described Ivy Middle School's student population as the "haves and have nots," two groups between which she discerned an apparent line. While 56% of the student population received free or reduced lunch, there was a prevailing focus in the school on Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) students and programs. Parents of AIG students were vocal in the school in terms of their communication with teachers and in their involvement in groups such as the Parent-Teacher Organization. School administrators mandated that teachers offer tutoring for students who received a level three on the End of Grade test on the previous year in hopes that they would earn a four, the highest level attainable, in the test given

at the end of this school year. There was a push for the upper echelon to rise higher and for the demarcation between the two groups remained stark.

Harperville's story included its fame as a site for events during the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Historically, its population consisted largely of African American citizens and the area was home to sit-in demonstrations and notable leaders. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited the city several times during the era to deliver his message of non-violent protest. The school systems were not separate from this fight for justice, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was active in achieving desegregation in Harperville schools by 1970. The current school district's Vision Statement included the centrality of community in educating children and professed a commitment to soliciting parental involvement in schools.

The Classroom

Tate Williams' classroom was vibrant. Upon entering, I was unsure where I should focus first because there was so much going on merely in terms of decoration, organization, and use of space. Desks were arranged in pods of four or five, and above each arrangement hung a sign from the ceiling that displayed a number. This number denoted the group to which the configuration of students who sat underneath it belonged. Tate referenced these group numbers throughout instruction, class discussion, and assignments, and she also used them to dismiss students from class. The placement of students into groups illustrated Tate's commitment to creating classroom community, which arose as a theme in her social justice literacies.

In the back left of the room was a "Reading Corner," with sofas and a student book library organized by genre. There was a sign on one of the couches that instructed students they

were only allowed to enter the reading corner when given permission from Ms. Williams. During the time that I observed, a few students entered the reading corner at various times of the day. Sometimes this was during Tate's class, and other times they were sent from another teacher's room to Tate's. This cozy corner was a refuge for students amongst traditional school structures, such as desks and hardback chairs. The books in the library spanned an assortment of genres, including texts generally classified as young adult literature.

Other key components of the classroom that communicated Tate's philosophy were the posted rules, which resulted in the acronym "Grrr" and personified the school's mascot. These included students treating one another in accordance with the "Golden Rule," and being "Respectful," "Responsible," and "Ready." In this lively classroom space, Tate's organization, as well as her expectation that students were duly organized, was also revealed. Her calendar on the wall displayed what students would foresee in the week with daily homework included. She kept a log on the wall that instructed students where certain class activities should be located in their binders, and she added to this regularly.

A final inclusion in Tate's classroom was the exemplification of her own sense of humor, which became central to her teaching style. A teacher-generated poster on the wall read: "Let's eat Grandpa/Let's Eat, Grandpa/Correct/Punctuation/Saves Lives." This comic rendition of a punctuation lesson displayed on the wall reflected Tate's pedagogy; she wanted her students to learn the tools they would need to be successful, but she communicated them in a way that was entertaining and engaging for students.

The Classes

Tate taught four classes of eighth grade English Language Arts. Two of them were labeled exceptional children's (EC) classes. There was often an inclusion teacher and a behavior specialist in these classes with Tate. One class was deemed Academically and Intellectually Gifted, and her final one was regarded as Standard Level. Since I determined to focus on specific classes in the research design, I worked with Tate's first and second periods, which were those labeled EC and AIG. First period contained approximately 25 students, almost all of whom were students of Color. Second period, the AIG class, was composed of 32 students, the majority of whom were White. There were eight students of Color in that class.

Taken together, the aesthetics of Tate's classroom revealed a great deal about her personality and teaching style, and she based her pedagogy on the students with whom she worked. In the next section, I will further elucidate the ethic Tate projected in her classroom and explain how she incorporated ideas about social justice in her beliefs.

Tate's Social Justice: "Everybody Gets What They Need"

Tate's memories of her early schooling were limited. She attended elementary school where her mom was a teacher, which she said mostly affected her when her mom was her fifth grade teacher. The lineage of educators in her family was long and for her, teaching seemed a natural career path. She relayed that she grew up all over the state but settled into a suburban area permanently with her family in her seventh grade year. Her memories of middle and high school were punctuated by her membership on athletic teams.

Tate was more descriptive about her high school experience, during which she was student council president and was enrolled in honors and advanced placement courses. She

speculated that the student population at her high school was 60% Black and 40% White. She remembered encountering three school lockdowns her freshmen year because of gang fights but disclosed that she was oblivious at the time to the severity of the situations. She said that because she was around gangs in her high school and had friends whose brothers were in gangs, “it’s not that big of a deal” that some of her current students were involved with gangs and explained, “it doesn’t necessarily freak me out.” Because she had known gang affiliated people in her youth, she gained an understanding for her students’ and their families that she may not have assumed otherwise.

Another way that Tate felt she was able to connect with her students was through her experiences with her sexual orientation. Tate identified as a lesbian. Although she did not include this identity as outstanding in her story about how she became disposed toward social justice issues, this subjectivity arose later and became crucial to the way she worked with students. She connected her approach to her own situation, while she did not elaborate on this element of her life. She explained:

And I’ve always kind of been drawn to minorities. Just because I feel like I also identify as minority groups because I’m a lesbian. And I feel like I don’t fit into heteronormative society, which is such a major like it’s an overwhelming majority, that I am in turn drawn to other minorities. Not just sexuality, but race as well. And I just want, it’s like rooting for the underdog, like I just want to understand, and I want to help, and I want to, you know like I want to empathize and I don’t know, I just want to feel like they, I want to help them feel like they’re not alone. And that somebody understands them.

She thus drew parallels between what she had experienced as a person forced to live on the margins of society and what her students went through being racially minoritized. Her identity was fundamental to her reasons for teaching and the kind of teacher she wanted to be.

In particular, Tate identified three experiences and people from her background that affected her outlook and culminated in her perspectives on racial issues. The first was having been raised a Jehovah's Witness, a member of a religious sub sect of Christianity. She explained:

Something good that came from my religion . . . besides all the horrible and terrible no good very bad things, I always noticed that there was no differentiation between the white and black people. There was an even mix, like we all sat together, we all still called each other brother and sister, regardless of race. And it was the first time that I saw mixed couples. Like a black woman and a white man and white man and black woman. And I think that from an early age just being around that you learn that it's like ok, cool. Because there is so much in society telling you that that's not right and that that's not a good thing, but if you see it from an early age that actually it's fine, it's not that big of a deal. I think that you're kind of desensitized to society telling you that it's not ok. . . So I think at an early age I was exposed to different races and being ok with different races intermingling. And it wasn't different. There was nothing different about those two people except their skin color.

Here, Tate recognized societal influences on perspectives of race but said that her experiences served to negate the ways that the media, for example, attempted to condition the ways she thought. She referred above specifically to prejudices against inter-racial friendships and relationships as one value that society discouraged. Because she witnessed bonds formed between people of various races in her church, she rejected the media's messages. Furthermore, despite the articulations (Hall, 1997) of racial difference perpetuated in larger social discourses to which Tate was exposed, she shared that she was also able to discern via her church that people of different races were not intrinsically different. She was cautious to say that hers was a "basic understanding" of race that she formed at an early age in her religious experience. She recognized that although people of different races were not inherently disparate, their race as a social construct carried real consequences. Nonetheless, she took her original understanding of

race as skin color variances and carried it through life as she met and worked with new individuals in college and jobs, and this informed her relationships in teaching.

Another monumental experience that Tate cited as central to her biography was her time as the only white player for two years on her high school girls' basketball team. She shared that her teammates nicknamed her, "white chocolate, because they said I was black on the inside and white on the outside." She specifically stated that this made her "relate a lot better" to her "black students" and taught her, "there's black people and there's white people and there's no difference between the two of them. Just like, they have different families. Everybody has different families." Her basketball experience taught her to recognize difference, while simultaneously showing her, as did being raised a Jehovah's Witness, that difference did not naturally equate to a negative opinion of those who were different from her.

Finally, Tate remembered one teacher specifically who pushed the boundaries of her thinking and motivated her to focus on English. She described this teacher as "overly liberal" and named her as providing Tate's first exposure to an ideology with which she had not been familiar. Tate related:

But I remember at our school . . . It was very, very segregated. . . Ms. Wentworth would like try and get me, because I guess I, like did not adhere to those divisions and so she would like talk to me about stuff like that. When I gave my senior class speech for student council, student government president I like made a rap. And she just thought that was the coolest thing ever.

Tate refers to Ms. Wentworth as influential due to the conversations she initiated with her Tate about racial divides and Tate's ability to navigate amongst them. Not only did this teacher affect Tate's thinking about social justice, but the teacher was also a catalyst for Tate choosing to teach English literature. Tate explained that Ms. Wentworth "had a way of making it seem like it

was really important that you read. . . .you have to read to make yourself a better person basically.” Her emphasis on texts inspired Tate to carry on the same prominence in her own teaching and to choose books in which her students would be genuinely interested.

Experiences from her more recent past influenced Tate’s decisions about the kind of students with whom she wanted to work and the actual school where she sought employment. She expressed that she intentionally chose “this demographic” of students when she began her career, knowing that if she had gone to another county, “it would have been really different.” She said emphatically, “I knew that I wanted to teach in Harpersville.” Thus, Tate, as a White female, knew that she wanted to work with a predominately minoritized population.

This choice came after her student teaching experience in which she worked with mostly privileged students. She shared that she had been offered an opportunity to apply at Olton High School, but her response was:

Definitely not. I just knew I didn’t want to be there. I was already there for a significant amount of time and I was like this is definitely not for me. I knew I wanted to work with underprivileged students. But I didn’t know that it would be like this. I thought I wanted to work at the high school level and talk about like skills that they already knew. And skills that they had. I didn’t know that I would come to the 7th grade and teach students how to read. . . It’s very difficult. I went to this school my junior year on a [name of college scholarship program] spring break trip. So we had to go to a different district. . .and I picked Harpersville. . .

Tate thus visited Ivy Middle while on a public school tour in college designed for aspiring teachers, and she was impressed with its student body and faculty. Her selection of Ivy was purposeful, yet she admitted that although she chose this school, it was more demanding than she might have originally grasped. Knowing she wanted to work with disadvantaged students did not equate to knowledge of what that context would incur. Despite these challenges, she

conveyed an unwavering commitment to her students, their engagement in her class, and their growth as learners.

Tate's Definition of Social Justice

The three encounters Tate described above: her childhood religion, her being the only white member of her basketball team, and her interaction with an inspirational teacher, culminated to fashion the way that she viewed social justice. To her, social justice meant treating students equitably, which she revealed in purporting:

I think social justice to me means, um, it's so hard, like I can think of it and I can do it, but it's hard to put into words. I guess it would be making sure that the way that I teach my students, the way that I present my information is accessible to everyone. Like the skills that I want my students to learn, like all the students have a way of accessing that material. Like, which would require me to present in lots of different ways. Basically making sure that every student gets what they need, but that, I mean that is all over the board. . . On a smaller scale, I do that with my students individually, like they need discipline in a different way, they need, you know? Like little things like that. I would say social justice is ensuring that everybody gets what they need in a way that they need it. Through my eyes as a teacher.

For Tate, social justice centered on regarding each of her students in a certain way. This might have meant that she acted differently toward different students, but to her that was social justice because it showed that she had achieved getting to know her students and their learning styles and responded accordingly. As she illustrated here, her vision of social justice was very much tied to her role as a teacher and she recognized this consistently. Once she completed her first year of teaching, she realized:

Every student needs something different. I treat, I honestly treat all of my students differently. Depending on their needs, depending on their background, depending on their IEPs⁴, their 504s⁵, depending on their mom yelled at them that morning. Like it's

⁴ Individualized Education Plan

⁵ Federally legislated plan for accommodations for students with special needs

just so important the more that you know your students, the better you can serve them. Cause you have to serve everyone differently. And that is still blowing my mind in the sense that I have 110 students and I have to know each one of them individually to give them what they need. And it's just, it doesn't blow my mind that that's like, that's what you are supposed to do. . .but now I'm just baffled at how hard it is to maintain.

Again, Tate emphasized attention to students' individuality as central to social justice practice. She referred to this in terms of both students' academic needs as well as their socio-emotional needs, and she identified that it was a monumental task to get to know all students. Yet, it was one that she felt was crucial. For Tate, then, social justice was about getting to know her students and their requisites and basing her interactions and instruction on that knowledge.

Tate exemplified her commitment to equitable teaching throughout my conversations with her. For instance, when I asked what was most important for her students to learn, she responded immediately "depends on which student it is" and continued to explain "for my 4th period, how to be a decent person. For my 2nd period, how to use the right grammar skills." For her, social justice meant providing students with what they most required established by how she perceived their circumstances as well as by what they communicated to her.

Her responsibility to her students not only spawned from her personal identification, but also from the fact that she believed in her own power as a teacher to affect her students' trajectories. She noted, "My influence is very important on these students' lives. Like they need a lot from me to be able to make it to high school. To next week, like whatever it is." She felt that the eighth grade was a fragile time in the path of a youth and perceived her role as one that could impact their track. She conceptualized this as an *opportunity*, declaring:

I think it's my opportunity to . . .help them learn those skills before they go of onto their own. And I feel like high school, like I know it's not as exaggerated as I make it out to

be, but like I'm trying to tell them that in high school you don't have this. You won't have support. . .like team.

Tate's emphasis here on her students' future became a central trope in her teaching and a major component of her social justice literacies. The challenge in her perspective of acting according to the multitude of students in her classes did not escape her. She disclosed in an interview, "It's so hard. Like I really have to take a couple of deep breaths and like I have to change the way I interact with the students in a matter of seconds. I don't know, I don't think I really like, it doesn't. My students don't change. The way that I approach them changes." She felt the very real pressure that the kind of teaching she wished to embody carried with it. I now turn to the type of targeted teaching that Tate specifically enacted.

Illustrating Tate's Social Justice Focus: Race and Inequity: "It Just Kind of Comes Naturally"

Based on the events that Tate shared from her life through which she recognized race did not mean people were "that different," it followed that her social justice focus was on the structurally imposed consequences of her students' race and how she interacted with them to overcome those inequities. She also included in her concern for race her own racial makeup and how this played a role in her exchanges with students. Tate was comfortable broaching topics of her race and others' race and did so throughout our conversations. In fact, in the transcript from the first interview, the word "white" arose 30 times and the word "black" arose 24 times. This illustrated in part that Tate articulated issues of race and did not shy away from identifying especially her own.

For Tate, attitudes and actions oriented toward equity were ubiquitous in her teaching. When I asked her how she saw social justice in the work she was doing with her students, she

responded: “I mean I see it every day. I don’t know exactly how I see it. The thing is I don’t think about it.” When prompted further by questioning if social justice was present, she confirmed, “Oh my god. Every single day. In every single thing that we do.” Through our continued conversations, I learned that Tate viewed social justice as the way she treated her students and the ways she enacted her pedagogy, although it was difficult for her to describe specific practices or name manifestations. Tate joked: “I don’t really think, I’m not really like ‘oh my god, this is such an act of social justice.’ When I put this lesson plan together. I think it just kind of comes naturally.” Thus to her, social justice was an embedded mindset and practice, not something she necessarily always thought consciously about. Like Etta, she felt that it was a way of being, and she did not separate social justice from who she was.

Despite this persona, Tate recognized that she was a white female and this might initially limit her ability to draw connections with her students. Her status as a minority was not visible and thus did not grant her immediate access to her students, a fact which she understood and accepted. This was part of her understanding of social justice and how it manifested in her work.

Following a statement about wanting to genuinely know her students, Tate noted:

Some times it’s weird because a lot of my students don’t get that. Because I’m a white lady and they don’t see it like that. They, I mean, they, these students have so many walls built up from people in their lives that have hurt them and people that they can’t trust because of their past experiences that they look at me and they are like why would I give this white lady a chance. So, some of them you can’t and it’s just not going to happen and they get offended. That you are a white lady trying to come in and talk to them about their life. But sometimes it does work, and some, once I get past that initial barrier of my skin color like we can start to make progress.

In this statement, Tate realized that her own race could pose a hurdle for students based on their life experiences. In her statement above, she did not, however, blame students for their potential hesitation, but verbalized her effort to work with that in hopes of forging a connection with them.

Tate's definition of social justice reflected her commitment to an ideology that acknowledged students' differential access to opportunities at a young age. She reminded me several times in our conversations how important early childhood education was to students' attainment later in schools. Furthermore, she recognized the connection between students' chances in life and what was valued in schools. She knew school as an institution expected skills that were not common amongst all students but rather automatically honored those of the dominant culture. She affirmed this in, "My AIG class came into school knowing how to read and write. You know? It's those fundamental years. . . That kid knew their ABCs before they came to school, that kid doesn't." Thus, Tate saw the complicated and discrepant nature of students' admittance to school knowledge and its racial implications.

Tate therefore expressed that the implications of her students' race and their opportunities were central aspects in her pedagogy. This focus manifested particularly in her text selection and in the ways she conceptualized students. Yet, there were contradictions within both of these elements of her social justice teaching. I explain each of those in the following sections.

Contradiction in Teaching: Engaging Content, Wavering Critique

Engaging Students with Content as a Social Justice Literacy

As in Beverly's case, content and curriculum were central parts of Tate's social justice teaching. Scholars have outlined that an English Language Arts classroom focused on social justice includes multicultural literature, both as a way to incorporate the subjectivities of students in the classroom (Gay, 2010), whereby curriculum is relevant to their lives, and to expose students to individuals and groups who different from themselves and their peers (Jordan & Purves, 1993). In the latter approach, multicultural literature is used "to consider the ways in

which different cultural practices contribute to different worldviews” (Smagorinsky, 2008 p. 52) and thus leads to broadened socio-cultural understandings. From a similar perspective, Bieger (1996) states, “Through reading, we briefly share in the lives and feelings of the characters rather than dealing only with facts. . . Books may be used as agents for change” (p. 309). Literature, then, can foster empathy. There are therefore a host of reasons for including multicultural texts in the classroom that relate to the social justice purposes of using students as curriculum and assisting students in broadening their perspectives.

Tate’s Quest for Relevant Resources

Two impressive elements that are paramount to Tate’s literacies were her untiring quests to secure materials and to create learning experiences that would engage her students. I coded 58 instances in which Tate relied on content and curriculum that was related to social justice goals (see Appendix M). Within these occurrences, 22 were specifically noted as relevant content, which reflected that they directly related to students’ lives and backgrounds. Although Tate could have allowed herself to be more restricted by the very strict mandates of her district, she instead found ways to sequester resources for her students that would entice them to read and learn. These linked well to students’ lives and their desires to learn and yet, as with Etta and Beverly, there remained a struggle in the use of these materials to analyze power and exercise a critical stance on social justice. I will elucidate Tate’s curricular choices and literacy in acquiring texts for her students, and then I will discuss the limits of critical discourse in her classroom around those texts.

Content and Curriculum

Content relevant to students' lives. Tate's definition of social justice in education was providing students what they needed, and she translated this into the content that she chose to use in her classroom. In particular, she attempted to bring in texts that would engage students. She explained:

I specifically think about my students when I design the things that I'm going to be teaching them. Well because the thing is and I mean, it's good to be like they're going to get so much out of this, but the other thing is I'm not going to have to deal with all of these issues if they like this book. You know I don't have to be like sit down, be quiet, do this, do this, do that if they are reading the book because they want to read the book. Like it makes my life easier, it makes their life better. Like it's just all around a win win, so I always, when I try and plan my lessons I always really, like that's a huge thing. Is are they going to get anything out of this, are they going to appreciate this, will this benefit them in any way?"

Tate recognized that what was often perceived as misbehavior, students' talking or being out of their seats, was actually disinterest, and she sought to assuage such conflicts by engaging students in texts they would like and desire to read. Her approach speaks to David Gallo's (2001) opinion that schools:

Have created over the last half century an illiterate society in America. We are a nation that teaches its children how to read in the early grades, then forces them during their teenage years to read literary works that most of them dislike so much that they have no desire whatsoever to continue those experiences into adulthood. (p. 34)

As a way to combat this, Tate sought texts that would get her students to *read* and enjoy the act of reading. This included texts with adolescent protagonists or with storylines where characters struggled with pressures related to racial issues. In my observations, Tate achieved her goal of facilitating students as readers. They did this both silently and aloud. When she engaged them in 'popcorn reading,' a strategy in which students took turns reading one sentence at minimum

and two paragraphs maximum before saying “popcorn to” a classmate, all of the students read aloud. This included students whose second language was English or who would have been perceived as shy. When I asked Tate how she cultivated an environment in which the students seemed so comfortable reading aloud she shared with me that they had practiced this all year, but that this was a result of the community she had initially hoped to create. I witnessed this reading strategy on a number of occasions and almost every student was engaged with the text and knew where the class was on the page when they were called on to read by a peer. Her cultivation of students’ involvement in academics, namely their participation and engagement in reading, and their membership in a community of learners, were social justice practices.

Strategies for connecting students to content. In her teaching and planning, Tate did not wholly ignore the mandates from the district. Instead, she organized according to the standards but used “resources that would be interesting” to her students. Her “big thing,” she said, was “thinking about what they would get,” referring to materials that students would understand. She felt that the concepts in district mandates were abstract, and she sought to find resources that helped her make them tangible for students.

In her activities, Tate also made content relevant for students by specifically asking questions that connected material from class to their own lives. For instance, in teaching *We Beat the Street: How a Friendship Pact Led to Success* (Davis, Jenkins, & Hunt, 2005), she asked students to journal often in relation to events in the texts, particularly about their own goals and their experiences inside and outside of school. As an introduction to the novel, she engaged students in an activity called “Four Corners.” In this activity, students determined how they felt about a series of statements, choosing from options along a spectrum of “Agree, Kinda Agree, Disagree, or Kinda Disagree.” Tate read the statement aloud and students positioned

themselves in the corner of the room that corresponded to their opinion. They then shared with the class why they responded as such, each volunteering a testimony or belief. Some examples of statements were “someone’s neighborhood can determine whether or not he/she succeeds in life,” and “I encourage my friends to make good choices.” In this activity, students shared a great deal about themselves and offered information that would later connect well with the text.

The content of the book *We Beat the Street* (Davis, Jenkins, & Hunt, 2005) was also germane to many of the students’ lives. The novel traced the story of three African American men who made a pact in high school to attend college and then medical school. Despite being raised in a poor, urban area, the three characters focused on separating themselves from negative peer pressure and not succumbing to gang activity. Events in the novel catalogued the loving families of the three men, their encounters with racism in school, and the various obstacles they overcame on their quest. Although the town of Newark, New Jersey was unlike Harperville in some ways, there were similarities for many of the readers in the class to draw upon. Not only did Tate facilitate this comparison process, but it also occurred naturally by the very substance of the book.

Some parts of the text, for example, were explicit about drug and gang activity. In one classroom observation, Tate stopped the students before they read a scene in which the main character described the making of a “woolly” (p. 77), which was tobacco mixed with cocaine and re-inserted into a cigarette casing to be smoked. Before embarking upon this scene, Tate paused and addressed its content, warning students they were going to read mature matter but expressing that she felt it was appropriate because it was a true part of these characters’ lives. She set clear expectations for how the students should handle reading this portion, and once they finished the section, she praised them for not laughing and for responding fittingly. She did not censor the

material or shy away from its contents, but rather addressed it as very real in both its potential existence in her students' lives and in the lives of the authors, for whom the book was autobiographical. The students mentioned this incident in the focus group, sharing that they knew what was important for them to learn and when it was time to "be serious" because Ms. Williams let them know.

The National Council of English Teachers' position statement on "The Students' Right to Read" (2009) includes:

Censorship leaves students with an inadequate and distorted picture of the ideals, values, and problems of their culture. Writers may often represent their culture, or they may stand to the side and describe and evaluate that culture. (The threat to education section, para. 1)

By including this text in its entirety, Tate presented students with a realistic portrayal of the difficulty of growing up in an environment plagued by drugs and violence. It was evident also, that this related to Tate's students' lives and thus her refusal to censor it validated those students. For example, for the statement in the "Four Corners" activity that read: "If someone grows up surrounded by violence, gangs, and drugs, it will be harder for them to succeed in life," one Black female student shared that she disagreed because these entities were part of her life and she felt that she was already successful. Tate was not promoting negative behavior by reading this chapter in the text, as opponents could argue, rather she was providing her students a platform to build connections with characters based on their own circumstances. In my interview with students, they recognized the relevance of the book to them. In fact, Superman, a student, stated that he felt they liked *We Beat the Street* (Davis, Jenkins, & Hunt, 2005) so much "probably because of our skin color," and another student shared, "it just relates to us."

Multicultural Texts. In addition to *We Beat the Street* (Davis, Jenkins, & Hunt, 2005), Tate relied on a number of texts that mirrored the population of students in her first period class. Again, this reflected her goal of offering students what she felt they needed, which, in the case of first period, was content that reflected influential figures from similar backgrounds. Prior to having students write, research, and deliver their own persuasive speeches, Tate incorporated an article about the techniques of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous *I Have a Dream* (1963) speech. However, she was unequivocal in her purpose of *not* using the speech in a superficial or repetitive manner and explicitly shared this with her students, affirming in class, "When I was in school we listened to it and we analyzed the text and almost everybody has done that. And it's really important, but I want to read an article about it and how perfect it was."

Thus, Tate included an article *about* the speech, not the speech itself, as a way of instructing students on speeches. Here she demonstrated a way to use multicultural content as integrated into her lesson plan. While they read the article together in class, she drew out concepts on speech practices as well as historic events, such as discussing with students the reference to the *Emancipation Proclamation* and King's references to the divisions amongst White and Black Americans. She highlighted how King used language to communicate his message for equality in an eloquent way. While her broader focus was on strategies in speech delivery, she used a text in which she thought students would be interested and about a topic related to their lives to communicate that purpose.

Another work that Tate included in her instruction was Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). Tate learned early in the school year that a nearby high school would be performing a production of the play in the second semester and decided that she would study it with her students and organize a field trip to view the drama. In preparation for attending the

play, the students read excerpts from the work, discussed characters and motivation, and created plot diagrams. In one activity, Tate required students to map out character personalities and relationships as a class on the SMART Board. She recorded their responses on the screen and asked them to note between for each character if their relationship was affected by money or racial issues. They discussed these racial issues as they arose, and in one instance the students felt that the racial issues were positive rather than negative. Tate asked, “should we call that racial happiness?” and a Black female student shouted, “racial agreement.” Tate’s response was “good job Kaitlyn,” and recorded those words on the board. Thus, Tate’s text selection included not only relevant content but also an attention to the diversity of her students and the topics with which they were faced.

Inquiry Based Learning

Beyond text selection, Tate created assignments for students that allowed for exploration and, over the course of the year gave them opportunities to present knowledge in multiple ways outside of traditional assessments. This inquiry-based learning is central to social justice teaching (Peterson, 2007) where students are encouraged to seek answers on their own or to build opinions from their own research. Examples of such assignments in Tate’s classroom included students’ speech projects, for which she provided a long list of choices for topics but also allowed students to submit their own. Her requirements for the assignment included researching both sides of the topic and incorporating facts or statistics that would help support the orators’ claims. The speeches that I witnessed ranged in topic from the disadvantages of ObamaCare, to allowing cell phones in schools, to the negative effects of mandating school uniforms.

Another inquiry-based project that Tate devised was an Occupation Project that followed the reading of *We Beat the Street* (Davis, Jenkins, & Hunt, 2005). For this assignment, students were required to determine a profession that they planned to enter and to research the path needed to obtain that career, including the educational requirements. Tate explained that her choice for this project was meant to inspire students:

Like if they could just think about their future now. And I just feel like none of them really do. That's why we're doing *We Beat the Street*. Because then afterwards we are going to do an Occupation Project. And we're going to research an occupation that matches them and in the back of their minds they are going to be thinking ok these guys decided in middle school they were going to be doctors. And that's where they are now. So, like I'm trying to prove to them that you can honestly do anything from this point. Like you're in school, your future is still ahead of you.

Tate wanted to prompt her students to think toward their futures with this venture, but those futures were not only ones that were distant. She relayed that there were a number of high schools in the district with strong magnet programs through which students could earn, for example, a mechanic's license or acquire theater experience or even gain medical knowledge. Most of her students would otherwise be assigned to a traditional high school, but she hoped if they began to think about their prospects they would take advantage of the openings offered by the school system and apply.

When I asked her what she hoped they took away from their inquiries, she said, "That there are opportunities available. It's going to take hard work and you're going to have to actually try and do something but if you have goals they're totally attainable." Her research-based project, then, directly related to her students lives in a way that was related to social justice purposes of propelling students toward academic achievement and recognizing that teachers must care about students' futures. Of this point, Ladson-Billings (2006) writes:

The truth is that most teachers care about what happens to their students only while they have responsibility for them. . . Our responsibility to students is not merely for the nine months from September to June. It is a long-term commitment, not just to the students but also to society. Although we have only a yearlong interaction with students, we ultimately have a lifelong impact on who they become and the kind of society in which we all ultimately live. (p. 40)

By including this Occupation Project in her curriculum and hoping to affect students' high school choices, Tate exemplified her dedication to the long-term affairs of the youth in her classroom. While many educators only hoped that they affected their students' trajectories, Tate's project offered a concrete way to influence adolescents positively.

Playing the Game

One final note about Tate's literacies in content and curriculum is *how* she worked within a structure to secure materials for her students that were relevant and reflected their subjectivities. This was not easy, and Tate shared with me how she drew on her social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to access and fund resources. As leader of her Professional Learning Community for eighth grade Language Arts at Ivy Middle, Tate had a great impact on the texts that the teachers' utilized. She was ultimately responsible for choosing *A Raisin the Sun* (Hansberry, 1959) because she researched the production and organized the field trip for her colleagues. All other language arts teachers followed suit because the expectation at Ivy is that all teachers implement the same material simultaneously.

Resources, however, for *all* classes in the eighth grade were difficult to obtain. The district provided units and posted lesson plans with suggested texts to be used for those units. When Tate realized that her school did not own the recommended novels, one of which was *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967) which she thought would be beneficial for her students, she wondered "how are we supposed to do this unit plan and everyone do the same thing when we have twelve

Outsiders?” Instead of discarding the idea to use this novel, Tate went on a journey to find them.

She described:

I borrowed them from Green Middle. . . they were able to give me 72 copies. . . I had to hunt down, like I emailed a bunch of different instructional facilitators like through the district. And nobody every got back to me. Then I had to email all the media specialists. It was absolutely insane. That’s only because I wanted to read *The Outsiders*. I would never just go through there and be like oh no it tells us we have to do this. . . I was PLC leader, I decided what we did.

Tate revealed here that while it may have appeared that she was working within district mandates, she felt she had plenty of power in what materials she used with students. She was also willing to put forth effort to acquire those resources.

While her first period class read *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967), Tate engaged her AIG class with literature circles around classical texts, which were also difficult to procure. Her story, which I here quote at length, again included the mission of soliciting materials:

I cannot tell you how much of a nightmare it was to go and get these lit circle books for my AIG class. So we, these were all brand new books, we ordered them from Townsend Press. . . we knew that we didn’t want to do *The Outsiders*, so I was like what else can we do? Let’s do a lit circle, I really want to do a lit circle. So I was like what kind of books? So I went and perused the book library. . . I was like let’s order some books. I was looking online, I talked to Katy Jones who is our media specialist who orders books anyway . . .She told me about Townsend press, so I went on Townsend Press, we came together as a PLC, came up with like book titles that we could use through Townsend Press and then I had to submit the order to Mr. George because it was my AIG class and he’s the AIG facilitator so the money that we used is from the AIG money. If I had bought the books for my regular ed, I wouldn’t have gotten the money. Cause there’s no money.

Tate felt that the text being used in her first period was not appropriate for her advanced class and sought a book “that would be equitable to their reading level.” When she was unable to

locate multiple copies of such a text, she capitalized on her relationship with Mr. George, asking him, “can you do me a solid and he was like yeah for sure,” and she received the books.

Similarly, she submitted a request for funds for a set of Scholastic magazines through the school finance officer with whom Tate felt she had a close bond. This person took Tate’s request to the budget meeting and was able to get it approved, although Tate did not intend on sharing these with the rest of her team and had thus far not disclosed this allowance. Tate recognized her own literacy in acquiring materials for her students, avowing:

I play this game like no other. There are people in this building that I cannot stand but you would never know it. Because I can use things from them. When it comes down to it this is all politics and it’s all a game and you just gotta know how to play the game.

Tate definitely seemed to be a winner at this ‘game’ of pursuing supplies. In a final instance, Tate borrowed the copies of *We Beat the Street* (Davis, Jenkins, & Hunt, 2005) from a teacher who lived two hours away. The teacher had been a colleague at Ivy Middle and relocated this school year. Tate reflected, “The hardest thing for me is like using, finding resources to use. Like I just got lucky that Melanie was like oh my gah this book was great do you want to borrow them and I was like oh my gosh yeah.” Despite the challenges in finding materials with which Tate was faced, she did not seem to permit this to stop her from seeking content and using curriculum that she wished to include.

The Contradiction in Content: Walking the Line of Critique

As mentioned above, Tate included curriculum as part of her pedagogy that she felt would relate to her students’ lives. She exerted significant energy in locating and appropriating materials and texts, and these efforts were not to be disregarded. Tate also broached topics of

race and inequality with her students. Her struggle, then, was that within those conversations on multicultural content she grappled with bringing students to a point of critique.

An example of Tate walking the line of critique occurred during a class discussion on *A Raisin in the Sun* (Hansberry, 1959). A conversation ensued about the character Mama and her desire to live in a White neighborhood. When Tate asked the class, “why is this a big deal in the 1960s?” the students responded there were White and Black parts of town and people did not mix. Tate affirmed their answer and continued reading from the play. There was an opportunity in that moment to discuss de facto segregation and its presence in today’s society. Furthermore, Tate could have opened up a conversation about racism with the character of Mr. Lindner who offered the family money to move into a White neighborhood. Beyond comprehension of the play’s events and cursory explanations of the characters’ motives, however, Tate did not push her students to consider the social justice related issues in which those were shrouded. This was not just related to race; for instance, Tate also avoided a deeper analysis of Ruth’s consideration of abortion. When she engaged students in a review of the plot, for instance, from the prior’s days reading, she asked what happened when Ruth learned she was pregnant and why she considered abortion. Students responded that she was stressed about money, and Tate added that Ruth already had one child who was sleeping on the couch. She then continued to the next event for review from the play. It seemed some topics were safer for deliberation, such as the drugs and violence in *We Beat the Street* (Davis, Jenkins, & Hunt, 2005), while others, as illustrated here, were not.

Another instance where Tate limited rich discussion and critique was in her inclusion of the article on Martin Luther King Jr.’s *I Have a Dream* speech. She engaged students in underlining particular words used in the speech as she projected it on a large screen in the front

of the room. She asked students what the referents for “their” and “our” were in the speech, and the students replied “white people” and “black people.” Tate explained that in that paragraph King “basically says that white people and black people are equal” and continued her analysis of language. Despite a chance to dissect what it meant to be *equal* and to problematize that concept, Tate carried on in her lesson. Additionally, when she asked students about the *Emancipation Proclamation* during reading the speech, a student said, “that’s the thing that ended slavery.” Tate confirmed this and asked if “things had changed” from then to King’s speech and the students replied no. Again, this could have been a time to delve further into what “things” she referred to and to consider those same “things” in the present day. Thus, while she used content that appealed to her students and fashioned assessments that afforded students opportunities for exploration, she did not fully cross the line with those into critique.

Contradiction in Teaching: Inspiring Students to Succeed While Struggling to Act for Change

Believing in Students as a Social Justice Literacy

As noted previously in Beverly’s case, a particularly outstanding characteristic of social justice educators is how they regard their students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). They see the youth in their classrooms as vibrant human beings with clear futures ahead of them. They value effort (Haberman, 1995) and do not believe in the inevitability of failure for students despite their recognition that there are challenges in students’ lives that are beyond their control. In perceiving these obstacles, they distinguish the ways that structural oppression impacts their students, rather than faulting students individually. They see that the “cumulative advantage and disadvantage” bestowed upon these adolescents, which shows “how early the process of

differentiation between the potentially successful and the potentially unsuccessful starts and how pervasive it then continues to be” (Barry, 2005, p. 47). Rather than construct students as deficient, then, practitioners of social justice think in terms of issues of access and reflect on how they can affect students’ learning and achievement.

Illustrated above in her use of content such as *We Beat the Street* (Davis, Jenkins, & Hunt, 2005) and the institution of the Occupation Project, Tate projected the social justice disposition of believing her students were capable of success. I coded 22 instances from the data that reflected this conviction. She felt it was her role to help students grow toward attainment, and she regarded this as an “opportunity,” for her as a teacher. Her use of that word, ‘opportunity,’ echoed recent language that shifted what has traditionally been labeled the ‘achievement gap’ to a difference in students’ access to opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 2010). By thinking in this way, Tate subscribed to a particular ideology, one that avoided locating students’ struggles in their perceived intellect.

Tate’s Belief in Students’ Capabilities

Tate truly wanted her students to also believe that they could flourish. She felt this year, the one prior to students entering high school, was principally important for cultivating students’ self awareness. While sharing this in an interview, Tate remarked:

One girl in particular that I’m thinking of just was hanging out with the wrong group and we’ve had three parent conferences this year just with her. Trying to, like her mom knows it too, she told us this is the year, it’s make it or break it right now and she’s doing horribly. . . She’s so smart though. But she just hangs out with the wrong people and I just feel like they don’t usually get that message. And I feel like it’s always negative. Like you have to do this or you need to do this or you’re not doing this. And they don’t ever get like you can do this, if you try. You are capable of doing this.

Tate here emphasized students as capable of choice and action. She acknowledged that students possessed intelligences in different ways, noting one student who was currently in a juvenile detention facility as: “smart. He’s street smart.” She complicated what it meant to be ‘smart’ in her conceptions of students in a manner similar to Hatt (2007) who asserts, “smartness is socio-culturally produced, rather than being biologically based,” (p. 146) and furthermore writes, “smartness is typically defined narrowly within schools to mean good grades, high standardized test scores, or being a member of gifted classes (p. 157). Tate defied conventional notions of smartness by exhibiting a belief that all of her students were smart in some way.

The Contradiction: Struggling to Facilitate Student Agency

Again, Tate’s use of content that catapulted her students toward ruminating on their futures was insightful and displayed her belief that the youth with whom she worked could achieve. The contradiction here, however, was that while she unwaveringly believed her students could set and accomplish goals and thus become change agents, she offered few opportunities for them to work for change in her classroom, in their current state of being. There was only one instance of coded data labeled for students as change agents, and this was in relation to how they could change their own trajectories through lessons learned from the Occupation Projects. I coded four total instances for the primary code social change, the other three of which related to Tate’s capacity for educational reform. Thus, facilitating students who saw themselves as able to effect change in their own lives and communities was not yet a central part of her pedagogy.

As cited previously, one of Tate’s main justifications for including the text *We Beat the Street* (Davis, Jenkins, & Hunt, 2005) was that she wanted students to believe in themselves and

alter their paths. These conduits could have been seen as nonexistent by structural oppressions related to race and socioeconomics, yet Tate did not promote that belief. When she introduced the novel to the class, she told them, “I’m excited to read this book with you and we’re going to get from it is if you set your mind and have goals for something you can definitely achieve those goals.” Her purpose of inspiring students through content was evident. Tate stated that her intent was to meet students where they were and to “push and motivate them beyond where they are,” but this forward progression rarely included reference to action. Tate struggled to show her students they were capable of *action* by designing opportunities for youth to realize their abilities *at that moment in time*. Affecting students’ futures was important, but so was helping students to discern that they could impact events in their present state. It would have been powerful, for example, if she had scaffolded that process for students by having them identify an immediate goal from their context and work toward its realization with their peers.

While she thus offered content that was moving because she believed her students were equipped to act in ways that could effect change, and she believed in those capacities in students, Tate faltered in proffering avenues through which they could exhibit those strengths she felt they possessed. The contradiction here is one of where inspiration and conviction was not accompanied by an affordance for action.

Concluding Tate’s Story

As a whole, Tate’s background led her to build positive relationships with students. She empathized with their positions and felt that she could connect strongly with them based on her experiences with people of different races, her own cultural awareness, and her marginalized sexual orientation. Because of her skills in acquiring materials and texts, she was able to locate

and employ content that spoke to those students whom she understood well. She chose texts that reflected adolescent struggles and racial issues and she included discussion of content that was relevant to students' lives. She also designed inquiry projects for students to allow for authentic research and the development of arguments, and she focused largely on how to engage them in tangible ways. And yet, despite these applications, Tate struggled to critique the texts she brought in and the social milieu they reflected. She rarely pushed students beyond a superficial understanding of topics and often avoided delving into sensitive issues. Relatedly, another contradiction in Tate's teaching is that while she held students in high regard, avoided discourses of blame, and sought to inspire students toward bright futures, she struggled to provide them with spaces to enact change in their current context. She did not afford students the chance to realize that they could act at that moment in time. Her case thus illustrates again the pressures in teaching for social justice in English classrooms and how tensions exist in the ways teachers embody pedagogies meant to promote equity.

CHAPTER 7

BIOGRAPHY, COLLABORATION, AND SOCIAL CHANGE: CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

Each teacher in this study was unique and worked within a particular context. Etta, Beverly, and Tate illustrated that the implementation of social justice was a nuanced embodiment of an ideal that manifested as a series of complicated actions. These actions were context and population dependent. While their stories were distinctive and I presented each individually, I also analyzed across cases to construct common themes. Stake (2006) writes, “It would be a mistake if a multicase researcher fails to disclose whatever generalizations appear evident from the data, in a tentative way” (4.4 Gener). He is thus cautious, however, and includes a warning about these generalizations, which ultimately should be left up to the reader because the researcher “should enrich the reader’s experiential knowing with as much of the action and context of the cases as possible”. (Stake, 2006, 4.4 Gener). Thus, I provide extensive detail for each participant and her context so as to help in this construction process. Nevertheless, while I “abstain from formal projections to cases that are not examined,” I here offer those evident and broad themes that were outstanding to the three cases in this study taken collectively. (Stake, 2006, 4.4 Generalizations)

What arose in this portion of analysis were three clear patterns, three aspects that were either key parts of or significantly affected the teachers’ overall practice. These were the

centrality of biography in teachers' perspectives on social justice, issues surrounding collaboration, and the struggle for practices that promoted social change. Stake (2006) writes, "The assertions in a cross-case report are the researcher's findings about the quintain" (3.1 Rationale) Since social justice in English classrooms is the quintain in this study, I share the most relevant related items, which I determined from the coded material. And although there were variations within these patterns, I present them here as a way to begin to discern the most exceptional issues in this work and to begin to think about what this means for teacher education. I will thus examine each of those three shared themes here, and then I consider what this means as a whole.

The Importance of Biography to Teachers' Practices: Limitations and Usefulness of Educator's Backgrounds in Teaching for Social Justice

It is not surprising that each teacher strongly attributed her social justice stance to her biography. Hinchey (2004) writes, "We act based on what we believe, and what we believe depends in large part upon evidence drawn from our life experiences" (p. 23). Thus, previous experience and socialization are strong forces that largely construct how we see the world and how make sense of it (Bowers, 1984). Harro (2010) labels the "cycle of socialization" in which our "socialization begins before we are born, with no choice on our part" (p. 46) and continues throughout our lives with the influence of families, institutions, and culture which inundates us with messages about our identities and how we should act in relation to others. Relating this to education, Gay (2010) tells us, "Even without our being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn" (p. 9) Researchers have examined in various ways the relationships between teachers' biography and their practice.

Teacher Biography as Limiting Social Justice Dispositions

Much of the scholarship on how biography affects teachers actually concentrates on the degree to which experience *limited* social justice stances in education, particularly in reference to the majority of the white, middle class female population of teachers (Applebaum, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sleeter, 2001). This significant body of work focuses on the fact that many white students do not recognize that they have a cultural identity that influences their perspectives (Nieto, 2000) and highlights how teachers will likely work with students who are different from themselves (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1999). The results of this work include an emphasis on autobiography and critical reflection as essential components to social justice education (Causey, Thomas, Armento, 1999; Cochran-Smith 1995; Gay, 2010; Grant, 1991; Zeichner, 1992) so that preservice teachers recognize their own socialization and how it impacts what they would do in their future profession. These recommendations are issued in an effort to deconstruct any stereotypes or fears that candidates might have possessed, since as Gay (2010) writes, “it is inconceivable . . . that teachers who have negative beliefs about ethnically diverse students and their cultural heritages as valid and viable educational resources can relate to them positively in personal and instructional interactions” (p. 150). Before many white preservice teachers can teach, then, they must recognize the beliefs they possess and the origin of those, as well as begin to see how they can mediate them in a classroom context.

Teacher Biography as an Impetus to Social Justice Literacies

The teachers in my study, however, all professed that they were cognizant of their backgrounds and were able to articulate an awareness of their cultural identity and its influence on their lives. Despite the fact that two participants identified as white, they did not wholly reflect the literature on white teachers. They referenced both critical events in their lives that

helped them build empathy for students and their teacher education programs for prompting their skills for critique in explaining this phenomenon. I now turn to the different types of experiences the teachers' discussed in an attempt tease apart the various ways that individuals become disposed to work for social justice.

Personal characteristics and experiences as impetuses to social justice literacies.

One participant, Tate, said that she recognized race quickly when she was the only white girl on her middle school basketball team. She voiced that this experience forced her to see her own position in relation to others and that it translated into her teaching by helping her to think about her students and their backgrounds. Etta's youth as a mixed race female in a conservative, small town showed her what it was like to experience marginalization. Beverly's experiences of having friendships in her childhood with people of races different from her own, as well as working as a youth with disadvantaged populations, helped cultivate her disposition for social justice.

Although there is a prominent focus in the literature on the challenges of overcoming teachers' backgrounds, there are some exceptions that relate to the three teachers in this study. This work brings teachers' biographies to the forefront as assets. In *Narratives of Social Justice Teaching: How English Teachers Negotiate Theory and Practice Between Preservice and Inservice Spaces*, Kirkland and Filipiak (2008) offer their own stories of why they chose teaching as a way to illustrate how closely social justice education is tied to personal goals. For instance, Kirkland (2008) shares, "becoming a teacher was about changing my world or at least the world of others who existed in conditions similar to the ones in which I was raised" (p. 47). There is a certain empathy then, which often comes with being a social justice educator wherein the teachers identify with students based on their own experiences. Tate illustrated this also when

she described how, as a lesbian she felt herself part of a minority group and as such felt she had a sense of understanding for her mostly Black students. She then said, “I want to help, and I want to, you know like I want to *empathize* and I don’t know, I just want to feel like they, I want to help them feel like they’re not alone. And that somebody understands them.” Tate’s use of a derivation of the actual word “empathy” here thus further supports the notion.

Expounding upon the idea of teacher’s identification with students, Kirkland (2008) writes that common amongst autobiographical narratives of social justice educators are “themes of passion and pain” (p. 61). He explains:

Pain defines social injustice, as passion may define a reaction against it. Without a clear understanding of what is unjust, however, one cannot truly define what is just. Hence, if social injustice is associated with pain, then social justice—in opposing it—must deal with the passion in healing both as an act and as a process. One aspect of social justice teaching must then be an act of healing, internally and externally, the pain that each of us uniquely and collectively witnesses and experiences. Social justice teaching seems to acknowledge a responsibility to others. (Kirkland, 2008, p. 61)

I found these notions of passion and pain to be true for all three teachers in this study. Etta was forthcoming about the pain she experienced being discriminated against by her peers for her Iranian heritage in a post-9/11 era. Out of place and under constant scrutiny, the transition to middle school was difficult and establishing bonds with her peers was a challenge. When she spoke, her passion was palpable for helping students not to “feel crazy” (for recognizing injustices in the world) as she did as a youth. Beverly shared the pain she experienced when her African American friend was not allowed to attend her birthday party and how deeply this affected her at a young age, and her passion for fostering respect amongst her students was a chief focus in her teaching. Finally, although Tate was less open in her interviews about personal events, her references to being raised as a Jehovah’s Witness and the implication that

her sexual orientation led to a break with claiming all religious affiliation suggested she had experienced her own pain related to issues of social justice. The passion that she exhibited in wanting students to feel as though their culture was acknowledged in the classroom and that they could be successful was evident in the constant discussions she had with them about those topics. Thus, the theme of passion and pain as a trope in social justice teachers' biographies aligns with what I documented. Their personal characteristics and experiences were central to their being oriented toward social justice.

Educational experiences as impetus to social justice literacies. In addition to personal experiences related to teachers' characteristics and specific events in their lives, the teachers in the study also referenced their educational backgrounds in explanations of their social justice related outlooks. These especially included both influential teachers from their P-12 schooling as well as events and figures from their teacher education programs.

Scholars have documented how preservice and in-service teachers often evoke past schooling experiences to inform their own practice. In *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (1994), Gloria Ladson-Billings presented eight successful teachers of African American students and, through vignettes, shared their personal experiences and backgrounds. Many of the teachers in her study, like Etta in this study, had close ties to the community and to their former teachers. One of the participants saw the profession of teaching, as did Beverly, as an "ethical way for people to give back to the community" (p. 39). Many of Ladson-Billings' (1994) participants drew on teachers from their backgrounds that had been instrumental when explaining why they chose their careers. Etta pulled similarly from her educational experiences. After sharing some dismal incidents from her early schooling, Etta relayed:

In high school I had some pretty fabulous teachers. . . I had these people who just really, they were really inspiring. And I had already been thinking about being a teacher in part because I wanted to be a different kind of teacher than what I had gotten, but then when I got to high school it was like no, this is the type of teacher that I could be.

She referenced teachers in her past who were both a positive and negative influence and particularly related them to social justice. Etta found that some teachers did not provide a safe space for her with regard to being bullied for her Iranian heritage, and in fact some perpetuated the negative stereotypes surrounding Iranian individuals. Her teachers in high school, however were more supportive and Etta recalled one teacher who encouraged her to write a speech about her experience. In this way, Etta learned from the teachers' she had to be supportive of students' backgrounds.

In her words above, Etta echoed Lortie's (1975) renowned theory of "the apprenticeship of observation" which refers to the period of time that students spent as observers in schools before they began, if they chose, formal teacher education. This powerful influence manifests in a number of ways. As Etta described above, teachers evaluate the practices of their predecessors and often either seek to emulate them or purposefully avoid their practices. Somewhat relatedly, teachers' also attribute an affinity for a content area based on the teacher's personality and pedagogy (Lortie, 1975; Boyd, Gorham, Justice, & Anderson, 2013). This was demonstrated by Tate, who described her 11th grade English teacher, Mrs. Wentworth as: "She just had a way of like making it seem like it was really important that you read." Tate further described this English teacher as a critical educator who exposed Tate to thinking deeply about racial segregation at her high school. Tate chose to teach English Language Arts in part because of Mrs. Wentworth's inspiration, and she remembered Ms. Wentworth's cultivation of her critical disposition. The prominence of the teachers' education experiences in this study is thus

consistent with the general literature on teachers' prior schooling experiences as influential, and this aligns specifically with social justice outlooks as well. In many ways, these teachers strove to practice social justice pedagogy because of the models they had growing up in school.

Teacher education as an impetus to social justice literacies. In addition to their P-12 schooling experiences, the teachers in this study also referenced their preservice teacher education programs when discussing their social justice orientations. Although some researchers have found that teacher preparation and accompanying field experiences do little to affect future teachers' dispositions (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Sleeter, 2001), other research has indicated that experiences and critical conversations in the preservice coursework can impact individuals' perspectives (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Cochran-Smith, 1991; Murrell, 2000, 2006). Jones and Enriquez (2009) are careful to note that a university teacher education program is "a point of contact and a point of departure" (p. 164). Their work affirms that teacher education has the potential to affect a teacher's *trajectory* if not to create radical change.

The importance, however, of the combination of university coursework and fieldwork with teachers' biographies and contextual factors in the future teaching environment cannot be understated. It is difficult to provide a direct link between teacher education programs and teachers' social justice abilities. While I do not propose a causal relationship, in conceptualizing the components of social justice practice as literacies, as elements that can be cultivated, teacher education is one mediating factor and is crucial to consider.

In my interviews with each teacher, I asked her to reflect on her teacher education experience. I did not specifically ask about social justice in that inquiry, but the teachers all drew connections between the two. For example, Beverly expressed gratitude for her MAT

program in which she said she read and discussed issues of social justice, particularly regarding inequities related to race. She in part attributed her critical stance to “the texts that I was exposed to and the theory” she learned, and she directly referenced reading Jonathan Kozol’s (1991) *Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools*. This text uncovered matters of staunchly unequal funding and access to resources across different public schools. In my analysis of Beverly’s narratives, it became evident that she often mentioned her school in relation to others in terms of wealth or she lamented the burden of bureaucracy in her county. The interdiscursivity (Lewis & Ketter, 2011), or references to texts that impacted her from her teacher education and emphasis on issues she saw in her context, is notable and illustrates how her teacher education program may have helped her discern those factors. Thus one way that preparation coursework can affect a teachers’ social justice perspective is by facilitating a language of critique to apply in various contexts.

Another way that teacher education impacted the participants was in how it affected the way they saw their students and themselves. Etta shared:

I think that the MAT gave me a really good lens for seeing my students as more than just students. And I felt like the little bit of ESL, like the ESL discussions that we had or discussions about LGBTQ students or just race and gender and how I just by being whoever I am bring that baggage into my classroom and you know about unpacking that invisible knapsack and all of that stuff. I feel like the MAT gave me a way to think about my practice, that just being a teacher wouldn’t automatically let you have.

First, Etta indicated that her coursework facilitated her perceptions of students beyond just academics. Her explicit references to social justice topics pointed to a marked relationship between her disposition and what she learned in teacher education. Following that, she designated that her program had also enabled her critical reflection. The allusion to McIntosh’s (1988) *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* denoted that she had recognized the

privileges she possessed before entering her classroom. Studies highlight the importance of such work prior to teachers entering the classroom so that they gain a sense of themselves as sociocultural beings (Causey, Thomas, Armento, 1999; Cochran-Smith 1995; Gay, 2010; Grant, 1991; Zeichner, 1992).

Without this reflection, educators are often unable to discern their socialization and apply their models of learning to students uniformly, without taking into account students' cultural background or learning styles (Grossman, 1989). Significant here also, as mentioned previously in her case study, Etta used the McIntosh (1988) text with her students in her unit on *Human Rights and Responsibilities*. This uptake is undeniably a connection between the social justice material utilized in her coursework and what she used in her practice. Finally, Etta's concluding remark in the passage above resounded the importance of teacher education, especially as related to social justice. She confirmed that a fast track to teaching, such as a lateral entry or emergency licensure program, would not have allowed her the space to become acquainted with social justice theories that her program afforded her. In a decree for the necessity of teacher education programs, Darling-Hammond (2000) writes, "Developing the ability to see beyond one's own perspective, to put oneself in the shoes of the learner and to understand the meaning of that experience in terms of learning, is perhaps the most important role of universities in the preparation of teachers" (p. 170). Etta referred to this capacity as well thus confirming that teacher education programs are one impetus for teachers' social justice orientations.

As a final note on teacher education programs as catalysts for social justice orientations, all three participants recognized the importance of their student teaching to their perspectives. Although the internship experience has been proven invaluable in research on teaching

(Britzman, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001), the participants not only confirmed this but also revealed its centrality for social justice. Tate avowed:

The best thing about the MAT was the student teaching though. And that wasn't because I had a great teaching experience, it was because it was experiential education. Like I learned the most from that. Because I was doing what I was learning how to do.

She goes on to say that she was able to embody the kinds of teaching, using relevant content and engaging methods, in her student teaching that she then applied to her current context. Etta also recalled being assisted by her cooperating teacher to develop a unit on feminism because that was a topic she was interested in teaching. All three participants especially related to the notion of being critical colleagues to the models from their internship. I return to this in detail in the following chapter. As a whole, then, both coursework and field experiences are thus included aspects in the teachers' development of social justice orientations.

Considerations of Race in Biography

A point also to be gleaned from the focus on teachers' lives is that efficacious educators included people from a variety of backgrounds. Of the eight teachers described in *The Dreamkeepers* (Ladson-Billings, 1994), five were African American and three were White. Race may, however, be a mitigating factor or a template for predisposition in orienting the teacher toward social justice (Darder, 1995). Irvine (1989) reflects this:

Minority teachers . . . bring to the classroom unique, culturally based pedagogical approaches that are often compatible with the learning needs of their minority students. . . Black teachers are more likely to understand students' personal style of presentation as well as their language. They frequently exhibit a teaching style that attends to cultural differences in perceptions of authority, instructional delivery and teacher performance, and in their use of culturally familiar speech and events. (p. 51)

Irvine (1989) here highlights that, through their own personal backgrounds Black teachers may have been more acquainted with the needs of Black students. Yet, it is important to note that the gender, race, or ethnicity of the teacher does not automatically lead to effective practice (Nieto, 2000). Rather, it is the *experiences* of the teacher that are salient to this discussion in how they fashioned the practitioner's stance. Race alone does not equate to critical consciousness or the capacity to work well with students. For Etta, growing up and attending schools as a mixed race individual in a small, conservative town significantly affected her outlook on equity. It also influenced why she returned to the context in which she was a student to become a teacher and impacted her goals for her students. She remembered well the population with which she worked and how their geographic location limited their worldviews. I sometimes wondered if Etta's insider status as a member of this community served to protect her from scrutiny when she may have pushed the envelope with her pedagogy. This was in regard to both her fellow teachers, some of whom had taught her and could have questioned her methods, and the parents of her students who knew Etta, her sister, and her mother.

Each teacher's characteristic, however, did not necessarily match with her social justice focus issue. Etta was mixed-race, but she advocated most for her LGBTQI students; Beverly was White, but was concerned with her students' socioeconomic status; and Tate identified as a lesbian, but worked to acknowledge race and inequities with her students. Thus, although qualities of their backgrounds may have *oriented* the teachers toward social justice, those aspects could not be said to directly transfer to what they did. Reasons for this are not clear, and there is a dire need for more research in this area. Also, these teachers' experiences are very different and we do in fact need a diverse body of teachers. The questions that this leads to are: What experiences in teachers' backgrounds make a difference in reference to social justice? How we

can think about affecting teachers who have not had these experiences? And, for those who have had experiences that might lend them toward social justice, how we can foster critical awareness and employment of the experiences they have had? I will return to these questions in the final chapter.

Perspectives on Collaboration and Community: Checklists and Critical Colleagues

In addition to the centrality of teachers' backgrounds in their orientation toward social justice, another theme that is central across all three cases is the limited occurrence of *critical collegueship* (Lord, 1994), although coded instances of collaboration were high in each case (see Appendix O). This area validates that the frequency in which a theme arose in the data did not necessarily equate to its quality, particularly in terms of the way instances related to social justice. There were numerous incidents of the *community and collaboration theme* for each participant, yet once I delved into each I found that these were shallow allusions, meaning they referenced meetings or the creation of lessons that satisfied bureaucratic requirements. In addition, the teachers varied in the degree to which they aspired for meaningful relationships with colleagues. In the following section, I discuss the requirements for collaboration at each school and how they manifested in practice. I explain their tendency to lead to contrived collegiality and comfortable collaboration, and finally, I examine two instances that happened when one teacher attempted to solicit critique in her context.

Administrative Expectations in Professional Learning Communities

At all three schools, administrators required educators to participate in professional learning communities (PLCs) wherein they co-planned with colleagues who taught the same subject. Professional learning communities themselves actually have a contradictory history and

purpose; although they can offer teachers a space to combat the individualistic feeling and isolation that schools have a tendency to promote collaboration (Britzman, 1986; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990), researchers have documented how they have also been used to “facilitate the smooth and uncritical adoption of preferred forms of action (new teaching styles) introduced by experts from elsewhere” (p. 230). These external impositions reflect a “trend towards the centralization of bureaucratic control, the tightening of administrative surveillance over both curriculum content and pedagogical process” (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990) as well as an obsessive focus on standardized test-based data due to the accountability movement (Datnow, 2011). What results from the mandates of districts and administrators for PLCs is contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1994), which “replaces spontaneous, unpredictable, and difficult-to-control forms of teacher-generated collaboration with forms of collaboration that are captured, contained, and contrived” (p. 195-196). Within meetings that promote contrived collegiality, other stakeholders generally prescribe the duration and content for the educators involved.

Evidence from the data suggests that Etta, Beverly, and Tate all engaged at times in contrived collegiality. For instance, Etta attended weekly PLC meetings held during lunch with her colleagues who also taught English I and English II. Administrators provided strict instructions for these gatherings including “One required norm: PLCs will discuss student learning only.” They also provided teachers with standard checklists reproduced from DuFour and Eaker’s (1998) *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* for the group to use to determine their own norms and to assess their ongoing productivity. Etta referred to this when I asked about her PLC, stating:

You have this list, this agenda that they want you to talk about. So you’re not really getting an opportunity to discuss lessons or brainstorm ideas, you’re really just going through the motions. You’re like ok, check check check.

All three emphasized the expectation for common instruction, meaning that teachers would align content, lessons, and standards. District officials and administrators expected, for instance, that each teacher would cover the same material in the same way at the same time. This was problematic for these English teachers whose access to resources limited the capacity to use texts at the same time. However, they did loosely attend to these mandates. For instance, Beverly explained, “We teach the same terms, we give the exact same test. Um, and we give the same article of the week and the same, we do this morphemes quiz.” Etta and Tate similarly shared that they taught identical skills and standards as other teachers, although they may have accomplished these differently.

The expectation for matching instruction inevitably led to common assessments, which was also addressed in PLCs. Etta received contradictory messages from the school and the district about this, where school leaders seemed to communicate a level of trust for teachers and respect for the art of teaching, and as long as teachers were planning together and addressing the same learning targets, instruction and texts could differ. Yet, she felt that information they received from the district communicated that they should be uniform in their place in the pacing guide. Tate’s district was much more clear on this, however, and the district provided a common assessment at the end of every nine weeks that was the identical for every eighth grade language arts teacher. The content of this assessment was shared with teachers in workshops and educators were expected to work backward to plan instructional strategies to teach the skills evaluated. Thus, according to district and administration guidelines, designing shared lesson plans and addressing common assessments were central to the operation of PLCs and contrived collegiality was one result.

The Reality of Professional Learning Communities

In actuality, however, these meetings focused on more than just checklists, planning, and analysis of data. Teachers involved also included discussions on pacing, sharing books, and upcoming school events such as field trips. Sometimes teachers considered issues related to students, but these instances were mostly related to clerical work, such as how to notify parents of student failure or how to provide work for students currently sentenced to In-School Suspension. Sometimes, they shared assignments, providing ideas for one another for their current unit or they reported generally on how students performed on an assessment. These were moments of *comfortable collaboration* (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996) which is “thin, superficial, and congenial,” and which “restricts the extent to which teachers can inquire into and advise one another on their practice” (Kutsyuruba, 2011, p. 547). This illustrated that although the teachers perceived the meetings as outside of their actual practice and as an additional responsibility, they were not necessarily viewed negatively. Rather, as Etta shared, “People get along, and I that people are willing, more than willing to support each other,” and Tate was adamant about how much she enjoyed working with the colleagues on her team. Research has also shown that collaborative culture can exist within contrived meetings (Datnow, 2011) because of the propensity of teachers who want to support one another and engage in a sort of cheerleader-type role (Glazier, Boyd, Hughes, Able, Mallous, 2012). Thus, despite the imposition of external requirements, the teachers’ there was an overall sense of camaraderie, albeit a lighthearted one, experienced by the teachers in the study.

Teacher attempts at critical collaboration. This general sense, however, restricted teachers from genuine co-construction of materials or critical consideration of issues. Instead of fully working together with colleagues, the teachers found ways to subvert the structure. In part,

this was because of access to resources and in part, as the teachers explained, it was due to their own preferences. Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) note this as a positive reaction to contrived collegiality, writing, “The saving grace is that not all teachers, by any means, are converted by this supervisory evangelism. Many resist, use it for their own purposes, or strategically distance themselves from what is required” (p. 239). Tate best exemplified this with her involvement in her PLC. As a team, the group was required to submit common weekly lesson plans that fulfilled certain requirements. They acquiesced and each week generated the documents. However, in practice, Tate shared that they actually all did different things in their classrooms. She lamented the extra work of the social studies department, who submitted lesson plans individually because they wanted to teach differently but which was also negatively looked upon and encouraged to be more alike. She felt that her department was circumventing this pressure by providing administrators what they wanted but at the same time the teachers satisfied their own needs because they quietly maintained autonomy.

The teachers also referenced how their own preferences or mismatched visions for teaching limited authentic collaboration. Etta referred to the fact that her approach was unlike her colleagues, saying “It’s hard because we have different ideas of what best practice are.” She cited one particular conservative teacher for whom she felt her methods would not work. Likewise, Etta said she would not want that teacher’s plans. She thus felt that common lesson plans would not fit at her school, so she engaged in comfortable collaboration in meetings, listening to her colleagues, sharing ideas, and then doing as she wished in her classroom. Beverly similarly felt that her personality and image of teaching differed from her colleagues, sharing “I think that we disagree about how to do certain things. So . . . we’re generally reading the same stuff but like this week I didn’t want to do *The Lady or the Tiger*, I wanted to do *The*

Lottery so I was just like I'm doing this. But we're all kind of teaching the same concepts." Her way of working around disagreement with colleagues was comparable to Etta in that she did as she wished behind closed doors. All three teachers felt the pressure to be more alike, but, as Beverly said, "that takes away all of your freedom as a teacher" and thus each resisted.

Limits of teacher attempts at critical collaboration. The challenge of these subversions, however, is that in subscribing to these methods, the teachers were not able to engage in meaningful collaboration around pedagogy and address qualitative student success. They also rarely participated in critical collegueship (Lord, 1994), which "requires that teachers engage with one another in ways that move beyond surface and simple solutions" (Glazier, Boyd, Hughes, Able, and Mallous, 2012, p. 9). In communities that exhibit critical collegueship, teachers embrace "ambiguity and disequilibrium," and engage in "critique of self and others" (Glazier, Boyd, Hughes, Able, and Mallous, 2012, p. 9). Research has shown that these types of relationships, where teachers make their practice transparent, and solicit feedback from one another can enhance teacher growth and effectiveness (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Little, 2003; Pfeiffer and Featherstone (1997).

For teaching for social justice specifically, the literature continuously refers to the importance of teachers working in critical communities (Cochran-Smith, 1999; Grant & Agosto, 2008; Nieto, 2000). Nieto (2000), for example, avows:

Developing a community of critical friends opens up teachers' classrooms and their perspectives, so that they can acknowledge that all students should be the concern of all teachers. What is needed are not simply peers who support who one another, essential as this may be, but peers who debate, critique, and challenge one another to go beyond their current ideas and practices. Developing a community of critical friends is one way of facing difficult issues, and it is one more step in the journey of transformation. (p. 185-186)

Here Nieto (2000) draws the connection between teacher communities and how they can help teachers recognize issues of equity. Yet, these groups not only serve to propel members' social justice beliefs through critical dialogue, but they also provide solidarity in working for social justice, wherein "participants engage in a joint enterprise to develop a whole repertoire of activities, common stories, and ways of speaking and acting for social justice" (Grant & Agosto, 2008, p. 189). Thus, teacher communities can be spaces for teachers to meet with like-minded colleagues and to build support for their pedagogy.

I did not witness, in any of the three cases, many instances of critical collegiality or support for social justice in the participants' conversations with colleagues. Most of their references to collaboration occurred as documented above, whether it was to discuss pacing, common assessments, or general business. I did, however, learn of Etta's attempts to invite assistance for a social justice-related issue and critique of her own practice on two separate occasions. In one, she asked members of her PLC for advice in regard to teaching Macklemore's (2012) song "Same Love." A student requested that she examine it with the class after she used a different Macklemore song in class. "Same Love" addresses issues of equality in federal marriage laws and, at the time, had been recently controversial in news and social media outlets. When Etta broached the topic with her PLC, one teacher, who had not heard the original question, asked Etta what the problem was. When Etta explained the situation and that the song addressed civil rights for same sex individuals, the teacher hardly replied and returned to her task at hand of sorting books. Another teacher in the room never looked up from her space. A third teacher listened intently but said nothing. Only one colleague, Mrs. Stone, who Etta later identified as an ally, suggested that she allow students to bring in songs for annotation that contained a social message or dealt with human rights, since that was the theme of the unit. This

way, they decided, the onus of responsibility was on the students, but at the same time Etta had not shut down the conversation. The “discrete silence” (Huckin, 2002) amongst the group was noteworthy and illustrates how Etta’s attempt to solicit feedback was thwarted by a disinterest or discomfort with the topic.

In a second instance, Etta offered herself for critique in a School Improvement Team meeting, sharing that it was difficult to help students accomplish piecemeal learning targets in an English course because of the circular nature of the subject. She expressed this struggle as a question in the larger group’s discussion of the requirement to post daily learning targets on their whiteboards. The focus of the broad conversation was how to determine if students actually acquired the skill in the target or if the teachers’ posting existed only for a nominal purpose. Instead of considering Etta’s point or offering ways to amend the procedure for her concern, interlocutors immediately offered solutions, such as making the goal on the board more general or including outcome-based language in the post. They ignored Etta’s attempt at a critical conversation on displaying learning targets in general or on the nature of her subject area. When we talked about this in an interview later, Etta felt that this seemed to happen to her often. She sensed that her colleagues viewed her as a new teacher seeking advice rather than a critical member hoping to encourage conversation. Thus, both the teachers’ subversions as reactions to the structure of their PLCs, and the avoidance of colleagues both contributed to the scarcity in depth of collaboration common across all three contexts observed.

The Challenge to Work for Social Change: Social Justice as a Verb

Perhaps the most outstanding theme that arose from all three teachers and contexts taken collectively is the uncertainty around the promotion of students as change agents. Few coded

instances of this literacy arose in each data set (see Appendix O), and, once I examined the pattern, this revealed that teachers were limited in terms of what they did in class to advocate social change with students. This was predominately in reference to the content they used and the types of assignments they employed with students. In what follows, I examine the literature on social justice teaching to build a case for including this aspect in instruction and to illustrate how acting for social change could appear in classrooms. Then, I consider why it might be that teachers experience difficulty in propelling students toward change.

Promoting Change as Part of Social Justice Teaching

In teaching posited toward social justice, belief in the human capacity to exercise agency and a commitment to cultivating students' propensity for change are non-negotiable (Bell, 1997; North, 2008). Social justice in education's theoretical predecessor, multicultural education, also included this call for action. For instance, in describing education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist, Sleeter and Grant (1993) explain that those who work within this approach help students "learn to begin seeing themselves as powerful agents within a social institution" (p. 228). Furthermore, in Banks' (2010) highest level of the Integration of Ethnic Content model, the Social Action Approach involves assisting students "acquire the knowledge, values, and skills they need to participate in social change so that marginalized and excluded racial, ethnic, and cultural groups can become full participants in U. S. society and the nation will move closer to attaining its democratic ideas" (p. 245). Banks (2010) includes teaching students how they can "as individuals and groups, influence the social and political systems in U. S. society" (p. 245). The transition of emphasis toward *social justice*, however, from multicultural education was intended to make the purpose of social change and activism even *more* explicit, as these original intentions of multicultural education were often diluted in practice (McDonald &

Zeichner, 2009; North, 2008). Yet, the transition to social justice has kept the connection to fostering democratic participation that multicultural education began. Nieto and Bode (2008), for instance, tell us that an “essential component of social justice is creating a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change. Creating such environments can provide students with an apprenticeship in democracy, a vital part of preparing them for the future” (p. 11). The cultivation of change, they cite, will situate students to become active adults. Finally, Grant and Agosto (2008) declare, “social justice includes supporting students in understanding and transforming their own positions in society and as citizens in a democracy” (p. 191). Thus, the notion of students as change agents who participate in a democracy is a notion firmly rooted in the literature on teaching that toils for equity.

The importance of deconstruction paired with reconstruction. The first step in this type of work is providing students with a language of critique with which they are able to name injustices in their own context (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and those that exist on a global scale. Once students have become familiar with this discourse and are able to recognize and articulate injustice, it is imperative that teachers help them locate spaces in which they can effect change. Reflecting this point, Kennedy (1992) concludes, “People need to be capable of acting once they know” (p. 43) and Peterson (2007) notes this importance especially for students, who through performing deeds “see themselves as actors in the world, not just things to be acted upon” (p. 34). As Walker (2003) notes, therefore, “social justice is and must be a verb (about doing and acting) as well as a noun” (p. 185). This is a crucial part of the process, for if we do not encourage our students to become active participants in their worlds, if we “unconsciously and uncritically act within our Discourses, we are complicit with their values and thus can, unwittingly, become party to very real damage done to others” (Gee, 1996, p. 190). Similarly,

Peterson (2007) emphasizes the effects of inaction, stating, “If we neglect to include an activist component in our curricula, we cut students off from the possibility of social change. *We model apathy as a response to the world’s problems* [emphasis added]” (p. 34). Thus, it is crucial to not only teach our students to recognize inequities and to critique them, but also to act upon them.

Although Etta, Beverly, and Tate made efforts to help their students acknowledge injustices, they provided few ways for students to act upon their knowledge. As documented in her individual case study report, Etta went to great lengths to teach her students about historic and current conflicts, yet when students wished to act she had few suggestions for them and did not integrate social action into her course. Hackman (2005) cautions, “Teaching about issues of oppression without proffering social action tools for students ultimately creates a classroom atmosphere that lacks hope and creative energy” (p. 106) which is what I observed in Etta’s class. Etta’s employment of critical pedagogy was noteworthy and she facilitated students’ analytical dispositions such as in her exposing United States’ involvement in foreign affairs of which students were previously unaware. Similarly, Tate broached topics of social justice with her students. She flirted with a language of critique that was less explicit than Etta, but she nonetheless delved into issues related to segregated neighborhoods and unequal rights. Yet, it is crucial to recognize that “Deconstruction alone can foster despair. Reconstruction, the remaking of culture in ways that educate social consciousness. . . can foster hope that social change is possible” (Kelly, 1997, p. 81). Teachers have to find ways to help students *act*. North (2008) writes, “Education for social change requires that students and teachers actively transform social injustices, not just study them” (p. 1194). Simply talking is not enough.

In Beverly's case, the focus on curriculum that was multicultural without critique did not facilitate students' thinking on how they could affect their worlds. She reflects what McDonald and Zeichner (2009) critique about the tendencies of multicultural education in practice, which "celebrate cultural diversity and the experience of the individual while paying less attention to societal structures and institutionalized oppression" (p. 597). Even in Beverly's outlook on students' lives as difficult there was a potential to encourage students toward action. Zembylas (2013) documents this notion as "critical pedagogies of compassion," which offer "an alternative vision of agency for students" (p. 515) because teachers who practice this pedagogy "want to reclaim altruism by inspiring small-scale actions of solidarity that constitute students as active participants of community life" (p. 515). His work gives us a framework for re-interpreting Beverly's treatment of students from in need of reprieve and rather helps us to see how she could have used their circumstances to encourage them to action.

Examples of Social Action in Practice

Despite the well-documented call to action by social justice theorists, Grant and Agosto (2008) lament that there is "little attention given to student agency" in the literature on teaching for social justice. Yet, some models do exist, and these occur at all levels, from elementary to high school (Sleeter & Grant, 1993). Furthermore, these examples elucidate how inciting students to action can occur in a multitude of ways. They include Peterson (2007), who in recounting his work with students shares "I tell students they can write letters, circulate petitions, and talk to other classes and children about their concerns. My students have gone with me to marches that demanded immigrant rights. . . (p. 34). Another exemplar is Morrell and Duncan-Andrade's (2005/06) work in which their students undertook projects to inform the general public on issues of concern to them that they felt had been misrepresented, such as "the media's

interactions with and portrayals of urban youth of color” (p. 5). Results of their project included students writing for their high school paper, submitting to online publications, and presenting at national conferences “with the intent of providing socially-informed reporting (p. 6).

Westheimer and Kahne (1998) report on a whole-school endeavor at C. Wright Mills Middle School at which “the curricular approach. . . is to emphasize what the Mills staff call transdisciplinary projects aimed at social needs, and to couple these with academic analyses of the social and institutional context” (p. 7). Thus students worked together on projects such as addressing violence or hunger and, after completing extensive research, presented their findings to parents and local organizations and exercised civic participation on the issues. Sleeter (1996) notes the potential far-reaching effects of teaching that incorporates social action, telling the story of a group of high school students who persuaded the Nebraska state legislature to pass a law requiring multicultural education in schools. She notes, “children and youth who learn to use the democratic process effectively to advance ideals of social justice can become adults who are able to actualize the ideals of justice and equality through the political process” (p. 246). These myriad forms of action demonstrate how students can involve themselves in work for social justice.

Examples of students working for change often include some sort of collaboration with the local community. This reflects Moje’s (2007) assertion, “Social justice pedagogy should, in other words, offer possibilities for transformation, not only of the learner but also of the social and political contexts in which learning and other social action take place” (p. 31). A model of this is in Ladson-Billings’ (2006) account of a teacher who channeled her student’s frustration with drugs and crime in his community into a community research project and presentation to his local city council. Other examples specific to English classrooms include Simmons’ (2012)

suggestions for use of *The Hunger Games* trilogy to encourage students to action and solicit community support around issues of hunger, involuntary labor, forced warriors, and the sex trade. Her social action projects “incorporate research, technology, expository and persuasive writing skills, public speaking, reflection, and creativity, not to mention the reading of the mentor text” (p. 28). Thus, she believes that discipline-related skills can be fostered while students are simultaneously engaged in civic action. Christensen (2008), a leading scholar in the combination of social justice and English, purports this as well, stating, “we don’t do social justice at the expense of students’ gaining the kind of skills they need to be able to traverse the world” (p. 60). This point is important for anticipating arguments against or teachers’ hesitations toward the inclusion of social justice action projects in classroom curriculum.

Individual and Contextual Limitations in Regard to Change

Why could it have been that social change was the missing piece for each teacher? Why are other elements, such as implementing multicultural curriculum, building relationships, and conceptualizing students as capable easier than helping students act for change? What accounts for the difficulty? I argue the answer resides in the fact that working for change often includes spaces and actors beyond the classroom context, beyond teachers’ immediate realm of control. In addition, each teacher’s comfort level, as well as the structure of school, significantly affects the degree to which they are willing and able to go beyond those walls. I will address each of these issues here to further consider what might restrict teachers from fulfilling the call for enacting change in social justice classrooms.

Stakeholders

Working outside of classrooms and engaging students in authentic projects that address social justice issues inevitably involved other key actors, such as parents, administrators, and

community officials. This work would require a shared vision on particular issues, which is difficult to attain, even amongst groups that claim to want to work for social justice (Zollers, Albert, & Cochran-Smith, 2000). Resistance to social justice teaching has been well documented (Applebaum, 2010; Copenhaver-Johnson's, 2010; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Kumashiro, 2002; McIntyre, 1997), and there is no guarantee that these figures, especially parents, who have a strong impact on curricular matters, would support a teacher's efforts. I witnessed this in Etta's case when a student relayed to her one day after class that his father did not like her because she was Middle-Eastern, and he relayed that his father disagreed with her teaching the class to consider Rwanda a genocide. He openly shared this with Etta. In the focus group, another student, Ethan, shared that his father was disgruntled over how Etta handled the incident in which Ethan and another student, Tim, clashed over Tim's refusal to stand and join the class in the Pledge of Allegiance each day. Thus, the threat of resistance to social justice teaching could be one reason that teachers feel limited.

Institutional Pressures

This anticipated resistance could lead teachers to experience trepidation with regard to taking a political stance and debunking the myth of neutrality in education (Cochran-Smith, 2009). Although scholars have dispelled claims that education is not ideological bound, there is still a pervasive sense of objectivity purported in schools, especially public schools in the state in which the three teachers taught. Zeichner, (2009) avows, "We as teachers, at whatever level, must act with greater political clarity about whose interests we are furthering in our daily actions . . . because like it or not and whether acknowledged or not, we are taking a stand through our actions and through our words" (p. 12). Yet, in reality, teachers are not actually encouraged to make their commitments explicit.

The teachers in the study also expressed fear related to ignoring curricular mandates. When I asked Beverly what limited her social justice, she replied, “The lack of trust for teachers that is increasing every year,” and when I followed up by asking what would happen if she did exactly what she wanted she responded that she might “get fired.” When I arrived to Pacific High School, Etta ha been reprimanded earlier in the year by the district Curriculum Specialist for including students’ memoirs as non-fiction, and she voiced anxiety in reference to how closely she followed the pacing guide. Finally, although Tate ‘played the game’ and submitted fabricated common lesson plans to her principal, she did this out of fear of the consequences for acting otherwise. The teachers’ fears of backlash from external players, then, played a key role in how far outside of their classrooms they were willing to venture for social justice.

Another issue with the teachers’ comfort levels is that all in this study were in their second year in their positions. Research has shown that a teacher’s focus shifts over time from their preoccupation with individualized issues in teaching and lesson planning to the broader concerns of their classroom (Feiman-Nemser, 1983). They gradually begin to see outside of themselves and can pay more attention to students and their needs. This transition occurs as teachers feel more confident in their practice over time. The same could be true here in relation to social justice and teaching. As novice teachers, Etta, Beverly, and Tate might begin to incorporate new methods and tasks that require their students to act beyond their classrooms. For example, I noticed that once Etta realized through our conversations and in member-checking that her students were in a state of helplessness she seemed concerned and mentioned wanting to do more with students on the topic of Syria. Likewise, Beverly mentioned projects in which students research an issue of concern in their school. She had not yet conceptualized this

as translating to action. Nonetheless, the potential to design change agent projects was thus present, and it could appear later in the teachers' careers.

Structure of Schools

A final reason that the teachers could have felt limited in their capacity to create social change with students resides in the very nature of schools. Despite recent efforts to encourage teachers to work collaboratively, we know that schools are structured in ways that continue to encourage educators to work with silo mentalities. High schools, for instance are separated by discipline and governed by bells. This limits how students could work on interdisciplinary projects and their capacity to work within fluid time constraints. In addition, instruction in public schools in this state is overwhelmingly expected to occur *inside the classroom*; this makes it difficult for teachers to conceptualize working with community officials unless those figures come to the school.

Etta repeatedly mentioned the lack of time for teachers to do anything additional in her context. On many occasions, I watched her struggle to eat lunch between the required "Smart Lunch" tutoring sessions and meetings held during lunch at her school. Tate coached junior varsity basketball and was preoccupied until late many evenings. During the day, teachers were responsible for supervising the many students in their class. With such little time and so many limits of their context, it would thus be extremely challenging to coordinate social justice action projects.

Concluding Cross-Case Analysis

Analysis across the cases led to the emergence of three general intersections. First, teachers' biographies, including their educational experiences, significantly affected their social

justice dispositions. Events from their lives, particularly related to race and sexual orientation, led them to empathize with their students and to treat them with high esteem as well to teach them about the topics themselves. The second overarching finding is that all three participants reflected varying degrees of collaboration in their contexts. They participated in required professional learning communities and fulfilled the dictates of administration. However, at the same time that they were active members of these communities, they struggled within them for authentic conversation, genuine efforts for student growth, and critical collegueship. Despite the potential for collaborative settings to promote equity, contextual factors precluded the extent to which teachers could partake in such groups. The final outstanding theme that arose across the three cases is the limitation in nurturing students as change agents. Although they made efforts to include multicultural content and to varied gradations enhance students' sociopolitical consciousness, there were very little opportunities for social action in these classrooms. This was likely due to a number of factors, including levels of support from the school and local community as well as pressures from stakeholders. Taken collectively, then, the three teachers' stories elucidate the ways that social justice can both come to be in educators' practice and the ways it remains a struggle.

CHAPTER 8

IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In the preceding chapter, I provided themes that were common across all three cases: the centrality of teachers' biographies to their social justice stances, the limited instances of authentic collaboration and critical collegueship in each context, and the difficulty in cultivating students as change agents. In what follows, I offer the implications for teacher education from each of those findings. I then provide further considerations that the study prompts, noting the significance of context and the ambiguity in definitions of social justice. Finally, I discuss a main theoretical tension in social justice teaching as seen from the cases, and I offer directions for future research on social justice in English Education.

Implications for Teacher Education

There are myriad places where we could begin to devote our attention given the story from the three teachers' cases. Schooling as an institution in general, for example, with the strict mandates the teachers described, needs reform. The lack of teacher autonomy that is rapidly declining, as seen in the restrictions on curriculum in this study, could also be an area for advocacy. However, because this study focuses on the *practices* of three teachers, and because I view social justice from a new literacies framework, which presupposes that we can cultivate social justice skills, I turn to teacher education as a distinct point on this horizon. Like Cochran-Smith (2008), I make "no assumption here that teachers alone, whether through individual or group efforts, can substantially fix the schools or alter the life chances of students. But a major assumption is that they can join with others as part of larger social movements for change" (p.

19). I thus offer an assortment of recommendations for how we in teacher education can do our part to work for equity.

Navigating Teacher Biographies

Given that identity and experience can affect professionals' practice in both productive and limiting ways, how can those of us in teacher education cultivate in students with limited exposure to diversity the tools to mitigate their latent scripts? On the other end of the spectrum, how can we help students who have had experiences that might predispose them to social justice to recognize and use those understandings in beneficial ways? How we can enhance teacher candidates' literacy of being self-aware and applying this to practice? I explore each of those questions in the next two sections.

Engage preservice teachers with autobiography and critical reflection. In either case, whether teachers have worked with diverse populations or have had limited multicultural experiences, candidates need avenues in which to examine their socialization and to reflect on it critically. We cannot assume that because students grew up in diverse setting or have had experiences that they are critically conscious (Hinchey, 2004). Thus, because beliefs can act as filters for new knowledge (Garmon, 2004; Tatto, 1996) as well as affect future practice (Delpit, 2012; Holt-Reynolds, 1992), numerous scholars have cited autobiography and critical reflection as essential components to social justice education (Causey, Thomas, Armento, 1999; Cochran-Smith 1995; Gay, 2010; Grant, 1991; Zeichner, 1992). This generally takes the form of writing assignments in which students are required to explore their own backgrounds. Uncovering one's beliefs about diversity and achieving self-knowledge (Britzman, 2000) can be uncomfortable for some students (McIntyre, 1997, 2002, Nieto, 2000), yet, as hooks (1994) declares, "we have to learn how to appreciate difficulty, too, as a state of intellectual development" (p. 154). Thus,

while confronting attitudes and beliefs can be distressing, it is necessary to do so as a practice to cultivate social justice dispositions.

The use of autobiography, narrative, and critical reflection occurs in teacher education classrooms for a number of social justice goals. In some arenas, the target is to confront students' racial beliefs. Cochran-Smith (1995, 2000) has described assignments in which she asks preservice teachers to construct personal narratives about the experiences which molded their views of race and culture, and Gay (2010) expands upon narrative work in the traditional form by inviting students to compose dialogic poems on their "ethnicity, culture, and individuality," create mixed-media posters to convey their identities, and pack a "metaphorical suitcase of things they would be taking on their journeys toward multicultural competence" (p. 148). Her innovative methods with autobiography are meant to open paths for critical examination in a way that is less threatening to students. This work with student narratives has been cited as vital especially for white preservice teachers, whose unconscious experiences with privilege abound (McIntyre, 1997), and whose good intentions (Milner, 2011) and colorblind ideology (Cochran-Smith, 1995) need to be deconstructed.

Beyond using personal story to probe dispositions toward race, other scholars have utilized similar means to recognize class and heterosexual biases. Causey, Thomas, and Armento (1999) explore autobiographical essays with teacher candidates who illustrate classism. Vavrus (2009) employs autoethnography with preservice teachers as a way to "provide a critically reflective space for teacher candidates to consider their teacher identity formations as shaped by their lived experiences with gender and sexuality" (p. 385). In these narratives, students revealed their memories of gender-molding events from their own educational

backgrounds and explored “assumed heterosexuality” as “the norm” (p. 387), and they made plans for future curriculum with their potential students.

It is important to note that while many of these methods are intended for traditional white, middle class preservice teachers with the goal of dispelling myths and stereotypes about groups who are perceived as different from them, autobiographical work can also be useful with *any* teacher candidate. This includes instances such as Etta in my study, who was raised mixed-race and whose experiences predisposed her toward social justice or Tate, whose experiences as a lesbian caused her to be sympathetic to other minority groups. Loutzenheiser (1998) notes the advantage of requiring students to compose a “cultural autobiography” (p. 207) to recognize how race, class, and gender have intersected in their own lives. Thus, all students need to become aware of how their experiences impact the ways that they view students. Hence, there is vast potential for personal narratives in teacher education.

Provide preservice teachers experiences in varied cultural contexts. Particularly salient for students who have had little experience in diverse contexts, researchers argue that one way to help preservice teachers identify and negotiate their values and beliefs in relation to diversity is through hands-on work in the field of education. Traditional field experiences include a teaching practicum wherein a preservice student teaches under the tutelage of a cooperating teacher, and some have suggested that teacher education programs become more thoughtful and deliberate in how they place students within these locales. Cochran-Smith (1991) advocates arranging students alongside teachers who are working “against the grain” so that they experience socially-just teaching firsthand. Yet, Lane, Lacefield-Parachini, and Isken (2003) have illuminated that such teachers are not always accessible and thus they propose that student teachers who work with guiding teachers that subscribe to dissimilar paradigms can also be

productive for both the student and the experienced teacher who can learn from dialogic interaction that questions and critiques schooling practices. The key to either model is the explicit emphasis placed on working toward equity in practicum placements.

While many teacher candidates highlight the teaching internship as vital to their learning, other types of field placements intentionally position students in settings with non-dominant students so that they glean information about their future students' communities (Causey et al.). These assignments range from involvement in community-based organizations (McDonald, Tyson, Brayko, Bowman, Delport, & Shimomura, 2011), to tutoring in after-school programs (Bondy & Davis, 2000), to total immersion in a community comprised of individuals who are different from them (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). The aim is to expose students to groups with whom they may have never worked, dispel deficit thinking, and involve students in environments outside of schools to provide a more robust picture of the inter-workings of the community. In research examining preparation of teachers for urban schools, Murrell (2000, 2006) has built upon communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) to develop a model in which he insists that the first field experience of a teacher education program be in a community placement rather than in a school because preservice teachers can learn much from the unofficial teachers who run the programs in which they assist. Finally, still others have cited the propensity of service-learning as a field experience to develop preservice teachers' "abilities to question their own assumptions, societal inequities, and existing curriculum" (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007). The service-learning model emphasizes that both the preservice teacher and those aided at the site mutually benefit from the exchange. Findings from studies on community placements have suggested that these can be transformative for students, helping

them to debunk prior assumptions (Baldwin et al., 2007) and become aware of the cultures of students who were different from them (Sleeter, 2001).

One aspect central to the field experience approach mentioned in this literature is the careful connection back to the university context (Causey et al., 1999; Zeichner, 1992). As Zeichner (2006) argues, “we need. . . to situate more of teacher preparation outside of the college and university campus in schools and communities, but we need to do much more than just send them out there to pick up what they need to learn by a process of osmosis” (p. 334). If community work is to have a lasting impact, university educators must require students to process what they are seeing and experiencing in placements (Sleeter, 2001). This can occur through the use of reflective papers (Baldwin et al., 2007) or planned discussion (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

We cannot change preservice students’ demographics, nor is that the implication here. We cannot travel back in time to affect the ways that they were socialized. We can, however, provide teacher candidates with opportunities and make pronounced efforts to ensure that those are meaningful. We can help them build genuine relationships with people they perceive as different from them, work in spaces outside of their comfort zones, and learn about communities with which they have little experience. None of these guarantees transformation, but they are starting points to break down barriers and help students become more critically conscious so that they in turn can be more socially just teachers.

Cultivating Skills for Collaboration

Despite the fact that school districts boast requirements for teacher collaboration and cite its potential benefit for students, the teachers in this study reported that very little of the time they spent in PLCs was devoted to genuine lesson planning or engaging in deep conversations

with colleagues. From what we know about how productive teacher communities *can* be (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Little, 2002; Pfeiffer & Featherstone, 1997), this was alarming. How do we help teachers learn to be critical colleagues? How do we show them where to go for support from like-minded peers? I address these questions in what proceeds.

Model collaboration in teacher education. Although group projects are commonplace in teacher education courses, structuring experiences for students to participate in discourse communities and asking them to plan lessons together are less prevalent. In traditional English methods courses, students are required to submit unit plans that they will implement in their anticipated student teaching internships (see Smagorinsky, 2008). They often painstakingly create these as individual assignments, and they generally choose texts based on their cooperating teacher's recommendations and glean methods and materials from these experts in addition to information from online searches. They adapt lessons to reflect their personal goals and meet principles stipulated by the course instructor.

If we wish to facilitate students who are capable of collaborating on meaningful lessons that promote social justice in their careers as in-service teachers, why not simulate these partnerships in teacher education? Students who will teach the same subjects or grade levels could design units or even individual lessons with a team to gain experience working with colleagues in their discipline. They could practice what it looks like to integrate social justice and critical literacy with the texts they are expected to teach. They could also learn to see colleagues as assets, breaking down the “narratives of individual heroism” (Grant & Agosto, 2008, p. 189) to which preservice teachers often subscribe. Glazier (2007) utilized a collaborative unit design model in her work with English teacher candidates and reported that they “developed an inquiry stance and have essentially made critical literacy their ‘own’” (p.

145). There are thus possibilities for shared lesson design to affect students' theoretical and practical knowledge as well as their capacities for working with others.

Not only can we enable productive co-planning with teacher candidates, but we can also design experiences in which preservice students engage in discourse about student concerns, their professional practice, and social justice issues. Constructing and monitoring discourse communities in the preservice space allows for teachers to become comfortable talking about traditionally perceived controversial topics such as race, class, and gender. Research has shown particularly how white females, which again comprise the large population of teachers, falter in discourse around “hot lava” (Glazier, 2003) topics (Frankenberg, 1993; McIntyre, 1997). Discourse communities afford students and instructors the opportunity to examine conversation closely through language documentation and attention to the ways we construct arguments about, for instance, students' parents. These could occur within English specific settings or across disciplines so that students could develop the skills necessary to work with other professionals, such as specialists in a school, which research has shown is one area in which teachers of all levels struggle (Able et al., 2012).

Another space tangential to teacher education in which to affect collaboration is through the actual partner sites where preservice candidates observe and student teach. Etta, Beverly, and Tate, the three teachers in this study, all fulfilled the student teaching portion of their programs at the same placement school, Olton High. Throughout my conversations with them, all three referred longingly to the collaborative culture they witnessed there. Etta, as an example, said:

Where I student taught I felt like most of the teachers were fantastic and I think the teachers here [at Pacific High School] are. . . but I don't know if that's—I feel like in a

lot of ways it's still old school teaching methods. It's not, you don't have any time to PLC. Or to actually have a conversation. . .the way that they PLCed was perfect. Maybe not perfect, but. . .

The teachers shared that, at Olton, the structure of the day was such that the English department could--and did--eat lunch together. Beverly referenced how shocked she was at the bureaucracy in her current county as opposed to what she experienced at Olton, which she referenced to account for the differences in teamwork. For a short period, then, these teachers were able to actually experience being a part of a collaborative culture because they attended meetings and were treated as colleagues at the school. They genuinely co-planned with the teachers while they student taught. While this experience was positive, it left them in their current contexts yearning for the same type of relationships. None of the three felt her existing environment reflected what she knew could be possible. Their experiences at Olton High with a community of teachers who were like-minded had shown them otherwise.

There is a silver lining in this narrative. The teachers were all able to imagine the possibility of collaborative culture and use their knowledge of cooperation in a practitioner context to advocate for a similar culture in their current schools. This was because they had *lived* it in their field experiences as preservice teachers. At Olton, they met with colleagues and constructed common lesson plans that they wished to implement, not fabricated plans to submit and check off of a list like Tate experienced at Ivy Middle. They discussed students and their successes, and they problem-solved social justice issues. Thus, integrating requirements for collaboration in school placements offers one way to help students realize the potential of collaborative communities in practice. One additional point here is that if students are not fortunate enough to experience positive collaboration, as were these three, the methods instructor

could nonetheless build on what students see for analysis. These could serve as cases to compare with classmates and students could think through ways to alter the context they discern or to be a productive member of the group.

Help teacher candidates locate spaces for community. A final recommendation for overcoming the barriers the teachers experienced in collaboration with colleagues is to assist preservice candidates in seeking and maintaining networks in which they can feel supported, whether this be in or outside of their schools. Locating like-minded colleagues and forging bonds within the school can help teachers combat isolation and work toward their social justice goals (Nieto, 2000). Beyond that, teacher educators can show students the benefits of belonging to national or state organizations, such as the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) or the International Reading Association (IRA) and their state affiliates. Through membership in these, teachers can connect at conferences or in online forums with colleagues whose interests are similarly aligned, and they can learn about current movements in their field. NCTE in particular offers support and materials for teachers on challenged books. These establishments deliver methods of support and ways to collaborate if, for instance, a teacher's text is questioned for social justice content that might be considered controversial.

Incorporating Critical and Reconstructive Pedagogies and Social Action Projects in English Methods

One of the main findings across the three cases was the challenge of teachers in facilitating students as change agents. Although I discussed teachers' fears and the limitations surrounding this notion, if we are to fully realize social justice in English classrooms we must help our students mitigate those concerns in the preservice classroom. How can we accomplish the aim of facilitating teachers who are comfortable employing the methods of critical pedagogy

in their classrooms? How can we make sure they include reconstruction in their classrooms so as guard against leaving students in despair? How can we help them design social action projects that help students identify themselves as agents of change?

Model critical and reconstructive pedagogies with English texts. To help students learn practices of critical pedagogy, methods instructors can incorporate these in their own instruction and require students to include them in their constructed units and lesson plans. Although it is beyond the scope of this argument to provide a complete portrait of critical pedagogy because, as McLaren (2003) notes, “there is no one critical pedagogy but rather various strands of critical pedagogies,” (p. 227) I here refer to practices through which teachers help students question accepted knowledge, systems of power, and language norms. Freire (1978) explains that critical pedagogy “takes the problems and needs of the students themselves as its starting point” (p. 20) and further elucidates, “a pedagogy becomes critical when an educator. . . has a dialogue with students and methodically challenges them to discover that a critical posture necessarily implies the recognition of the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity” (p. 48). Critical pedagogies thus deconstruct what students take for granted in their own lives in terms of everyday norms and media constructions. Examples of this applied to English Education abound in the literature, and Behrman’s (2008) extensive review of these models offers six general approaches: “(1) reading supplementary texts, (2) reading multiple texts, (3) reading from a resistant perspective, (4) producing counter-texts, (5) conducting student-choice research projects, and (6) taking social action” (p. 482). Methods instructors can help students use a combination of these in their lessons. The idea here is that we need to be explicit about what we want our English teachers to do in the preservice context so that when

they leave the university and begin their professional careers they are well versed in the approach and are able to articulate it to their students and colleagues.

What we want English teachers to do, then, is to *use* texts of multiple forms to accomplish the goals of critical pedagogies. Sometimes, as Beverly in this study illustrated, teachers limit themselves because of what they ‘have’ to include in the classroom by way of district mandate. An argument for critical literacy claims that any text can be taught through an analytical lens. Etta showed us this with her inclusion of exploring gender roles in her instruction of *Romeo and Juliet*. This application to reading print, digital, and other resources exemplifies critical literacy, which Etta and Tate both illustrated in their practice; it was the reconstructive element, which I argue should be inextricable from the analytical, that needed more work. Yet, teachers cannot ignore the need for reconstructive pedagogies once the critical has occurred. Freire (1978) states, “critical literacy is both a narrative for agency as well as a referent for critique.” Critical literacy requires both dismantling systems of power and taking *action*. The next step, then, is helping preservice teachers imagine what can be done with future students toward the goal of social change.

Include research and assignments related to social action. While, as noted in the previous chapter, teachers may feel reluctant to include social action projects in their classrooms, it is possible that this hesitation is due to simply not knowing *how*—how to design action projects so that they are curriculum based, how to solicit community support, or how to evaluate student work in this genre. Most preservice students likely did not engage in these types of activities in their secondary schooling, which we know serves as a point of reference for many on how education should operate (Lortie, 1975). In order to first prove to candidates that social action projects are valuable classroom tools and have the potential to be academically rigorous

when designed appropriately (Christensen, 2008), methods instructors can expose students to examples of such work from the literature in the field (Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Mancina, 2005; Simmons, 2012). Once students have become familiar with this field, they can begin to design their own projects based on the units they will be teaching. A final component could be engaging preservice students in their own social action project related to a topic in the university context or to an issue in the teaching profession. This would enable students to go through the process on their own so they can better assist their upcoming students. These suggestions culminate in the implication that there is a vast need in teacher education to find ways to support our candidates in imagining possibilities for students as change agents. Without this forethought, they will be limited as Etta, Beverly, and Tate were in their follow through for students' involvement outside of the classroom. They will leave students in a deconstructive space when the goal is to show students the potential power of re-building.

Additional Considerations for Social Justice in Education

While I am able to offer recommendations for each of the three cross-case findings, there remain some tensions from this research that warrant further discussion. I studied social justice in the context of English teaching to develop commonalities across sites, yet there is a dialectic within this goal. While overarching themes did emerge, each case is unremittingly unique. We cannot ignore the fact, as shown in each teacher's story, that social justice is largely dependent on context and student population. It is also determined by the teacher's definition. This point begs the question: Should there be some uniformity in the enactment of social justice? Is one method of doing social justice better than another? While I hope my research opens a conversation on these topics, I here posit a few considerations for these queries based on my work.

Social Justice for Whom: Issues of Access in Definitions and Implementation

All three teachers' struggles for social justice were based on their context. This was in regard to both the restrictions they felt from the political culture of their environments and the confines of district mandates on curriculum. Furthermore, the three varied their course texts and approach according to student population. And yet still, this variation also resulted from the teachers' definitions of social justice.

Etta described social justice as a critical stance, and her literacy in critical pedagogy was strong (see Appendix J). She constantly relied on current and historic events as starting points for students' analysis, and she wanted to expose students to other ways of thinking about norms they treated as axiomatic. What is interesting about this is her critical pedagogy overwhelmingly occurred in her Honors English II class. Her struggle in relationship-building was in her Standard English I class. While she used course material in her standard class to foster conversations about social justice topics such as racism and gender stereotypes, critique related to the social milieu was less pervasive there. In her story, I documented how she attributed the differences in her pedagogy to the content of the course. She felt that world literature more readily invited critique.

Beverly and Tate, from a different but related perspective, both defined social justice in terms of equity and as Tate stated, it meant: "giving all students what they need." With their classes composed of mostly minoritized students who were labeled as lower level learners, they included culturally responsive materials. They struggled, however, with critical pedagogies related to them. What was most striking is that when I asked Tate if social justice related to her Academically and Intellectually Gifted class because I had only heard her speak of it in relation to her inclusion class, she grappled with an answer. At the time, she replied "oh definitely," but

could not say how, and we ended the interview there. She returned a week later to tell me that this question had been weighing on her and that she determined social justice connected in the same way to her AIG class as it did to her inclusion class: She was still giving the students what they needed. She felt that the advanced students needed rigorous, exploratory work, so she had designed a Shakespeare research project for them that was completely student-centered. Students' fulfilled daily research requirements in the computer lab and worked in groups to learn and perform scenes. To her, this was exhibiting equity because she was providing learning opportunities based on students' perceived academic needs.

Etta, Beverly, and Tate thus all to a degree executed social justice *the way that they defined it*. These issues lead me to ask: Is one form of social justice better than another? Do all students have equal access to social justice, or should it vary according to the level of students in classrooms? North (2008), begins to shed light on this concern:

Multiple pathways are necessary to create politically engaged, critically aware citizens. When some students are struggling to find food and shelter while others are debating the merits of this advanced placement class over that one, we cannot expect a single approach to social justice education to be effective for all students in all contexts. (p. 1200)

There are no easy answers to these questions, but it does seem that all students should be exposed to curriculum that is rigorous and multicultural *and* gain skills for critique of their social worlds. I thus argue for a broadly defined social justice that is for all students, regardless of track placement or race, class, or gender status. This should include both equity-oriented and anti-oppressive methods such as including a diverse body of literature and forging meaningful relationships with students. Yet, it also must include critique and the cultivation of students' skills for dissecting power relations. This includes helping students locate themselves within

these structures of power so that they can act for change. The teachers in this study struggled to focus on both, the critical and the responsive, simultaneously.

Cautions and Possibilities

While I note each teacher's literacies and where she struggled, I am not advocating a rating scale of teachers' literacies in social justice. To do so would imply that the teachers in this study were not successful, which is untrue. Their efforts to connect with students, their genuine care for student growth, and their tireless energy for their work were outstanding. There is a certain sense of fluidity in social justice-oriented teaching, and we cannot profess that teachers will have every aspect of social justice pedagogy in a perfect package. In fact, as Kumashiro highlights (2001), "even 'proven' lessons or 'master' teachers act in both oppressive and anti-oppressive ways" (p. 10). All three teachers in this study were doing social justice and all three were struggling in some way. Yet, they were battling different challenges in different ways. There was nothing to suggest that if their context had been altered they would not have acted otherwise. Thus, this is not a study of comparing teachers' social justice capacities to one another. It is a study of seeing what is happening in three specific classrooms located in three permanent communities and of what can be possible given those circumstances. Thus, the hope here is that by making these issues transparent, I can open up spaces for conversation around teaching for social justice in English classrooms.

Neither am I suggesting a uniform approach to teaching social justice. This would further strip the autonomy in teaching that is already pervasive in this state. Etta, Beverly, and Tate all worked within the established structure to find ways to express a sense of sovereignty in their profession when they were overwhelmed with pacing guides, required meetings, and state-regulated policies. While I do suggest an overarching definition that expresses an ideological

commitment and a call to action, there is not one best way to ‘do’ social justice. Greene (1998) tells us:

To teach for social justice is to teach for enhanced perception and imaginative explorations, for the recognition of social wrongs, of sufferings, of pestilences wherever and whenever they arise. It is to find models in literature and in history . . . It is to teach so that the young may be awakened to the joy of working for transformation in the smallest place, so that they become healers and change their worlds (p. xlv).

These purposes, the ways to awaken youth, are multitudinous. Assuming this perspective offers teachers tremendous power in selection and in paths on which to guide students. There are thus only models we can show, practices we can emulate, and questions we can ask. This study attempts to offer some of those in a way that is not prescriptive.

I have hoped to show, rather, that pedagogical practices in social justice teaching are much more complicated than the literature portrays. The themes created from the literature did not map equally onto each teacher and the story from practice is wrought with the intricacies of teachers’ strengths, students’ subjectivities, and contextual limitations. After all, teaching is a human endeavor. And in teaching for social justice, that element is crucial to remember.

Directions for Further Research

This study was designed to elucidate how three teachers define and embody social justice literacies in particular contexts. I provided a portrait of each along with the contradictions that inevitably come with such work. Based on my multicase analysis, I offered recommendations for teacher educators to consider how to employ teachers’ biographies in their classrooms and to channel those into candidates’ future practice as well as posited ways that we can strive toward

an agenda for collaborative and agentic realizations. And yet, the work has only just begun.

Stake (2006) writes,

When the study is well done, the research questions will not be fully answered. Some assertions can be made that partially answer the question, but ways the questions need to be improved will become apparent. And new questions needing to be asked will become apparent. So the case study report is a summary of what has been done to try to get answers, what assertions can be made with some confidence, and what more needs to be studied. (Chapter 1, Section 1.8, para. 1).

As Stake (2006) notes here, this study leaves questions unanswered and raises new ones for additional research.

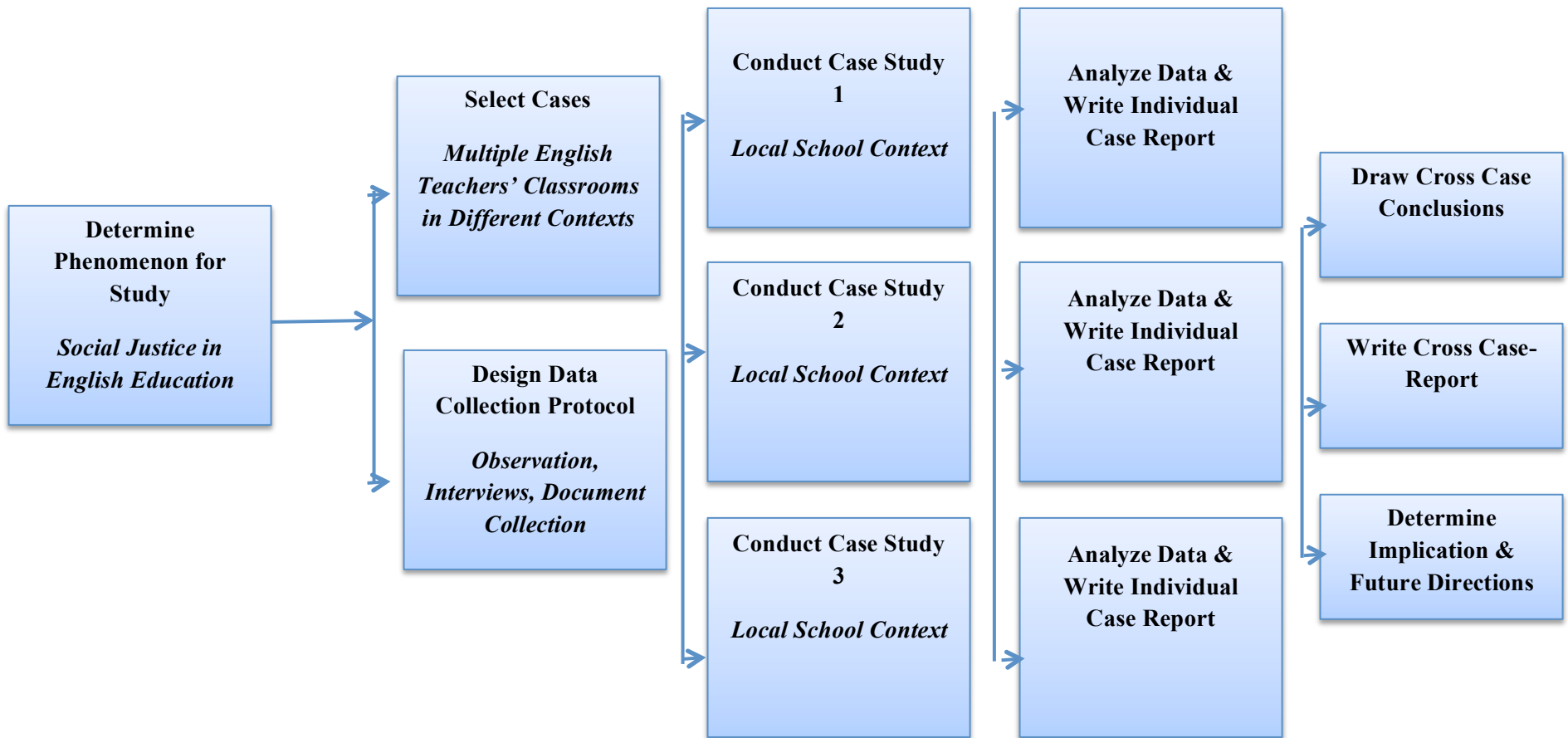
More inquiry is needed into teachers whose experiences and biographies that led them toward a social justice disposition and, additionally, what practices are most effective for those whose have not. Current literature on autobiography and narrative in teacher education overwhelmingly applies to white preservice students who are lacking in knowledge of diverse communities. While this is important work, we also need more research on both White teachers and teachers of Color who bring their biographies to teaching in productive ways. This would inform our knowledge of what types of events make a difference and how we might begin to think more about those who have limited exposure.

Another point of investigation is around social action projects in the English classroom. One direction is to engage teachers who are interested in the integration of social justice in English to join together in discourse communities around these topics and to design projects that are related to curricular materials that they use. This would both address the collaboration dilemmas found in the study as well as help teachers envision prospects for students as change

agents. These could be triangulated with classroom observations in which the projects were instituted as well as with student and teacher interviews to document interpretations of the projects' effectiveness.

A final area of research is in social justice as a literacy practice. Hines and Johnson (2007) completed groundbreaking work to offer a taxonomy of social justice literacies, and in this study, I have offered a set of literacies constructed from the literature and what I witnessed. Additional research should continue these efforts as we attempt to see social justice as literacies that can be cultivated with preservice teachers and not as static entities that teachers either possess or do not. Working toward social justice in practice is an ever-present struggle, but we must continue to toil if we truly hope to create a more equitable society.

Appendix A



Appendix B

Table 6.
Timeline of Research and Data Collected at Each Site

Research phase	Estimated time	Site	Data collected
Phase 1	1 Week	School/classroom context	1 semi-structured interview from participant Reflecting on teacher preparation program, discussing first year of teaching, communicating a perspective on social justice, and planning for the upcoming year
Phase 2	2 Weeks	School/classroom context	1 semi-structured interview from participant; Observation field notes from three full days at each site; 2-3 class period per day in the following days at school site; Documents from teaching materials and assignments; Notes on classroom discourse
Phase 3	2 Weeks	School/classroom context	1 semi-structured interview from participant; Focus group interview with students from each class observed; Observation fieldnotes from 2-3 focus class periods; Documents from assignments and instructional aids as well as school handbooks, publications, and materials reflecting school culture; Documents from text choices, teacher units, assignments, instructional aids as well as materials reflecting school culture; Modified member-checking transcripts

Appendix C

Observation Protocol

1. What is the physical setting of the classroom? What is on the walls? How are the desks arranged?
2. Who is in the class? How many students? What are their ethnicities?
3. What is going on? What is the teacher saying and doing, and what are the students doing and saying?
4. Which behaviors are repetitive? What routines are occurring? How do the students interact with the teacher and vice versa?
5. What is written on the board?
6. What is the content chosen by the teacher? What aspect is the teacher focusing on?
7. What is the teacher teaching? What pedagogical strategies is she using? What activities are occurring?
8. How does the teacher communicate her purpose for the lesson or activity?
9. What feedback are the students providing in the activity/discussion/instruction? How are they providing it?
10. What is not happening that could—in reference to classroom structure, pedagogy, and activity?
11. How are the students responding to the teacher and to what she is teaching?
12. What resources are available?

(Adapted from LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 199-200 as cited in Carlson, 2007, p. 5)

Appendix D

Research Phase	Estimated Time	Interview Guides
Phase 1	Week 1	<p>Teacher Interview Guide</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about where you grew up and the school (s) you attended. 2. Tell me about some of the people or things that influenced you growing up. 3. Why did you choose to enter the profession of teaching? 4. How do you see yourself as a teacher? 5. What is most important to you that students learn in your classroom? 6. How would you define your classroom philosophy? 7. How have your perceptions of teaching changed from coursework, student teaching, through 1st year? 8. What have you learned in teaching? 9. Describe your teacher education experience. 10. What did you learn in your teacher education that has helped you? 11. Tell me about the school where you teach-how you came to work here, what the school culture is like, what your relationships with colleagues are. 12. How flexible do you feel your curriculum is? On what do you base this assessment? 13. What does it mean to teach for social justice? 14. How do you see social justice relating to your teaching specifically?
Phase 2	Week 3	<p>Teacher Interview Guide</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you structure your course overall? How have you structured the unit under study now? 2. How do you decide what texts (including videos, music, etc.) to employ? 3. Tell me about how you determine daily lesson plans. 4. Why did you choose the texts you chose for this week's observations? 5. What did you hope to accomplish by teaching these texts? (What did you hope that students took away from this text)? 6. How did you determine the accompanying activity/discussion questions/etc.? 7. How do you view the relationships between social justice, content, and pedagogy?

8. How did you feel the students responded to this text?
 9. Would you teach this again? Why/why not?
 10. What might you do differently next time teaching this (if yes?)
 11. How do you see the students in the class (that I'm observing)?
- How do you see social justice in the work you are doing now with these students?

Student Interview Guide

Phase 3 Week 5

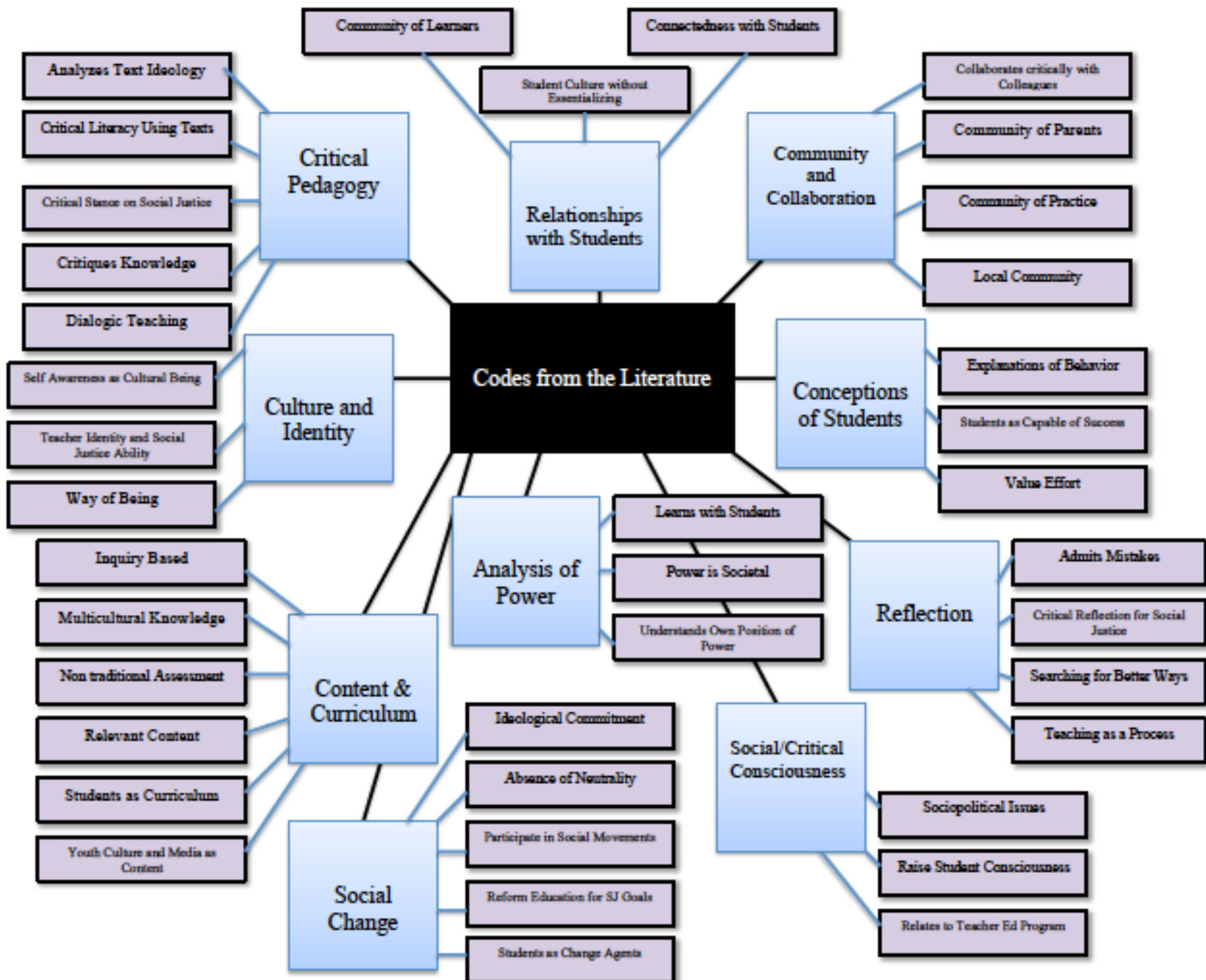
1. What do you feel you've learned in this class?
2. What are the texts from this class in which you find yourself most engaged?
3. What are the ways that you find yourself most engaged in class (activities, groupwork, etc.)?
4. How does your teacher communicate what is important for you to learn from English class?
5. Your teacher has said that 'social justice' is important to her and in what she teaches—what do you think this means? Why would this be important?

Phase 3 Week 5

Teacher Interview Guide

1. Modified Member checking
2. How would you describe yourself as a teacher now?
3. What are your goals for your students—what do you hope they leave this class knowing?
4. What are some things you hope to accomplish in your classroom/school in the remainder of this year in regard to teaching for social justice?
5. To what extent do you think the school culture matches your vision of social justice?
6. In what ways have you enacted social justice in your classroom in these past 9 weeks? What have been some successes from this?
7. How have colleagues and administrators reacted to your teaching for social justice this year so far?

Appendix E



Appendix F

	METHODS OF DATA		COLLECTION		
	Observations	Transcripts/Notes on Classroom Discourse	Teacher Interviews	Document Collection	Text Selection Information
Phase 1			✓	✓	
Phase 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Phase 3			✓		

Appendix G

Goal 1: Students at [redacted] will be educated in a safe, nurturing environment that fosters parent and community involvement and support.

Strategies: How will we do this?	Data-driven: Why did we select these?	Who will lead the effort?	Resources: What will we need?	Monitoring: How will we know if we are being successful?
Provide students with an opportunity to voice concerns and positive outlets for their emotional needs through consistent expectations of behavior	State mandated plans Hierarchy of (Maslow)	Administration Discipline Committee SRO Counselors Safezone certified staff JROTC	SBHS Tip-line Discipline Matrix Safezone Training Monthly Emergency Drills Lobby Guard Parking Passes Bell to Bell Instruction	Documentation from Tip-line Discipline records Times and records of emergency drill activity Visitor/contractor data Data collected by JROTC Unit/Lesson Plans
Engage students with opportunities for personal development and school involvement	Hierarchy of needs (Maslow) Ecological Model (Brauffenbrenner)	Administration Freshman Homeroom Teachers Club Sponsors Safezone certified staff Counselors	Freshman Homeroom/Orientation Safezone Training School Clubs/Club Fair Crisis Team	Club Attendance records Discipline Records
Create opportunities for stakeholders to be actively involved in the school community	Incomplete Student Records Lack parental/guardian attendance at school events CAPS	Administration Teachers PAC Chair	PAC ConnectEd Attendance Policy Contact Information Power School Open House	Increased parental/guardian attendance at school events Power School data
Promote healthy choices for students and teachers	Student Medical data Employee request	PE Department School Health Advisory Council	Structured intramural program Team inspired exercise competition	Student and Faculty Involvement

Appendix H

Unit Two: Human Rights and Responsibilities

Overview: Every human possesses universal, fundamental rights that help people get along and live in peace with each other. When human rights are not well known, articulated, or respected, abuses such as discrimination, intolerance, injustice, and oppression can arise. Students will explore “natural law,” “human law,” human rights, and global responsibility via analysis of fiction, non-fiction, and multimedia texts as well as through completion of a research-based project.

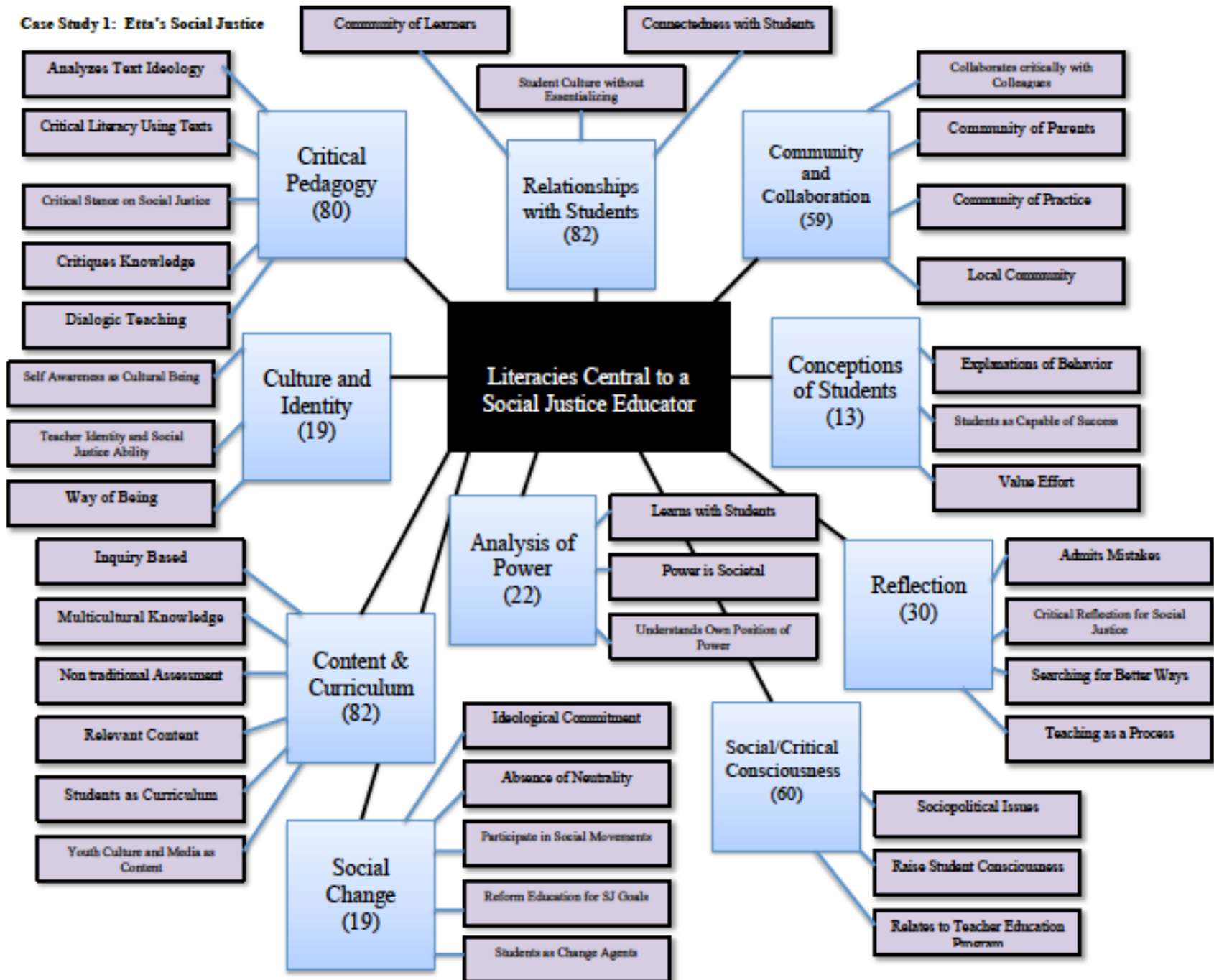
Essential Questions

- How are we globally responsible? Why must we be so in 2013 and beyond? What are global issues are connected to social responsibility?
- How can and do and will we influence the future?
- How do we analyze informational texts so as to construct a coherent, expressive, logical argument?

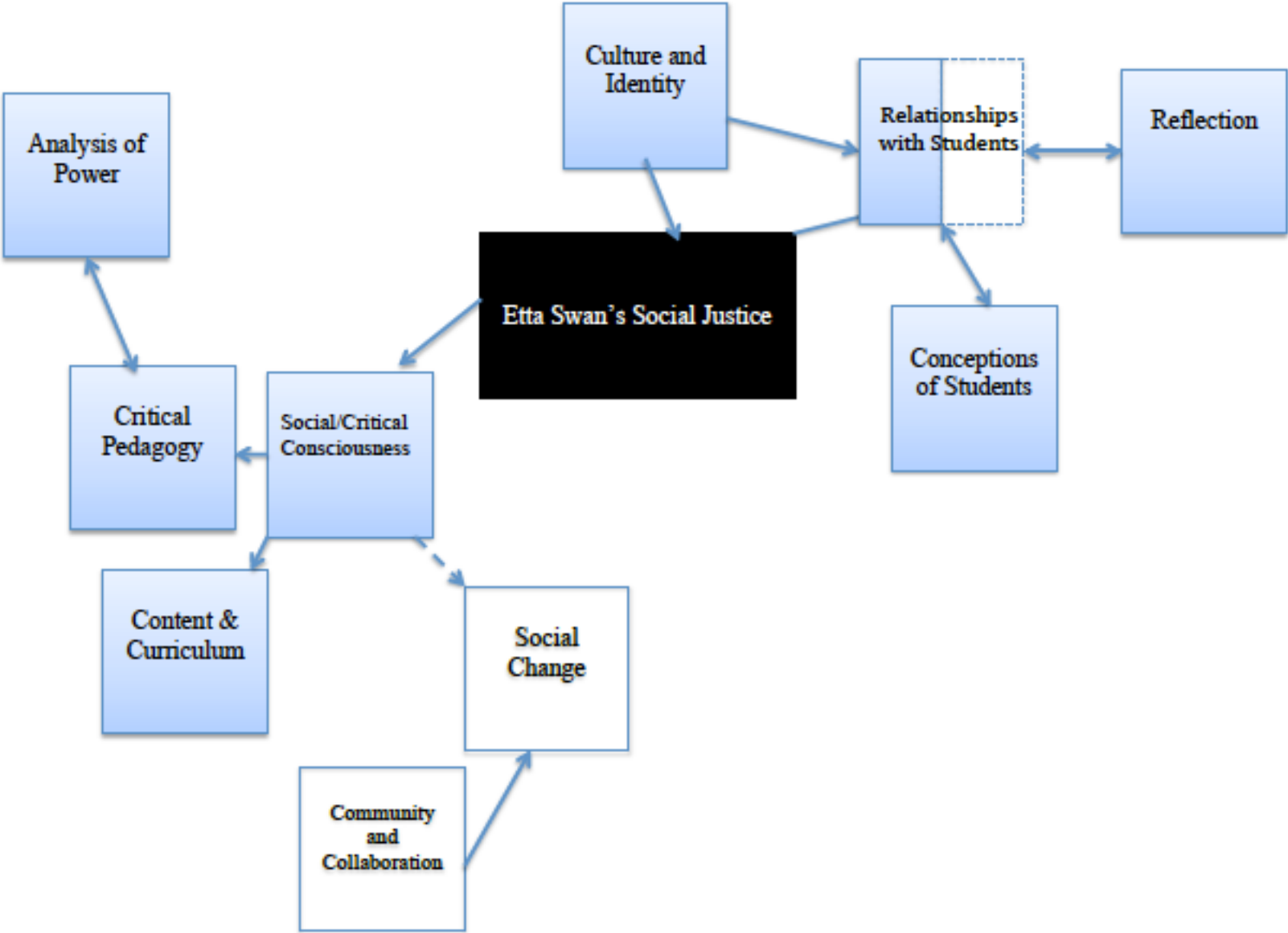
Time: 4 Weeks

CCSS Standards	Learning Targets	Formative Assessments	Readings/Text	Language Study
<p>RL.9-10.2 Determine central idea of text & analyze its development, including how it emerges & is shaped/refined by specific details; write objective summary.</p> <p>RI.9-10.4//RL.9-10.4 Determine meaning of words/phrases, including figurative, connotative, & technical meanings; analyze cumulative impact of specific words on meaning & tone.</p> <p>RL.9-10.9 Analyze how an author draws on & transforms source material .</p> <p>RI.9-10.8 Delineate & evaluate the argument & specific claims, assessing whether reasoning is valid</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine conflict (internal, external, man vs. self, man vs. man, man vs. society, man vs. nature) within the text. • Analyze dialogue and description as it relates to author’s tone and purpose. • Take notes on conflicts and find evidence in the text to support your claims • Analyze character’s motivations and author’s choices. • Identify an extended 	<p>Students will write an objective summary of a work and exchange it with a peer for editing and responding.</p> <p>Students work in groups to act out scenes of conflict in one of the unit works, making sure to address both internal and external conflicts.</p> <p>Students will identify a metaphor or extended metaphor in a text and create a visual product that represents that metaphor.</p>	<p>Fiction <i>The Book Thief</i> <i>Night</i> <i>Anthem</i> <i>The Shawl</i> “The Moment Before the Gun Went Off” (Nadine Gordimer) “First Confession” (O’Connor) “War” (Jack London) “Marriage is a Private Affair” (Chinua Achebe)</p> <p>Poetry “A Fine Spring Morning” “The Ballad of the Landlord” (Langston Hughes) “The Jasmine Poem” (Mohammad al-Ajami-- received life sentence for writing/publishing this piece against the</p>	<p>Characterization (major/minor characters) Protagonist Antagonist Conflict Irony Dramatic Irony Situational Iron Verbal Irony Imagery Parallel Plots Allusion Cumulative Impact Human Rights Natural Law Intolerance Discrimination Oppression</p>

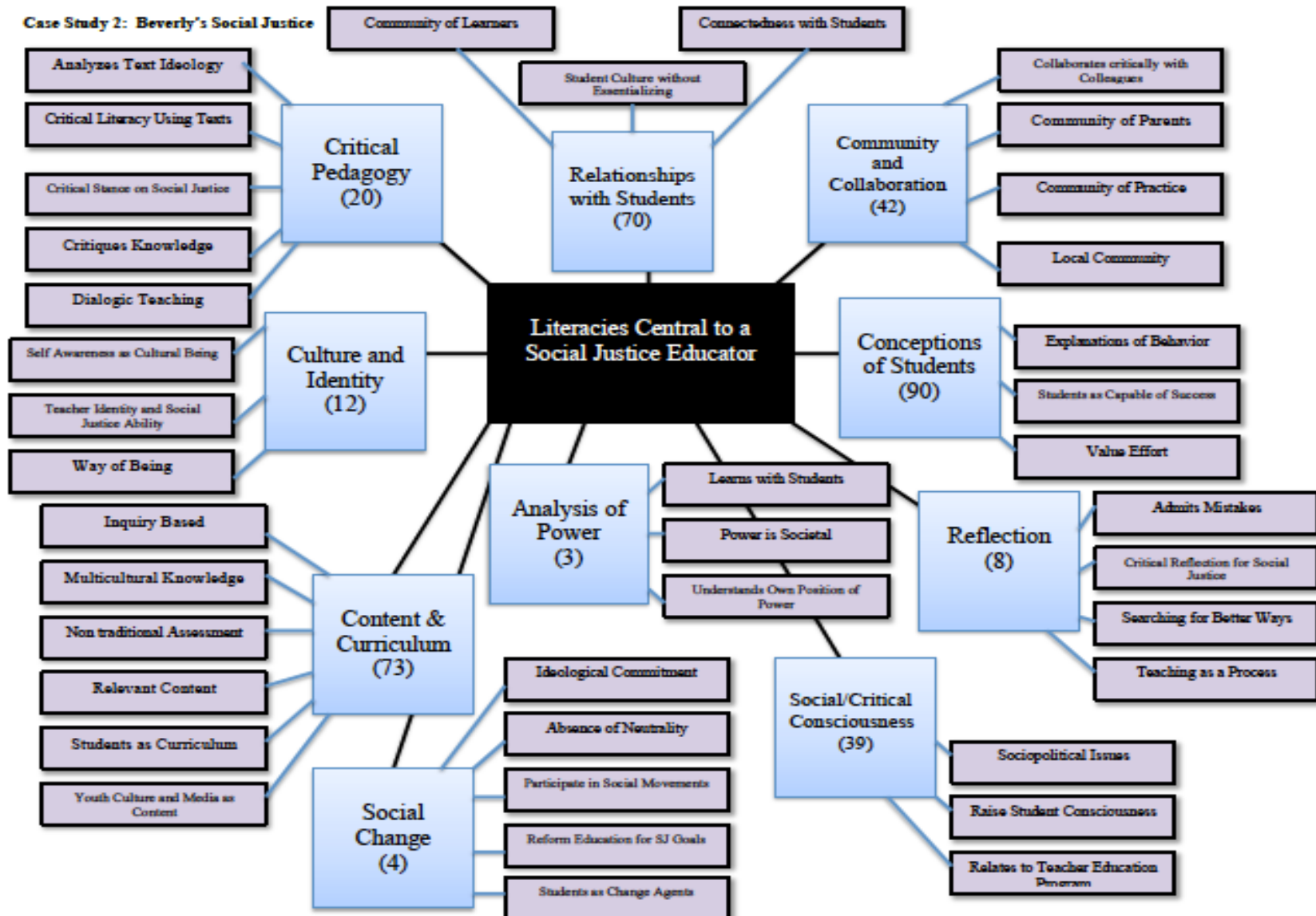
Appendix I



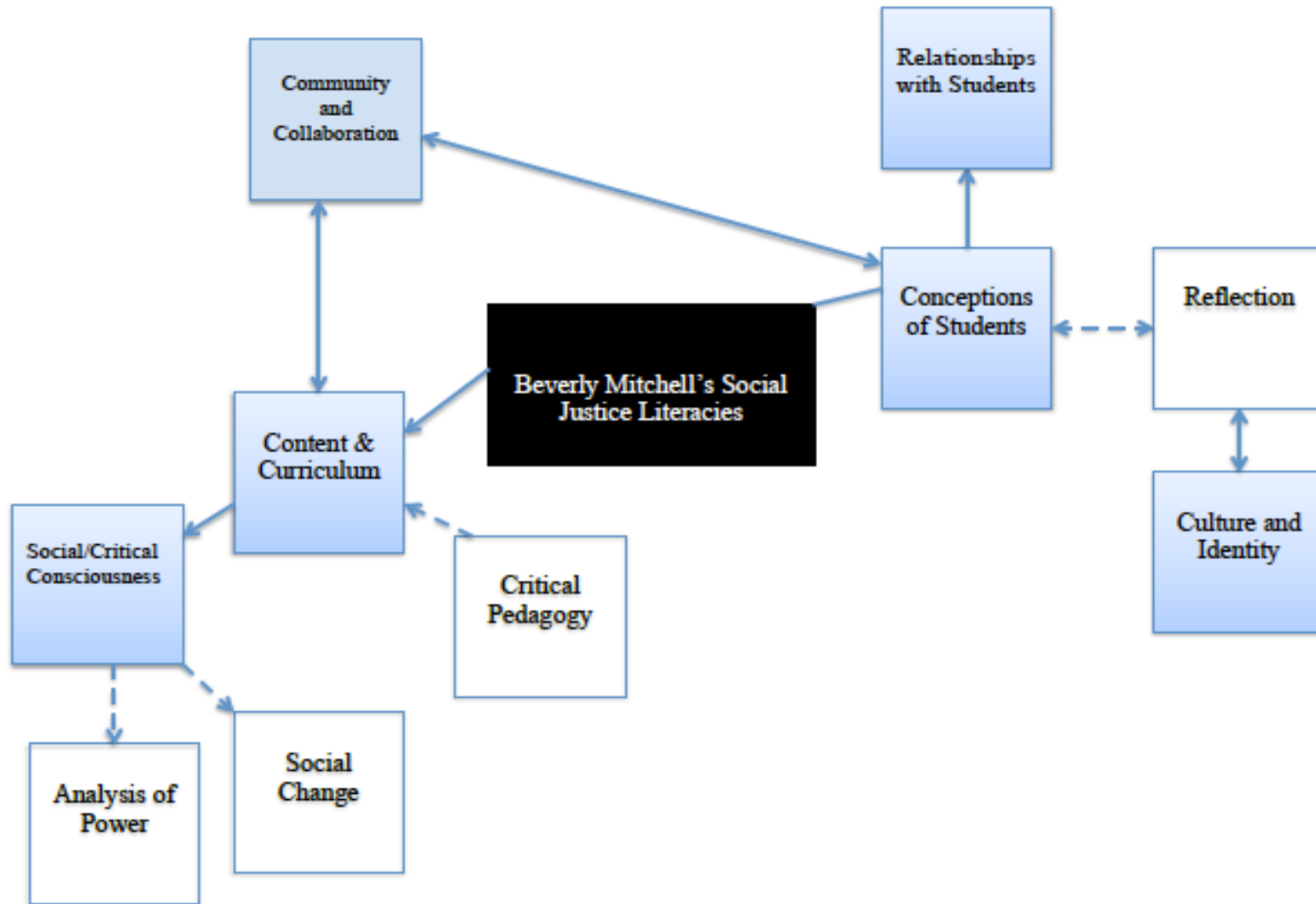
Appendix J



Appendix K

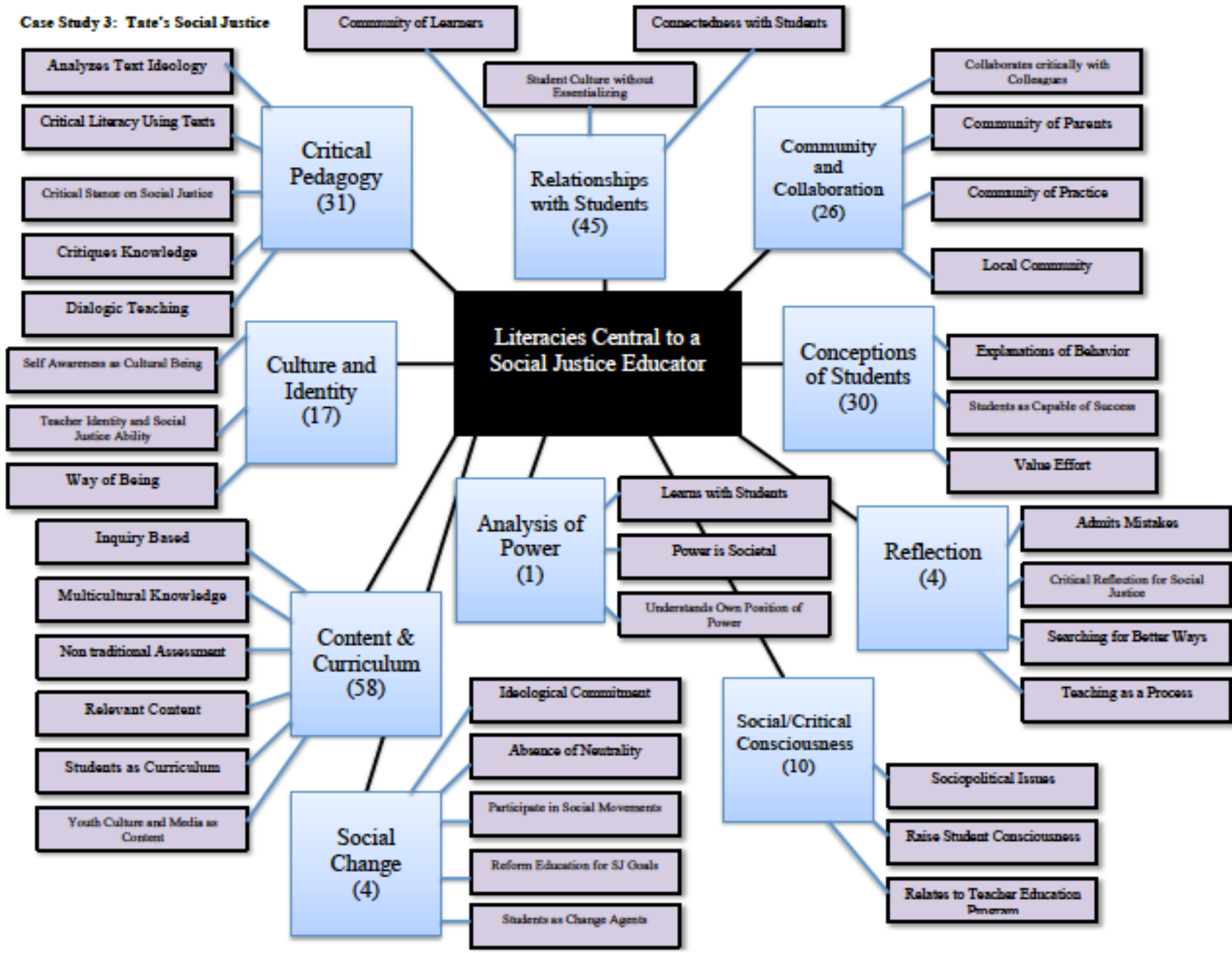


Appendix L

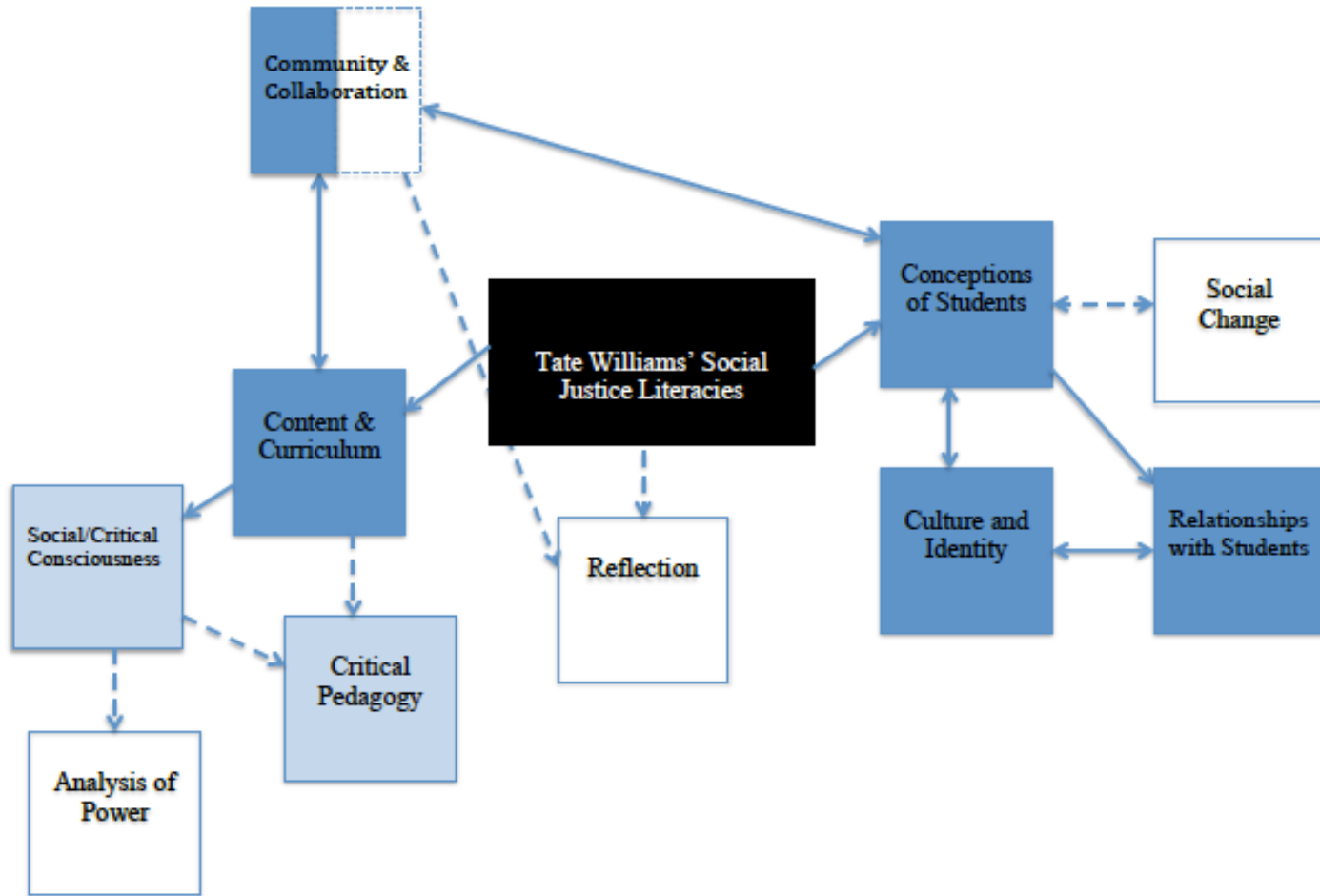


Appendix M

Case Study 3: Tate's Social Justice



Appendix N



Appendix O

Table 7

*Cross Case Comparison: Approximate Percentage of the Total Number of Coded Instances
for Code by Participant*

Primary Code	Etta Swan	Beverly Mitchell	Tate Williams
Analysis of Power	4.72%	.83%	.44%
Community & Collaboration	12.66%	11.63%	11.5%
Conceptions of Students	2.79%	25%	13.27%
Content & Curriculum	17.6%	20.22%	26%
Critical Pedagogy	17.2%	5.54%	13.7%
Culture & Identity	4.1%	3.32%	7.5%
Reflection	6.44%	2.22%	1.8%
Relationships with Students	17.6%	19.4%	19.91%
Social Change	4.1%	1.2%	1.77%
Social/Critical Consciousness	12.9%	10.8%	4.42%

Note. Percentages were calculated for each participant by dividing the number of coded instances for each theme by the total number of coded instances for the participant.

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