

# Reclaiming English Education: Rooting Social Justice in Dispositions

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This article addresses the importance of foregrounding social justice in teaching and assessing dispositions for preservice teachers in secondary English language arts. We provide a historical overview of dispositions and their politicization, and we address NCATE's removal of social justice and its impending return. We conclude with possibilities for assessing dispositions for social justice and reflections on the implications for accreditation and consider what might be in store for the future of dispositions in English education.

**M**odern notions of social justice have been in existence since the nineteenth century (Nussbaum, 2006; Rawls, 1971) but have only become a tenet of educational philosophy in English education as of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (see Adams et al., 2010; Apple, 2006; Ayers, 1998; Bender-Slack, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 1999 & 2004; Groenke, 2010; Miller, Bellevue, DeStigter, Kirkland, & Rice, 2008; Miller & Kirkland, 2010; Morrell, 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2011). On first consideration, it may seem obvious that social justice is an important concept in the field of English education due to issues of injustice that are presented and (re)presented time and again through various texts and related real-life issues. However, for those of us who teach methods courses at universities and are educating new secondary school ELA teachers, the stakes might be even higher. To be successful, preservice teachers must be prepared for the diversity of students they will encounter and be comfortable modeling and encouraging fairness, equity, and respect in their classrooms. To complicate the issue, our field has become increasingly vulnerable to losing social justice as a critical tenet to those who believe that the teaching of academic skills and knowledge alone, when aligned with standards, should ostensibly provide youth with the tools they need to bring about a more just society. However, we recognize the criticality

of opening up dialogical spaces that allow for such critique of social justice, because critique is at the epistemological core of its very premise. We hope this article will serve as one such dialogic space for our readers.

In a field focused on critical approaches to language, literature, and literacy, English educators are often particularly motivated to embrace social justice as a personal and professional disposition (see Miller & Kirkland, 2010; CEE, 2009). One may ask, why *is* social justice a controversial issue in our profession? How could striving to model a social justice disposition possibly be met with skepticism? How do we best define, and ultimately assess, valued dispositions in English education? This article attempts to begin this conversation and serve as a call to action for English educators who struggle with the idea of teaching and assessing social justice dispositions. While we provide some suggestions and classroom examples of assessing social justice in the methods classroom, we see this article as the beginning of an ongoing conversation rather than a solution to a fraught professional issue. We begin by providing an overview of how social justice dispositions have been viewed in English education and teacher education generally; we then strategize how to move social justice into preservice English teacher education and provide examples of how social justice dispositions might be fostered and assessed in methods classrooms.

## Social Justice as Controversy

It is true that *social justice* as a term and stance is not universally embraced in teacher education. As an example, in 2006 NCATE, the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education, removed social justice as an explicit performance indicator for assessing teacher dispositions. Twenty-five states have adopted or adapted NCATE (now CAEP) unit standards as the state standards, and according to the NCATE website, “NCATE’s professional program standards have influenced teacher preparation in 48 states and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico” (<http://www.ncate.org/>). NCATE regularly partners with professional organizations (in our case, NCTE) to create standards for teacher preparation and assess programs on their success in doing so. NCATE explained that its removal of the explicit reference to social justice was because social justice was merely an illustrative example for a professional disposition that they retain (Wasley, 2006) and that institutions *could* still require that teachers embody (NCATE, 2007). Some, however, have suggested that social justice was removed because it is highly ambiguous, garners political overtones, could be used to weed out would-be teachers who espouse particular morals, and has inadequate theoretical grounding

(Cochran-Smith, 2010; Miller & Kirkland, 2010). NCATE, on the other hand, claimed that it drew upon rhetoric from No Child Left Behind and argued that the words *social justice* themselves were unnecessary because they could be assumed under the revision of Unit Standard 4, which now reads, “The unit designs, implements, and evaluates curriculum and provides experiences for candidates to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn. Assessments indicate that candidates demonstrate and apply proficiencies related to diversity” (see <http://www.ncate.org/Standards/NCATEUnitStandards/UnitStandardsinEffect2008/tabid/476/Default.aspx>).

The revision of NCATE Unit Standard 4 and its indicators specified what was meant by diversity through two changes: the first was by adding linguistic diversity to the assessment rubrics and defining the ethnic/racial groups by U.S. Census categories, and the second was adding the sentence, “Candidates are helped to understand the potential impact of discrimination based on race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and language on students and their learning” (Kissel, 2009). What continues to hold true is that since the phrase *social justice* has been excised from the definition and as a descriptor for a disposition, it has been replaced with an emphasis on the importance of addressing diversity with cultural and linguistic awareness in the classroom.

As noted above, NCATE’s definition of *diversity* is arguably myopic in scope because it is instantiated by who is defining it, the time it is being defined, and who/what is included/excluded. When we see absences of the words *social justice*, replaced by more politically comfortable or less charged terms such as *diversity* or even *tolerance*, we, as English educators who recognize that our students cannot be reduced to essentialist or binary categories, might challenge how social justice is being defined and by whom, as social justice and diversity are not the same. In this case, using *diversity* in lieu of *social justice* can potentially downplay an emphasis on preservice teacher dispositions that could remedy educational disparities among specific populations of students. This lack of naming particular student identities in the definition of diversity, such as those whose race, gender identity or expression, national origin, or weight (size or height) are nonconforming, makes vulnerable preservice teachers, who by their nature are new to the profession, to marginalizing the potential cultural and social capital of the students they are teaching.

Such patterned absences of particular identities speak to larger systemic issues at play that have great power to create and sanction inequities and privileges in educational settings reinforcing a binary of normal/

abnormal, inclusion/exclusion, superiority/inferiority, and desirability/undesirability. These dichotomies in turn tend to be reinforced through administrative policies that are non-inclusive and polarizing to students, teachers, and sometimes even administrators.

As many readers will know, a CEE task force recently revised the NCTE-NCATE standards for initial preparation of teachers of secondary English language arts, as required approximately every 10 years by NCATE. Building on the work of two earlier CEE committees on standards and accreditation and much feedback from NCTE and CEE members, this task force comprised of CEE members with knowledge of the history of NCTE SPA (Specialty Professional Association) standards completed a revision of our standards in 2012 and presented it to NCATE's Specialty Area Studies Board for their approval. In October 2012, the board approved the revised standards for the preparation of secondary English teachers. An area of ongoing consideration for the task force as it revised the existing standards was how to explicitly integrate social justice into the standards in ways that reflected CEE's beliefs and yet were assessable by NCATE's methods. There was some concern about how teacher educators could devise assignments that would effectively ascertain teacher candidate's social justice stances, even though CEE and task force members were confident such a standard must be included. The work of CEE's Commission on Social Justice to codify a framework for social justice in education was vital as the task force considered how to create ideologically strong, yet practical, standards, and at the end of this article we include specific examples of assignments that sj Miller created as a result of the commission's process.

The current, recently approved NCTE/NCATE standard that addresses social justice reads as follows:

**Standard VI:** 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.

**Element 2:** Candidates use knowledge of theories and research to plan instruction responsive to students' local, national and international histories, individual identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender expression, age, appearance, ability, spiritual belief, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and community environment), and languages/dialects as they affect students' opportunities to learn in ELA. (NCTE, 2012a)

A supporting statement written by the task force follows the standard:

While we recognize that NCATE itself has raised concerns about the possible use of ostensibly “social justice” pedagogies to potentially indoctrinate and even thereby discriminate against potential candidates whose ideologies may lead them to hold certain beliefs that run counter to a non-specified but particularly “liberal” approach to professional teaching, considerable research now exists that clearly demonstrates how teaching for social justice is not merely a particular or partisan moral argument related to education. Rather, teaching for social justice in English language arts classrooms is clearly supportive of curriculum designs and instructional practices based on a significant body of both qualitative and quantitative scientific research. (NCTE, 2012b, pp. 45–44)

In other words, *social justice* isn’t just a euphemism for liberal politics. It isn’t a way to exclude a group of preservice teachers who belong to a certain political party or vote a certain way. It is a way of approaching public education, and teacher education, that ensures that it will be as open and equitable as possible to all children, regardless of their identities, biologies, or experiences. ***Social justice isn’t just a euphemism for liberal politics.***

### **Social Justice as a Disposition**

At their core, dispositions are the context and culturally specific embodied manifestations of one’s beliefs, values, and judgments about all practices related to the teaching profession. Historically, dispositions have varied in definition as behavioral patterns or a “trend of actions in particular contexts” (Katz & Raths, 1985, p. 301); voluntary and intentional patterns of behavior (Katz, 1993); habits of mind and tendencies to respond based on context (Carr & Claxton, 2002); “awareness, inclination and reflection on behaviors and thinking” (Schussler, 2006, p. 257); how beliefs shape actions in particular contexts (Villegas, 2007); how one’s internal beliefs or values can be noted through observable behaviors (Diez, 2007); accepted trends and norms in teachers’ actions, analyses, and prejudgments (Oja & Reiman, 2007); how moral guidance affects practice (Carroll, 2005); moral sensibilities (Dottin, 2006); and how morals shape teachers’ character, intellect, and care (Sockett; 2006).<sup>1</sup> The latter three definitions, whose emphases demonstrate how morals guide teaching, are evidenced in the NCATE definition of dispositions, up until 2006:

The values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student

learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator's own personal growth. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and *social justice* (emphasis ours). (NCATE, 2006, p. 53)

More recent disposition research reflects challenges to the politicized nature of the polemics of dispositions by taking into account that dispositions are shaped by pre-dispositions, or the ways a teacher's past experiences affect morals, behavior, and performance (Carroll, 2011; Stooksberry, Schussler, & Bercaw, 2009).

We first heard the term *disposition* in connection with NCATE accreditation, which revised its definition of dispositions in 2007 to become:

Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities. These positive behaviors support student learning and development . . . The two professional dispositions that NCATE expects institutions to assess are fairness and the belief that all students can learn. (NCATE Press Release, 2007)

Even though this revision was in response to the claim that NCATE removed social justice from its definition of dispositions due to conservative political pressures from the National Association of Scholars who argued that a social justice disposition was a violation of First Amendment rights (as in Johnson & Johnson, 2007), this definition of dispositions is not, on the surface, anything *today* that most teacher educators would question. We do want our teacher candidates to interact positively with students and parents; we want them to be fair to students, and we are careful to help them build and retain a belief that all students can learn.

A social justice orientation is often seen as a component of a desired disposition for an ELA teacher, both in English education methods classes around the nation and in NCTE unit and SPA standards. In a world of assessing knowledge, skills, and dispositions, owning a social justice stance is most clearly a personal/professional disposition, a hard-to-define quality that is supposed to create good teachers. However, when many of us first heard that our colleges would be responsible for assessing preservice teachers on so-called dispositions and reporting the results of these assessments to NCATE, we began to worry. We worried about the exclusion of the phrase *social justice* in the most recent iteration of NCATE's definition, even though NCATE states that it was never anything but an illustrative example (NCATE Press Release, 2007). We worried that the absence of the words *social justice* might imply that the concept is simply a politicized catch phrase or example

of educational jargon that teacher educators can ignore in favor of more easily assessable dispositions, such as punctuality and professional dress. We worried that our home institutions, and even our own field—which have yet to clearly define dispositions and respective assessments—would be accountable for assessing dispositions that are still quite definitionally nebulous. Without codified definitions for dispositions or assessments, we wondered: Would certain political or social perspectives be valued over others? Would assessing such dispositions lead to the unintended consequence of discriminating against some attitudes or values simply because they did not match those of mainstream educational culture? Was teaching dispositions actually a euphemism for ideological brainwashing?

Dispositions seem to have two uses in our programs: first, to cultivate and encourage new teachers to be reflective, keenly aware of diversity in their classrooms, and dedicated to the prospect that all students can learn; and second, to justify checklists of much more narrowly defined behaviors that we then use to eliminate students from programs (e.g., punctuality, dress, work ethic, and relationships with authority figures). We do think that student teachers should arrive to class on time and complete all required teaching tasks, but these two types of dispositions (we might call them the abstract and the concrete) can be in conflict with each other and can confuse teacher educators' goals. And let's face it: checklists are much easier to assess and report in a numerical, aggregated table than deeply held, sometimes-messy subjectivities.

In our experience, most English teacher educators will strive to help candidates develop dispositions about teaching and learning that foster a social justice sensibility; however, for large-scale assessments for colleges or accreditation agencies, they often resort to the easier to assess and report checklist model. And to complicate matters, defining dispositions too complexly often opens one up to accusations of classroom politicizing and indoctrination—teaching morality, if you will. So the conflict for English teacher educators remains: Do we understand dispositions (and, by association, social justice) in different ways for different purposes? Do we define them one way within our own classrooms and another way for external audiences? And if we do, how can we keep from confusing our teacher education students on this issue, those young teachers still developing their sense of teacher self?

Despite the justified worry and confusion over assessing dispositions, there are certainly ways English teacher educators can think about them, both in program accreditation assessments and in daily curricular decisions, that are productive and helpful for preservice teachers making a challenging professional transition. Since much research has told us that teachers tend

to teach as they were taught and not as they were taught to teach (Crow, 1987; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Knowles, 1992; Lortie, 1975), teacher educators may have a responsibility to think about dispositions with our teacher candidates and how they are formed, re-formed, and realized in the classroom. As Alsup (2006) argues, “when teacher educators recognize the importance of the embodiment of teacher identity, they will have to lobby for the creation of disposition standards that are more complex and multidimensional” (p. 186). In other words, teacher educators must value the abstract, as well as the concrete, dispositions.

While social justice is central to our palette of critical reflection, it is next to impossible to discuss dispositions without considering the inherent paradox often embedded in assessing them: NCATE requires that teacher preparation colleges shape and, through performance-based assessments, assess the dispositions of teacher candidates. However, because there is not consensus, clear definitions, or guidelines for teaching dispositions, nor widely shared performance-based assessments in English teacher education for assessing dispositions, these assessments have become a site of contention among polarizing perspectives. In spite of the freedoms afforded to colleges of education and ELA programs to assess teacher candidates, when social justice is privileged, those assessments are often used as a critique against English education as a form of inculcating morals and beliefs. When placing a term such as *social justice* into a dispositional standard, or even as a performance indicator, it can become divisive, as some see it as synonymous with certain political, or even religious, beliefs.

But we have made significant headway as a discipline in understanding, and assessing, social justice as a valued disposition. Over the last 40 years or so, definitions of teaching dispositions have shifted from an absence of even the mention of social justice, to inferences about social justice, to the active removal of social justice discourse, to more current neutrality regarding social justice and now its return within our revised NCTE-NCATE standards for initial preparation of teachers of secondary ELA (see Figure 1).

As a profession, we need clarity about what dispositions are, why we need/want to create and define them, and how they can be best assessed. They do seem to be nebulous, and English educators often are confused about how to define, teach, and assess them. However, we can't think of a single English education colleague who doesn't ask teacher education candidates to critically reflect on their own teaching selves and their personal pedagogies. We can't think of a single English education program that doesn't include some emphasis on developing philosophies and beliefs about teaching and learning that stress equity, critical thinking, and awareness of individual



- a. **Inception: In 1973**, American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) issued a policy statement calling for teacher preparation programs to consider the importance of diversity. NCATE developed standards that focused on diversity in all areas of teacher education (focus was on tolerance).
- b. **In 2000**, NCATE mandated adoption of Standards 2000 that said teacher candidates in NCATE accredited programs must develop professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn.
- c. **In 2002**, Teacher education programs were charged with defining and creating their own performance-based methods. NCATE's value-driven definition for a disposition was: "The values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities that affect student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator's own personal growth. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice" (NCATE, 2002, p. 53).
- d. **In 2006**, NCATE suggested that "social justice" was merely an illustrative example for a professional disposition and that institutions (Wasley, 2006) *could* require that teachers embody it (contrary to popular belief, it was never a standard of measurement). *Social justice* was removed from NCATE's definition of professional dispositions altogether.
- e. **In 2009**, CEE adopted a position statement on social justice in English education that included the following definition: "Thus it means that in schools and university classrooms, we educators must teach about injustice and discrimination in all its forms with regard to differences in: race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, age, appearance, ability, [disability] national origin, language, spiritual belief, size [height and/or weight], sexual orientation, social class, economic circumstance, environment, ecology, culture, and the treatment of animals" (CEE, "Beliefs about Social Justice in English Education," <http://www.ncte.org/cee/positions/socialjustice>).
- f. **In 2010**, members of CEE's Commission on Social Justice proposed the *Resolution on Social Justice in Literacy Education*, which was adopted by NCTE (<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/socialjustice>).
- g. **In 2012**, NCATE approved the revised NCTE-NCATE standards for initial teacher preparation in ELA, which contain a social justice standard.
- h. **In 2013**, CAEP accepted the newly vetted Standard VI from NCTE, and it will be used to assess dispositions.

**Figure 1.** Iterations of social justice in English teacher education, 1973–2013

student identities and subjectivities. In the sections that follow, we provide some specific ideas for how we can build on our strengths and confidently reclaim social justice when assessing dispositions in English education.

## Assessing Dispositions for Social Justice

CEE's revision of its NCTE/NCATE standards for initial teacher preparation in ELA has highlighted the struggle of performatively assessing dispositions that account for social justice. If we are to instantiate social justice within dispositions we must ask: What pedagogy and curriculum are teacher candidates experiencing and employing to demonstrate teaching for social

justice? NCATE's definition of an assessment (an activity that can be clearly aligned to the standards and that will produce numerical data that one can aggregate and compare across semesters) made assessment for accreditation purposes more difficult, as understandings of social justice in education are often internally experienced and recognized; external manifestations of dispositional beliefs are often only identified through the inference of the audience (i.e., the English education professor).

However, we believe there are ways to assess the application of valued dispositions, including those reflecting an awareness of social justice, in the English education methods classroom and during student teaching internships. The standards revision committee wrote the elements that elucidate the standard with such assessments in mind, as these elements all require the planning of instruction that is consistent with the beliefs that all children can learn and that their home cultures and individual identities affect this learning; that contextualizing units of instruction within larger social and cultural issues can increase students' understanding of others unlike themselves; and that language can be used to both oppress and uplift.

Reflecting on the possibilities of assessing dispositions for social justice through performance does provide our field with critical opportunities to challenge unjust institutional and structural practices. We know that for NCATE, the meaning of performance (Elliott, 1996) is not so much in their interpretation of the standards, but in the actions taken to apply them, which leaves the term *performance* broadly defined. Provided this liberty, we might consider performance to mean that teacher candidates have opportunities to create, elaborate, and demonstrate (e.g., measurable actions with clear criteria and assessments) what they are learning related to social justice. So what could performing a social justice disposition actually look like in a methods classroom?

To answer this question we first turn to what might comprise or activate a continuum of social justice dispositions. Lortie's (1975) thoughts on such predispositions help to ground our thinking here. He suggests that what preservice teachers bring with them to a teacher education program provides a more realistic understanding of socializing influences than do the programs themselves. Pre-dispositions, or the inner filters, inclinations, and prior as well as current and future experiences that preservice teachers bring to English education programs, are essential to their developing social justice dispositions.

Aligning to Lortie's (1975) work of a continuum on pre-dispositions, Stooksberry et al.'s (2009) and Carroll's (2011) definitions of dispositions expand on how the interrelatedness of a preservice teacher's inner filters,

inclinations, and the contextual spaces for teaching might help us consider possibilities to enact dispositions for social justice. If we agree that social justice is on a continuum of learning, unlearning, and relearning, we might consider that a *disposition* (the thoughts, feelings, actions, and attitudes) *for social justice* promotes agency and simultaneously strives to disrupt current practices that reproduce social, cultural, moral, economic, gendered, intellectual, and physical injustices. We suggest that each person has her/his/per own funds of social justice knowledge, or an already available embodied, moral, cultural, and socially conscious understanding of how ideologies perpetuate oppression within and among various subjectivities, which can manifest internally and/or externally and that can be tapped into, acquired, and developed in English teacher education (Miller, in press-a).

Given the emerging definition of a disposition for social justice, artifacts might be seen as aggregates over specified time (e.g., a semester, a year, or an entire undergraduate curriculum) to better understand a continuum of performance related to social justice teaching. In other words, a social justice orientation to teaching and learning is complex, requires the activation of multiple subjectivities, and may take time to develop. Having made the point about complexity and time, if we apply the concept of a “funds of social justice knowledge” (Miller, in press-a) to the draft performance indicators for Standard VI, Elements 1 and 2, we might consider teaching and assessing Standard VI through any one of the possibilities below.

**I. Option A: Assignment Development.** Asking candidates to design assignments or lessons consistent with a social justice orientation can be done in various ways: (a) structural assignment design by teacher candidates that takes student subjectivities into account or that overtly addresses issues of diversity, equality, and opportunity (goals, objectives, standards, procedure, materials, assessments, adaptations, and resources used to develop a lesson); (b) candidates assessing and keeping track of their students’ cognitive and affective processes related to the objectives; and (c) candidates’ written reflections (e.g., accounting for self and student growth, struggles/tensions, and possible lesson redesign). Additionally, teacher education candidates might be asked to specifically recall educational experiences that were instrumental in their past and connect them to their current teaching decisions. In this way, teacher educators might be helping them deconstruct the notion that teachers teach as they were taught, not as they were taught to teach. Personally and critically reflecting on narrative memories can be a powerful way for candidates to grow their teacher identities, in this case in regards to social justice.

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**II. Option B: Observation.** (a) Observation of preservice teachers during student teaching through written, visual, or oral narrative; (b) comparing candidate self-reflection and mentor teacher reflection on a lesson taught; and (c) identifying and revising any gaps in the observed lesson as it relates to Standard VI.

**III. Option C: Social Justice Portfolio.** (a) Submitting a portfolio of all lessons (and their accompanying documentation), unit plans, activities, participation in school or community events, etc.; and (b) self-reflection on how Standard VI was met by each submission. (Miller, in press-a)

We might also consider how assignments and their assessments might place less emphasis on outcomes and instead focus more on ways that candidates come to understand social justice processes. While assessments matter, when too much focus is put on outcomes or products, sometimes the micro-steps that enable growth are missed. By asking preservice teachers salient questions about what helped them learn about or unlearn justice and injustice, how they have experienced in/justice in their lives, how injustice affects people they care for, and how their former teachers acted in socially just or unjust ways, they can learn from their funds and use them as building blocks for other lessons and assessments.

Taking into account the intersection between Standard VI and the recognition that each preservice teacher is on a continuum of understanding related to social justice, and has a fund of social justice knowledge, we provide one final example of an assignment and evaluation that could be used to assess how preservice teachers are meeting the standard. Note: As Standard VI was only recently adopted, the example provided below, while addressing social justice, did not originally include direct reference to the standard or the assessment rubric we provide here (see Figure 2).

The Investigations in Geo-History assignment took place in sj Miller's course, Critical Pedagogy in English Education, but could be completed in a method's course. A geo-history (Miller, in press-a) is the narrative remnant of how social justice and injustice are situated in particular local histories as well as within the inhabitants who dwell in a local context and that leave (in)visible scars, woven into culturally and ideologically entrenched educational geographies. Since social justice and injustice are geographically co-produced by inhabitants, sustained by policy and behavior, and even co-opted into discourses, understanding and embodying social justice geo-historically can have endless possibilities. Bringing an assignment such as this into an English education classroom, and then disseminating the findings in schools at large, can potentially disrupt and interrupt practices that reproduce social, cultural, moral, economic, gendered, intellectual, and physical injustices.

This assignment asks students to look at a dominant social injustice narrative that sustains itself in dominant culture and to think critically about the messages that are disseminated: Where does this narrative come from? How does it get perpetuated? What and who is left out of this narrative? How does the narrative position the status quo of the population being discussed? Students are then asked to think through the consequences of that injustice, consider the accuracy of the geo-history (i.e., who narrates it, who is left out, whose voices are included/excluded), question the casting of the geo-history's social injustice as linear (i.e., Was a policy enacted that created an injustice? Was there a social injustice first? What caused subsequent events?), and how the social injustice has positioned people, groups, ideas, and ideologies into various dichotomies of inclusion/exclusion, normal/abnormal, superiority/inferiority, and desirability/undesirability.

For the assignment, students were asked to identify a topic of social injustice in the community where they were raised, where they currently live, or in the neighboring city to the university and examine the injustice based on the following criteria (Miller, in press-b).

1. **Describe the context of the location.** In your description, provide a sense of the geographic place of the injustice through explication of its economic, historical, and political history.
2. **Describe the inhabitants.** By approximating percentages, describe the mix of ethnicities, social classes, religions, typical family make-up, immigrants, persons with disabilities, English as a first language speakers, and the gay/lesbian/bi/transgender population.
3. **Describe the schools.** How many public versus private schools and universities are there? Be exact. Check the department of education website for this information, and then cite it.
4. **Explicate the social injustice.** In detail, describe the social injustice, where the injustice came from, how it affects the population of people in the environment, and if it is sanctioned by law.

**More specifically answer:**

- What is the dominant narrative about the social injustice?
- Is the casting of the geo-history's social injustice linear? In other words, was a policy enacted that created an injustice? Was there a social injustice first? What caused the change?
- What and who is left out, and how does that position the status quo or the population that is served?
- What are the general consequences of the injustice in the local community?
- Consider the accuracy of the geo-history (i.e., who narrates it, who is left out, whose voices are included/excluded).
- How has the geo-history generated dichotomies of inclusion/exclusion, normal/abnormal, superiority/inferiority, and desirability/undesirability?

- What can your research now tell us about shifting an evolving geo-history? How can it be re-casted? What was learned? What can we as English educators learn from this?

- 5. Describe how the social injustice affects a school.** To the best of your ability, explain how you see the social injustice and the answers to the above questions manifesting in a school of your choice. For this section, interview 2–3 teachers (or an administrator) at the school and investigate its impact on the school environment. **Please prepare a note for the teacher** that invites him or her to be interviewed and explain the reason for the interview. You should meet the teacher at a time and location that is convenient to the teacher. Prepare 5–6 questions in advance, and they could range from (a) How does this social injustice affect your school? Consider how the geo-history has generated dichotomies of inclusion/exclusion, normal/abnormal, superiority/inferiority, and desirability/undesirability. (b) How does this injustice affect your classroom? (c) What agency do you have in affecting change, and what do you foresee being able to do? You can either take notes or use an audio-recorder, but you will need to transcribe your interviews. This can also be done via email or Skype. Your findings from these interviews should be woven back into your paper as appropriate.
- 6. Suggest possible solutions or resolutions.** Based on your findings, consider solutions or suggestions for change that might be applied in the school or larger community. How can recasting this geo-history facilitate an awareness around social justice? Also, brainstorm a lesson that you could use in a secondary language arts classroom that draws attention to the social injustice. Your brainstorm should include a rationale and then briefly discuss how you would teach the lesson. Synthesize the answers found in part 5 as well as provide your own suggestions.
- 7. Type a thank-you letter to the teachers** (or administrator) and send it along with part 6 in this assignment (including the lesson idea), synthesizing ideas for change.
- 8. References:** Minimum 3.

### Write-up

Your write-up should be no longer than 6 pages (excluding the sources) and encompass all parts of 1–7, be double-spaced, 10–12 point font, using either MLA or APA formatting. Use sources as relevant to the research on the social injustice (citing its historical or political genesis), etc.

**Please also submit the following. These are not included in the write-up but are appendices.**

**Appendix A:** The letter to the teachers

**Appendix B:** The transcription of the interviews, or notes from the interviews, with coding notes

**Appendix C:** The copy of the thank-you letter sent to teachers or administrator (see Figure 2)

While this assessment rubric accounts for the intersection of Standard VI and the assignment, the standard did not drive the assignment develop-

	<b>Accomplished</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Progressing</b>	<b>Emerging</b>	<b>Developing</b>
<p><b>Element 1:</b> 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.</p>	<p>Assignment response has excellent insights that promote social justice and critical engagement with complex issues related to maintaining a diverse, inclusive, equitable society; includes specific details and descriptions for all questions; submits all three pieces of the appendix and includes specific details to all questions</p>	<p>Assignment response has good insights that promote social justice and critical engagement with complex issues related to maintaining a diverse, inclusive, equitable society; includes some specific details and descriptions for some of the questions, and has good command of language; submits all three pieces of the appendix and includes some specific details to all questions</p>	<p>Assignment response has adequate insights about how social justice and critical engagement relate to maintaining a diverse, inclusive, equitable society; includes less than thorough details and descriptions for some of the questions, and has sufficient command of language; submits all three pieces of the appendix but only adequately addresses details</p>	<p>Assignment response has insights but lacks in details and descriptions about how social justice and critical engagement relate to maintaining a diverse, inclusive, equitable society; command of language is thin; submits all or some pieces of the appendix but work is thin and there are gaps</p>	<p>Assignment response has a beginning awareness about how social justice and critical engagement relate to maintaining a diverse, inclusive, equitable society; submits some pieces of the appendix but work is still in the beginning stages questions or assignment was not completed</p>
<p><b>Element 2:</b> Candidates use knowledge of theories and research to plan instruction responsive to students' local, national, and international histories, individual identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender expression, age, appearance, ability, spiritual belief, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and community environment), and languages/dialects as they affect students' opportunities to learn in ELA.</p>	<p>Assignment response demonstrates mastery about how connecting students' individual identities with theories and research affects students' learning in the classroom.</p>	<p>Assignment response demonstrates a solid understanding about how connecting students' individual identities with theories and research affects students' learning in the classroom.</p>	<p>Assignment response demonstrates a growing understanding about how connecting students' individual identities with theories and research affects students' learning in the classroom.</p>	<p>Assignment response demonstrates a thin understanding about how connecting students' individual identities with theories and research affects students' learning in the classroom.</p>	<p>Assignment response demonstrates a beginning understanding about how connecting students' individual identities with theories and research affects students' learning in the classroom.</p>

**Accomplished** The preservice teacher has a mastery of how the task and standard intersect.

**Proficient** The preservice teacher has a strong awareness of how the task and standard intersect.

**Progressing** The preservice teacher is moving toward an understanding of how the task connects with the standard.

**Emerging** The preservice teacher is beginning to connect the standard with the task.

**Developing** The preservice teacher does not yet connect the standard with the task.

Note: The Teacher Candidate, the Cooperating Mentor Teacher, and the University Supervisor will each complete this assessment with a narrative that addresses any concerns, and the conversation will be crystalized in order to determine how well the candidate has met the requirements of the assessment. Should the candidate score below progressing, a remediation plan will be discussed.

**Figure 2.** A Possible assessment rubric that accounts for Standard VI and the intersection of the Geo-History Investigation

ment. The assignment was conceived from Miller's research about how geo-histories affect preservice teachers' teaching in various ways. English educators must have the academic freedom to devise assignments and related assessments that are relevant to their population of students and that can be informed, but not driven, by standards. On one hand, while this rubric does account for a continuum of understanding related to social justice, it is broad enough that assignments that connect with Standard VI might use this or a similarly devised assessment. Our intent is not to prescribe an assessment but instead to provide an example aligned with the new NCTE/NCATE standard. Simply put, our methods, as Dewey prophetically stated in 1916, should allow opportunities for students to wrestle with conflicts about morality.

Assignments that provide choice can motivate preservice teachers to write and conduct research about social justice and injustice. Crafting assignments that invite students to account for how history has affected dominant narratives and how it has shaped ideologies (including their own) can heighten awareness of social injustices. As preservice teachers are challenged to reflect, critique, embody, and assess differences across multiple social injustices through different activities, they can grow more justly conscious. Assignments that account for disjuncture between time and space and that are non-linear or understood as they occur in simultaneity can help teacher education candidates develop a framework for how unjust ideologies can marginalize students' identities. As English educators continue to create assignments and assessments that account for the intersections of multiple subjectivities that do not privilege one over another, binaries that have reinforced unjust dichotomies will begin to diminish in the English language arts classroom. Preservice teachers emboldened by these shifts can help to swing the pendulum toward a recasting of historical narratives in ways that can help transform the secondary language arts classroom in the twenty-first century, and possibly (if not ideally) the larger world.

## **The Future of Social Justice and English Education**

Even though accreditation is just one piece of an English Education program's mission, preparing for assessment does provide an opportunity to revisit our priorities. As NCATE and TEAC have merged to become CAEP, we might see a change in how accreditation agencies view their relationship to social justice teaching. Certainly, the NCATE Specialty Area Studies Board, which recently approved our revised standards, was enthusiastic about the inclusion of a social justice standard.



Our negotiation on issues such as social justice and its inclusion in assessments of dispositions is critical and necessary. With each revision of our standards we reevaluate what knowledge and competencies contemporary English teachers need to succeed with their students, and with each revision timely changes are made reflecting changes in society and culture as well as accreditation system requirements. As we reclaim social justice as not only embedded in NCTE/NCATE Standard VI, but also in the performance indicators or elements to activate the standard, English education develops and embodies agency to rupture a potential flattening out of social justice throughout preservice English teacher preparation. As our field embraces ideological and philosophical challenges reflecting those in our cultural landscape, and as we generate performance-based assessments that create rich opportunities for teacher candidate experiences to be assessed across context and over space and time, we prepare ourselves for other changes that may be in the pipeline.

As we continue in our efforts to name and center social justice in our teacher candidate assessment work, we draw attention to acts of injustice. By putting social justice back into teaching dispositions, and recognizing that each preservice teacher has social justice knowledge, our profession is both theoretically and pedagogically prepared for the possibility that teacher education and professional development may be sidelined in favor of the corporatization and de-professionalization of education looming on the horizon. By making sure social justice is an inherent and transparent aspect of valued dispositions for English teachers, we enact our belief that preparing English teachers is not only about lesson planning and the Common Core State Standards; it is also about fostering and effectively assessing social justice-inspired dispositions that are the foundation for a critical and equitable education for today's diverse students.

It is nearly impossible to refute that schools and schooling are inequitable and that multiple injustices affect schooling environments daily. These inequalities—too many to name—are at the core of the work we do. Centering social justice in education as ontological and epistemological would take a revolution of values in this country. We recognize this perspective and understand that even if social justice were to become dominant within theoretical and pedagogical practices, we know that as history has often demonstrated, when a pendulum swings too much one way there tends to be pushback, which in this case would likely galvanize oppositional strategies to offset or decenter social justice.

Social justice then, for us, at this time, is a paradigm for thinking about injustices in schools, and how people arrive at and work for more equitable schooling practices as a moral, embodied, and social realization to provide youth powerful opportunities for real-time critical engagement with curriculum in schools. We are not prescribing nor suggesting that social justice should be a mandate; yet we recognize that rooting social justice in standards can move us toward reclaiming English education, while recognizing competing perspectives and values about education in our country. At the beginning of this article, we opened up a dialogical space for our readers to help them think about the new NCTE/NCATE Standard VI for Social Justice. We are fortunate that it is here now for our field to wrestle with and contemplate. We know social justice work is messy and complicated and mediated by an ever-changing society. That said, we wonder how long the standard will last. What type of controversy might its codification provoke? What we know for sure is that standards, such as Standard VI, will shift along with political climates. We look forward to continued conversations about how English educators and their preservice teachers grapple with the complexity.

## Note

1. Morals are subjective, personal, and existential and stem from how individuals experience the world around them as right or wrong and therefore affect one's response in specific contexts.

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