

3-26-2014

## Reflections in the Classroom: Perspectives on Teaching for Social Justice from Secondary Social Studies Educators

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Reflections in the Classroom: Perspectives on Teaching for Social Justice  
from Secondary Social Studies Educators

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Secondary Education  
College of Education  
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:  
March 26, 2014

Keywords: critical pedagogy, secondary education, social justice, social studies

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## **Dedication**

This manuscript is dedicated to my best friend and wife, Amy. You have exemplified true friendship, support, and love at times when others did not. Sacrificing many of our favorite pastimes and placing many aspects of our lives on hold for something bigger than us required extreme focus and commitment and I thank you for experiencing that with me and supporting me in the process. Since working alongside you in Clarion during the Building Bridges and EOP years, our relationship has been like a flower constantly in bloom as we have explored social issues and conversed often on topics for which we had no labels. Now, we can continue to explore our curiosities and engage in those critical conversations with a more refined lens and expanded language through which to express ourselves.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express gratitude towards educators who teach and allow their students to learn from a social justice approach. This thing called social justice is not supposed to be comfortable in teaching or learning and you are fighting the good fight. First and foremost, I want to thank my participants. Sharing your lived experiences has been more like a series of meaningful conversations than interviews and without you this product would not be possible. Furthermore, I would like to thank my cohort members who have prompted untapped potential and a competitive spirit that aided me along the way. Despite our different perspectives on education and the social sciences, and theories on pedagogy and politics, I will cherish the experiences we shared throughout our years together.

It is with great honor that I acknowledge those who have supported my research interests through my coursework, the proposal defense, to this culminating moment of working to complete this research study. Dr. Eugenia Ivanovic-Vomvoridi has encouraged me to foster discussion of content and pedagogy with which I previously struggled to provide a name for: Teaching for Social Justice. Dr. Deirdre Cobb-Roberts, who not only provided creative experiences while learning about multicultural education, offered an in-depth and provocative look at the history of and current controversies of higher education. In addition, she encouraged me to explore a more comprehensive view of this research and has made this experience more manageable and meaningful. Dr. Valerie J. Janesick, as my methodologist, has helped to provide me with a comprehensive understanding of qualitative research. By asking tough questions and helping to foster my descriptive writing skills, her influence was powerful and I will always

remember the “co-researcher relationship” throughout the process of research. Dr. Michael J. Berson, my chair, advisor, and lifelong mentor. Providing academic guidance since graduate school, illustrating the useful nature of technology and social studies, introducing me to quality grant opportunities, and co-authoring my first publication, I cannot thank you enough. Your calm advice, keen eye for emergent research, drive to provide quality instruction, and consistent efforts in creating publications to inform others is inspirational.

"Well, if one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected — those, precisely, who need the law's protection most! — and listens to their testimony. Ask any Mexican, any Puerto Rican, any black man, any poor person — ask the wretched how they fare in the halls of justice, and then you will know, not whether or not the country is just, but whether or not it has any love for justice, or any concept of it. It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have."

James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, p. 149

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the perspectives of five secondary social studies educators who identified with teaching for social justice. The following research questions guided the study: How do educators who identify with social justice perceive teaching for social justice?; In what ways do educators who identify with social justice facilitate a social justice education?; What experiences prompt educators to teach for social justice in the classroom?; In what ways are educators challenged and rewarded while facilitating a social justice curriculum within the secondary social studies classroom? This qualitative study employed semi-structured interview questions and was conceptually-framed within critical pedagogy. The study provided participants the opportunity to: (1) explore their own perspectives on social justice as both a theory and pedagogy, (2) reflect on the qualities they bring to the classroom regarding social justice, and (3) familiarize others with challenges and rewards as they relate to teaching for social justice. While the study served to further investigate the overarching theme of teaching for social justice, findings revealed: commonalities in how participants define and interpret social justice as both a content and a pedagogy and how they facilitate a social justice approach in the classroom; similarities in the influential power of experiences in the lives of participants and the role these experiences played in both their personal and professional lives; the idea of exposure in that content and people with whom participants were exposed influenced their personal interpretations and understandings; teaching for social justice is not always implemented easily and without challenge, yielding courage and the commitment to stand up for what one believes. While critics argue against this framework and point out its vague and under

theorized meaning, the study serves to argue that teaching for social justice is inclusive and practical in nature and serves to promote equity and justice. Included within the study are implications based on the findings and the researcher's interpretations providing recommendations for other researchers, social studies educators that may want to frame future research on similar topics, and recommendations for social studies teacher education programs on implementing and facilitating teaching for social justice.

## Chapter One: Introduction

"And that is why I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Whenever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must – at that moment – become the center of the universe."

Elie Wiesel, *Night*, p. 118

Teaching for social justice is not only a theoretical approach to educating students, but a pedagogical style of providing voice to marginalized populations that can be employed across content areas. "Teaching for social justice involves advancing children's moral and ethical development and helping children learn how to (a) value differences between people, (b) identify social injustices in the world around them, and (c) take collective action to remedy the social injustices they find" (Lucey & Laney, 2009, p. 261). Furthermore, social justice education is intended to assist students in discovering and wielding their own power as both knowledgeable and critical people in attempt to create a more just society (Chapman, Hobbel, & Alvarado, 2011). Even with the push for a more inclusive and diverse content and pedagogy in education, the hierarchical structures in society continue to influence education that lacks representation of marginalized populations. Consequently, when consciousness of diversity is limited in education, the dominant culture continues to dominate, thereby, often leaving the voices of the

oppressed and marginalized populations silenced in many ways (Howard, 2006; Kumashiro, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ndimande, 2004).

Despite reform efforts, curricula in schools, from a behaviorist and positivist approach, often treat knowledge as something to be managed, adhered to, followed unyieldingly and without critique, and consumed unchallenged as if the represented knowledge is the universal “truth” for every student in the classroom (Ndimande, 2010). Therefore, the social studies classroom is an appropriate venue for fostering a social justice curriculum, since best practices emphasize social studies classrooms should serve as mediums of open inquiry where diverse viewpoints and perspectives are shared and analyzed reflectively (Banks, 2006a). Since social justice is aligned with and can be infused in multiple facets of the curriculum, social studies content lends itself to foster this style of liberatory pedagogy, democratization of the curriculum, and providing voices to marginalized populations.

### **Rationale for the Study**

While teaching for social justice is seen as a theoretical approach for educating students, as well as a pedagogical style to promote equality in learning environments, it continues to be under theorized and vague (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, & McQuillan, 2009; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009; North, 2009). Consequently, this creates a need for further discussion and clarification of the topic in order to further define its meaning and purpose. This study was an effort to further define the meaning and purpose of social justice, as well as explore how teaching for social justice can be facilitated in the classroom by exploring the perspectives of secondary social studies teachers who identified with teaching for social justice. Encouraging dialogue on teaching for social justice as both a theory and pedagogical practice helped to further inform the body of research, as well as provided a reflective experience for participants. There is

a need, as Giroux (1993) contends, for teachers to engage in inquiry in order to provide themselves the opportunities to take critical stances in their own practices as well as those of others and, thereby, reflexively and actively shaping their curriculum and policies within their school.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the push in social studies education to incorporate curriculum and pedagogy that is more inclusive, diverse, and representative of various perspectives, the hierarchical structures in society continue to influence education that lacks representation of marginalized populations (Kumashiro, 2000; Loewen, 2007; Takaki, 2008).

Rather than continuing to utilize a narrow or superficial lens to view multicultural education, as argued by Takaki (2008), *A Different Mirror* must be employed to incorporate a genuine multicultural perspective. Success or oppression should not be limited to a particular group, but rather education must focus on how all peoples have faced challenges and made achievements through the years. Takaki (2008) argued multicultural perspectives usually focus on just one minority and, while this may enrich and deepen “our knowledge of a particular group, this approach examines a specific minority in isolation from the others and whole” (p. 6). Representing people or groups in isolation is problematic as it encourages development of a narrow perspective that often includes misrepresentations. As Adichie (2009) highlights in *The Danger of a Single Story*, constantly portraying people through a single lens can lead to the belief that there is no alternative lens. As a result, it is critical to remember no story should be silenced and no story should be presented through a single, narrow, isolated lens. Since consciousness of diversity is limited in education (Kumashiro, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ndimande, 2004), attempts must be made to challenge the domination of the dominate culture

and the silencing of oppressed and marginalized peoples. Facilitation of social justice can aid in this process by encouraging curriculum and pedagogy that: (a) values differences between people, (b) highlights existing social injustice, (c) and encourages students to take action to positively influence existing social injustices (Lucey & Laney, 2009).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Connecting to Freire's (1970/2010) idea of emancipatory knowledge and the concept of educating for freedom (Janesick, 2004), teaching for social justice, as both a theory and practice, is framed by a critical perspective that directly aligns with and incorporates features of critical pedagogy. Within a social justice approach to educating students, Ladson-Billings (1995) argues it is important to "...systematically include student culture in the classroom as authorized and official knowledge" (p. 483). In an effort to encourage a more just society, teaching for social justice continually promotes the un-silencing of marginalized students. This effort should not only be present in the classroom by providing access and opportunity, but by taking steps to ensure various viewpoints and perspectives are shared in relation to history, facilitating learning on social issues, and representing various demographics so as not to perpetuate marginalization. When considering critical theory, an important component is the idea of "voice" by providing opportunities to highlight the thoughts and ideas of marginalized peoples (Ladson-Billings, 1998), as well as the intended goal to "...critique and challenge, to transform and empower" (Merriam, 2009, p. 10). Critical theory lends itself to teaching for social justice in that it seeks to expose power dynamics, highlight and challenge hegemonic structures that result in continued oppression and marginalization, and strives to bring about a more just society (Merriam, 2009). Incorporating critical theory in the classroom, critical pedagogy seeks to provide a connection between emancipatory knowledge and the injustices in the world by promoting the development

of critical consciousness in a way that students can begin to challenge and question the hierarchical structures in society. Since active questions emerge, not from passive learners or docile listeners, but critical agents actively questioning societal sources of power (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Freire, 1970/2010, Giroux, 2007), it is important to emphasize, in the teaching for social justice paradigm, learning is not something done to the student, but rather something they do (Shor, 1993).

Additionally, critical pedagogy maintains a connection to the goals and implications of teaching for social justice in the similarity that they both challenge hegemonic curricula in an effort to provide a more inclusive perspective. As noted by Jay (2008), "...it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action as the basis for social change" (p. 305). That reflection and action is what Freire (1970/2010) defines as *praxis*. For example, in the classroom, an educator can provide real-life application and discourse regarding elements in the students' diverse communities such as poverty, war, discrimination, or the national budget, while simultaneously highlighting what efforts can be taken for transformation, change, or improvement

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the perspectives of secondary social studies educators who identified with teaching for social justice. Participants involved in this study had the opportunity to: (1) explore their own perspectives on social justice as both a theory and pedagogy in the social studies classroom, (2) reflect on the qualities they bring to the classroom regarding social justice, and (3) familiarize others with challenges and rewards present in the classroom as they relate to teaching for social justice.



The provisions of this study were not solely for the participants, but for the researcher as well. Janesick (2007b) notes a commonality and sharing between the researcher and participant by stating they are “both engaged in a mutual process of translating and making sense of one another, essentially in a co-researcher relationship” (p. 112). Before the onset of the study, it was especially important for me, as the researcher, to explore, uncover, disaggregate, and interpret moments and experiences throughout my own life, so I could come to understand how I have come to interpret and frame this phenomenon. Additionally, this reflective process encouraged further understanding in the co-researcher relationship and allowed for a greater comprehension of “the lives of those whom we interview in order to understand ourselves and our worlds” (Janesick, 2007b, p. 112).

### **Background of the Researcher**

While my professional career has given me the opportunity to facilitate learning from a social justice perspective, the collection of experiences from both my personal and professional life have influenced my interests and have helped to frame my actions to align with this perspective of teaching and learning. Whether it was in my youth or in my current career as a social studies educator, I have had a series of experiences that have influenced my perspectives. I truly believe the child I was yesterday molded me into the student and educator I am today. In this writing, I will share a collection of moments that shaped how I view the world and how this has led me to embrace a social justice perspective. I must emphasize the experiences should not be seen as static, but rather have an ebb and flow in both momentum and occurrence. My experiences surrounding the nature of my connection to such an emancipatory style of teaching and learning are blended in time and have varying degrees of impact on my life, my interests, and my interpretations.

## **Speaking Freely About Race and Injustice**

During my senior year of undergraduate school, I worked on-campus in the minority student services office. Working with their affiliated program titled “Building Bridges,” I happened to meet my present-day wife. The program was arranged into teams of four or five facilitators and the goal was to build and/or explore better relationships amongst the various cultures and races on campus. This program was engineered in such a way that facilitators visited classrooms throughout the day to discuss pertinent issues both on-campus and in society. A program such as Building Bridges was certainly needed and valued by many on the campus. I believe it was my membership in Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, the Black Student Union, and involvement in Minority Student Services that provided the opportunities for me to discuss inequity and injustices on-campus and within society regarding demographic factors of race, gender, religion, and socioeconomic status.

My undergraduate alma mater is a predominantly white university in a rural area of western Pennsylvania where homogeneity and separation of race was evident in both the academic and social settings. However, despite these conditions, there was no blatant conflict between the various races that I personally experienced or heard of during the duration of my schooling. It seemed as if people assumed if you did not talk about race, injustice, or inequity, then it did not exist. Students would attend class, return to their dorm rooms, attend social functions, eat in the cafeteria, and rarely discuss race relations, culture and/or ethnicity, controversial current events, or segregation in society at large or within our own college community. For instance, in my courses, that had a one to thirty teacher-student ratio, I was the only black person in most of the classes, perhaps one of three in others. During my senior year, I was in a political science course and we were discussing the rights provided to blacks before and

after the slave era. One white male became agitated and angrily stated that slavery occurred centuries ago and it was a waste of time to discuss. Besides me, one other black person was enrolled in this class, but there was no verbal support from this classmate who shared this historic tragedy surrounding our ancestry. I immediately took offense to the white male's comment and argued the importance of discussing historical human rights violations, not only because they were historical atrocities, but because they relate to existing inequities today. My comment seemed to go over without response, because no one else was stirred by the conversation, even the other black student in the class. Even today, as I reflect back, I am disappointed that the black student, or any other like-minded white students, did not support me in leading the charge against minimizing the importance of civil rights in history. Despite my disappointment and lack of support, I am still glad I choose to speak my mind. From that point on, it became strikingly clear defending issues would sometimes be a lonely battle, but necessary.

### **Personal Connection to Social Justice**

As I reflect on my life today, I speak from a point of view that encompasses all of my lived-experiences up to this point. Given my own personal context, my perspectives regarding issues related to social justice are primarily connected to race and the historical struggles and oppression of African-Americans in the United States. Through my early school experiences, college, and teaching career, issues related to race have been a constant influence.

My earliest memory of feeling a need to advocate for social justice in a more structured manner than being involved in the Building Bridges program was during my internship as a student-teacher. One of the two schools where I was assigned was a facility for adjudicated teen males. While designing an American History lesson on the 1930's, I came across the Scottsboro

Boys trial of 1931 in a supplementary book, not the actual textbook for the class. Although I majored in social studies education, I never heard of this case during my high school or undergraduate years, and could not find it within the assigned textbook. Over the next few days, I made a few lessons surrounding this trial and, in my research, uncovered many other marginalized topics rarely discussed throughout the mainstream social studies curricula such as Executive Order 9066, the Willie Lynch letter, life and death of Harvey Milk, and the Navajo Code Talkers. My motive for researching and incorporating these topics throughout my teaching career came from a personal need to expose these historical tragedies, despite the fact that some textbook publishers elect not to tell these stories and share these “voices.” Therefore, I felt an obligation to purposefully insert the stories and voices of silenced groups in America into lessons. I began to ask myself questions such as: Why are these topics so taboo? Will students feel as if their race, gender, religion, or socioeconomic class does not matter if they are not referenced in textbooks or highlighted in lesson plans? Which topics are school-appropriate and which ones are too controversial? Why do some stories get voiced while others are left untold?

As I teach from a social justice perspective, my experiences are central in my efforts and guide both my instruction in the classroom and my research interests as a graduate student. While I do not consider myself as having arrived, as I continue to grow as a teacher for social justice, I continue to face various challenges, obstacles, and constraints. Nonetheless, I hope to guide myself and others toward a more democratic and just society while providing a representative perspective and inclusive voice in the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

Parameters of the proposed study align with qualitative methods and employed interviewing in an attempt to explore the thoughts and experiences of participants regarding

teaching for social justice. I created the following research questions to guide the study and prompt relevant feedback surrounding the participants' thoughts and experiences on the topic of social justice:

- (1) How do educators who identify with social justice perceive teaching for social justice?
- (2) In what ways do educators who identify with social justice facilitate a social justice education?
- (3) What experiences prompt educators to teach for social justice in the classroom?
- (4) In what ways are educators challenged and rewarded while facilitating a social justice curriculum within the secondary social studies classroom?

### **Overview of the Study**

The research sought to further examine teaching for social justice by exploring the perspectives of secondary social studies educators who teach for social justice. I selected five participants from a purposeful sample. In regards to selection, participants had to identify as aligning with the following criteria: (1) have taught for three years or more, (2) currently teach at least one social studies course, (3) acknowledge concern with topics related to oppression of marginalized groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion), (4) incorporate topics within lessons related to oppression of marginalized groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion), (5) acknowledge concern with oppression of marginalized groups, (6) promote the identification of injustices throughout society, and (7) acknowledge a concern to encourage a more just and equitable society.

Based on components of qualitative methods, I conducted interviews to gather data on participants' thoughts and experiences. The interview protocols that structured the interviews were provided to the participants one week prior to the interviews in order to allow time for

review. This review was intended to allow time for participants to comprehend the questions, recall related experiences, and consider any additional information that may aid in a more efficient, comfortable, and reflective interview process.

Beginning in July 2013 and extending into October 2013, I interviewed each participant twice to explore thoughts and experiences related to the research questions. Each interview lasted approximately one hour in length and was recorded on a 16 gigabyte iPod Touch™. At the conclusion of interviews, I fully transcribed each interview using Express Scribe™ software. Along with interview transcriptions, field notes and a researcher's reflective journal were used as additional data for the research process. Both the field notes and the journal were used for self-reflection and increased awareness by encouraging consciousness of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, reflections, personal biases, and assumptions. The process of writing field notes began with the first interview, but I began maintaining a reflective journal approximately one month prior to the first interview. The reflective journaling was used not only to provide a data set on my own reflections on the act of research, but to improve the practice of exploring my beliefs and ideas (Janesick, 2004) surrounding the topic of inquiry. Penzu™ was used for the reflective journal, which is online software for journal writing. This online software is password protected. Evidence of both journal writing and field notes will be provided within the appendix of the dissertation manuscript. After data was collected through the interviews, I used Rubin and Rubin's (2005) Steps of Interview Data Analysis to prepare and analyze the collected evidence. Based on the analysis, a manuscript was prepared to report the findings through the use of a developed narrative for each participant. Additionally, cross-case analysis was utilized to present findings by commonalities and themes.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were used to guide the research.

- (1) The dominant culture dominates the curriculum.
- (2) The student population is becoming more diverse.
- (3) Discussing perspectives and practices of teaching for social justice will help clarify the meaning and purpose of the phenomena and increase diversity awareness for educators and researchers in the field.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following concepts and terms are used throughout the research study:

#### **Critical Theory**

Developed out of the Frankfurt School in the 1920s as a response to positivism (Crotty, 1998), critical theory promotes awareness and emancipatory knowledge to identify and question sources of hegemony with the intent of empowering oppressed groups and promoting democratic change in relation to marginalized populations (Freire, 1970/2010, McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007).

#### **Critical Pedagogy**

Stemming from critical theory, critical pedagogy is an educational theory and practice that gained popularity through Paulo Freire's publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2010). This theory and "approach to schooling" (Grande, 2007, p. 317) encourages the development of critical consciousness by focusing on liberatory and emancipatory education to identify and question hierarchical structures in society that perpetuate oppression. Critical pedagogy aids in exposing and demystifying some of the truths that are often taken for granted and promotes analyzing them critically and with care (Nieto, 2002). The inclusiveness of this perspective captures what Shor (1992) highlights as "habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official

pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse" (p. 129).

### **Social Justice**

Social justice" has recently become increasingly popular in teacher education and is all-encompassing of a large range of practices and perspectives (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007), such as anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2004), critical literary practices (Comber, 2001; Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2005; Vasquez, 2004), critical, multi-cultural, and anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Schniedewind & Davidson, 2006; Sleeter, 2005), and culturally-relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This multilayered concept is centered on valuing the human rights of all people and is utilized by various "educators who set as a task the fostering of a more democratic society through classroom practices" (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009, p. 30).

### **Teaching for Social Justice**

Teaching for social justice is an educational philosophy that evolved out of and extended the concept of social justice, thereby placing it in the classroom as pedagogy to be implemented in multiple content areas. Rather than looking at society as a whole, teaching for social justice is focused on equality in the learning environment. In the pedagogical sense, Oyler (2011) emphasizes teachers must assume a capacity rather than a deficit orientation to children, families, and their communities, with a developing knowledge of oppression and a keen eye for inequity as it functions in schools, and a commitment to equity pedagogy" (p. 148). In social justice education, race, religion, gender, and sex are considered inclusionary rather than exclusionary



components (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). Whether it is considering gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, learning or physical abilities, language, or sexual orientation, teaching for social justice is all-inclusive and contends all students should be taught in a way that stimulates a consciousness of membership and agency within students (Greene, 1998).

### **Limitations**

The research maintained a focus on the perspectives of teachers who identified with teaching with a social justice approach, as well as the inner workings of teaching for social justice, and how it is manifest in the social studies classroom. In the study, the role of the researcher served as a limitation. I am not only sensitive to issues related to social justice, but I am a secondary social studies teacher who supports this approach to instruction, as well. While I used a reflective journal as a means of bracketing my biases, my personal connection to the research topic undoubtedly influenced my analysis and interpretations. Another potential limitation, in relation to my identity as the researcher, is the fact that I identify (and others identify me) as African-American. Considering race was one of the descriptors frequently used to define and describe social justice, I wonder if my race could have possibly influenced participants to mention issues surrounding race during interview discussions. I also wonder if participants, particularly the four white participants, would have spoken more freely about race or added additional information related to race if they were interviewed by a white researcher. Additionally, although the interviews and data analysis allowed for the conveyance of the rich description of the experiences surrounding the role of the participants as secondary social studies teachers who teach for social justice, the reported findings should not be generalized beyond the sample of participants in the context of the study. Despite their varied personal histories and variety of courses they teach in the social sciences, all of the participants teach in the same

school district in west central Florida. Additionally, although qualitative methods allow for the collection of rich and descriptive data, it is important to mention that obtaining verbal self-reported data through interviews may only be partially accurate and cannot be directly verified, especially since direct observations in the classroom setting were not employed. The findings, however, can be used to contribute to the social science education field by adding to the current literature on teaching for social justice, as well as encourage thinking and reflection on how to further influence both the theoretical approach and pedagogical style of teaching for social justice in the social studies classroom.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter one provided context for the study by describing the educational value of utilizing teaching for social justice as both content and pedagogy, while emphasizing the need for further exploration of the phenomena to clarify its vague and under theorized meaning and purpose. The chapter introduction highlighted the benefit of teaching for social justice by emphasizing its potential to encourage facilitation of liberatory pedagogy, democratization of the curriculum, and providing voices to marginalized populations. The chapter continued by explaining influences for and an overview of the proposed research. A statement of the problem that drives the research was provided, as well as the rationale and purpose for the research study. Chapter one also included the theoretical perspective used to frame the study, research questions, an overview of the study, research assumptions, and limitations.

In the second chapter, literature is examined related to the theoretical and pedagogical components of teaching for social justice in the field of social studies. Definitions of social justice provided by various educational researchers and authors are cited, along with references

to critical components, barriers, and resistance to implementation. Strategies and suggestions for incorporation in teacher education programs at colleges and universities are also explored.

Chapter three provides a thorough explanation of the research design employed for the study. The underlying theoretical perspective used to support the research is highlighted, as well as methods for participant selection, interview procedures, and data collection and analysis. The chapter also outlines how data was interpreted and reported.

Chapter four serves as a means of presenting the results from the research. After a narrative is provided to allow the reader to better contextualize the participants by offering an overview of personal histories and experiences, themes and subthemes from cross-case analysis are explored in relation to the research questions.

Chapter five presents a discussion of the major findings and interpretations from the interviews, establishes connections between emergent data and themes in relation to literature on social justice education, and offers suggestions for further research and implications for practice in the field of teacher education, particularly secondary education

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Social justice” has recently become increasingly popular in teacher education and is all-encompassing of a large range of practices and perspectives (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007), such as anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2004), critical literary practices (Comber, 2001; Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2005; Vasquez, 2004), critical, multi-cultural, and anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Schniedewind & Davidson, 2006; Sleeter, 2005), and culturally-relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This multilayered concept is centered on valuing the human rights of all people and can be employed by various “educators who set at task the fostering of a more democratic society through classroom practices” (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009, p. 30).

### **Teaching for Social Justice Defined**

Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, and McQuillan (2009), suggest that teaching for social justice is a subjective concept that is viewed as ambiguous by many and, although it may be widespread, given its under-theorized and vague meaning, there is a likelihood that it exists only in name. Considering the negative connotations associated with the term, the criticism surrounding its subjective nature, as well as arguments presented within the literature on its supposed impracticality within schools, it is pertinent to not only explain the foundational components of teaching for social justice, but also highlight its connections to critical pedagogy, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching.

Teaching for social justice is a multidimensional philosophy that encompasses many educational stakeholders including students, teachers, families, the community, and society at large. As referenced by Grant and Agosto (2008), Nieto (2000) contends “social justice is an individual, collective, and institutional journey that involves self-identity awareness, learning with students, developing meaningful relationships, developing multilingual/multicultural knowledge, challenging racism and other biases, having a critical stance, and working with a community of critical friends” (p. 187). Extending the concept further, Lucey and Laney (2009) claim, “Teaching for social justice involves advancing children’s moral and ethical development and helping children learn how to (a) value differences between people, (b) identify social injustices in the world around them, and (c) take collective action to remedy the social injustices they find” (p. 261).

Considering phrases in the previously cited definitions such as “meaningful relationships”, “moral and ethical development”, or “collective action”, one may see how critics proclaim social justice to be a subjective or ambiguous term or ideology; however, proponents of teaching for social justice would argue they are not looking to create an objective, solid definition, as one meaning does not exist, but rather they are looking to further incorporate the philosophy into practice to work toward equality in learning environments. Rizvi (1998) contends “the immediate difficulty one confronts when examining the idea of social justice is the fact that it does not have a single essential meaning—it is embedded within discourses that are historically constituted and that are sites of conflicting and divergent political endeavors” (p. 47). Therefore, the vagueness and ambiguity that some theorists reference is not a remarkable hindrance to the philosophy of teaching for social justice, but actually serves as a catalyst to

prompt further research on the topic, as well as exploring further means for implementation in the classroom.

Given their subjective nature, social justice definitions encourage theorists and practitioners who are examining them, regardless of their own perspective, to take away something new, ponder what it means to them, and consider to whom it applies. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970/2010), one of the major theorists of critical pedagogy who advocates educating for freedom (Janesick, 2004), states that within “the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 72). As maintained by Freire (1970/2010), many educators transfer knowledge to their students like empty containers and expect them to receive a collection of facts to be memorized, regardless of its applicability and relevance to the students’ lives.

The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (2010) conducted a study that reported a feeling of unpreparedness of teachers to work with students from socially and culturally diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) reported that 84 percent of teachers in schools are white and most speak only English (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2005). While the majority of the teacher population aligns with the dominant group (Zeichner, 2003), considering the ethnic minority student population is increasing and the student population is majority ethnic minority in many locations (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), there is a likely disconnect in the information students are expected to “bank.” For example, as emphasized by Meija and Gordon (2006), the school environment tends to be more favorable and embracing to students who exhibit European American middle-class behaviors similar to the European middle-class teachers and

administrators that maintain a majority presence within schools. Taking this into account, teaching for social justice may help to address these disconnects by encouraging incorporation of a philosophy that would encompass the experiences of oppressed, marginalized, minority, and non-dominant groups. Such encompassment could allow for facilitation of information regarding social injustices in content areas such as history, politics, and economics.

Subsequently, this style of teaching can create opportunities in the classroom to facilitate learning around a collection of experiences that highlight and value differences and represent diversity and inclusivity.

The experiences of the teacher and students involve hierarchies that establish an unequal and biased measurement of power and privilege. Lewis (2001) believes in “exploring the social construction of unequal hierarchies, which result in a societal group’s differential access to power and privilege” (p. 189), the same power and privilege consistently referenced by Freire (1970/2010). Both the teacher and students live in the world where they witness or experience social injustices; however, since most teachers represent the majority population (Zeichner, 2003), and most often do not belong to oppressed or marginalized groups, they often experience privileges, some of which they are unaware, and have power to either perpetuate or counter systems of oppression (Ladson Billings, 2006a). Considering the reciprocation of the learning process, incorporating social justice benefits the teacher, as well as the students, by helping teachers better recognize systems of oppression and how they can be challenged. As suggested by Lucy and Laney (2009), learning how to create a more just and democratic society would positively influence the moral and ethical development of both groups, as well as help both the teacher and students understand how to collectively take action to counter existing injustices and advocate for equality.

Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) define social justice “as the exercise of altering these arrangements (institutional and organizational power arrangements) by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing educational and personal dimensions, among other forms of relationships” (p. 162). Incorporating substantive terms like “actively engaging” and “exploring” within the definitions and facets of social justice, highlights that, when incorporated into the educational setting, something meaningful is happening with learning. This interaction serves to emphasize why teaching for social justice seems to embody both theory and practice as it is all-encompassing of what a nourishing and enriching education should be for all learners in the classroom.

Extending this idea, Nieto and Bode (2007) highlight features of social justice education that reference both theory and practice in the classroom. The authors contend social justice: (1) 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,” (2) provides “all students with the resources necessary to learn to their full potential,” (3) draws on the “talents and strengths that students bring to their education,” and (4) creates a “learning environment that promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change” (p. 11). It is the responsibility of the educator to promote such learning environments, which Ayers (1998) emphasizes as having ample opportunities to exercise social justice with entry points for learning and numerous pathways to success which display, foster, embody, demand, expect, model, nurture, and enact inquiry toward transformation.

### **Critical Components of Teaching for Social Justice in the Social Studies Classroom**

In view of Freire’s (1970/2010) idea of *conscientização*, a concept that suggests individual and collective consciousness can be altered when individuals learn to recognize and



challenge contradictions within social, political and economic frameworks, further highlights the benefits of incorporating social justice as a critical component in the social studies classroom. It encourages the exploration of such consciousness to allow both the students and teacher to identify existing injustices and consider how to take action against them. As emphasized by Kumashiro (2000), harm to the marginalized groups in schools can result from actions by peers, teachers, or faculty. Additionally, Kumashiro states, “the harm results from inactions, by educators, administrators, and politicians” (pp. 26-27) which can be aligned with what Kozol (1991, 2005) details as poor educational resources, disengaging curriculum, and/or unsafe classrooms and buildings. Considering both the actions and inactions, careful steps should be employed to examine existing marginalization and oppression and explore ways to counteract injustice. Argued by Ndimande (2004, p. 202), “It becomes important to interrupt hegemonic tendencies, including those that manifest themselves through educational institutions.”

Conscious efforts to counter oppression and interrupt dominant norms can be supported through efforts to teach for social justice when all stakeholders collaborate as “actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, and the broader world in which we live” (Dixson & Smith, 2010, pp. 1-2).

When thinking about social justice and its incorporation into the social studies classroom, some may ask, “Isn’t that just good teaching?” Although most proponents of teaching for social justice would not challenge the idea that incorporating culturally-relevant pedagogy in the classroom is “good teaching”, Ladson-Billings (1995) responds to this suggestion by highlighting, if it is just good teaching, “why does so little of it seem to occur in classrooms populated by African-American students?” (p. 484). Moreover, given the expanding nature of diversity in the United States, it is important to recognize demographics beyond racial and ethnic

minorities who experience marginalization, such as students from lower-socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, students with special needs (physical and/or academic), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and students who self-identify as gay or lesbian. The United States has experienced the largest arrival of immigrant children since the last turn of the century and is dealing with more religious and language diversity than most educators are trained to embrace effectively in their classrooms (Banks, 2006; Eck, 2001; Garcia, 2005). Subsequently, Ladson-Billings' argument can be applied to this inclusive view of diversity given the students' learning experiences are often considered inferior since they are not representative of the dominant culture and norms (Kumashiro, 2000), and, as a result their stories are commonly misrepresented in the classroom, glossed over, or overlooked entirely.

Students in low-income communities are at a disadvantage to their middle and upper-class peers because of a lack of resources and a qualitatively inferior education (Ferguson, 2000; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Rothstein, 2004). Poverty and substandard education tend to go hand-in-hand; while the middle and upper-class schools offer a quality education, allowing for more critical literacy and college preparatory courses, schools in low SES communities tend to focus on rote memorization skills and prepare students for standardized tests (Kozol, 2005). Considering that the majority of educators are white and middle-class (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), incongruence exists between the teacher's and student's experiences that may influence how they can relate to one another. The incongruence may also provide some sort of explanation as to why this "good teaching" is not happening in such environments. When attempting to consider the experiences and perspectives of the marginalized groups, members of the dominant group are challenged, partly because they have not been subject to the same experiences, oppressions, and inequalities. Without facing and addressing such challenges, the

teacher may not recognize that equality in the learning environment is something that even needs to be considered. As a result, there continues to be an overwhelming presence of a monocultural approach to educating students, which furthers the idea of the dominant culture's values, behaviors, and beliefs are necessary for succeeding academically (Green, 2007). Countering these forced ideas of assimilation and thinking patterns, teaching for social justice encourages educators to embrace diversity and value the experiences of all students. Not only does incorporating social justice ideals help to create a moral, ethical, and equal learning environment, but given the various characteristics of diversity found in classrooms today, the practice can be fodder for a rich assortment of culturally-based learning scaffolds, especially in the social studies classroom (Green, 2007).

Along with being more inclusive and representative, adding to the criticality of the philosophy, is that incorporating teaching for social justice enhances the opportunity to nurture critical and multicultural literacy within classrooms. Considering the presence of injustice within various social studies curricula, as well as throughout the world, critical literacy challenges the dominant ideology in an effort to unveil alternative options for individual and social growth (Shor, 1999). Multicultural literacy derives from the skills and ability to recognize the creators of knowledge and their interests (Banks, 1996), to uncover the assumptions of knowledge, to observe knowledge from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives, and to utilize knowledge to guide action that will create a humane and just world. Banks (2004b) states, "When we teach students how to critique the injustice in the world, we should help them to formulate possibilities for action to change the world to make it more democratic and just" (p. 291). As a vital component of the many lessons with social justice characteristics embedded within their framework, students are taught to inquire about the sources of knowledge placed

within textbooks or media sources, entertain and respect the viewpoints of diverse demographics, and creatively formulate their own opinions of how to implement change within society, no matter how popular the effort may be. Therefore, citizens will not just participate in a democratic society, they will be taught, as students, to effectively critique the world, which is essential when considering how to fight unequal or oppressive systems (Wade, 2007). In order to encourage such advocacy in the classroom, teachers can employ practices of social justice by (a) enacting curricula that integrates numerous perspectives, questions dominant Western narratives, and is inclusive of ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity in North America; (b) supporting students in developing a critical consciousness of the injustices that characterize society; and (c) scaffolding opportunities for students to be active participants in a democracy, trained in forms of civic engagement and deliberative dialogue (Agarwal, 2011).

Welcoming social justice as a critical component into social studies provides practice for critical thinking on various educational levels concerning topics of injustice, imbalances in power and hierarchy, oppression, and ideas for changing society. This theory, practice, and method of teaching for social justice can be sought after on many levels. Pre-service teachers and professors in colleges of education can read *Other People's Children* by Lisa Delpit (1995/2006), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire (1970/2010), *Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms* by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2001), *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know* by Gary R. Howard (2006), *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?* edited by Peter McLaren and Joe L. Kincheloe (2007), or *See You When You Get There* by Gregory Michie (2005). Books such as these can help to further inform pre-service teachers of what is required of good teachers, as well as the existing policy and practice within the classroom. Within these books lie reminders to graduate-level educators of the importance of

creating an inclusive classroom, family-community-teacher relations, the impact of abusing power, and a plethora of strategies on how to encourage liberating the minds of their students.

Along with being a powerful tool for teachers, books can be used within the classroom setting to enrich a social justice curriculum, as well. Trade books such as *Souder* by W.H. Armstrong (1969), *Elijah of Buxton* by Christopher Paul Curtis (2007), or even *Sneetches and Other Stories* by Dr. Seuss (1961/1989) can be used to incorporate teaching for social justice in the classroom. Within the secondary social studies curriculum, books to consider for incorporating social justice are *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James Loewen (2007), *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* by Randy Shilts (1982), and *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston (1973).

Teaching for social justice also provides a means to critique the current educational system, a system where some students may feel oppressed, and express their current identity and status within the American hierarchy. In a piece titled, “Once Upon a Time When Patriotism Was What You Did” by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006b), dialectic is introduced to the reader between patriotism as it is done and how it is said. Ladson-Billings (2006b) expressed concern over her past “micro-aggressions” of being raised during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s. In this piece, she describes a local school district in Madison, Wisconsin that forced students to stand for the pledge of allegiance and national anthem after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. Additional details were provided surrounding the controversial decisions made by the U.S. government during national crises such as September 11<sup>th</sup> and Hurricane Katrina. While political pundits question the patriotism of American citizens during crises such as those previously mentioned; they establish a framework for what the phenomenon of patriotism looks like. Echoing a statement made by a local school board member, Ladson-Billings (2006b) states,

“patriotism is not what you say; patriotism is what you do” (p. 588). Real-world experiences such as these can encourage fruitful conversation under the umbrella of social justice and foster a level of critique that confronts how students perceive patriotism from their own perspective, not just from what the dominant culture and structures may influence them to believe.

Similar experiences exist for teachers within schools today, as well as our students in the classrooms; however, this dialectic often falls silent within the classroom as students often do not have platforms to speak upon these issues like university professors, college students, or even teachers within the community. Teaching for social justice within the classroom provides opportunities for students to express their opinions based on past experiences and the current situations of their surrounding community. Students in schools today experience and witness Islamophobia, homophobia, racism, bigotry, ableism and other issues concerning oppression, discrimination, and an imbalance in power and hierarchy. Thornton (2003) highlights the concept of “heteronormativity” in an article titled, “Silence on Gays and Lesbians in Social Studies Curriculum” as a reminder of how to incorporate research into practice from a critical perspective. This concept of heteronormativity or the “belief that the archetypal human is straight” (p. 226) is omnipresent within schools today and affects the ever-so-changing population of students. Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, or transgender students are influenced to remain as silent as the textbooks remain on such issues often without the support of teachers skilled in promoting social justice within the classroom walls.

Social justice education can assist students in discovering and wielding their own power as knowledgeable and critical people (Chapman, Hobbel, & Alvarado, 2011), especially those who identify with marginalized groups in America. While human rights issues are primarily reserved for once students graduate and join organizations in college or the community, human

rights can be emphasized in the classroom, as well. Karagiannis, Stainback, and Stainback (1996) state, “Education is a human rights issue and schools need to modify their operations to include all students” (p. 3) and further suggest discrimination as a means of social discontent. Students need tools to combat any form of oppression or add to the discourse surrounding issues of social discontent.

### **Barriers and Resistance to Teaching for Social Justice**

Rarely will one find a theory, philosophy, or practice without critics or opposing theories attempting to create barriers or form resistance to oppose its implementation or effectiveness; social justice is no exception. As previously referenced, critics often oppose teaching for social justice simply because it is not an objective standard. Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, and McQuillan (2009) reference criticism regarding the philosophy and practice of teaching for social justice by asserting that social justice is a concept that is ambiguous, under theorized, and vague. As highlighted by Chapman, Hobbel, and Alvarado (2011), “For many teachers, social justice remains an espoused ideal with little practical application” (p. 539). Some teachers find teaching for social justice to be too overwhelming as they perceive it in that they are expected to undo a long list of discriminatory social structures in order to teach in this manner with full effort (Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu, 2009). Agarwal (2011) notes:

Although pre-service teachers may leave their graduate programs with strong social justice leanings, they also may enter the profession struggling to build, integrate, and enact justice-oriented social studies curriculum. Pressures and constraints, such as adhering to a mandated curriculum and preparing students for standardized tests, may be

especially challenging for novices, requiring those committed to social justice to delicately balance what they want to teach with what they are able to teach. (p. 53)

While novice educators certainly face overwhelming demands and are constrained by policies and politics, if “good teaching” is really a priority and teachers are committed to creating a representative and inclusive classroom and equal learning environment, teaching for social justice should become a priority.

Highlighting the impact of policies and politics, there is an on-going struggle between standards and teaching for social justice in many classrooms throughout America. Bender-Slack and Raupach (2008) note “because of standardized state tests and national mandates such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), standards-centered curricula tend to drive many social studies classrooms” (p. 255). In *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?*, edited by McLaren and Kincheloe (2007), Janesick (2007a) explicitly states, “...in the case of high-stakes testing, critical pedagogy has been pushed to the margins” (p. 239). Along with not being promoted, and sometimes being invisible within the proposed curriculum, teachers often assert that since the social justice content does not relate to the standardized tests, it is a secondary or tertiary focal point. Teaching is indeed driven by various standardized tests. As a result, the benefits of teaching for social justice are often minimized or overlooked as teachers feel they face an ultimatum between: a) covering the standards that align with the standardized tests or b) incorporating social justice. Given the reality of the attention paid to test scores, as well as the monetary rewards and academic prestige tied to such scores, the ultimatum is usually quickly solved. If it were not viewed as an ultimatum, but rather teachers could see the academic value in the strategies incorporated in teaching for social justice, such as critical thinking and critical



literacy, perhaps it would not be seen as a choice of one over the other and both needs could be accommodated.

### **Teaching for Social Justice in Social Studies Education**

Implementing theory into practice can sometimes be challenging for classroom teachers and professors and those difficulties often serve as further research interests in academe. Teaching for social justice is no exception, but when it emerges from the social studies curriculum, it is illustrated and implemented in various ways. For example, the ways an educator could approach the curriculum from a social justice perspective should, as Au (2009) suggests, challenge the status quo norms of historical knowledge, “integrate multiple perspectives, examine and question sources of privilege and inequity, and support social change” (Agarwal, 2011, p. 52). Furthermore, Wade (2007) contends social studies classes are well-suited for instruction of oppressive tendencies and anti-oppressive possibilities of individuals, cultures, institutions, and histories. A critical part of social studies instruction has long been the involvement of students in making sense of social issues in the past and present in order to inform future decisions (Samuels & Berson, 2012). Such ideas can be translated into classroom practice through the use of a variety of strategies, some of which may include whole group discussions, small group activities, independent learning, online learning interfaces, and extra-curricular opportunities.

When illustrating the practicality of teaching for social justice, teachers navigating their way through any grade-level social studies curriculum may utilize critical literacy activities. As emphasized by Freire (1970/2010), critical literacy encourages readers to move beyond accepting the messages they read in a passive manner, in order to look at the material more deeply and foster good question-posing. Some cited examples are reading trade books (Wade, 2007) that

capture scenarios involving marginalized groups experiencing social injustice, writing expository essays (Chapman, Hobbel, & Alvarado, 2011) that revolve around various themes of social justice, reading poetry (McCall, 2004) that exposes students to cultural diversity throughout the nation or world, creating awareness through the identification and analysis of local history and protests (Cruz, Berson, & Falls, 2012), and listening to music (Lucey & Laney, 2009) for lyrical analysis of social justice issues.

In a more modern pedagogical and independent approach of allowing students to immerse themselves in social justice, educators may also attempt to engage students with an online interface. In an article titled, “Beyond a Story Well Told” (Miller, 2010), five graduate students interviewed 11 consenting adults (five African Americans, six Caucasians, four males, and seven females) in a southern Illinois community in order to capture stories concerning experiences of racial segregation in their lives. An activity like this, that uses interviews, can be implemented on most grade levels. Although the available resources would influence how the interview material could be reported, especially in schools with limited resources, the interviews could prove to be an enlightening and enriching educational experience.

Despite the plethora of pedagogical strategies, relevance is of the utmost importance and active learning needs to be at the forefront when facilitating teaching for social justice. The difference between “just good teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and strategies highlighted in much of the social justice literature is the emphasis on empathy, multiple perspectives, and activism. An overarching goal should be to prepare students for participation in a democratic society and “whether they are part of a planned curriculum or a spontaneous teachable moment, the ways in which we use a variety of teaching methods empower our students to be critical thinkers and social activists, now and in the future” (Wade, 2007).

### **Teaching for Social Justice in Teacher Education Programs**

Reports from teachers indicate their pre-service preparation did little or nothing to prepare them for today's diverse classrooms (Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Oylar, 2011). With the changing demographics in the United States population, this lack of preparation can be counterproductive regarding what teachers need in order to educate, relate to, and meet the needs of a diverse student population. Cobb-Roberts and Agosto (2011) emphasize, "Schools and colleges of education are responsible for preparing pre-service and in-service professionals (i.e., teachers, counselors, administrators) to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse society" (p. 7). Therefore, it is critical social justice remains at the core within an institution that maintains a culture that is conducive to teaching and promoting diversity (Cobb-Roberts & Agosto, 2011).

For example, during the 2006-07 school year, Title I schools served more than 17 million children. Of these students, approximately three percent were in preschool, 60 percent in kindergarten through fifth grade, 21 percent in grades 6-8, 16 percent in grades 9-12, and less than one percent ungraded (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). By 2003, racial and ethnic minority students comprised 41 percent of overall enrollments in U.S. public schools (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). In 2010, there were more than 23 states with 1,000 or more Title I schools from elementary to secondary (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). If one previews the statistics for people of color, 33.1 percent of all African Americans, 30.6 percent of Latinos, and 18.8 percent of other people of color live in poverty, as compared to 9.9 percent of whites (Taeuber, 1996). Based on race alone, the percent of change from 2000-2010 in population remained at 5.7 for Whites, 12.3 percent for Blacks, and 43 percent for Latinos (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Given the ever-changing population and the increasingly diverse demographic that will result, teacher candidates will undoubtedly encounter more diverse classrooms where a diversity of racial backgrounds is represented. Epstein (2009) notes that dialogue about racism, both historically and present-day, is challenging, especially in classrooms consisting of multiple races or those where the student and teacher have different identities or interpretive frameworks. While this dynamic is often perceived as challenging, it could be perceived as an increased opportunity to discuss the dynamics and impact of race in educational arenas. Furthermore, when considering immigration, poverty, English-language learners, and other situational backgrounds, if teachers want to both nurture and challenge their students, they should not continue to incorporate assimilating policies or uphold the cultural norms of the majority, but rather be prepared to create an equal learning environment where all students are understood and valued.

This exponential increase in diversity throughout schools heightens the need for a prepared force of teacher candidates to emerge from the various colleges of education with an arsenal of skills, experiences, and content knowledge. Instilling knowledge and skills will encourage teachers to develop an increased confidence that may result in enhanced energy and creativity on how to implement teaching for social justice. When thinking about such preparation, it is important to consider the plethora of new graduates entering the profession with relatively high levels of privilege (i.e., white, educated, middle class, heterosexual, and Christian) who should come to acknowledge a potential communication barrier (Murray, 2010) and avoid the destructive nature of a deficit-based approach (Oyler, 2011) to educating students in their classroom. Despite the changing face of the population of students, in 1999, 80 percent of prospective teachers nation-wide identified as white (Association of Colleges of Teacher

Education, 1999). In 2004, national statistics revealed people of color represented 40 percent of the student population in public schools, whereas only 17 percent of public school teachers were people of color (Boser, 2011). Public school teachers of color are 7.9 percent Black, 6.2 percent Hispanic, 1.3 percent Asian, 0.7 percent Multiple Races, 0.5 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.2 percent Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Subsequently, the majority of members of the current teaching workforce and the students they teach do not look like one another. This presents a challenge for educators, particularly new educators, as they enter into some of the most diverse schools, and as Delpit (2006) states, “teachers cannot hope to begin to understand who sits before them unless they can connect with the families and communities from which their students come” (p. 179). In order to try to promote and encourage equity in the learning environment, educators have to engage the students immediately without hesitation. Given new educators will no longer have the support or be held accountable by their supervisors, cooperating teachers, or university professors, it is critical teacher education programs prepare teachers to not only teach to a diverse population, but consider the needs of the diverse students, in an attempt to encourage a learning environment conducive to understanding, valuing, and respecting all people.

Given the onslaught of statistical evidence regarding the changing demographics within communities, schools, and classrooms, some teacher preparation programs are navigating their way through the curriculum in ways that attempt to prepare educators. Such navigation includes efforts to decrease the effect of inequality and inequity, oppression, increase critical literacy, encourage moral and ethical development, and create more active citizens. For example, Elmhurst College in Illinois has a Masters level teacher preparatory program designed for educators who want to remain in the classroom, but serve as leaders in their school communities

and within education in general. “Promoting Social Justice in Pre-K through 12 Multicultural Literature” is one of the courses in the program. Taught by assistant professor Jeanne White (2008), the course is designed to explore questions such as: (a) what is the meaning of the term social justice? and (b) how can it be incorporated in to the social studies curriculum? Each week, the teachers enrolled in the course examined children’s literature that revolved around issues of social justice. Throughout the course, the teachers explored the use of various terminologies (i.e. Chicano, Latino, and Hispanic) and the appropriate usages of terms such as Oriental and people of color (Feagin & Feagin, 2002). The teachers were introduced to strategies and methods, as well as resources such as current events, picture books, and articles. Such classes could be useful to both pre-service and experienced teachers who have little connection to their students or those teaching in a community that does not primarily identify with the same race, culture, or level of privilege as the teacher. Methods and strategies of infusing social justice into lessons similar to those being explored by the program at Elmhurst College could help to provide teachers practical applications and strategic resources.

Similar templates can be found in other programs, as well. Supported by the works of Freire (1970/2010), a critical literacy curriculum is implemented in social studies methods undergraduate courses and pre-service teachers are taught methods of instructing elementary students about topics such as the Holocaust and Ellis Island (Marshall & Klein, 2009). In an article titled, “Lessons in Social Action: Equipping and Inspiring Students to Improve Their World” (Marshall & Klein, 2009), the authors argue why such strategies are needed and explicitly contend that it is “the responsibility of teacher educators to provide pre-service candidates with the tools necessary to address issues of social justice and equity in their future classrooms.” Much of the research on teacher education programs is associated with local

community partnerships (McDonald, 2005; Carlisle, Jackson, & George, 2006), within the elementary teacher preparation programs (Agarwal, 2011; McCall, 2004), or titled with other terms relating to social justice: culturally-relevant pedagogy or multicultural education (Green, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

### **Needs of Teacher Preparation Programs**

In regards to meeting the needs of what novice educators need to be prepared for the diverse classrooms of today, many teacher education programs are still in need of improvement (Ladson Billings, 1995). Nieto (2000) notes in 1980, during the time when she taught her first multicultural education course, it was a little more than “window dressing” of what took place in the classrooms and schools in the name of diversity. She references attempts at multicultural perspectives such as “Christmas Festivals around the World” or “Brotherhood Week” during an assembly program. Although such strategies are efforts to encourage multiculturalism, many pre-service teachers considered them to be a waste of time and did not see or value their relevance. As previously highlighted, given the majority of educators are from the dominant group in America, they are less likely to have experiences and interactions with diverse demographic groups. As a result, they might not see the value in such multicultural exercises, because they do not have to. Ladson-Billings (2006a) suggests an immersed experience, giving “prospective teachers an opportunity to interact with children and adolescents in non-school settings; pre-service teachers need the chance to see students in places where they are likely to be experiencing success—community and neighborhood center, clubs, teams, and after-school activities” (p. 108). According to Ladson-Billings (2006a), this active engagement and learning on the part of the teacher is comparable to the practical experience of being in the field.

Another factor for teacher education programs preparing educators to teach for social justice to consider is to encourage the teacher educators to “structure experiences and activities so that our students can take a close look at their cultural systems and recognize them for what they are—learned behavior that has been normalized and regularized” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 109). Davis (2007) poses a rhetorical question in an article highlighting what educators need to know in order to teach African American students, “How can educators properly educate African-American children without a firm grasp of African-American historical cultural heritage and confounding contemporary African-American sentiment that often discourages African-American educational attainment?” (p. 33). Although Davis specifically addresses African American students, the idea could be adjusted to represent any oppressed or marginalized group represented in classrooms today. Teachers must be equipped with knowledge of and tools to encourage and incorporate diversity in order to appropriately educate students. Ultimately, as individuals prepare to be teachers, it is critical to keep democratic values and commitments in mind if they are to be the primary agents of change in schools. Goals should include placing educators in classrooms with strong and clarified democratic values and the knowledge and skills to implement a curriculum that will empower students to acquire the content, commitment, and competencies needed to partake in democratic social change (Banks, 2006b).

### **Conclusion**

There is a strong need to educate future teachers in a way that extends beyond the content courses of social studies, strategies and methods, or multicultural celebrations of yesterday in order to equip pre-service teachers with knowledge so they feel comfortable talking about and facilitating instruction regarding matters of diversity, equality and justice. It is time for equity



and social justice to move beyond being simple buzzwords and enter a place where they can be a lived practice in the classroom (Hackman, 2005).

Although teaching for social justice is a subjective idea that encompasses a variety of definitions, the ideas behind the philosophy and practice embrace equality and value human rights of all people. The ideas perpetuated by able-ism, sexism, heteronormativity, racism, classism, and other forms of oppression must be challenged. Not only does the changing demographic warrant the philosophy and practice of teaching for social justice, but the need to be a better people that embrace equity for all and fight systems of oppression serve as a rationale as to why the practice must be embraced.

Despite resistance to incorporating social justice and reasoning such as lack of time and resources, if teachers and students want to work towards change, it is not something that can continue to be ignored. Though the idea of teaching for social justice is gaining in prominence, and it is well represented in the literature, the reality is that it remains a topic and practice that can be easily overlooked. Rather than infusing the characteristics within the curriculum, many teachers view teaching for social justice as an extra topic to be covered or a topic to be presented in isolation. Such thinking not only marginalizes the topic of teaching for social justice, but also further marginalizes the experiences of marginalized populations. Since many argue there is still room for improvement within teacher preparation programs, there are researchers, practitioners, and theorists that provide frameworks and methods for execution. Given the fear of offending someone or prompting feelings of uneasiness surrounding matters of potential controversy, such frameworks are important because they equip teachers with the knowledge of how to incorporate teaching for social justice in an attempt to create and inspire equality in the learning environment.

## **Chapter Three: Methods**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of secondary social studies educators who identified with teaching for social justice. These perspectives were then used to examine how participants developed an interest to teach for social justice, how they facilitate a social justice education, and what they perceive as potential successes and challenges of this phenomenon.

This study was designed to further examine teaching for social justice by exploring the perspectives of secondary social studies educators who identify with a teaching for social justice approach. Five participants were selected from a purposeful sample. Selected participants self-identified with the following selection criteria: (1) have taught for three years or more, (2) currently teach at least one social studies course, (3) acknowledge concern with topics related to oppression of marginalized groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion), (4) incorporate topics within lessons related to oppression of marginalized groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion), (5) acknowledge concern with oppression of marginalized groups, (6) promote the identification of injustices throughout society, and (7) acknowledge a concern to encourage a more just and equitable society.

The following research questions were designed to guide the study and were explored in the interviews: (1) How do educators who identify with social justice perceive teaching for social justice, (2) In what ways do educators who identify with social justice facilitate a social justice education, (3) What experiences prompt educators to teach for social justice, and (4) In what

ways are educators challenged and rewarded in facilitating a social justice curriculum within the secondary social studies classroom?

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The research study was framed by critical pedagogy, a theory that evolved from and coexists within the realm of critical theory. Emergent from the Frankfurt School around the 1920's (Henn, Weinstein, & Foard, 2009) and the philosophies of Antonio Gramsci, Jurgen Habermas, and Karl Marx, critical theory evolved from critiques of societal and class structures in Europe, aligned with Freire's commitment to educate for freedom (Janesick, 2004), and the critical pedagogy facilitated in some American classrooms today. As an advocate of positivism, August Comte (1957) argued knowledge emerges from positive verification of scientific experiences and empirical investigation, leaving observation of reality to be purely objective and value-free (Ingram, 1998). A paradigm shift prompted a theory and pedagogy that lessened the objectification of scientific inquiry and moved towards student construction of individual meanings through what was learned and experienced. Differing from the positivist approach to discourse, critical theory focuses on the curriculum of the school and classroom, human emancipatory philosophies, and democracy (Ndimande, 2010). This paradigm shift encouraged the emergence of critical theory and decades later, it would allow for application within education as critical pedagogy.

The content surrounding the study is teaching for social justice, which is driven by critical pedagogy and maintains goals such as providing voice to marginalized populations, encouraging critical thinking, promoting critical literacy, identifying the power structures present within society in order to challenge the hegemonic structure, and creating a more just society. This theory, practice, and conceptual framework was used to center the experiences of educators

who consciously or unconsciously promote critical thought in their classrooms and provide a channel for dialogue surrounding their experiences of teaching from a social justice approach. When analyzing key features of critical pedagogy, it can be beneficial to reference the banking concept of education. The banking concept is a popular educational notion within the critical pedagogy paradigm that emphasizes how educators facilitate educational experiences with their students in the classroom in a way that promotes liberatory knowledge and critical thinking within an oppressive society. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970/2010) describes the banking concept of education where “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 72). In this reference, the “knowledgeable” are those called educators, whereas those considered to “know nothing” are the students. As suggested by Freire (1970/2010), many educators transfer knowledge to their students like empty containers and expect them to receive a collection of facts to be memorized, regardless of their applicability or relevance to the students’ lives. Within this study, not only were the responses offered by participants concerning their own perspectives on social justice pertinent, but just as important were participants’ interactions with students and their acquisition of knowledge in this learning process; not in the way of an empty container, but rather a conduit that promotes critical engagement and interaction between teacher and student.

Critical pedagogy is theoretical and manifests itself as a pedagogical tool to be used in multiple ways within the classroom. However, it is important to consider challenges that may prevent absolute implementation, or even a heavy emphasis of this tool in the classroom. When teachers confront the dominant culture of measurement, standards, and curriculum mandated by the various levels of government, as well as school boards, to enhance student learning, they face possible alienations or pejorative labeling with terms like “maverick” or “radical” (Schultz,

2008). Therefore, some teachers may be reluctant to incorporate critical pedagogy, or specifically, a social justice education, in the classroom for fear of how others, or the system at large, may respond. However, considering that, despite the push for a more inclusive and diverse content and pedagogy in education, the hierarchical structures in society continue to influence an education that lacks representation of marginalized populations. As a result, it is important to encourage consciousness of diversity in education, challenge the dominant culture, and highlight the voices of oppressed and marginalized populations that have been silenced in many ways. The push for critical pedagogy allows educators to take on the “task of educating students to become critical agents who actively question and negotiate the relationships between theory and practice, critical analysis and common sense, and learning and social change” (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007, p. 1).

Critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice are aligned as they promote the un-silencing of marginalized populations, investigation of how to limit the effects of hegemonic sources of power in society, schools, and the classroom while simultaneously promoting a more just and democratic society. Additionally, the critical pedagogical perspectives were aligned with the methods and guiding questions to encourage exploration of the thoughts of educators who teach with those goals in mind.

### **Research Design**

This research study sought to encourage discourse on teaching for social justice by exploring the perspectives of secondary social studies educators who teach for social justice. This study explored the perspectives of social studies educators in the secondary classroom. Five participants were selected from potential participants suggested through purposeful sampling. Participants (1) have taught for three years or more, (2) currently teach at least one

social studies course, (3) acknowledge concern with topics related to oppression of marginalized groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion), (4) incorporate topics within lessons related to oppression of marginalized groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion), (5) acknowledge concern with oppression of marginalized groups, (6) promote the identification of injustices throughout society, and (7) acknowledge a concern to encourage a more just and equitable society.

Employing qualitative interviewing, I created research questions that were explored during the study. During the interviews, the research questions allowed the experiences of the participants to emerge as they have had direct experiences with the phenomenon, primarily focusing on social justice. Additionally, an opportunity was provided for participants involved in the study to: (1) explore their own perspectives on social justice as both a theory and pedagogy in the social studies classroom, (2) reflect on the practices they bring to the classroom regarding social justice, and (3) familiarize others with challenges and rewards present in the classroom as they relate to teaching for social justice.

To design inquiry around teaching for social justice, it was critical to recognize participants provided data regarding their own experiences. The study examined the consciousness of the social studies educators who experience the phenomenon of teaching for social justice and know it as they experience it from the first-person point of view (Smith, 2007). The vague definition and under-theorized nature of social justice can indeed serve as barriers to practitioners in the classroom, as well as researchers; however, encouraging discourse about the experiences and understandings of the participants encouraged further exploration of the phenomena of teaching for social justice. Additionally, setting aside embedded notions associated with teaching and learning for social justice encouraged dialogue that focused on

getting back to the “things themselves” (Crotty, 1998, p. 78) or the essence of the meaning of the experience of teaching for social justice in a secondary social studies classroom. Therefore, in an effort to develop an authentic understanding of the participants’ experiences regarding teaching for social justice, it was important to develop inquiry that set aside these embedded notions and assumptions regarding how this concept may be defined and understood by others and take on a new way of viewing that may have been overlooked previously (Husserl, 2006). This was done in order to develop an understanding of how participants perceive and construct their own understanding (Rockmore, 2011) of what it means to teach for social justice. Such thinking and analysis helped to encourage relearning to see the world from a new perspective (Russell, 2006).

### **Interviewing**

As Janesick (2004) states, “Research is an active verb. It is a way of seeing the world that goes beyond the ordinary” (p. 3). Qualitative methods employ an inquiry style and data collection method that encourages in-depth responses and exploration (Patton, 2002) and provides “rich and substantive data” (Janesick, 2004, p. 71). When reflecting on how to best design this study, based on the research questions, qualitative interviewing was the research style best suited for the study as it “attends to particulars”, relies “on the use of expressive language and the presence of voice in the text”, and is “interpretive in character” (Janesick, 2004, p. 11). Interviewing not only allows researchers to gather data on the perspectives of the participants, but it also provides the researcher the opportunity to enter into the participants’ perspectives, which can further assist in gathering rich data that can be meaningful to others (Patton, 2002). As stated by Rubin and Rubin (2005), “Qualitative interviews are conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion” (p. 4) and it is

within this discussion where valuable exploration of the phenomena and lived experiences can take place.

Although there are various styles of encouraging these extended discussions with participants, when thinking about which best fit the research questions for this study, the standardized open-ended interview (Patton, 2002) seemed most appropriate. This style of interview has an open-ended, embedded approach so I asked participants to answer a few carefully-worded questions, while simultaneously allowing opportunity to probe and follow-up to questions throughout the process. By providing probes and follow-up to the original carefully constructed questions in the interview protocols, I was able to manage the conversations by regulating the amount of detail, response length, clarification of vague sentences or phrases, and keeping the dialogue on topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This was beneficial to me as the researcher and the participants as it promoted an efficient use of time and allowed coherent and useful feedback throughout the carefully guided conversation.

In an attempt to explore the perspectives of participants, I conducted two open-ended interviews with each participant, each lasting approximately one hour in length. I scheduled all interviews based on a date, time, and location selected by participants. The questions that structured the interviews were provided to the participants via email one week prior to the interview process in order to allow time for comprehension of the questions, recollection of experiences, and any additional information that may aid in a more efficient and comfortable interview process. Research questions for the first interview can be found in Appendix A and a protocol of research questions designed for the second interview can be found in Appendix B. Interviews were conducted beginning in July 2013 and extended through October 2013.



Interviews were recorded on a 16 gigabyte iPod Touch™ for the purposes of future reference, as well as transcription purposes. The recording device holds up to four hours of audio, but space was restored after I transferred files to a password-protected laptop. After the interviews, I utilized Express Scribe™ (free, downloadable software) on my password-protected laptop for the purpose of transcribing interviews.

### **Participant Selection**

Five participants were selected for the study through a selection process that took place beginning July 2013. During that time I worked to encourage a purposeful sampling process for selection. The criterion within purposeful sampling was important for selection because it illustrated attributes essential to the study and allowed me to proceed to locate participants that align with those characteristics (Merriam, 2009). In order to begin this process, I contacted secondary social studies educators via email. The pool of social studies educators to be contacted consisted of colleagues from district-level workshops, participants and facilitators of past grants, as well as those from the schools where I worked over the years. The pool of participants aligned with having exhibited teaching practices, hosted extra-curricular activities, or discussed beliefs that align with the selection criteria. In the email, I outlined the purpose of the study and highlighted selection criteria for participants within a Participant Nomination Form found in Appendix C. Upon initial contact, I asked potential participants if they self-identified with the selection criteria. Additionally, based on their experiences and the outlined selection criteria, I also asked if they had recommendations of other secondary social studies educators who they felt may also align with the selection criteria. Selection criteria included secondary educators who: (1) have taught for three years or more, (2) currently teach at least one social studies course, (3) acknowledge concern with topics related to oppression of marginalized

groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion), (4) incorporate topics within lessons related to oppression of marginalized groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion), (5) acknowledge concern with oppression of marginalized groups, (6) promote the identification of injustices throughout society, and (7) acknowledge a concern to encourage a more just and equitable society.

### **Recruitment and Screening Process**

Participants in the study were identified through purposeful sampling, specifically, snowball sampling (Merriam, 2009). Potential participants who met the selection criteria were identified by me and contacted through email. The email addresses were obtained by me through personal contacts and professional experiences. After initial contacts with potential participants were made by me as the researcher, I allowed teachers to voluntarily contact me via email or phone. After highlighting the purpose and details of the study and outlining the selection criteria to the potential participants, I provided the opportunity for them to evaluate their identification with the criteria aligned with a social justice approach in the classroom. The self-identification process was aided by the Selection Criteria Form (found in Appendix D) that was attached in the email sent to the participants. In addition to asking potential participants if they were interested in participating in the study, I inquired if they could refer other secondary social studies educators that seem to meet the established criteria. If participants had knowledge of other prospective participants, I asked them to ask the other potential participants to voluntarily contact me via email or phone. As a result of this snowball sampling process, the participant pool, or “snowball” as Patton (2002) references, grew in size. As Patton (2002) highlights, selected participants were information-rich individuals; therefore, I actively sought teachers who

displayed knowledge on the topic of teaching for social justice and were willing to share their stories and convey their experiences in relation to the topic.

### **Informed Consent and IRB Approval**

Before the interview process began, I verbally informed each potential participant of the purpose and nature of the study, as well as in writing through an informed consent form prepared in accordance with the expectations and regulations of the university-based IRB. Participation in the study was based exclusively on voluntary participation and did not include anyone who did not volunteer or provide consent. I verbally highlighted the option to cease participation at any time during the study, with no penalty as a result during the informed consent process. The informed consent form listed the following features: (1) the purpose of the study, (2) study procedures, (3) the total number of participants, (4) alternatives, (5) benefits, (6) risks or discomforts, (7) compensation, (8) cost, and (9) confidentiality. Participants received an electronic copy of the informed consent form prior to the first interview and I brought a hard-copy of the form to the first interview. After the informed consent was explained, participants were asked to sign the form if they agreed to participate in the study. Interviews only began after participants verbally acknowledged informed consent and signed the official informed consent form.

### **Benefits and Compensation**

Within the informed consent, notification to the participants was provided to highlight a potential benefit of participation as an increased understanding of the theory and practice of teaching for social justice. Additionally, upon completion of both interviews, compensation for the study was provided to participants in the form of a \$40.00 gift card to a local grocery store. In the case of participant withdrawal before the completion of the study, each participant would

be given a \$20.00 gift card to a local grocery store; however, no participants elected to withdraw before the study was complete. The gift cards were purchased by me, the researcher, and were sent to each of the participants via United States mail.

### **Research Interview Protocols**

I asked participants to respond to research questions concerning their perspectives on social justice, various methods of facilitation in the classroom, possible challenges and rewards associated with the implementation of teaching for social justice, and experiences that influence this style of teaching and learning in the secondary social studies classroom. Participants were encouraged to discuss their personal experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and values as they relate to social justice. I also encouraged discussion through semi-structured interviews that use open-ended questions in order to gather increased data that was rich in context and related to the topic at hand. The questions that structured the interviews were provided to the participants one week prior to the interview process in order to allow time for comprehension of the questions, recollection of experiences, and any additional information that may aid in a more efficient and comfortable interview process.

During the first interview, general questions were asked to encourage participants to discuss their educational background, past and current experiences as an educator, as well as views and attitudes on teaching for social justice in the classroom. Questions included: (1) Talk to me about where you grew up. (2) Please describe your family. (3) Can you briefly discuss your program of study and degree in undergraduate school? Graduate school? (4) How long have you been a teacher? (5) At how many schools have you taught? Which subjects have you taught? (6) From your perspective, how is social justice defined? (7) How did you first become familiar with the idea of teaching for social justice? (8) What experiences influenced your

understanding of this style of teaching? (9) Discuss how you became interested in social justice. (10) Was there a person in your history that influenced your desire to teach from this approach? (11) In what ways did your educational training prepare you to teach in this manner? (12) Discuss your experiences as an educator teaching for social justice? (13) In what ways do you facilitate teaching for social justice in the classroom? (14) Describe activities you have used in order to facilitate teaching for social justice. (15) When you think about teaching for social justice, which demographics come to mind? (16) Throughout your experiences, how have you incorporated these demographics in your lessons? (17) In your opinion, what characteristics make teaching for social justice successful? These protocol questions can also be found in Appendix A.

I conducted a second interview to focus on the experiences that prompt educators to teach from this perspective and challenges and rewards that may be present when facilitating this approach of educating students. Questions included: (1) Why is it important for you to teach for social justice? (2) In what ways do you see yourself embracing this teaching philosophy? (3) What learning outcomes or goals do you strive for when teaching for social justice? (4) What positive experiences or rewards have you had when teaching in this manner? (5) In what ways have you struggled with teaching for social justice? (6) In what ways does the curriculum cater to teaching for social justice? (7) In what ways does the curriculum limit teaching for social justice? (8) Are there other challenges? (9) What influences has this style of teaching had on your students? (10) What influences has this style of teaching had on you as an individual? These protocol questions can also be found in Appendix B.

## **Triangulation**

Utilizing a combination of approaches to encourage greater accuracy of results and findings, increase credibility, and search for consistency are all benefits of triangulation. The balance does not necessarily focus on any one of the multiple methodologies or emergent data used to strengthen the study, but the use provides a deeper understanding into the relationship between the inquiry approach and the studied phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In this study, in order to best explore the phenomenon of teaching for social justice, since I am also a proponent of teaching for social justice, I used field notes, a researcher reflective journal, and member checks as a way of examining my personal feelings and thoughts, and to bracket these ideas to minimize their influence on the research.

## **Field notes**

In addition to collecting data through interviews with each participant, I recorded data through field notes. Field notes, recorded by me, as the researcher, were written randomly at times and in a structured manner at others, as there are no formal guidelines for this procedure. However, the field notes were used as a tool to track information during and immediately following the interviews. As a researcher, I could not trust myself to clearly recall thoughts and insights that came up during the interviews or when reviewing the data; therefore, field notes were used to highlight such ideas, questions, and insights. This process helped to encourage further description of my own ideas, thoughts, and interpretations, as well as to highlight further research questions and ideas. As suggested by Patton (2002), field notes were dated and recorded data concerning various details about the setting, time of interview, direct quotations, and, other personal interpretations. At times, they also highlighted nonverbal cues and behaviors that could not be recorded on the audio device such as body language and voice tone (Janesick,

2004). Along with what was said, the notes were also used to highlight what was not said and things that did not make sense (Janesick, 2004). After the interviews concluded, I revisited the field notes to expand on any fragmented ideas or clarify questions or thoughts. The data collected in my field notes throughout the two interviews were used as a resource to further recollect the interviews and offer a further interpretive stance on what may not have been understood, what I questioned, or what I thought at the time of the interview.

### **Reflective Journal**

Along with interview transcripts and the researcher's field notes, a researcher's reflective journal was also used to "refine the researcher as a research instrument" (Janesick, 2004, p. 95) by further encouraging the triangulation process. Since the researcher is the primary research instrument in qualitative research (Janesick, 2004), journaling was used as a way of providing a data set of my reflections on the interviews regarding participants' perspectives on teaching for social justice. In addition, as a way of clarifying my own ideas and perspectives, the journal was a tool to accept ownership of my own perspective and clarify how conclusions were determined (Patton, 2002). As noted by Janesick (2004), this heuristic tool can be utilized for several reasons such as: (1) to refine the understanding of the role of the researcher in the form of reflection and writing, similar to that of an artist, (2) to refine the understanding of participant responses in the study, similar to a physician or health care worker, (3) use of a journal as an interactive tool of communication between the participant and researcher within the study, and (4) view journal writing as a type of connoisseurship by which individuals become connoisseurs of their own thinking and reflection patterns, and certainly their own comprehension of their work as qualitative researchers. As stated by Janesick (2004), "The qualitative researcher is always dealing with lived experience and must be awake to that experience and for that

experience” (p. 103). The researcher reflective journal was a strategy to further awaken myself, as the researcher, to what I observed, heard, saw, thought, reflected on, and questioned.

I recorded thoughts and experiences in the form of a researcher reflective journal on a website titled Penzu™. The main purpose of this website is for online journal writing. This website is password-protected and was utilized on my laptop which is password-protected, as well.

Samples of both journal writing and field notes are provided in the appendix. It should be noted that pseudonyms are consistently used for participants to maintain anonymity.

### **Member Checking**

Merriam (2009) references Maxwell (2005) when noting the importance of “ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed” (p. 217). In an attempt to prevent misinterpretation, after the data was transcribed from the first interview and before the second interview was conducted, each participant had the opportunity to review an electronic copy of their transcripts and perform data oversight and verification of an accurate portrayal of their comments. I also provided participants the opportunity to clarify comments or offer feedback regarding their original responses. A similar process occurred at the conclusion of the second interview. Every transcription was completed by me, as the researcher, after each interview. The member checking process was important when dealing with interpretation of individuals’ perspectives in an attempt to create an accurate representation of their thoughts and ideas. I felt it was important to follow-up to ensure the message they delivered was the message they intended to be heard.



### **Data Analysis**

During the interview process, it was critical for me, as both the researcher and observer, to learn to pay attention to detail, to see what there was to see, to hear what there was to hear, to know how to separate detail from trivial comments, to accomplish the former without being overwhelmed by the latter, to use meticulous methods to validate and triangulate observations, and to report the strengths and boundaries of my own perspectives that required both self-knowledge and self-disclosure (Patton, 2002). These skills and qualities allowed me to notice things that have become to be perceived as ordinary to the participants and that may lead to further understanding the context (Merriam, 2009). During the interview sessions, common terms or phrases emerged, as well as gestures or feelings of excitement about teaching for social justice. This information was placed in the field notes and reflective journal. However, to gather raw data from all sources and extrapolate thematic interpretations, I used the steps of interview data analysis explained by Rubin and Rubin (2005): (1) recognition, (2) examination, (3) coding, (4), sorting, and (5) synthesis. Recognition, examination, and coding were used to prepare the data and sorting and synthesis were used to analyze the data. In order to locate frequently referenced concepts and themes to clarify meaning and comprehension of the research topic, I implemented recognition, which involved the process of reading, reviewing, and studying the data. Rubin and Rubin (2005) recommend working through all of the transcripts of the interview and placing a label or code beside each unit of data where the matching concept, event, theme, or topical marker appears. By implementing this procedure, which occurred over a six-week window, beginning in October 2013, I was able to retrieve the data collected and identify codes and themes more efficiently. As mentioned previously, there was detailed thought processes involved in the coding of themes as I had to make decisions of what to code, how to

define key concepts and themes, and compare ideas that were expressed across interviews with participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). When completing the data analysis process, the concepts and themes were combined to tease out insight in relation to the research questions, as well as encourage further discourse on teacher perspectives on the topic of teaching for social justice in the social studies classroom.

### **Reporting**

For this study, I made every effort to reflect the discourse regarding the research questions, as well as give voice to the participants in the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As a result, it was pertinent that organization was a primary focus as I outlined details to ensure rich and thorough descriptions of what was discussed throughout the study was provided in the report.

When working on reporting the findings, I began by providing a clear and thorough description of each participant in narrative form to assist the reader in developing an understanding of the participants involved in the study. The short narratives for each participant help to provide an overview and historical perspective of their experiences, as well as their stories that start to reveal their connection to teaching for social justice. Then, after presenting a description of each participant in narrative form, I provide a cross-case analysis, which Patton (2002) describes as a process used to search for patterns and themes that are similar amongst the experiences of individuals in order to present a holistic picture. The process “attempts to understand the whole picture of the social context under study” (Janesick, 2004, p. 7) and is relevant to conducting an appropriate inductive analysis of the cases present and occurs after the separate cases are analyzed. From the data analysis, concepts and themes emerged and served

the purpose of focusing the reporting and pinpointing the concepts and ideas I wanted to convey to the reader in alignment with the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

When presenting the findings, I attempted to be conscious of writing the manuscript in a way that was inclusive to a wide variety of readers. As highlighted by Janesick (2004), hooks (1994) asserts "...any theory that cannot be used in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate" (p. 4). Themes that exist across the experiences of the participants were highlighted and a description of their experiences was emphasized by utilizing direct quotations, but only those that are meaningful and relevant, "substantively significant and providing enough detail and evidence to illuminate and make that case" (Patton, 2002, p. 503). Additionally, in regards to drafting a manuscript, my focus remained on constructing an accurate and balanced portrayal of the participants' perspectives surrounding their understandings of teaching for social justice, how such curriculum is facilitated in the classroom, challenges and rewards of this style of education, and experiences that prompt teaching for social justice. Since the researcher is the primary research tool (Janesick, 2004), the findings also include my perspective and insights in order to convey how my thoughts, ideas, and assumptions progressed and were influenced and transformed throughout the research process.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher serves as the primary research instrument in qualitative methods used to design, collect, and interpret data. With that major responsibility, I took ethical considerations seriously. First and foremost, I was attentive to the participants in this study and upheld a responsibility to them, as well. From the communication of informed consent between the participant and me, throughout the study, during the interpretation of the data, and through the reporting of the findings, I carefully designed and implemented ethical considerations. It was

necessary to approach every aspect of the study with accuracy, integrity, and a commitment to quality. As highlighted by Merriam (2009) ethical issues that should be maintained while engaging in qualitative research are: (1) explaining purpose of the inquiry and methods to be used, (2) promises and reciprocity, (3) risk assessment, (4) confidentiality, (5) informed consent, (6) data access and ownership, (7) interviewer mental health, (8) advice [who will be your counselor on ethical matters], (9) data collection boundaries, and (10) ethical versus legal conduct. Commitment to these features not only helped to ensure ethical considerations and a level of quality throughout the research, but enhanced trustworthiness on my part as the researcher, as well.

Reflecting on actual steps that were taken regarding ethical considerations, as mentioned previously, I explained informed consent clearly with each participant and each participant signed the informed consent form before starting the interview process. I was certain to outline that participation was voluntary and participants could elect to withdraw from the research at any time. Additionally, pseudonyms, rather than participants' names, were used in both transcripts and manuscripts and identifying information such as the names of schools, school districts, colleagues, or students were removed. The real names of the participants were secured on a password-protected computer and any additional features in accordance with IRB expectations.

### **Conclusion**

Since critics claim that teaching for social justice is under theorized throughout the literature, there was a need to further clarify this concept, as both a theory and practice, to further define its meaning and clarify its purpose. Although the findings from the study cannot be generalized outside the context of the participants, the study can be used as a means of encouraging discourse on teaching for social justice to further inform the body of research and

provide a reflective experience for social studies educators. Even though there has been a push for more inclusive and diverse content and pedagogy, the hierarchical structures in society continue to influence an education that lacks representation of marginalized populations. Therefore, discourse must be encouraged to explore diversity in education, challenge the domination of the dominant culture, and encourage the voices and stories of the marginalized populations who have frequently been silenced.

In review, chapter three began by highlighting the theoretical perspective of critical pedagogy used to frame the study, along with the qualitative research design and methods of interviewing, field notes, and the researcher's reflective journal. Specifics were also outlined in relation to the participant nomination, selection, and recruitment process, as well as how data will be analyzed and reported in the manuscript. The chapter concluded by highlighting ethical considerations of the research.

Chapter four will serve as a means of presenting the results from the research. After a narrative is provided to allow the reader to better contextualize the participants by offering an overview of personal histories and experiences, themes and subthemes from cross-case analysis are explored in relation to the research questions.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the perspectives of secondary social studies educators who identified with a teaching for social justice approach. Participants involved in the study had the opportunity to: (1) explore their own perspectives on social justice as both a theory and pedagogy in the social studies classroom, (2) reflect on the qualities they bring to the classroom regarding social justice, and (3) familiarize others with challenges and rewards present in the classroom as they relate to teaching for social justice. The parameters of the study aligned with qualitative methods and employed interviewing in an attempt to explore the thoughts and experiences of participants regarding teaching for social justice. I created the following research questions to guide the study and prompt relevant feedback surrounding the participants' thoughts and experiences on the topic of teaching for social justice:

- (1) How do educators who identify with social justice perceive teaching for social justice?
- (2) In what ways do educators who identify with social justice facilitate a social justice education?
- (3) What experiences prompt educators to teach for social justice in the classroom?
- (4) In what ways are educators challenged and rewarded while facilitating a social justice curriculum within the secondary social studies classroom?

In this chapter, I present findings related to the four research questions using data from two semi-structured interviews per participant and field notes recorded throughout each interview session. I used Rubin and Rubin's (2005) Steps of Interview Data Analysis to prepare

and analyze interview data. Based on the analysis, this chapter serves as a means of reporting the findings. Through the use of developed narrative, an overview is provided of each participant to highlight characteristics and personal histories that are important in establishing a background and emphasize information that may be influential in the participants' interest or alignment in teaching for social justice. Additionally, cross-case analysis was employed and findings are presented by themes and commonalities.

### **Participants**

I employed purposeful sampling to select five participants for the study. Selected participants identified with the following selection criteria: (1) have taught for three years or more, (2) currently teach at least one social studies course, (3) acknowledge concern with topics related to oppression of marginalized groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion), (4) incorporate topics within lessons related to oppression of marginalized groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion), (5) acknowledge concern with oppression of marginalized groups, (6) promote the identification of injustices throughout society, and (7) acknowledge a concern to encourage a more just and equitable society.

### **Summary of Participants**

For easier reference, Table 1 provides a brief summary of the five participants in regards to age, years of teaching experience, and social studies courses taught throughout their careers thus far. A descriptive narrative of each participant is provided following the summary.

Table 1. Profile of Secondary Social Studies Educators from the Narratives

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years Teaching</b>	<b>Courses Taught</b>
Anna	Early 30's	10	American History World History

Table 1. (continued)

Rose	Late 40's	13	American Government American History American Mosaic History of the Holocaust
Oscar	Mid 30's	13	African-American History American History World History
Jennifer	Early 40's	6	American History Civics
Hanna	Early 30's	11	American Mosaic History of the Holocaust Peer Counseling Women's Studies World History

### **Anna**

As agreed upon by Anna, we completed both interviews at her school in a conference room that was tucked away near the administrative offices. There was a long table providing us the option to sit at a comfortable distance of each other with a beautiful view of campus and entry of sunlight offered through an expansive window nearby. Before formally explaining the nature of my research, the formal procedures of the study, and the interview process, we spoke briefly about her background and the unique nature of her school. The school is located a few yards from a beautiful river so it offers views not easily obtained by many schools. Along with the schools environmental distinctiveness, during our initial conversation, Anna thoroughly explained her school has a prestigious reputation and competes with very few neighboring schools regarding high academic prowess which makes it academically exclusive, as well.

Anna, a white female in her early-thirties has taught secondary social studies courses for ten years. The majority of students she has educated are from an urban community in the west-central region of Florida from a high socioeconomic family background. Since entering the



classroom, she has taught both American and World History, but shows a preference towards the latter. Outside of her classroom, Anna has advised Student Council, sponsored clubs dedicated to genocide awareness, and has hosted Carl Wilkens (the man famous for standing up and refusing to leave Rwanda when genocide erupted) as a guest speaker at the school where she works.

Before relocating to Florida seven years ago, Anna lived in a rural, predominantly white region of Pennsylvania. Consisting primarily of blue-collar, low-middle class citizens, the community was nestled in the Appalachian Mountains. While the rural location resulted in a 20-minute bus ride to the closest school, there was plentiful land for children to ride their bikes, take hikes, or play outside. The geographical information Anna provided about her hometown allowed me to briefly and secretly reminisce as I am also from Pennsylvania and remembered driving through communities similar to what she vividly explained on vacations or Sunday drives during my childhood. As a result, I began to feel a further sense of connection.

Anna not only has a special place in her heart for her community, she enjoyed the close-knit nature of her family, as well. During the interviews, Anna proudly explained, “We’re not the kind of family that sees each other all of the time, but in terms of our Pennsylvania family, I’d say we’re very close. My parents, my sister, and I did a walk together growing up. They’re really a little wonderful spirited family” (Anna, interview #1, July 2013). Along with the close-knit nature of her family, Anna attributed an understanding of difference to her family, as well. For example, without hesitation, she explained that various members of her family illustrated and exemplified characteristics that have had a lasting effect on her such as respect for differences, forgiveness, patriotism, and community.

Throughout the interviews, Anna proudly reminisced on incidents where she witnessed her mother taking a “positive” approach when interacting with people. Through these comments, I inferred Anna perceived her mother as having a deep respect for people and their differences. She stated:

My mom, she works and, pretty much as long as I can remember, she works in schools as a secretary. For most of my elementary, middle, and high school, and today she still works at the same place. It’s a local community college. She had a couple different jobs there. So I would visit her and just sit with her in her office. She’s someone who would greet people and ask them about who they would want to see. Sometimes, people were just rude. These kids wouldn’t really want to engage with her or be nice. I would say, ‘How do you deal with that?’ She said, ‘You know I think about that.’ She gives everyone a smile and is very welcoming with everyone. She’d say, ‘I don’t really know where they are coming from. They could’ve had a terrible class or been up all night with a baby. So even though they are mean and I want to say something or have a different reaction, I just don’t. People are coming to me and I have no idea where they are coming from. My job is to be friendly and hopefully someone who is positive in their day.’ That is something that clicked in my head. When I got to college and I thought about teaching, that’s what I wanted to be like. I wanted to be that positive person. Even if I’m the only one who says something nice to a kid, gives them a smile or a little pat on the back with a ‘good job today.’ That really mattered to me. She recognized how different everyone’s experiences were. (interview #1)

Throughout our conversations, Anna maintained a high level of admiration for her family. Expanding on this, when speaking of her grandfather, she spoke with great appreciation centered on the notion of forgiveness. She stated:

One thing that stood out to me was when he talked about serving in the war (World War II). He went into Japan after the bombs went off. He saw a lot of the destruction. His job was to code and decode messages. He was in Tokyo Bay when the Treaty was signed. When he talked about the people he encountered and coming home, he never seemed to harbor resentment. He never seemed to feel like the Japanese were evil. I think that he...he never actually said it and I never thought to ask, but I think he would have felt like the internment camps here for the Japanese were not a good idea. He bought American, but he never expressed any kind of hatred. He never seemed to have any ill will. I thought that was interesting because as I went through school and interviewed other people, they did. (interview #1)

While patriotism can take many forms, Anna held strong to the belief that both of her grandfathers expressed commitment to their nation. During the interviews, she maintained a serious face and tone of voice that inferred an intense respect and level of honor when speaking of them and telling their stories. She asserted:

For them, the war was a point of pride, but also, I hope that doesn't happen again. They were really proud to serve and defend their country and be part of that, but they never thought they had a right to treat people badly. I never saw any of them, in any capacity, treat someone differently than they would treat us (family members). (interview #1)

Continuing to speak of her grandfathers, Anna highlighted additional stories about them and their relationships and demeanor with those in the community. She expressed:

My mother's biological father was a barber...Everybody loved these guys. I only ever saw them being kind and compassionate. I can't remember how many times when my grandfather would say 'oh they couldn't pay today, so whatever, I'll cut their hair'.

Something like that, the smallest things. Or my other grandfather, the milkman, knowing everyone or what orders they have. Appreciating and valuing all of their customers, the people, and their wives. (interview #1)

Aside from reflecting on content and pedagogy surrounding teaching for social justice within the interviews held with Anna, I reflected on her passionate and zealous spirit inside and outside of the classroom. Growing up in a region of Pennsylvania where there was little opportunity to interact with diverse populations, she purposefully sought out opportunities to enrich her experiences. Through studying abroad in Cuba and Russia, she was able to observe and interact with different people and see various perspectives on education, culture, language, and history. Furthermore, Anna avoided letting her environment shape her attitude in a negative manner towards those different than herself. She did so by capturing ideals espoused by her grandparents and parents. She seemingly noticed these valuable moments, regardless of how small, and appreciated how they shaped her as a person. She was humbled by the spirit of her grandfathers and vividly remembered spending time with her mother at work as she exhibited kind interactions with all people. I was able to gather a further understanding of her passion for teaching for social justice through her widened smile and heightened tone when she enthusiastically described hosting Carl Wilkens at the school where she works. Through her comments, she questioned and wondered how a man could do so much for others. Her passion for Carl Wilkens and his actions spoke volumes about her interest in humanity. Anna provided ample ideas regarding the practical nature of teaching for social justice, but the zeal and passion

she expressed while communicating her experiences made it evident that social justice was a core component in her personal philosophy.

### **Rose**

Upon meeting Rose in a local coffee shop, I noticed her small stature, fashionable style of dress, and energetic smile. After finding a quiet and discreet area in the establishment, we began to engage in small talk about the hot and humid weather. She also expressed her excitement regarding the upcoming school year. Soon after, I explained the nature of my research, procedures of the study, and began the formal interview process.

Rose, a white female in her late-forties, has taught secondary social studies courses for 13 years. I felt a subtle connection in that regard as I myself had the same years of experience in the classroom. The majority of students she has educated are from a rural community in the west-central region of Florida from a low to mid-socioeconomic background. Since entering the classroom, she has taught a wide variety of social studies courses such as American History, American Government, American Mosaic ( a course that highlights the histories and struggles of African-Americans, women, Jewish-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans), and History of the Holocaust. With 13 years of teaching experience at one school, Rose has seemingly taken advantage of multiple courses offered in the social studies curriculum. I immediately gained a certain amount of respect for her willingness to explore more than one or two courses during her career as many educators do not have the opportunity or interest. Outside of the classroom, Rose is heavily involved, advising and sponsoring clubs and activities such as *Amnesty International*, *Invisible Children*, *Mix-It-Up Day*, Step Team, and Student Council. Since she is extremely knowledgeable in content aligned with genocide, history, human rights, and politics, she is an asset to the school as she is able to successfully host school-wide clubs and activities related to

these topics. During the interviews, she enthusiastically explained her recent student-nomination to sponsor the school Step Team. While she has never danced or participated on a step team herself, she appreciates the drive and passion needed and has difficulty saying no to any students with aspirations to learn and have fun while doing so.

Before arriving in Florida, Rose was raised in a predominantly white suburban neighborhood in Georgia where she lived amongst both blue and white-collar families. While none of her immediate family members attended or graduated from college, her grandfather owned a small business in a large metropolitan area that eventually was inherited by her father. Rose had a close connection with her father, as she proudly acclaimed with a smile, "I was a real daddy's girl" (Rose, interview #1, July 2013). She continued to smile as if she welcomed any questions about her father. As she continued to speak of her father, it became evident that her pride and admiration stemmed from his many characteristics such as his selfless attitude, acts of valor and kindness, and educational exposure.

Throughout the interviews, Rose revealed several scenarios when she perceived her father as reflecting a selfless attitude toward others. She expressed:

My dad was one of the managers of one of their stores and he would collect the money. These people would buy the furniture and make payments. When the welfare checks came, that's when you would collect. Because of that, my dad met all of these different people. On Christmas Eve, he would take me and my sister to visit these three old ladies. They were all black. One of them lived in the nursing home and the other two lived in apartments. We would bring them food, money, and cigarettes. That's what they wanted. (interview #1)

In addition to her father's selfless attitude, Rose also saw her father as a man who carried out acts of valor. For example, sharing an experience she had not learned about until years after its occurrence, Rose stated with admiration:

Those experiences with my dad and those other experiences are important to me and I carry them with me. My dad is the most patriotic man I ever met. I found this out years ago. It was in the '70s and he was with his brothers that owned the furniture store. They were at a restaurant, late at night when the TV would go to snow. When it would go to snow, the flag would come on the TV. Here he was at a restaurant and here it was midnight and he demanded everyone stand up and they didn't. Apparently he ended up in jail. I never knew my dad went to jail because of that, but years later I found out about it. (interview #1)

As Rose articulated the details of her father's experience, I appreciated her willingness to share and the opportunity to hear as it did not seem as if she shared this story with many others.

Along with standing up for what he believed in, Rose also articulated appreciation for her father's modest nature when committing consistent acts of kindness. As she embarked on these topics, her voice adjusted slightly and exhibited a more modest tone. She discussed an instance when one of her father's elderly friends, who did not have any family, passed away. In a soft tone, she continued to explain, "My dad found out she died. I guess the nursing home knew that he came and saw her a lot and she was going to be buried as a pauper. He bought her a new dress. He didn't want that to be the way she died" (interview #1).

Rose also highlighted several instances where her father exposed her to informal education. She stated:

He loved history. All my life, he told stories of history. Taking us to historic places like

Andersonville to see the prison when I was a little kid. He had a lot of books around the house. I remember when I was in tenth grade... I didn't even know anything about the Holocaust. I picked up a book on Dr. Albert Speer. So daddy would always talk about current events. We had a relationship that nobody ever knew about. He would call me every day as I got older and we would have these conversations about whatever was in the news. I think he really opened me up to a different way of looking at things that I wouldn't have had without having those conversations. (interview #1)

Despite the abundance of information Rose offered during the interviews that aligned with her perspectives on teaching for social justice, I uncovered additional information to learn more about the person sitting across from me during those three hours. Rose is not only a proponent of social justice, but shows resilience, strength, and loyalty in many ways. Throughout our discussions, while she spoke with a soft voice that was timid at times, she consistently revealed a friendly smile that further exemplified her natural friendly demeanor. Through our conversations, I learned of the many battles she has faced throughout the 13 years at her school. The administrative staff and a few teachers at the school where Rose works have not always been supportive of her ideologies and the clubs and activities she has sponsored. Every year, she faces challenges such as administration not allowing a new club proposed by students or prompting additional regulations to meet club establishments. From her tone of voice and descriptive details of experiences, these challenges certainly frustrate Rose, yet she remains seemingly undefeated. Despite working under an administration she perceives as unsupportive of a social justice approach, Rose never once mentioned leaving her school. An unwavering loyalty to her students and the school and strength to promote her ideas through practice allowed me to quickly learn of Rose's sense of commitment to her beliefs and principles.



## Oscar

Oscar and I met on a July afternoon at a bakery with a welcoming patio for those partaking in coffee, tea, pastries and even soups and sandwiches. The weather was hot and humid, but we managed to find a shady spot underneath an awning that allowed comfort and privacy from other customers. Before beginning the formal interview process, we briefly discussed educational initiatives such as the upcoming implementation of Common Core Standards and ideas we heard throughout the district about its implementation into the social studies curriculum. A critic of educational overhauls and a self-identified contrarian, Oscar seemed comfortable to energetically articulate a few jokes about potential issues that may arise in the next few years of its implementation. It was obvious he was resistant to such changes and did not seem confident that changes would be implemented seamlessly.

Oscar is a black male in his mid-thirties who has taught secondary social studies for 13 years. The majority of students he has educated are from a suburban community in the west-central region of Florida from a middle-high socioeconomic background. Courses he has taught since entering the classroom include African-American, United States, and World History.

Raised in a small, blue-collar community in rural northern Florida, while Oscar found himself faced with many challenges throughout his youth, nurturing the drive to obtain an education was not one of them. At the time of the interviews, Oscar had earned a Master's degree and completed all of the necessary coursework credits before his dissertation phase in a doctoral program. His mother, who is still heavily instrumental in his life to this day, impressed the importance of overcoming obstacles. Referencing the influential factor of race, he remembers her saying, "...unfortunately, you have to be twice as good as the people around you" (Oscar, interview #1, July 2013). He continued to reference her comments by quoting her as

saying, "... you can't use your race as an excuse. If you use it as an excuse, you're already defeated before you get started... you got to keep pushing and when they push you too far, push back and don't let them get you down" (interview #1). Such advice, high expectations, and admonishments were seemingly motivating for Oscar and inspired him to use the power of education as a vehicle to graduate high school and enroll in a four-year institution to find his place amongst "the best" in society. Illustrating this pride in his education, he lifted his sleeve to reveal a tattoo on his arm, the mascot of his undergraduate alma mater. As he did so, his face exhibited a wide grin and he thoroughly described the significance of a quality education.

Oscar articulated the success his mother modeled in many ways and he vividly recalled a particular instance that occurred early in his life. Reflecting back, Oscar stated:

My mother was different from most women that were in her position, especially most African- American women. Even when I compare her to her sisters, my aunts. My sister was graduating from high school in 1984. In 1983, my mom decided that she needed to get her G.E.D. because she didn't want to be a hypocrite telling us to finish school and she never finished. I remember my mom going to community college and taking classes. Me watching my mom studying, she was like, 'I want you guys to be the best that you could possibly be.' (interview #1)

While Oscar expressed that his mother prompted accountability throughout many aspects in life, the accountability was especially critical in relation to education. Oscar remembered, "I had cousins and friends that could tell their mom, 'I got a bad grade because of things like this...' , they could come up with all kinds of excuses. In my house, there was no excuse that was acceptable." (interview #1).

Throughout our conversations centered on family, life experiences and social justice both inside and outside of the classroom, I continually observed that Oscar did not take himself too seriously. He laughed at some of the experiences he shared and joked about many of the ironies he sees in the justice system. There were times that the tone of his voice became serious, but never angry. One particular topic of conversation that I remember centered on his mother. According to Oscar's comments, his mother is seemingly the stronghold of his life and he highlighted her influence throughout many moments of his childhood and adolescence. She promoted the value of an education and even modeled this idea for her children. He also referenced her strength during his comments of his father. He explained that his father physically abused his mother during the time that she was pregnant with Oscar. Although he did not discover this until later in life, the details of the story he shared still evoke emotion in him. Oscar referenced a long, keloid-like scar that still remains on his mother's neck that originated from his father sharply holding a knife to her throat and slicing through the skin. As he shared the story, the tone of his voice remained stern and steady, but never hinted at anger. I asked him if he still had a relationship with this father and he quickly, yet calmly rejected that idea and described how he does not let the absence of this relationship impact him emotionally. The ability to overcome feelings of anger and hostility towards his father provided a glimpse into Oscar's character and hinted at his forgiving nature.

### **Jennifer**

I arrived early to the preferred location of our interviews to find a coffee shop and book store positioned near two restaurants and a shopping mall. After purchasing light refreshments, Jennifer and I found a bench-seat combination in the coffee shop section. A few other patrons with laptops and books were positioned nearby. On this particular day, the establishment was

bustling with activity, but our seats were neighbored by a few empty spaces which created a minor privacy buffer on both sides of us. Since Jennifer and I already knew each other on the professional level, we spent some time catching-up and discussing workshops and seminars we participated in over the past few years, courses we were teaching, and where we currently were positioned in our careers. When the small talk began to dissipate, I described the nature of the study. Jennifer reiterated her interest in the research topic and the formal interview process commenced.

Jennifer, a white female in her early-forties, has taught secondary social studies for six years. The majority of students she has educated are from both suburban and urban communities in the west-central region of Florida from a low socioeconomic background. Since entering the classroom, she has taught American History and Civics. Outside of the classroom, Jennifer has participated in the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship Mentor-Teacher Program.

Before relocating to Florida, Jennifer was raised in Ireland as an Irish Catholic. Religious tensions and persecutions throughout the country were a consistent factor in her daily environment. In addition to the violence witnessed and discriminatory ideas expressed throughout her youth, she faced many other challenges, as well. For example, Jennifer was subjected to the ills of poverty, the death of her mother to cancer at the age of seven, and a father who suffered from alcoholism for years. Despite the overwhelming challenges, Jennifer zealously asserted, "I'm very strong-willed, very self-disciplined" (Jennifer, interview #1, July 2013). Additionally she argued, "I always knew I wanted to make something of myself and do something productive. So I think that is why I was led to teaching eventually even though it came later" (interview #1). The resilience and determination to overcome adversity, nurture the

potential of others, and the natural tendency to connect with others helped to offer a glimpse into what makes Jennifer who she is.

Facing and overcoming adversity early in life has encouraged future successes for Jennifer in multiple arenas. She reflected, “As far as my family struggles....It’s hard to say...I don’t know if I felt like I wasn’t good enough or my family background gave me a little bit of a chip on my shoulder...that because I didn’t come from a nuclear family and I didn’t have parents and a lot of my friends did....I felt a little bit ostracized” (interview #1).

Despite the lack of a nurturing environment in the home by her parents, the ability to cultivate potential in others seemed natural to Jennifer. During the interviews, she expressed:

I look at my own children today and I think about how I don’t want them to experience those struggles. Yet, I also want them to know that life isn’t easy. If you’re thrown a difficult path that you just have to work to get out of it. I try to tell the kids at school, especially the kids that struggle at home without the support... I just say, “The path in which you’re living currently is education and the more education you get and the harder you work, you can make something for yourself”. So that’s the kind of thing that I try to say to the kids. (interview #1)

Also, related to this idea of struggle, Jennifer tends to connect with people she encounters with a humanistic approach. She stated, “I can identify with the kids who struggle, no matter what ethnicity or race they are. I definitely can see myself in kids and see some lost with no support. That’s what differentiates the kids with parents that support them and love them verses the parents that aren’t present. They are there, but they are not present” (interview #1).

While Jennifer is racially and socioeconomically different than the majority of her student population, she maintains a commitment and sense of responsibility to her students that

could equal those to whom she is connected by familial ties. Many of the students at Jennifer's school are transported from an urban neighborhood that many reference as the inner-city that is more than 15 minutes away while her school is located in a suburban community that has been in existence since the 1950's. The majority of her student population is from a lower-socioeconomic family background, identify as African-American, and live in racially segregated neighborhoods. Jennifer is a white European who was raised in Ireland until the age of 20 with little exposure to racial diversity. She realizes that while she may look different than the majority of her students that she teaches every day, she feels an unwavering connection to each and every one of them. Similar to many of her students, Jennifer was raised in poverty. During her childhood, like many of her students, she faced discrimination. Struggling financially and supported by (what some would call) welfare was not a foreign notion to Jennifer during her childhood. As a self-identified proponent of social justice, Jennifer is committed to connect to her students in order to encourage purpose and value in their quest for a quality education in order to increase their life opportunities. Throughout our discussions, there were multiple times that Jennifer emphasized her desire to provide minority voice in history and how she is committed to ensure students can see themselves in history. This idea of voice was a common theme in Jennifer's story.

### **Hannah**

Hannah chose to meet in a café near her place of employment in a well-populated office building with quiet and comfortable conference rooms on either side of its long corridors. Hannah, knowing her way around the location more than me, found an empty conference room for us to begin the interview process. I explained the nature of my research and she began to explain how interesting the topic of social justice was to her and how it personally connects to

her story. I immediately became eager to begin the interview as it seemed she had a lot to speak of and much to contribute on the topic.

Hannah, a white female in her early-thirties has taught secondary social studies for 11 years. The majority of students she has educated are from suburban communities in the west-central region of Florida from a low-middle socioeconomic background. Since entering the classroom, she has taught a wide variety of courses including American Mosaic (a course that highlights the histories and struggles of African-Americans, women, Jewish-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans, as well as the Holocaust), AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination), and History of the Holocaust, as well as Peer Counseling, Women 's Studies, World History, and World Religions. Outside of the classroom, Hannah has participated in curriculum development, teacher mentoring, and union representation.

At the age of four, Hannah's family moved from urban Illinois to a rural, region of west-central Florida. Hannah expressed that her mother and father, who are still married after more than 40 years, made considerable sacrifices early in her lifetime by moving away from family to an area where they knew no one. Both of her parents were from a lower socioeconomic background and lived amidst gangs, drugs, and violence. According to Hannah, her parents' decision to relocate was "...to provide a better life" (Hannah, interview #1, September 2013). After relocating to Florida, increased stability and heightened financial security served to progress her family to a middle socioeconomic positioning. Considering this, being raised in a middle-class, predominantly conservative household, Hannah approaches life with a sense of independent-thinking that, at times, segregates her opinions from those of her family members. She highlighted, "I wouldn't say that I'm the black sheep of my family, because I don't feel outcasted at all. However, ever since I was a little girl, I've always been the one that brings in the

counter argument. My family is very, very conservative, which is very interesting because considering where they grew up, that's not typically the route that you go" (interview #1). Coupled with other experiences in her life, her positioning within her family, commitment to education, desire to inform others, and the influences of a professional mentor have helped shape Hannah into the person she is today.

Early in her career, Hannah developed a passion and drive for education. During the interview, she proudly explained:

I studied secondary social studies education. I did the four-year typical, traditional program. I was also in the Honors College...I actually have two degrees. I got my certification and then I decided that I would start my master's degree. So after I finished that and did my internship, I started teaching right away. I taught for three years and then applied for my national board certification. (interview #1)

Having pride in her parents' history, Hannah has attempted to honor their story in many instances throughout her life. She expressed:

I describe my growing up as a typical, middle-class existence, but it's always tainted with this baggage that my parents claim from being from poverty, because they both were absolutely from poverty. So I've always had this lens, even though it may have not applied to me. I think I recognize and see some things because I saw it in my parents. I saw the struggles in my aunts and my uncles and my very close uncles who didn't leave that place. (interview #1)

Early in her career, Hannah felt fortunate to meet a quality instructor who was able to nurture and forever influence her teaching practice. She reflected:



My mentor was my teacher starting in seventh grade. She was one of those special teachers... She was also my intern sponsor and we taught next door to each other for eight years. She's my best friend, mentor, all of the above. We have a very special relationship. I attribute her as the one who shaped my values as far as social justice.

(interview #1)

As a self-identified proponent of social justice, Hannah is very keen to how she implements and communicates a social justice approach in her classroom. Throughout our conversations she not only highlighted her experiences and strategies used throughout her courses, but provided theories on what she thinks different social justice approaches look like. For example, she not only thinks of social justice as content, but described how skills are needed for its implementation, as well. She smiled as she assertively described herself using a content bowl and a social justice or skill bowl, both partnering together and being used simultaneously in order to build on one another. Her idea seemed simple, yet advanced beyond what other participants highlighted about the practicality of teaching for social justice. She furthered her thoughts by explaining how a teacher could also use one bowl at a time to gradually move through a series of content or ideas for the benefit of students and efficiency of a social justice approach. Hannah's keenness seemingly showed me as the researcher that teachers of social justice go beyond facilitating a social justice approach or experiencing challenges and rewards, because, at times, they theorize about the current identity or evolution of the philosophical idea of teaching for social justice.

### **Perceptions of Secondary Social Studies Educators Who Teach for Social Justice**

Husserl (2006) emphasizes the importance of developing inquiry that sets aside embedded notions and assumptions regarding how concepts may be defined and understood by

others and take on a new way of viewing that may have been previously overlooked. As a result, prior to initiating the first semi-structured interview with each participant, I realized that listening carefully to participants' responses, as well as their short stories, scenarios, and reasoning would be critical in helping to place each story in context, create an accurate narrative for each participant, and develop an authentic understanding of the participants' experiences regarding teaching for social justice.

During the first interview session, while engaging in brief conversation regarding the background of each participant, I began to notice the emergence of information directly related to the research questions. While how one "perceives" things is subjective, through the use of this term in the first research question, I attempted to establish increased clarity to the under theorized and vague nature of teaching for social justice (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, & McQuillan, 2009; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009; North, 2009). Encouraging reflective dialogue, especially related to perceptions of secondary social studies educators who teach for social justice, not only reinforced much of what is highlighted in current related research, but provided new insights and views on how a carefully selected group of educators recognize this theory and pedagogy and apply it to their lives, as well as their classrooms.

### **Teaching for Social Justice Defined**

Throughout the interview process, participants offered both vague and specific definitions, descriptive means of promoting this style of education in the classroom, and its impact and role in society. Participants posed rhetorical questions on whether there may be both a textbook or academic definition for this term, as well as more practical definitions developed from life experiences. Despite the textbook verse practical struggle, as shown in Table 2, there were overarching themes related to characteristics of teaching for social justice. Also, as

evidenced in Table 2, sub-themes aligned with characteristics of a social justice teaching approach emerged.

Table 2. Characteristics of a Teaching for Social Justice Approach

<b>Noted Characteristics of Teaching for Social Justice</b>	<b>Participants Noting Highlighted Characteristics</b>	<b>Emerging Sub-Themes</b>
<b>Pedagogy</b>	Anna Rose Oscar Jennifer Hannah	Act of Doing Deviate from Traditional Lecture Style Way of Approaching Topics and Content
<b>Race</b>	Anna Oscar Jennifer	Biased Perspectives Criminal Justice System Injustice & Exclusion Justice Racial Profiling Connected to Treatment and Difference(s)
<b>Treatment</b>	Anna Rose Oscar Jennifer Hannah	Current Day (Society & Classroom) Historical (Holocaust, Civil Rights Movement, Human Rights, Genocide) Humanity Connected to Difference(s)

Table 2. (continued)

<b>Differences</b>	Anna	Respect & Value Others
	Rose	Similarities Connected to Treatment
<b>Citizenship</b>	Rose	Classroom & Society
	Oscar	Create Informed, Good, Better Citizens
	Hannah	Hidden Curriculum
		Role of Educator Connected to Treatment

**Pedagogy.** Each participant either alluded to or specifically mentioned the act of “doing” something in the classroom or “how” something is done in the classroom to promote the concept of social justice amongst their students. This notion of “doing” reinforces the perspective of critical pedagogy and the authentic embedded notions of teaching for social justice in the secondary social studies classroom. While the idea of pedagogy was frequently referenced when attempting to define or explain teaching for social justice, themes such as race, treatment, citizenship, and difference(s) were also highlighted in multiple responses, thereby serving as another commonality.

**Race.** Similar to politics and religion, the term race can have varied meanings and interpretations and can result in controversy among both adults in society and students in the classroom. Whether race is interpreted more as a sociological construct, difference in biological composition, or having origins in various regions throughout the world, the notion of race was largely present in the discussions with participants related to perceptions of teaching for social justice. Referencing race to varying degrees, and sometimes contexts alone, participants

highlighted race as an influential connection related to both treatment and/or differences; however, none of the participants articulated connections between citizenship and race.

The term race can be referenced in varying degrees and contexts during conversations, but when exploring the research question, “How do educators who identify with social justice perceive teaching for social justice?” Anna used race to add context to the demographics that are separate in society and, to some extent, particularly in our system of justice. She stated, “...I feel it’s socially referring to how people see each other in the world and try to understand one another. Obviously ‘justice’ meaning some way to bridge the gaps between different groups of people, whether that’s based on class, race, religion” (interview #1). Similarly, Oscar established a connection between justice, race, and one’s socioeconomic status when highlighting his perception of social justice. Almost taking an evaluative approach, he asserted:

Justice is relative. Justice in this country, for the last 15 or 16 years, we have seen that justice is flexible depending on who is accused. There is a different justice depending on your race, depending on your SES, because if you are wealthy enough, then doubt can be manufactured or purchased. The best example of that was O.J. (interview #1)

While Anna’s comment seems to highlight a positive feature of how she perceives social justice if various demographics are not marginalized or if justice provides some way to bridge the gap, Oscar’s approach seems to highlight the shortcomings of the justice system as he sees race and socioeconomic status as inhibiting agents to justice. Although the comments offered by Oscar and Anna are not meant to be compared, they lend themselves toward highlighting the influential role race plays in teaching for social justice. Additionally, the ideas also connect to what Jennifer highlighted regarding the notion of race and the role it plays in teaching for social justice. Jennifer argued that, regardless of color or economic status, every child should be made

to feel as though they have a purpose. She emphasized that social justice in the classroom should reinforce and reassure every child that they are “relevant” and they “matter” both in the classroom and in the world. According to Jennifer, it is critical, considering that social studies has been taught from the “white man’s perspective” for more than a century, “every child feel validated.” If students do not see themselves in the textbook or the curriculum, it is important to make efforts to ensure their relevancy and importance is reinforced.

While race was not a defining phrase or all-encompassing idea in participant’s overall perception of teaching for social justice, the demographic of race was frequently referenced by three of the five participants, thereby, resulting in a seemingly influential component in the overall understanding of this content and pedagogy. Along with race, additional terms and ideas, such as treatment, difference(s), and citizenship were also emphasized by participants.

**Treatment.** Emphasized by the majority of participants in the study, the term treatment, or a variation of the term, was referenced in relation to how they define teaching for social justice. While Oscar and Jennifer never specifically used the term, or a variation, they alluded to the action of treatment in both the classroom and/or throughout society, specifically emphasizing being mindful of how to treat others. Furthermore, along with being the most frequently referenced term throughout the interviews, treatment was also regularly connected to difference(s). The idea of difference will be discussed later in the chapter.

While speaking with Anna, through various comments made, I noticed many of her ideas related to treatment were aligned with the experiences and mindsets of popular figures in history. For example, when explicitly discussing “how people treat one another” while others commit to inaction (refrain from acting), Anna referred to Elie Wiesel’s comment in *Night* (1972/2006), saying, “The Nazi’s aren’t the worst ones; it’s the ones who do nothing.” Despite

simultaneously being a means of content and pedagogy in her classroom with her ninth grade students, this connection to teaching for social justice highlights Anna's concern with imparting the idea in her students that they have a responsibility to humanity and humane treatment towards other people. Discussions she facilitates with her students, after reading seminal works such as *Night* (1972/2006) and *The Translator* (2008) by Daoud Hari, allow her to not only highlight historical events, but provide the opportunity to emphasize the idea of treatment of others in the world and throughout the history of the world. Anna explained:

In terms of world history, anything from ancient to the present and how people treat one another, some people go straight to certain events: the Holocaust or the Civil Rights Movement. Forming opinions on my own relate to: Why those events occurred? What were the world's reactions to them? What did we learn from those reactions? What was the right way to deal with certain issues in our world history? That's what I wanted to bring to my class." (interview #1)

Likewise, in relation to treatment, Rose pronounced her core beliefs in that, "We are all the same" and "Everybody deserves to be treated the same and with dignity and respect" (interview #1). Her reasoning behind equal treatment stems from her belief that race is a sociological construct, not a biological difference. She furthered this idea by stating, "...just because the way you look, the color of your skin, your religion, people should be treated the same" (interview #1). According to Rose, incorporating the idea within class discussions of how to treat others seems to provide a connection for students who are proponents of treating others with kindness, as well as for students who may be more resistant to the philosophy of the Golden Rule. Regardless of the students' mindset, Rose argued such discussions "make them more open-minded about what is going on in the world" (interview #1). Further reinforcing the idea of

humane treatment, Hannah spoke of social justice as a protection of the "...definition of humanity. It's like saying that, 'I protect you as a fellow human being' to say that 'you deserve to be treated the same way as any other human being on this planet.' Period, because that's our common bond" (interview #1).

Given the similar comments offered by Anna, Rose, and Hannah in relation to treatment, participants seemingly connected teaching for social justice with treatment of others as it pertains to both people in society and other students in the classroom. The level of authenticity for the idea of treatment of others was reinforced through the context of each participant's descriptive stories, whether professional or personal. For example, Anna's background in teaching World History influenced her to further contextualize teaching for social justice through a worldly lens. As a result, in relation to the treatment of others, she often found herself asking her students questions such as:

What were the world's reactions to them? What is your role in confronting these issues?

As a citizen of the world, what should your country do if they knew something, like genocide, is happening? What happened in Europe before and after World War II? How did the world respond in Armenia and Rwanda? Do you agree with that? What should the U.S. at least do and what would you advocate the U.S. do when they know something is happening? (interview #1)

When referring to a major current event or influential historical tragedy, Anna finds such questions powerful in prompting students' ideas related to treatment of others in other parts of the world. Although teachers may often focus on conditions, issues, or challenges that face their own country of residence, Anna emphasized the importance of exploring such thoughts and ideas in a more inclusive and worldly manner. As a result, in order to analyze and evaluate treatment



of others and social justice, Anna utilizes films and teaching materials to explore the 1993 Mogadishu conflict, Sudanese refugees, and genocide in Armenia and Rwanda. Also embracing a more inclusive, worldly view, Rose's background and classroom experience in *Amnesty International* encourages lessons and discussions on such things as universal genocide. Considering pedagogical approaches, similar to Anna, Rose highlighted the use of film. For example, she spoke of a documentary she utilizes to serve as a foundation for discussing the abuses of human rights in Uganda. Along with employing the use of film, Hannah's emphasis on the idea of treatment was reinforced through experiential learning opportunities such as taking her students to visit the local Holocaust museum in order to explore resources such as historical artifacts, photographs, and illustrations, as well as hear Holocaust survivors speak.

When considering how social justice is defined, along with a pedagogical approach, in relation to content, in addition to race, participants also strongly emphasized the idea of treatment of others. Connecting with the idea of promoting kindness and humanity, participants considered treatment an important component in both the classroom and society. Expanding beyond their own personal situations and the situations of their students, Anna, Rose, and Hannah discussed the importance of embracing and promoting a more inclusive view of treatment; thereby expanding teaching for social justice to a more worldly level.

**Differences.** Connecting to the idea of treatment, when considering characteristics that define teaching for social justice, participants also emphasized the idea of difference(s). When talking with Anna in relation to how educators perceive teaching for social justice, she shared an idea she often thinks about, "How do we convince people that social justice and differences in people are a good thing?" Connecting the idea of social justice and differences immediately stood out to me and offered insight as to how she frames the concept of teaching for social

justice. Anna reinforced this connection between social justice and difference when she stated, “How do we learn to appreciate one another and live together and realize that your differences are not scary to me? My world is going to be okay with all these different people....I feel so strongly that people should learn how to appreciate one another and respect differences” (interview #1).

Anna’s connection with difference and feeling respect and appreciation towards one another despite differences, align with proponents of teaching for social justice such as Lucey and Laney (2009) as they assert, “Teaching for social justice involves advancing children’s moral and ethical development and helping children learn how to (a) value differences between people, (b) identify social injustices in the world around them, and (c) take collective action to remedy the social injustices they find” (p. 261). This connection to valuing differences between people serves to reinforce ideas highlighted in the literature are consistent with what social justice proponents are practicing in the classroom.

In the first interview, Rose also referenced the idea of difference. Interestingly, however, her comments took on a much different approach. Rather than emphasizing the notion of valuing differences between people and seeing differences as a good thing, alternatively, Rose argued, “We are all the same” and “Everyone deserves to be treated the same and with dignity and respect.” While Rose alluded to the idea of difference when she mentioned various identities, “...the way you look, the color of your skin, your religion...”, unlike Anna, she alluded to the idea that the differences should be overlooked. When it comes down to it, according to Rose, the differences do not matter. As she argued, “We are all the same.” Both of them, however, whether promoting the valuing of differences or the ignoring of them, promoted the idea of respect in relation to such differences in the way of treatment.

**Citizenship.** Additionally, along with race, treatment, and difference, when offering defining characteristics of teaching for social justice, the idea of citizenship was voiced by several participants. While it could be described as an overarching theme to their teaching philosophy, participants also alluded to a connection between citizenship and teaching for social justice. For example, Rose stated:

I think it's our job to create better citizens and build citizenship in the classroom. That is a part of it. We are all human beings and we need to treat each other equally. I see that as more of my role. The curriculum is important, such as who is George Washington?, but it's more important that we are creating citizens that are aware and want to make the right decisions. (interview #1)

Oscar stated, "My job as a social studies teacher is not just to teach my given subject. Instead, I am to help, to raise a good worker and citizen" (interview #1). In addition, Hannah proclaimed:

It's that hidden curriculum, that piece that you're teaching that underlies all of your motives of why you're doing what you're doing. That ultimately, as they go out and become these democratic citizens and start to make choices that are going to impact other people. I feel like I want to represent a voice that represents someone that they might not hear somewhere else. Because I can't trust that someone else is telling them that. I don't know. But to be a really well-rounded citizen, I think you have an obligation to consider social justice. (interview #1)

Reinforcing this argument, Hannah also stated, "We have an obligation to protect and value every citizen. I want my kids to think about what every citizen means, I want them to

think about the faces of people when they get to one day make decisions for our country” (interview #1).

When considering how participants define teaching for social justice, it is strikingly clear they all make a direct connection to pedagogy; they think of teaching for social justice as a way of approaching teaching and strategies used in the classroom. In addition, along with being a pedagogical approach, participants also made direct connections between specific topics and content covered in the classroom. While other topics can be included, when considering overall themes, participants voiced the topics of race, treatment, difference(s), and citizenship are directly aligned with teaching for social justice.

### **Facilitating a Social Justice Education in the Secondary Social Studies Classroom**

While education can be facilitated in teacher or student-centered lessons, whole-group or small-group activities, and traditional or alternative assessments can be used, two features that remain constant in most classrooms, regarding teaching and learning, are content and pedagogy. While the content being taught is important, the process through which students learn is critical, as well.

Throughout the interviews, when exploring how participants facilitate teaching for social justice in their secondary social studies classroom settings, participants emphasized both content and pedagogy as critical components in the process. They emphasized the need to teach content related to social justice issues while employing methods to encourage students to think and have the opportunity to discuss. Intertwining both content and pedagogy, considering their individual experiences in the classroom, while participants implement a social justice approach to varying degrees throughout each class, content and pedagogy are continually examined. The findings of such discussion were helpful, as they not only offered me, the researcher, a clearer understanding

of their two-prong approach, but provided the teachers the opportunity to reflect on their own practices, thereby, reflexively and actively shaping their curriculum and practices within their school (Giroux, 1993).

### **Content**

Participants in the study taught various classes within the social studies field. Some of those courses, such as African-American History and American Mosaic, are only available at select schools in the teacher's respective districts, while other courses are offered at all sites. Some courses, such as American History and World History, were taught by most of the participants, while Women's' Studies and African-American History were only taught by one participant. Despite the variety of courses taught, each participant emphasized the need to present content aligned with the course standards and objectives. However, throughout the interviews, participants highlighted how they went beyond the curriculum aligned with their course(s) in order to infuse additional content as evident in Table 3.

Table 3. Content Emphasized When Facilitating a Social Justice Approach

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Courses Taught</b>	<b>Content Emphasized</b>
<b>Anna</b>	World History	Genocide Holocaust Racial Profiling Universal Human Rights

Table 3. (continued)

<b>Rose</b>	American Government American History History of the Holocaust	Amnesty Character Development and Citizenship Civil Liberties and Civil Rights Civil Rights Movement Genocide Holocaust Immigrant Experiences and Policy Minority Interest Groups Tolerance of Marginalized Populations Universal Human Rights
<b>Oscar</b>	African American History American History World History	Character Development and Citizenship Lynching Race and Racism Slavery and Slave Auctions Socioeconomic Status and Nutrition World Religions
<b>Jennifer</b>	American History Civics	Abolition Civil Rights Character Development and Citizenship Race and Culture Representation (students see themselves) Self-Reliance and Self-Restraint Women's Rights
<b>Hannah</b>	American Mosaic History of the Holocaust Women's Studies World History	Affirmative Action Body Image and Modifications Character Development and Citizenship Jewish History (Pre-Post Holocaust) Rape and Sexual Assault Tolerance of Marginalized Populations Women's Rights

Even though they were technically teaching two different courses, both Rose and Jennifer had the opportunity to teach course content related to government in America. Rose taught American Government and Jennifer taught Civics. Both courses maintain a focus on the history, structures, processes, and politics of American Government, yet the rigor of the curriculum is

age-appropriate; American Government is designed for students in grades 9-12 while Civics is written for middle-school students, particularly those in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

In American Government, Rose was required to cover established curricular objectives mandated in the state standards, but seized opportunities to incorporate additional content throughout. Rose explained:

I think it's because I feel like it's who is in my group...I know that I have a lot of Mexican Americans in my groups. I know that I have a lot of immigrants. I know that I have kids that are illegal. Like the DREAM Act. Even if I have kids that are not illegal, I know that their parents are. We take time to talk about the Bill of Rights and the Constitution and we spend a lot of time talking about Amendment 14. So at the beginning of the year we can talk about how that's going to be the basis for Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement and to keep bringing that up all along. In the news they're talking about the DREAM Act, Amendment 14, Equal Protection, and everyone needs to be treated the same. (interview #1)

Rose's appreciation of the diverse backgrounds of her students seemingly prompts her to provide enrichment beyond topics required in the established curriculum. While her extensions were directly related to required topics, such as The Bill of Rights, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and other Constitutional provisions, she infused additional components to provide learning opportunities regarding civil rights and immigration. She also expressed utilizing current events aligned with government legislation on immigration, as well as fostering a level of critique amongst her student population to related topics.

Similar to Rose, Jennifer approaches presentation of content through aligning lessons with curriculum mandates, but also offers enrichment in her courses to meet the needs of her student population. Jennifer explained:

We talk about Civics education with social studies education. When we get to that element...another thing we teach is civic virtue. What is this idea of self-reliance and your role in society and self-restraint? Those things obviously come up because kids as teenagers like to fight, they like to get physical. Certainly it would come up. The kids see the injustice, they'll say, 'well that's not fair'. I've always told them, especially when it comes to police, already, kids have this preconceived notion in their brains, either the police are bad, or they are good, or they are in-between. My advice for them is, 'If you're stopped by a police officer, you should be respectful. You don't fight the law; that is the position of authority. If something goes wrong, just behave appropriately and things will happen afterwards, if something goes wrong.' Because the kids are familiar with, we have a deputy on campus. There are arrests on campus. Kids bring drugs, they bring alcohol and prescription medication. It's not like they don't know what's going on. I use a lot of relevance. (interview #1)

Like Rose, Jennifer values the needs of her student population and takes an approach to educating them beyond curricular objectives. Making the idea of citizenship more practical and relevant, she aligns the idea of "civic virtue" to the students' personal circumstances or understandings. Highlighting events her students may encounter in their lives and in their communities is seemingly important to Jennifer as it conveys a sense of "relevance" while simultaneously meeting objectives mandated by the state curriculum.



Rose, Oscar, and Jennifer had the opportunity to teach American History. American History courses survey content aligned with history in the United States, including influential people and events throughout particular segments of history. The curriculum captures major and some minor events in history. While the course is primarily focused on the United States, some foreign leaders and events are highlighted in order to better contextualize events in which the United States was involved.

Similar to her approach in American Government, Rose makes efforts to enrich the American History curriculum by adding additional content and context. During the interviews, she justified this approach to teaching. She stated, “I think that’s why sometimes, you stray off the exact curriculum a little bit because you feel like those are the lessons kids need to learn. Not necessarily who is the president in 1960” (interview #1).

Throughout discussions related to their American History courses, participants expressed a feature of their teaching style that I noticed as both similar to others and unique in their own regard. For example, Rose, Oscar, and Jennifer use some form of technology to infuse a connection between topics present in the American History curriculum and additional topics, topics that are not present but are brought in to better contextualize the lesson. Rose visited a national interest group’s website to capture current data related to the Civil Rights Movement. She explained, “...when I teach the Civil Rights Movement, I go to the NAACP’s website and view their data on education, the economy, and other things to bring in current statistics to compare. It’s so cool, because you can almost go there every day or look at CNN and find things that relate to what you are talking about in class” (interview #1).

Such connections are made by both Oscar and Jennifer, as well. In the interviews they explained how they use additional resources in their classrooms to reinforce the curriculum.

Oscar uses the poem and animated short film titled, “Bid’Em’In” by Oscar Brown, Jr. to depict slave auctions held in the Deep South during the Slavery Era and “Strange Fruit”, a song by Billie Holiday, to capture the racist act of lynching in the United States. The content present in these pieces allows Oscar to educate his students on topics surrounding the processes and mindset of those present during slave auctions and mental images of those persecuted through violence without the use of a textbook.

Utilizing technology to connect historical content and popular culture, Jennifer expressed employing YouTube™. She explained that this free video collection website for watching videos online allows her to show students a depiction of Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I A Woman” poem read by the currently popular actress Kerry Washington with co-hosts James Earl Jones and Howard Zinn. This piece explores details and ideas behind women’s rights and abolitionism by focusing on the speech delivered by Sojourner Truth in May 1851.

Since most students are familiar with various major news sources, major special interest groups, and free video collection websites, there is not a large learning curve when incorporating such resources and the participants’ attempts to use them consistently result in success.

Participants’ comments related to how they facilitate a social justice approach, in relation to exposing students to content related to slavery, abolition, women’s rights, civil rights, and immigration, offered insight regarding their individual perceptions of teaching for social justice and what specific content qualifies as aligning with such an approach. Additional beliefs were revealed throughout the interviews, as well. For example, during our first interview, Jennifer expressed, “I want them to feel relevant and involved and that they had a role in society....” She later went on to explain her reasons for using visuals in instruction. She stated, “...because kids are so visual today. I use a lot of YouTube™ stuff. Especially for them to see African

Americans...strong male and females...reading Frederick Douglass excerpts or reading Sojourner Truth excerpts.” Therefore, along with incorporating information on topics related to underrepresented groups, it was important to Jennifer for her students to see themselves in the curriculum.

Rose and Hannah had the opportunity to teach a course titled American Mosaic. This course was developed from state legislation mandating classroom lessons focused on Native Americans in Florida, which eventually evolved into a course with additional objectives connected to the history of African-Americans, Jews, Women, and Latinos. The overarching themes of the course include the history and experiences of marginalized groups in America, as well as tolerance for others.

In relation to teaching American Mosaic, Hannah stated, “You should allow kids to think about what comes next. It’s got to come all the way to today. I don’t want you to just know history; I want you to use history to make this world a better place, period” (interview #1). Implementing this perspective in the classroom, which seems to be a fundamental component behind the development of the course, helps to encourage the creation of agents of change and the promotion of a more democratic environment, both of which are critical components in a teaching for social justice approach.

When teaching historical content related to African Americans, Hannah talked about how she was prompted to discuss affirmative action with her students. In addition to extending beyond the written curriculum for content related to African Americans, content related to women prompted the discussion of rape, body image, and body modifications. Hannah furthered this idea of extending the content and connecting it to relevancy when she stated, “It’s always under the context of understanding yourself so that you can understand others” (interview #1).

Along with American Mosaic, both Rose and Hannah also had the opportunity to teach a History of the Holocaust course. Similar to American Mosaic, coded as an elective, this course is optional and allows students to enroll in the course if their schedule permits and if they elect to do so. History of the Holocaust surveys the history of the Jewish population in Europe before, during, and after the Nazi regime. Despite the title of the course, which makes it seem as though the course is completely based on historical events, the objectives are more inclusive and align with topics such as tolerance and religious, political, economic, and social dynamics present before, during, and after World War II and extending into present day.

Speaking of the challenges of teaching the course, Hannah warned, “You have to know why you’re teaching it to pull it off, because very much like the other courses, it can turn into a course of Hitler or a study of death” (interview #1). Similar to other courses, where participants emphasized that they went beyond the curriculum, Rose and Hannah expressed that they did so in this course, as well. For example, outside of the provided curriculum and recommended activities, both Hannah and Rose utilized primary resources and went on field trips to the local Holocaust museum to enrich students’ experiences by providing them the opportunity to hear survivors of the Holocaust speak, as well as examine artifacts, photographs, and illustrations.

When discussing her rationale and purpose for her teaching approach, Hannah offered further reinforcement of using a social justice approach. For example, she explained:

But look at everything else that was going on. Look at what caused this. I’m about causation. Let’s look at the social context of that time, the political context of that time, the culture at that time period so you can identify patterns in the future. When you see these things lining up, it’s a red alert, ‘hey, this happened once before, is it possible that it can happen again.’ because I need you to plug in and be a change agent so that you can

make a difference. To me, it was always the idea that we study the past to make the world better. (interview #1)

This continued declaration to “make the world better”, as she noted, is a steadfast component in the perceptions of many teachers who promote a social justice education in the classroom. Through facilitation of this course, and after exposing her students to related-content, much of which extended beyond the required curriculum and textbooks, reflecting back, Hannah stated her students would beg, “Help us. Help us figure out a plan so that other people know and we can make witnesses out of other people” (interview #1). As a result, social clubs have been inspired from the content covered in this social studies elective course, thereby joining content and action.

In addition to courses previously addressed, several of the participants also taught World History. More specifically, Anna, Rose, and Hannah have taught this course sometime during their professional career. Similar to American History, World History surveys history through time and place, but from a worldly point of view. The focus on content reaches from before the Common Era through the twentieth century.

While there is a required curriculum for the course, teachers can elect what content to emphasize and what pedagogical approaches to employ. Reflecting back on the various units of study for this course, Anna expressed the power in facilitating instruction through the use of novels. She asserted:

...the biggest way that I facilitate teaching for social justice is through discussion and the materials we choose. When we use *Night* at the beginning of the year, we use the basic History and Ourselves materials and the CHOICES program. So after we read *Night*, we talk more about the definition of genocide, because really, that wasn't even a word until

*Night* takes place or the events took place. Then we talk about other events surrounding genocide in the world like Armenian Genocide or Rwandan Genocide. Then it (CHOICES) asks and gives suggested methods that challenge the students to ask about their role in confronting these issues? Or, as a citizen of the world, what should your country do if they knew something like genocide is happening? What happened in Europe before and after World War II? How did the world respond in Armenia and Rwanda? Do you agree with that?. What should the U.S. at least do and what would you advocate the U.S. do when they know something is happening? Then we come back to that when we read *The Translator* in January since it's more current. We are talking about Darfur and Sudan. What should people be doing? (interview #1)

Through such comments Anna suggested that the content and resources serve to encourage and prompt student responsibility. The various lessons constructed are facilitated in such a way to encourage students to think and inspire them to make connections. Additionally, the pedagogical approach of posing discussion questions to promote open inquiry and to encourage critical agency in the classroom directly connects to the literature (Banks, 2006a). While evident here, in relation to content, the idea of questioning and inquiry will re-emerge in the next section in relation to facilitation of a social justice approach.

There were only two courses taught by only one of the five participants; Oscar was the only educator to teach African-American History while Hannah was the only educator to teach Women's Studies. The focus of African-American history maintains a focus and objectives aligned with Africans and African-Americans from early civilizations in Africa, arrival to the Americas, and historical events up through the twentieth century. Key people, places, tragedies, and achievement are highlighted throughout the course. The Women's Studies course surveys

not only the history of women in the United States, but their achievements and dynamic evolutions and growth amongst systems of oppression that existed early in American history and present day. Both African-American History and Women's Studies are coded as electives and are optional as far as student enrollment. While the curriculum in both courses naturally lends itself to discussing marginalized groups and giving voice to populations that are often minimized or excluded in other mainstream courses, similar to the courses previously addressed, participants emphasized that even in these courses that naturally lend themselves to a social justice approach, they found themselves going beyond the curriculum.

### **Pedagogy**

As previously emphasized, when considering defining characteristics of teaching for social justice, every participant asserted, amongst other things, it is an approach to teaching. Every educator interviewed in this study had a style and method of teaching that deviated from the traditional norm, particularly a lecture-style dominated social studies environment. In addition, as previously highlighted, each participant alluded to or specifically mentioned the act of “doing” something in the classroom or “how” something is done in the classroom to promote the concept of social justice amongst their students. While various resources and content that emphasize marginalized topics were expressed, such as slavery, abolition, lynching, immigration, women's rights, Affirmative Action, body image, genocide, and the Holocaust, participants also expressed similarities in pedagogical styles. This section of the chapter is dedicated to providing evidence from the study to reflect the varied pedagogical practices utilized by participants to facilitate a social justice approach in the classroom. Below, Table 4 serves to highlight pedagogies employed by participants to implement a social justice teaching approach.

Table 4. Pedagogies Emphasized When Facilitating a Social Justice Approach

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Courses Taught</b>	<b>Pedagogy Employed</b>
<b>Anna</b>	World History	Critical Thinking Current Events CHOICES© Discussion (Harkness Method) Guest Speakers Field Trips Flipped Classroom Journaling Novels Teacher as Learner
<b>Rose</b>	American Government American History History of the Holocaust	Critical Thinking Current Events Discussion (validate all opinions) Film Journaling Reflection Websites
<b>Oscar</b>	African American History American History World History	Critical Thinking Current Events Discussion (Informal Debate) Film Songs Poetry Sensory Learning
<b>Jennifer</b>	American History Civics	Critical Thinking Current Events Discussion Imagery & Pictures Literacy Design Collaborative© Journaling Novels Online Clips Sensory Learning Teacher as Learner
<b>Hannah</b>	American Mosaic History of the Holocaust Women's Studies World History	Critical Thinking Current Events Discussion Film Imagery & Pictures Reflection Sensory Learning TCI© Learning Strategies Teacher as Learner



**Discussion.** The most frequently referenced pedagogical approach highlighted throughout the interviews was classroom discussion, as every participant highlighted the teaching strategy of hosting discussions in their classes. Some participants explained procedures to formally hosting discussions and encouraging appropriate mannerisms. For example, Rose spoke of the rules she establishes regarding respecting the speaker. She asserted:

To move forward with that and have real good discussions, you need to set the boundaries of how you talk with each other. I think I'm getting better at it, but making sure the kids respect each other. When the kids talk, everybody has to look at the speaker no matter what. I don't care if it's uncomfortable. You should be silent and show appreciation for what people say. I think it's definitely important to start with that. That's what kids have said, "I really do feel comfortable with speaking my mind" and it goes both ways. It's not just how you as a student acts, I as a teacher acts that way, as well. When you're talking, I listen and when I talk, you listen. (interview #1)

This strategy of teaching students to exhibit respect for the speaker and modeling such respect as an educator in the classroom, helps to encourage a culture for learning that embodies and exemplifies respect, thereby promoting what Lucey and Laney (2009) highlight within the facets of teaching for social justice as "advancing moral and ethical development." Further reinforcing this idea, Rose explained her reasoning by emphasizing the critical components of "building communities, making sure everyone is respected and valued, and feeling a part in it" (interview #1).

Even when a variety of opinions are expressed, and there is dissension amongst ideas in the room, she asserted it is critical to promote inclusivity and make everyone feel their ideas and experiences are important. What she calls an "appreciation clap" establishes an expectation for

students to raise their hands and clap once, in unison, for their classmates. This clap of appreciation serves to exhibit appreciation to the speakers as recognition for their contribution to the learning environment and providing good insight in the discussion. Rose argued that this technique helps to promote a positive classroom culture as no student's input during discussion goes unnoted or unappreciated.

In conjunction with her idea of respect, Rose's comments further reinforced the theoretical approach of teaching for social justice by highlighting her vulnerability and willingness to learn from her students. She stated, "You may think you have all the answers, but you (teacher) need to be willing to listen to what they (students) have to say as well" (interview #1). This level of reciprocation not only helps to keep the educator at the same level as the student, so as not to serve as an oppressor or keeper of knowledge in the classroom, but also helps to authorize the students' comments and help their ideas serve as "official knowledge" (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

While establishing, modeling, and reinforcing procedures aligned with a classroom culture of respect, appreciation, and valuing of others, participants expressed how they hosted discussions on many different topics and in many different ways. For example, Anna discussed utilizing a discussion strategy that originated from the Phillip Exeter Academy referenced as the "Harkness Method". Describing this style of discussion, Anna explained that the "Harkness Method" is:

...much more about the teacher as the facilitator and leading a discussion. The kids are really forced to come prepared and ready to discuss the material that they read. At least when I started, it was like a low-tech version of the 'flipped classroom,' because the kids

are preparing. The class is really about working through the questions or the pieces of history. (interview #1)

With this method, Anna feels she is able to shift the focus and place some responsibility on the students participating in the discussion, thereby helping to reinforce Shor's (1993) belief that learning is something students do. Similarly, Oscar explained another strategy for facilitating discussions where he, as the teacher, articulates an opposing viewpoint in an attempt to play "devil's advocate". He explained:

I often challenge students. Come at me with something that you know I won't agree with, but you better be able to truly defend your position. That is what education is supposed to be about. I am not supposed to produce 150 to 200 clones, depending on what I teach every year. Instead, I'm supposed to produce independent thinkers. I'm not supposed to produce 150-200 rah-rah America, red, white, and blue...I'm not supposed to do that. Instead, if you think what we did in Iraq is wrong, say that! If you think killing bin-Laden was wrong, say that! It's not what you say to me, it's why. (interview #1)

Not only do such discussions serve to promote open inquiry and diverse viewpoints (Banks, 2006a), they lend themselves to promoting critical agency by posing questions that encourage students to challenge and critique (Merriam, 2009) sources of hegemonic oppression. Not striving to produce "clones", as Oscar argued, his efforts are motivated by providing students the opportunity to engage in independent thought. Such thinking connects not only to what students have been taught in a formal setting, but allows them to connect their feelings and ideas to their experiences, thereby, further "authorizing" and framing their knowledge as "official" (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

**Use of Film.** Along with discussion, another pedagogical approach highlighted amongst every participant in the study was the use of films and / or documentaries. While some teachers and administrators tend to frown upon showing movies in the social studies classroom, participants did not describe showing movies, but rather using film to promote teaching objectives. For example, participants asserted that aligning a visual representation of content with the course curriculum helped to better contextualize the material and helped to further support content related to social justice. When discussing teaching Women's Studies, Hannah explained how she executed a lesson aligned with the topic of body modification. She stated:

We did a whole unit in Women's Studies on body type. We talked about body modification specifically. We used to talk about women from different parts of the world. We talked about Chinese women and we discussed foot binding. We used our preview question to be able to use the concept of body modification. Isn't that what foot binding is? We didn't use the term "foot binding" when we first started, but we started to get their opinion to find out if it was appropriate or inappropriate. (interview #2)

Allowing students to see the act of foot binding allowed students to more clearly understand the concept, thereby, encouraging more in-depth learning regarding body modification.

As an avid proponent of the Teacher's Curriculum Institute (TCI™) learning strategies, Hannah often performed a preview, activity, and processing phase for most lessons. The preview, which is the early phase of the lesson, allows for students to activate prior knowledge and learning and provides the teacher with "important background knowledge" related to pre-assessment. Hannah highlighted another purpose of utilizing a preview activity was getting to "see which kids experienced it themselves and which kids see it from different perspectives" (interview #1). After activating prior knowledge and examining students' foundation in relation

to the content, the next phase of the lesson, incorporated the use of film. Hannah asserted the power of the use of film and clearly explained:

We used an Alfred Hitchcock *Twilight Zone* episode that we used to show them. All of the doctor's faces are hidden the whole time you are watching it. There's a lady that is brought in who has to have plastic surgery because they are trying to fix her. They are saying, 'oh she's so deformed, she's so hideous'. They are thinking about sending her to some concentration camp for some horrifically deformed people. So in the end, they are like, 'doctor, doctor, please tell me if this surgery finally worked' and then they unwrap her face. She's beautiful! Beautiful blonde hair, blue eyes, beautiful! The doctors are like, 'ahh, it failed again!' and then they show you that the doctors look like pigs. They have piggy ears and piggy snouts. The title is 'Where Beauty Lies' and it introduces us to the idea of beauty being in the eye of the beholder and how beauty has been used to put pressure on women. (interview #2)

The final portion of the lesson, as described by Hannah, developed into what is often referenced as a debriefing or a processing phase. The goal in debriefing or processing is to encourage students to process what they learned in relation to what occurred in the lesson or film. Hannah explained, "...ultimately, after we've done whatever lesson we are going to do, giving a kid an opportunity to make it meaningful to them. To transform what they've learned. To have that takeaway for themselves" (interview #1). Continuing to explain the final phase of the lesson, Hannah explained:

That's how we introduce the idea of foot binding and we talk about where it's roots are in society, the implications that it had for women socially, and then we bring it to modern day body modification. We talk about physical enhancements, we talk about tattooing,

we talk about piercings, and all of these other issues. We show them pictures and we ask them, ‘is this beautiful? Is this not beautiful? What does it mean to be beautiful?’ So that to me is where you sometimes get these body type issues that start to surface. Kids start to talk about how they’ve been discriminated against because they don’t fit the norm of what beautiful is and how they feel pressured to change their body and some of the decisions they make because of it because of the social implications of fitting into the norm. (interview #2)

In relation to the use of film, this specific example provided by Hannah helps to reinforce the participants’ argument that film is an accommodating pedagogical approach in facilitating liberatory and emancipatory pedagogy in the classroom as students are able to form connections to the ideas and content presented through their own experiences, thereby giving further authority (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to their culture and knowledge.

**Current Events.** In addition to discussion and use of film, when reflecting on pedagogical styles employed to facilitate a social justice approach, participants also emphasized incorporation of current events. Throughout the interviews, all of the participants volunteered comments related to their use of current events in the classroom. While participants incorporated current events to varying degrees, they all used this practice to extend their course content and enrich the topics at hand. For example, when Rose visits the CNN™ website, she explained that she is able to find information to make connections to what they are discussing in class. She also expressed using information from the NAACP’s website in order to bring forth current statistics to compare to historical information cited in the text and curricular materials (interview #1).

Reinforcing the idea of relevance, trying to make a connection between the course curriculum and the real world, Jennifer also encourages her students to watch the news at home

as she believes students will be able to make thoughtful connections. Since some of her students show reluctance to do so, she continues her efforts through the use of the Literacy Design Collaborative©, a free online printable template designed to improve college and career readiness in the areas of reading and writing. This program prompts students to “bring in a current event that relates to the particular aspect of history that they are learning” (interview #1).

Anna also emphasized the importance of using current events in her courses. Asserting the benefit of the strategy, Anna stated current events are important so that “kids can hear first-hand what someone had to say about these issues at the time” which better helps students to consider, “what does that mean for us today?” (interview #1).

Participants argued it is critical to couple current events with reflection since such reflection seems to place the onus on students rather than the teacher and encourages discussion that is more student-centered. Anna highlighted:

Discussion is very important. Using the material as a sort of springboard for conversations about...even how the history correlates with current events. I really like to talk about current issues in the world and spend some time on just what’s happening. For the World Cultures class to the American History class, a lot of it for me is trying to show the students that what was happening in that ancient period really isn’t a whole lot different from where we are today. Or the fact that we are the way we are because of what’s happening. (interview #2)

Overall, participants argued incorporation of current events within the secondary social studies classroom is a valuable pedagogical strategy because it helps to tell a larger story and connects with students’ communities and interests. Anna, Rose, Oscar, Jennifer, and Hannah all emphasized that current events can highlight unequal hierarchies present in society,

discrepancies in statistics that may connect to oppression of marginalized groups, and online news sources may be incorporated to tell stories that may otherwise be overlooked. Correlating history with the present and the future helps to encourage not only critical thinking, but meaningful connections for students.

**Journaling.** Three participants cited journaling as a method of facilitating a social justice education in the secondary social studies classroom. Implemented in various styles, encouraging students to elicit this form of internal thought and structure their ideas on paper is a constructive approach in teaching. More than a student-centered approach to learning, journaling can encourage deep reflection and meaningful connections. Anna, Rose, and Jennifer highlighted features of their journaling activities and explained how these activities are designed to prompt best practices, establish confidentiality of student thought, analyze current societal characteristics, and foster critical thinking and writing skills.

Best practices in education often prompt educators and stakeholders to consider teacher procedures for implementing the most efficient and effective lessons throughout the school year while maintaining a safe and inviting environment for students and their families. While this holds true for many when considering overall teaching philosophy, participants were also able to connect these best practices related to efficiency, effectiveness, and safety to the teaching strategy of journaling. Anna stated, “Its (journaling) at the beginning of the class. They’ll (9<sup>th</sup> graders) come in and that’s usually the first thing they have to do. Get your homework out, here’s the question, write, think, go back to your homework if you need to. I just want them to turn their brains on for the class. That’s my motivation.” (interview #1). While some educators reference this beginning of class activity as bell work, or drills, and many use it to serve as a review of the previous day’s lesson or to preview the current day’s lesson, the goal of bell work



is often to minimize misbehavior at the start of class while the teacher tends to procedural responsibilities. Anna expressed that she found the first few minutes at the start of class to be an appropriate time to prompt student thinking through the use of journaling.

Jennifer described giving students the opportunity to reflect on their lives through utilization of strategically created writing prompts. For example, she explained that her students respond to prompts such as, “I am..., I feel..., I believe..., or I think...” with personal anecdotes of “I wish my dad was here...,” or “I hope I don’t get bullied next year...”. She often uses such journaling as a simple assignment at the start of class. She expressed the benefits of the strategy in relation to developing an increased understanding of your students. She stated, “...you start to see the family dynamics.” (interview #1). Jennifer insisted, however, that with such personal journaling prompts, it is critical to establish trust and maintain a level of confidentiality with your students. This trust further reinforces the approach of teaching for social justice as it can seemingly decrease or minimize a potential gap of hierarchy position in the classroom.

Additionally, learning about the personal or intimate experiences of students and fostering a level of vulnerability, often only revealed to close peers or family members, may serve as motivation for students who are typically reserved or hesitant to share their thoughts and experiences. While journaling is a strategy that prompts all students to think critically and often times about potentially controversial topics, it can be especially helpful for groups of students who may be marginalized in the larger school population, as it can encourage feelings of inclusion and allow them to be heard. In the second interview, Rose emphasized:

I think that so many kids have so much to say and they get labeled so easily...They have a composition book and a lot of times they have questions in a journal form. I tell them that I read every word, and I do read every word, and I will respond to those words. I

feel like sometimes, people don't get heard and with that, they can provide their opinion. It's incredible what these kids say when I read their responses. I haven't done this for long, but it's been something that I've done recently because I never had the opportunity to know what the kids had to say. It amazes me. They are not like the stars with the highest grade, but they have an opinion as well. I feel like sometimes, some of those kids haven't been heard that much. I see how they change even throughout the class by becoming a little more vocal.

Further fostering the notion of confidentiality and articulating a verbal contract of trust, Jennifer consistently reassures her students that "no one else is going to see this except me" (interview #1).

Rose also highlighted the importance of structure and communicating with students during journaling. She stated:

It's not like they journal whatever they want, there's a guide to it. I give them an open-ended question. I tell them that I read every single thing that they write, and I do. When it's that kind of thing I do...and I write back. Then I will post something. I would never post something if it was something I thought was embarrassing. I will sometimes post things from students with lower GPAs who are not necessarily successful in other classes. But that doesn't mean that they don't have a lot to offer so I think it's a good opportunity to let them know what they do have is valuable. What they have to say is valuable. They might fail their history class or fail their whole year, they might have their 1.9 GPA, but they are really smart kids. Honestly. Just for them to realize that they do have something to offer. (interview #1)

The implementation of journaling aligns with the research on teaching for social justice as it encourages reflection and can inspire action. As Jay (2008) notes, "...it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action as the basis for social change" (p. 305). This reflection and action is what Freire (1970/2010) defines as *praxis*. For example, in the classroom, an educator can provide real-life application and encourage discourse regarding elements in the students' communities. What is written in journals or highlighted in current events can be connected to students' lives and communities while simultaneously being used to highlight what efforts can be taken to encourage transformation, change, or improvements in the future. Rose articulated that she attempts to capitalize on such opportunities through responding to students' reflective journal entries and attempting to minimize that potential marginalization by letting "them know what they have is valuable" (interview #1) while maintaining a level of confidentiality which builds trust between her and the student.

Similar to Rose's "appreciation clap," (interview #1) which is meant to illustrate respect for the speaker during discussions, Anna also discussed a routine that she uses to support a positive culture for learning that is aligned with both an analysis of current societal characteristics and writing skills. As previously highlighted, Anna is committed to active learning and wants students to turn "their brains on for class" (interview #1). She cited an example and described how she will "come up with questions that will help connect ancient history to the present or that will help to get them (students) thinking and discussing." Anna prompts students to "write out a question that was more modern." She explained:

Like, why do we have rules? Getting them to answer that and talking about the foundations of society and why and how are rules developed? Or what's fair? I ask them

about our school handbook. What rule would they change if they could? A lot of it is based on informal questioning and the formal discussions that we run pretty regularly?

While establishing a connection between content from the social studies curriculum, textbooks, and supplemental materials can sometimes prove challenging, participants argued that utilization of journaling seems to aid in this connection, as well as help to foster a social justice approach by honing in on critical thinking and writing skills. When talking about providing time for students to practice their writing skills, Anna stated:

Sometimes it has more of a purpose. I'll ask them to create a thesis statement. It may not be to create a paragraph or two in a journal. It's more like answer a question by practicing writing but it still gets us to the same point of discussion. In ninth grade, I try to keep their time structured. They tend to see the value in routine. They do journal I would say, at least...if I see them four times a week, probably three times out of that week, we would journal. Sometimes every day, sometimes I might go a few days without a journal and other times it's pretty regular.

**Sensory Learning.** Another common means of facilitating a social justice education by educators that identify with teaching for social justice is through the use of sensory learning. Sensory learning is associated with learning that appeals to feelings and is not necessarily based on required course content. While facilitating learning that elicits feelings can be beneficial since it can support deeper learning and understanding, it is also challenging, as it can easily go off-course and result in unnecessary anger or misguided emotion. When talking about the advantages of shock value, Oscar stated,

So I think you have to shock them (students). You've got to appeal to their own sense of morals and their own thought patterns. Let's face it, these kids are really self-centered.

If you cannot relate it back to them, it doesn't matter. Talking about some things doesn't really have any value to them. (interview #1)

This approach toward facilitating instruction requires both care and skill throughout any lesson. Concerned for the safety of students, Jennifer reflected on the need for "briefing and debriefing" (interview #1). For example, when reviewing document-based questions with photographs and pictures of "slave torture devices", she argued that such a practice was necessary. Since images can be troubling to students and elicit powerful emotions, it is necessary to prepare students for what they will see and allow them to reflect on what they have seen. When describing one of her sensory-based lessons, Hannah explained:

We have one picture we show in American Mosaic of a lynching. The kids deserve to get upset at this picture. They have a right to get upset about that picture, but I have to navigate it so it still is teachable, so that we are still moving forward. We can get lost in the emotions. We have to acknowledge the emotions and we have to turn that into something else. (interview #1)

Oscar also talked about the use of music to elicit emotion. He spoke of how he provides a script and plays the song, "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holiday. He stated, "The first time I played it, a little girl said, 'If I didn't know any better, this song is about somebody getting lynched'" (interview 1). He was then able to use the reactions to the song and the emotion it elicited to transition into content. While the atrocity of lynching is something that is often marginalized or minimized in many social studies classrooms, for Oscar, he feels it is important for it to take center stage. Use of the song is an approach that allows that to happen.

Nieto (2002) highlights that critical pedagogy aids in exposing and demystifying some of the truths that are often taken for granted and promotes analyzing them critically and with care.

While Oscar's idea of allowing the atrocity of lynching to take center stage reinforces this argument, Jennifer also reinforces the idea when discussing teaching about slavery. She explained:

Particularly with American History and our history of slavery, you have to recognize that it's not a pretty part and it can't be glazed over. You have to present to them the obvious inhumanity of it and let them know that it was wrong, it is wrong. We don't hide it in any way. It has to be out there and visible to them, especially for children of color. I think for the first time, maybe, they are getting an open and honest discussion about it in the classroom. (interview #2)

Regardless of the content, shock value and elicitation of extreme feelings amongst students can be a powerful learning tool. However, it is essential for the teacher to be mindful of such emotions and encourage a safe and secure learning environment through briefing and debriefing.

### **Experiences Prompting Educators to Teach for Social Justice**

In attempt to explore the experiences that prompt teachers to teach from a social justice approach in the secondary social studies classroom, questions were asked during the interviews to explore participants' motivations and reasoning for teaching for social justice. Directing questions to both earlier and recent times, I was interested in investigating experiences and involvements that may have prompted participants to become interested in teaching from a social justice approach. Along with how participants define teaching for social justice and how they facilitate this approach in relation to both content and pedagogy, since our experiences are influential in our views, I thought it was equally important to know what shaped participants' beliefs and ideas. Helping to formulate our identity, at least to some degree, experiences are

influential, therefore, I thought it would be helpful to consider participants' experiences and the potentially influential role they may have played in motivating participants to employ a liberatory pedagogy in their classroom.

### **Connections to Family and Community**

When encouraged to discuss experiences that may prompt educators to teach for social justice, participants reflected on times during their childhood and youth and extended their reflections until today. Considering their reflections, many of the cited stories captured moments involving family members and persons in their hometowns or current communities. While the context of the stories varied, and some were positive or neutral in tone while others were negative, all participants discussed the influential role of family and/or community on their identity. Below, Table 5 outlines these experiences prompting a social justice approach aligned with family and community.

Table 5. Experiences Prompting a Social Justice Approach: Family and Community

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Family &amp; Community Experiences</b>
<b>Anna</b>	Minimal Exposure to Diversity, Homogeneous Hometown Exposure to Derogatory Comments or Slurs Challenged Relatives' Comments Family & Community Encouraged her to Embrace Diversity
<b>Rose</b>	Family Relocated for Increased Financial Opportunity, Overcame Adversity Exposure to Negative Comments or Slurs Close-Minded Family Members Family (father) Encouraged Her to Embrace Diversity
<b>Oscar</b>	Instilled Values Related to Work and Life, Overcoming Adversity Relocated for Increased Educational and Employment Opportunities
<b>Jennifer</b>	Religious Persecution and Violence Minimal Exposure to Racial or Cultural Diversity Disease and Death of Parents Relocated for increased educational opportunities, Overcame Adversity

Table 5. (continued)

<b>Hannah</b>	Family Relocated for Increased Opportunity, Overcame Adversity Exposure to Derogatory Comments or Slurs Challenged Relatives' Comments Embraced Others with Differences in Demographics
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When asked about experiences that prompted them to teach for social justice, participants highlighted critical moments in their childhood. For example, Anna immediately made connections to her hometown and the lack of diversity. She explained:

I don't know if that comes from growing up in a place like where there were no differences. I didn't go to school with anyone of a different religion, even though my family is not very religious. Everyone in that school was pretty much the same. There were very few people of color, there were very few people of different religions. There were very few differences, even in class. Most people pretty much had the same lot in life. Until I went to college and actually saw a much different human mosaic. I said, "Oh, wow!" I knew all of this existed, but I never interacted with it, or I never really talked to someone who went to a different kind of church or practiced something other than Christmas. I feel like a lot of students, even though they have access to so much more, in terms of social media and knowing more about people, even making friends online that they have never met in different places in the world. I get the impression that a lot of kids are still somewhat sheltered sometimes. So they should understand that there are differences in the world. So I guess that is a key word for me, yes. Because I worry or wonder how much they really know about or respect those differences. Maybe they know they exist, but they don't know how to deal with it. (interview #2)



The vast homogeneity described and minimal exposure to difference that emerged from Anna's description of her hometown and community was similar to Jennifer in that there was minimal difference in race, ethnicity, or social status; however, their stories differ dramatically in the powerful role of religion. Raised in Ireland, Jennifer remembers religious persecution between the Catholics and Protestants. While there was no difference in race or ethnicity, religious difference played an influential role in the country's history and current status. She stated, "Of course growing up in Ireland we had the IRA, which is the Irish Republic Army, which is a terrorist organization. They would specifically go out to kill British soldiers or Protestants. We also had the UFF or the UVF, which is the Ultra Volunteer Force, who would go out to kill Catholics" (interview #2).

Anna remembered a time when the state of Pennsylvania "had the fourth highest rate of hate crime in the nation" (interview #2). With minimal differences in religion and race, conflict related to difference still found a place in her community. She explained:

The KKK came to (my hometown in Pennsylvania) for a rally when I was in college. I was like, 'okay, I know they exist, but they exist?' Our school put on a counter-rally that same day the KKK came. So while the KKK was in the town square, we had this big unity day on our football field. The whole town was invited and the college helped. The KKK rally had their little membership and maybe a handful of people who were curious or enjoying that kind of hateful talk. Meanwhile, there were hundreds of people at our event. In college, I was shocked to learn of the demographics and what was actually going on in Pennsylvania, but to know that this town could come together in such a powerful way. I had never really experienced that or no one had ever been forced to...that was awesome! (interview #2)

Additionally, both Anna and Jennifer reflected on conflict related to differences that related directly to their families. For example, both participants highlighted experiences that portrayed family members who exhibited a dislike for others who were different in some way through use of racial slurs and negative comments. When talking about the attitudes of some students in her local high school, Anna made a direct connection to her family and described a particular instance related to her grandmother. Anna explained:

It's interesting because my grandmothers were maybe a little more, opinionated; I don't want to say resentful. My father's mother, she seemed a little more wary of people. She's a little more, she has her opinions about people. She grew up and still lives in (near hometown), Pennsylvania and she saw that city go from what she considered idyllic to being overrun by a certain type of people. Calling them the names that you don't want people to be called. I remember driving through (near hometown) and, and she would say, I'll say it, but it's not nice. She'd say, 'I can't believe what the spics have done to this place!' I would feel like my ears were going to start bleeding. I was in high school and I didn't understand because I didn't have that experience up north. Even seeing people who were different from me, I knew that was bad and that she shouldn't be saying that. So that kind of made me think about social justice in a different way, not just in the perspective from my grandfathers, respecting people, and just enjoying life, but also from her perspective. Why would she say that? What does that really mean? How can I tell her that's not nice? My grandmother was talking about the Hispanic community. She would still say that today, even though I've told her repeatedly that she shouldn't say that. She's done better, I think, but in her head, I know she hasn't changed her opinion. She's a little bit more leery, if she sees a crowd of people that are different than her, she

would be nervous. She would question: what are they doing? Why are they here?

What's their motive? I'd say, 'probably the same as yours; we're in the mall!' (interview #2)

Similar to Anna's experience of dealing with her grandmother's distasteful comments, Hannah spoke of her grandfather and comments he made that resulted in Hannah's discomfort. Prefacing the story by expressing an unfettered love for her grandfather, Hannah referenced him as "the kindest man you'll ever meet" (interview #2). However, remaining true to her values and beliefs in relation to differences amongst others, despite her admiration for her grandfather, Hannah found it necessary to correct him regarding the use of racial slurs. She described an experience during her childhood and explained:

Even though I never heard my mom talk that way growing up, every once in a while, I'd hear my grandpa, my pa-pa with some really inappropriate comments. So I remember being at the kitchen table with him one day....He made a comment about 'knuckle draggers'. I was little. I was little. I want to say that I was in second or third grade, maybe. He then used the word 'nigger' and it killed me. I remember being that little and looking at him and saying, 'grandpa you can't say those words in front of me.' I said, 'Those aren't nice words and they're not appropriate.' I can remember. I can remember saying that to him. And he looked at me and said, 'Ahh, but that's what they are' and he tried to explain to me why I was being silly. I remember I got sad. I can remember feeling this at the kitchen table and how it was the first time I looked at him and thought, you are such a good man, why would you say such hateful things about people, they're people. I remember my mom looking at him and saying, 'Dad, (Hannah) doesn't like that

kind of stuff, don't say it around her, it makes her upset.' It was so weird, because since I was little, I knew I was different in that way. (interview #2)

While the families and the communities in which we are raised tend to have an effect upon who we are and who we become, both Anna and Hannah felt that they were able to resist the negativity and did not assume or develop an attitude of dislike for people who are different than themselves in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status. Additionally, both participants have gone as far as to openly correct negative comments directed towards other groups of people by family members. While Anna's situation with her grandmother occurred while she was in high school, it is interesting to note how young Hannah was in the story she shared where she challenged her grandfather's use of racial slurs.

In terms of accepting the differences that exist throughout society, Jennifer has also assumed an inclusive approach and seemingly embraces such differences. Despite what she witnessed in terms of religious persecution during her childhood in Ireland, she has not developed bitterness for people who are different, but rather feels the need to embrace justice and equality. During the interviews, she explained:

I've always had an idea of equality and I guess because it stems from my background of not having a whole lot growing up. Living on social welfare, but not...I wouldn't say we...we would get assistance, we didn't get food stamps. Maybe occasionally when my mother died and my father would go in and out of work, but we never felt good about that. It was like we got it, but we just wanted to be self-sufficient basically. There are people who are in dire need of support and assistance. I guess it's always been...I've always seen injustice and people not being treated fairly. (interview #2)

Rather than influencing participants to foster negative feelings and resentment, the challenging experiences and encounters faced by participants seemingly motivated them to become more interested in difference and eventually educate others within their classrooms and throughout their schools about inequities between groups of people, oppressive attitudes of others, and / or hegemonic entities in society. While such experiences involving people who took a positive approach to the differences of others may not be a formula for promoting a social justice approach, participants like Anna, Rose, Jennifer, and Hannah were seemingly stimulated in that way.

As previously explained, Anna used to visit her mother as she worked as a secretary in an office at a local community college. Hearing her mother greet and assist students with a consistently positive approach, despite the frequently poor attitudes and lack of enthusiasm exhibited by students, prompted Anna to ask, “How do you deal with that?” (interview 1). These interactions with her mother served as lesson on how to treat people; regardless of reciprocation, it is important to treat people with respect and dignity.

Additionally, Anna learned about respect for others despite their differences from family members such as her mother, father, and her grandfather (who served in World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor). Given his circumstances, even though Anna implied she would have understood if her grandfather had harbored some ill feelings towards the Japanese, according to Anna, he did not. She stated, “When he talked about the people he encountered and coming home, he never seemed to harbor resentment. He never seemed to feel like the Japanese were evil” (interview #1).

Also highlighting the power of positive influence within family, Rose spoke of her father. She explained:

When we would go back to Georgia...I can't even talk to a couple of my relatives anymore because of the things that they say. Even my sister to some degree, she'll say something like, I mean it's the close-mindedness. I think my dad helped me to become a lot more open-minded than what we had been raised to be. I mean he was the underdog. (interview #2)

Also speaking of his positive influence, Rose described how her father performed honorable duties for community members of another race, as well as those who assumed a lower socioeconomic status than they. She explained how he would take people to the grocery store, buy them cigarettes, or simply provide money to elderly women.

Extending outside the realm of family, Hannah spoke of the influential role of her professional community, in relation to what prompted her to teach for social justice. Throughout her childhood, but especially "nurtured through junior high and high school," Hannah gained experiences that prompted her to teach toward a social justice approach. However, her mentor, who served as Hannah's middle school teacher, who later became her internship supervisor, and, most recently, her colleague, was an additionally strong influence as she modeled a social justice education in class, and has since come to serve as a friend with whom to discuss social justice issues. During both her internship and her early years as a classroom teacher, Hannah felt fortunate for the guidance of her mentor. She explained:

The teacher I talked about earlier, (mentor, friend, and colleague), that's how she taught us back in seventh grade. She talked about it (social justice) all of the time. She may have been the first one who gave a name to it and those things to how I felt. I always had an instinct for social justice. I remember wearing a peace sign on my clothes. I remember watching *A Different World* growing up and thinking 'this is right', you know

what I mean? Because in my family, that story wouldn't be known to me. That's not my family's story. I remember seeing it on TV and saying, 'yes, yes!'. She gave a name to it and attached it to social studies and modeled for us, how to use these stories to take them out of the past and put them into the present. So for six years, I was exposed to that as a student in a very formative time in my life. To see another grown-up, because I didn't have that model in my family, but to see a grown-up who believed what I believed. That was life-changing. You have to have a grown-up somewhere along the lines, because you're not crazy, you're bright. She absolutely encouraged that in me. As my teacher and later as my mentor. So when I was in high school, definitely, and then when we started teaching these courses next door to each other. Especially how to bring it in from all of these different layers and different levels to kids. (interview #1)

### **Connections to School and Education**

Along with connecting a social justice approach to their families and communities, participants also highlighted experiences they had in school and in education in general that served as inspiration and motivation in their interest and commitment to teach for social justice. This data is highlighted in Table 6.

Throughout their childhood, adolescence, and even extending into adulthood, participants experienced school on various levels and education that stretched beyond the classroom in a more informal setting. All participants completed undergraduate degree programs and some attended graduate school, as well. When asked about experiences that prompt educators to teach for social justice, participants discussed events that occurred while they were formally enrolled in school, as well as informal educational experiences.

Table 6. Experiences Prompting a Social Justice Approach: School and Education

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Educational Experiences</b>
<b>Anna</b>	Positive Influence from Professor (Pedagogy)
<b>Rose</b>	Positive Influence from Professor (Content and Pedagogy) High School Social Studies Courses Lacked Diversity (Content) Taught Inclusive Courses During Internship (Content)
<b>Oscar</b>	Positive Influence from Professor (Pedagogy)
<b>Jennifer</b>	Positive Influence During Internship Experience (Pedagogy)
<b>Hannah</b>	Positive Experience from Middle and High School (Content and Pedagogy) Taught Inclusive Courses During Internship (Content)

Every participant interviewed for the study holds an undergraduate degree in secondary education social studies, has taught in the social studies classroom for at least three years, and self-identifies as teaching from a social justice approach. Experiences from undergraduate and / or graduate school years, internships before obtaining a full-time teaching position at a school site, and daily occurrences at the schools where they currently work were highlighted as critical influences in forming the participants' views and identity as social studies educators who teach for social justice.

When asked about their undergraduate experiences, participants remembered those who propelled them towards their current mindsets. Anna highlighted experiences from her undergraduate years in Pennsylvania. Methods that one of her professors employed to educate students in history courses really impressed Anna and offered learning outside of historical content. Speaking of her professor, she stated:

I think he (professor) was a big influence because he was so focused on making us think for ourselves, talk in class, defend our opinions and back it up with evidence. In my high



school, I was never really asked to do that...He really was one of the first people that made me want to get better and do things that way, and see the value and that kind of method in teaching. (interview #1)

These experiences impacted Anna's views on teaching, as well as the approach she employs in her classroom today. In the second interview, she explained:

One of the professors that I referenced in our previous interview, he was the one who became my advisor. I was really engaged and challenged by his teaching style because he was the first person among others that first year at \_\_\_\_\_(college) who made me participate and realize that history is a lot more than just, "oh, I'm smart and can answer questions about it on a test". I felt that I could actually talk about it and defend my opinion. That was one of the first things he said to us and I will never forget it. I still use his words in my class to this day. On the first day of class, he asked us "what is history?". That was his question. I'm sitting there like, "hmmm?". His response was, "history is interpretation". I thought, really, that is not what I learned in high school. I was amazed. It just stuck with me. I think it influenced a lot of the things we addressed about social justice. In my opinion there's not one right answer how you define social justice, how you teach or understand it, what I would expect of the kids. But his method really stuck with me. (interview #2)

Similarly, Oscar provided details related to his undergraduate and graduate school experiences in Florida that emphasized alternative teaching styles used by a professor. He stated:

Dr. (professor) taught me a completely new way of teaching. He does not do formal assessments at all. Instead his assessments are completely in-class and they are verbal.

He grades everybody based on discussion. He assigns no papers, no quizzes, tests, or nothing. But at one point, I kind of felt like we were getting away with something. Of course I didn't say anything until the class was over. I talked to him and said, 'Dr. (professor), you know we didn't do any papers or anything?' He said, '(Oscar), in any class, was there anybody that didn't say anything at all?' I said, 'No'. He said, 'Everybody contributes to our discussions.' These were 3 hour discussions. He said, 'What that tells me while you guys are debating and arguing back and forth, absolutely, you all knew what you were talking about. To debate, you all had to have read. Or else, there would be no debate; you'd get shot down immediately!' He said, 'That is how I know. There's no need to give a test, you know the material!' (interview # 1)

While the professors referenced by Anna and Oscar had a different style of approaching teaching and learning in terms of alternative styles of assessment, the discussion that happened in the classroom was heavily influential in the manner these participants teach in their classrooms today. Fostering an environment to discuss issues openly while maintaining a sense of accountability for participation, is considered a valuable teaching approach by both Anna and Oscar. Additionally, it is interesting to connect that when asked to discuss pedagogical approaches they employ in the classroom to facilitate a social justice approach, the most frequently referenced strategy by participants was use of class discussion.

Along with influencing pedagogical approaches, when reflecting on experiences that prompted them to teach for social justice, participants also discussed experiences related to content.

Rose, a native of Georgia, attended undergraduate school at a major university in Florida before completing her internship and obtaining a full-time teaching position in the state. During

her undergraduate years, she enrolled in education and social studies courses such as geography and psychology. When reflecting back on her experiences, one course stood out to her in particular. She explained:

So it came down to a summer class called Latin American History in Film. This was one of the last classes before I got my degree...But that was a class! I wouldn't have picked that if I was given an option, but when I took it, I've used stuff from that class even today. To me, the most interesting thing was thinking about the revolutions occurring in Central and South America. The priests had a role in those events. It kind of reminds me of what this new Pope is doing. I'm not even Catholic. He's all about social justice and he gets criticism for that. He washed the feet of people that had AIDS. He was from somewhere that is more than 90% Catholic, like Venezuela or Argentina. He is the one that believes that homosexuals should be treated as human beings. That was controversial what he did. Liberation Theology, where they had a lot of repressive regimes that took over. I thought that would be interesting. College age, idealistic, and then they would disappear from their home because they disagreed from the person in charge. So that was probably the most interesting class I took. (interview #1)

Connecting back to pedagogy, while Rose was interested and inspired by the content that aligned with social justice, she was also motivated by the methods that were used to deliver the content. She reported that the professors who stand out to her are those that "have taken a different approach", the ones that "don't just follow a straight curriculum" (interview #1). She seemingly admires the way content was delivered and communicated in some of her undergraduate courses, especially the courses where the content related to topics of "cultural perspectives." When reflecting on effective and inspirational teaching, she explained, "I think

they (professors) are all those who look outside the box when they think about their approach to how they want to teach their kids” (interview #1).

Alternatively, when reflecting on content that aligns with social justice, Hannah was not pleased with her university experiences. Even though she was originally from Illinois, since her family relocated, Hannah attended undergraduate and graduate school in Florida. Enrolling in both education and social studies courses, she hoped she would have the opportunity to heighten her educational understanding, especially since she was enrolled in a university honors program. During discussion surrounding experiences in education aligned with social justice, she critiqued courses in her program of study. With passion, she explained:

I was just talking about this with somebody the other day about how you take a class called *Teaching Diverse Populations* which was such a superficial class when you look back on it. I imagine if you didn't know anything about diversity, it was probably shocking, but if you know something about it, it's almost offensive at how superficial it is. That's the only word I can think of for it. I remember these assignments that we had to do where you had to show how you were differentiating based on the diverse conditions. I only ever remember talking about ELL (English-Language Learners) students. I remember a tiny chunk about how you should also be cognizant of ethnicity and race, but then I don't ever remember talking about it. We read some books; we did some presentations, but nothing life changing. When I got into my upper level courses, once I was in the College of Education, I can remember a few pit stops about diversity. That's the best word to explain it. We might have read some articles related to diversity or a few conversations, but no strategic focus on it as far as I can remember. Even if it was there, isn't that revealing?

Along with participants offering mixed reviews about their experiences at the university level, they did so in relation to high school, as well. For example, both Rose and Hannah spoke of educational experiences in high school. Disappointedly, Rose remembered, “I’d always been interested in the Holocaust because of my dad. We didn’t learn about anything like that in high school. Back when I was in high school, they’d say, ‘Oh, and then World War II happened’ and that was it. So you didn’t really go past that. So no Civil Rights, no ‘60’s...no anything!” (interview #1). Conversely, Hannah spoke of her middle school and high school experiences from a positive and meaningful perspective. (The experiences related back to the mentor who was previously highlighted.) She explained that an influential teacher not only taught and modeled a social justice approach, but also asserted that, “I attribute her as the one who shaped my values as far as social justice” (interview #1).

Also connecting to education, along with high school and undergraduate school, one of the most commonly-cited experiences of participants, prior to obtaining a full-time teaching position, was their internship experience. Rose, Jennifer, and Hannah discussed their experiences in a positive light, and explained that the internship experience helped to inform their current understanding and practice.

In relation to her internship experience, Jennifer felt fortunate to have been placed with a qualified and effective cooperating teacher. Describing her experiences, she stated:

I think I’ve become the teacher I’ve become because of what I’ve seen. I have to say that my internship was probably the biggest benefit that I had because I saw a master teacher teach and I learned from her. I feel like the teachers that never do an internship miss out. That’s not to say that there are teachers out there who have interns and the interns probably get nothing out of it, but I was one of those interns that did. I think that made

me become the teacher that I am, but I suppose it depends on the effectiveness of the teacher and how they can connect it and link it. (interview #2)

Similarly, Rose stated, "...I lucked-out in my internship." (interview #1). She went on to explain the district with whom she was assigned had just begun offering a new social studies elective course called American Mosaic. During her internship experience, she first had the opportunity to share the teaching load for this course with her cooperating teacher and eventually was responsible for teaching the course herself. The curriculum for the course was inclusive and allowed her to facilitate lessons related to African-American History, Latino History, Holocaust History, Native-American History, and Women's History.

Along with Rose, Hannah also had the opportunity to teach American Mosaic, in addition to Women's Studies. Thinking about these courses, she explained:

It's interesting, Mosaic and Women's Studies. My mentor was my teacher starting in seventh grade. She was one of those special teachers that I had at (middle school in FL) and then (high school in FL). She was also my intern sponsor and we taught next door to each other for eight years. She's my best friend, mentor, all of the above. We have a very special relationship. I attribute her as the one who shaped my values as far as social justice. She was the designer of the Women's Studies curriculum in (school district in FL) and she was part of the team that created American Mosaic for the county. When I was an intern, she got me a job editing the American Mosaic curriculum that went out to the teachers. So I grew up with it. I know those courses very intimately because I have it from her point of view. Why they were designed and what the purposes of those courses were. Sometimes, the teachers that teach it today don't have that background knowledge

so they don't understand the fabric of how it's woven together. I was lucky that she gave me that vision from the very beginning. (interview #1)

While the opportunity to teach courses specifically aligned with the history of marginalized groups in society and historical content from diverse viewpoints seemingly provided participants with an opportunity that is not common, both Hannah and Rose were appreciative of the opportunity. Hannah highlighted the purposeful connection between course content and a social justice approach. Reflecting back on her internship, she commented:

The teacher that I keep talking about (mentor, friend, and colleague) and I, we'd have conversations about it as it came up. We were definitely teaching the classes that lend themselves to social justice. I can remember her modeling different ways to...when we would have individual students. Beyond the theoretical and teaching about it, but definitely different ways to actually apply that to the kids we worked with. I can remember very specific cases where we would have those conversations.

While no participant could provide an exact reasoning as to why (s)he teaches from a social justice approach, all participants were able to immediately highlight experiences that motivated this style of teaching and learning. Whether it was seen through a positive, neutral, or negative frame, Anna, Rose, Oscar, Jennifer, and Hannah discussed experiences earlier in life, extending through today, that have been influential. Connecting to family, community, school, and education, participants have encountered both beneficial and challenging circumstances in both their personal and professional lives that have served as motivation and inspiration to teach from a social justice approach. While the degree of significance is authentic to their individual lives and circumstances, they use the insight gained from these experiences to inform how they teach for social justice.

### **Challenges and Rewards Associated With Facilitating a Social Justice Curriculum**

While there are challenges and rewards associated with employing any approach to teaching and learning, participants agreed this was especially true when considering teaching for social justice. In relation to challenges, participants emphasized ideas that are frequently referenced amongst most educators, regardless of what or how they teach. For example, participants gave voice to the challenges associated with accommodating various learning styles of students, knowing how to effectively navigate the barrier of language with students who speak English as a second language, gaining access to technology for use in the classroom, and covering all of the benchmarks in a district or stated-mandated curriculum in the time allotted for any given course. While rewards may be vague, intangible, or obscure in nature when compared to challenges, they are present. In relation to rewards, participants emphasized witnessing students of multiple backgrounds and learning styles experiencing success, increased comprehension of difficult vocabulary and overall fluency for students who speak English as a second language, being awarded grants based on creative use of technology in the classroom, and fostering a culture for learning that extends beyond the district or state-mandated curriculum.

Throughout the interviews with participants, I wanted to explore ways that participants considered themselves to be challenged and rewarded in relation to facilitating a social justice curriculum within the social studies classroom. The themes that emerged, as evidence in Table 7, related to overarching themes and closely-related ideas aligned with politics, administration, voice, empowerment, and urgency.



Table 7. Challenges and Rewards of a Social Justice Teaching Approach

	<b>Challenges and Rewards: Emergent Themes</b>	
<b>Participants</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Rewards</b>
<b>Anna</b>	Politics Urgency	Supportive Administration Empowerment Urgency
<b>Rose</b>	Unsupportive Administration	Empowerment
<b>Oscar</b>	Unsupportive Administration Politics	Voice
<b>Jennifer</b>		Urgency Voice
<b>Hannah</b>	Politics Urgency	Empowerment Urgency Voice

### **Politics**

Within most classrooms across the country, there is an unwritten rule for teachers in that they are not to express their political affiliations and beliefs. Depending on the courses that are taught by a given teacher, such restrained communication may prove more challenging for some teachers than others. For example, if a teacher has American Government or Civics on their course load, given that politics and political affiliations are a daily topic of discussion, students may be much more likely to ask the teacher about his/ her thoughts and opinions. While the unwritten rule is to refrain from sharing, it can also be potentially alienating to students if the teacher is continuously refusing to answer or avoiding questions.

When examining potential challenges during the interviews, two participants emphasized challenges as they relate to discussing politics. For example, Anna, who teaches tenth grade world history “at an independent school where people are usually more well-off.” (interview #1)

discussed the struggle with politics. She described the challenge of remaining neutral during classroom conversations related to politics. In relation to her political beliefs, she stated:

...the kids don't purposely know, they can probably guess. We don't talk about my political party. I have never registered with a party affiliation. Yes, they can probably judge how I feel about certain issues, even though I try to keep an even playing field for them to discuss things. I try to dissuade the students from thinking they know me. If I don't say it, then how can they? Don't judge me and I'm not going to judge you. In my classroom here, I'm very lucky to have smaller classes where we talk through a lot. Most of our class is discussion based. That's why I really don't like showing all of my cards...(interview #1)

Despite the fact that Anna purposefully avoids sharing her political affiliation with students, this does not mean her location on a political spectrum is never unveiled or alluded to during class discussion, particularly those related to social justice education. Anna argued that this is challenging and presents an internal struggle of finding and maintaining a balance; for example, how much should one share?

This level of restraint and balance between academic freedom and expression can be challenging in other ways, as well. For example, Oscar discussed more external challenges he has encountered in relation to a bulletin board displayed in his room titled, "My Influences Board". He explained:

There are all of these pictures of famous people and then there are three poems up there. My Influences Board is a way for me to let my students know who I am. I tell them, 'these people and these particular three poems give you some insight into who the person is that stands in front of you.' They are a large part of the building blocks with

something they wrote. There are musicians, writers, politicians, and this and that. I remember I had a parent that came in and she said, ‘All of these people are pretty much on the left.’ I said, ‘Yes...and?’. She was like, ‘Well, shouldn’t there be balance?’. I said, ‘Why, there’s no balance in me. My agenda is real clear. This is who I am. I’d be lying if I put George Bush up there.’ (interview #2)

The challenges present for Oscar are undoubtedly different than those present for Anna. His challenges stem from student critique and parental oversight of materials in his classroom related to his personal choice to display pictures of individuals such as W.E.B. Dubois whereas Anna’s struggle is more internal as she questions what to reveal and how much to share.

Another participant discussed challenging experiences related to politics in relation to her family, but described how those challenges motivate her theories on education and life. When speaking of her political affiliation and values, Hannah described her location on a political spectrum as opposite of her parents. After characterizing her family as “very, very conservative” (interview #1), she further discussed the influence of political views. She stated:

My dad went into the military when he was 16, so a little bit of that is attributed to being in the military. We are a military family, so that definitely swayed their political views. It’s interesting, as I talked to my parents growing up, I think they became so conservative because they saw in themselves no excuses. Look where we came from, if we could do it they could do it. That has been, that is my parent’s paradigm. I can’t argue with that and they are right. There is no way they should’ve accomplished what they accomplished, no way! It totally came with no parent support, the family who did everything to stop them from being successful. They ran away to a state where they had no family members, they were kids with a baby! My parents got married when my mom got pregnant with my

sister and ...it shouldn't happen. So it's hard for me to argue, you can do it! (interview #1)

Hannah's challenge of expressing and maintaining different political views than her family members permeates into the classroom through promotion of a pedagogical approach that highlights open-mindedness in relation to others in society. Speaking of her family, Hannah explained, they "never encouraged me to be open-minded. They usually tried to convince me how dangerous it is to be open-minded" (interview # 1). As a result, although Hannah has personal challenges at home in terms of the opposing politics of her parents, she is able to highlight her perspectives on a social justice education in the classroom, which at times are in complete opposition to her parents' belief system. She asserted, "We have to be open-minded to the fact that social justice means you should advocate to and for all groups that are not being treated appropriately" (interview #1).

### **Administration**

Challenges and rewards can also emerge or present themselves as a result of the varied leadership styles present at different school sites. Along with the struggle related to politics, participants also discussed a challenge related to scrutiny from administrators in relation to employing a social justice approach while simultaneously emphasizing the potential benefit of being granted permission to carry out activities that promote a social justice approach to education. Either way, whether considering challenges or benefits, it is interesting to note that teachers can be subject to both positive and negative outcomes from administration while facilitating a social justice approach to teaching and learning.

As discussed earlier, Oscar attempted to remain true to his beliefs and highlight works influential to him by utilizing a bulletin board. However, after a parental complaint was filed

with the principal's office, Oscar was summoned to explain his side of the story. Reflecting on this story, he explained:

I ended up in the principal's office. The principal said, 'I don't know if you want to leave that up there.' My response was real clear. I said, 'You could ask any student that is in there now or any student that has been in my classroom, I do not teach to The Influences Board. If one of these people that is up there...if their name comes up within the lesson, then I will point out. Like when W.E.B. appears in the history book. I point out he's on the Influence Board. There's that poem, W.E.B. and Booker T. I point out, there's a reason W.E.B. is on the board and Booker T. isn't. Then, I point out what W.E.B. was about and Booker T. was about. And my students knowing what I'm about, then it's clear to them why W.E.B. is on the board and Booker T. isn't' I think that most of the time it's a misunderstanding. Parents thinking that who they are is who their kids are and is who all of their other kids should be. I just don't agree with that. When you are teaching for social justice, that's when you find yourself out there on a limb because you are most often not going to be supported by administration. That's when the politician that is in every principal usually comes out. They will err on whatever side the parents are going to say or what they think the parents are going to say. They will say, 'Well that is wrong and you really shouldn't teach that.' (interview #2)

Rose faced challenges similar to Oscar in that she was also discouraged (encouraged not to act) by administration. However, her story related to the opposition she received when trying to create clubs related to social justice. In Rose's classroom, she promotes organizations such as *Amnesty International* which, she explained, "is all about getting people out of prison that have been jailed for whatever reason: exercising their rights, freedom of speech, or universal rights"

(interview #1). Reflecting on the challenges presented by administration when trying to establish social justice clubs, in a frustrated tone, Rose stated, “The administration was kind of like, we had to have real specific constitutions detailing exactly what was required” (interview #1).

While Rose was making an attempt to create the clubs to stimulate student involvement within her classes and in the school, she felt her efforts were minimized. Speaking of her frustration stemming from administrators’ concern that it could be “controversial”, she argued:

... how could this ever be controversial? At the same time it was like how could they not want us to do it. Or with *Invisible Children*. Trying to bring the movie to school. They (administrators) were like, ‘they (club advisors) might try to raise or collect money from the kids’. I guess it’s more of that thinking something is going to happen so they don’t let us do certain things. (interview #1)

While Rose was trying to provide opportunities “for students to take action” and she believed that increasing their awareness would encourage such action, she felt her administration stood in the way. Rose explained:

When I wanted to do something with *Invisible Children*, basically that’s what I was told (by administration)...that it was political and you couldn’t do it. Or trying to do petitions for certain things, that’s political. Even though it’s human rights, it’s political. I don’t think it’s political. Or even certain things that I would think, ‘Oh, the kids can get community service hours for it!’, but when they determined that it’s political, they can’t get community service hours. (interview #2)

While Rose and Oscar discussed the inhibiting influence of administration, alternatively, Anna highlighted the supportive role that administration can play in promoting a social justice

education. She discussed how administration was extremely supportive in the process of hosting guest speakers to discuss experiences and circumstances related to social justice.

Anna spoke extensively about her experience hosting Carl Wilkens, a well-known humanitarian featured in the documentary *Ghosts of Rwanda*. She passionately explained:

I showed the documentary *Ghosts of Rwanda*. One of the people chronicled in the documentary is Carl Wilkens. He was the only American that stayed in Rwanda during the genocide helping people. With all the characters in that documentary, I always gravitated toward his story. Here's this guy with a wife and 3 kids, but he chooses to protect the people in his home, the Tutsis. And try to deliver supplies and aid to mostly children in orphanages. I'd say, 'Why did he do that?' The people in the film are wonderful human beings, but that story stuck with me. Then, when I came here (current place of employment), my second summer here, I went to the Holocaust Museum and looked at the schedule. It said that Carl Wilkens is coming to talk. Wow! Carl Wilkens is coming! I was like freaking out! So I met him and he talked to the class, but I was like star struck! I invited him to my school, because he comes to Florida. So I brought him here for the kids to meet. Meeting him and exposing the kids to him and his story has been wonderful. The online class and being connected with like-minded people has been helpful. Feeling like I'm doing something positive, like having Carl come makes me happy. The kids ask me the day he comes, 'When is he coming back?' Being aware as far as some of the opportunities makes me feel more empowered. (interview #1)

Through this story, Anna revealed the benefit of not only feeling some level of empowerment for herself from the experience, but the empowerment resulting from having access to such a resource to share with her students. However, without approval and support of

her administration, hosting Carl Wilkens would not have been a possibility. Therefore, while some participants characterized administration as a road block in their journey towards teaching for social justice, Anna characterized administration as a beneficial component in the process.

### **Voice**

As employed in the many definitions, characteristics, and descriptions of critical theory, critical pedagogy, and social justice education, the term “voice” is often used to characterize the views or stories of those who are often overlooked, glossed over, or relegated to the margins. Just as the stories about marginalized populations that go untold or are not as prevalent throughout the pages of the textbook or conversations during class discussions surrounding the social studies curriculum are important, so are the voices of students in the classroom. Throughout the interviews, participants discussed both challenges and rewards in relation to voice.

Hannah described an instance when her students chose to seek justice surrounding an incident involving gang colors displayed in student clothing. As the school resource officer canvassed the school in order to take photos for the purpose of documenting students wearing certain colors, colors that indicated alleged involvement in gangs, Hannah’s students became upset and felt victimized. Reflecting back on this story, she explained:

I liked that they were mad because they recognized that what was happening was not right because of the things that we were talking about in class. They could own that, they could recognize that. Instead of feeling like victims, they knew that they needed to put a voice to it, and they knew that we were the ones to share it with. So as they’re talking to us about it and other kids start to hear, the other kids would say, “Well I’m going to wear



a red shirt.” You could see how the whole class starts to become invested in this minority group’s issue. (interview #1)

Despite the challenges presented in this instance of providing guidance to students who were navigating their way through this perceived injustice, Hannah found it rewarding to witness the attempt by students to “put a voice to it”. Hannah further explained how she personally took the issue to the steering committee and reported back to her students; thereby putting her belief of the importance of being an up stander (someone who stands up for what (s)he believes in) into practice and being a voice for her students.

Since voices are often silenced through untold stories of people who are marginalized in society, Jennifer finds it rewarding to provide that missing voice during her history lessons rather than simply teaching from the “white man’s perspective”. Her goal when teaching about topics like women’s rights or the Declaration of Independence is to address questions such as “Whose voice is left out?” Jennifer finds it important to remind herself and her students that “there is always the question of whose perspective is not here?” At times, she will play videos during class using characters known in popular culture so “...they can get that voice.” (interview #1).

Oscar also used the term voice, but different from the manner explained by other participants. Raised by a single parent who prompted responsibility and accountability in education and other areas of life, a voice, according to him, highlights transference of responsibility and accountability. A positive outcome in his quest in a social justice education means, “You have to be that voice.” (interview #2). He further explained:

One of the things that I’ve done as a teacher and that I’ve always done is look at the report card of every kid that has ever sat in my class. Not only do I look at your report card, but if your report card is not where it should be, you’re going to hear it from me. If

you've never had me before, when the first report card comes out and I circulate the room, most of them are outdone. I think it makes a difference because when they come back that second time, they will say things like, 'Mr. (Oscar) I did better in math this time' and, 'I was able to hold on to this...and I'm doing this...and I'm doing that.' We have to be that voice in their head. Let's be honest, a lot of them don't have that voice at home. I'm a lot older than my student's parents. For all intents and purposes, I have far too many kids that are raising themselves, so there has to be somebody that is coming from that perspective. I feel, be it formal or informal, I have to be that voice in their head. (interview #2)

## **Empowerment**

When considering benefits associated with facilitating a social justice curriculum, all participants spoke of the idea of empowerment. While empowering students through increased knowledge and skills may be considered a reward of educators in general, for the participants, the idea of empowerment was directly related and authentic to their experiences teaching for social justice. For example, after Hannah discussed what social justice means to her personally, she furthered her description by explaining what she desired for her students. She stated:

Just taking that opportunity to get kids to see themselves in history. To get them to see themselves in these stories that I tell and not let that be the end for them. It's not just a story. It impacted your life and who you are. Let's use that. I just want to empower kids to not put themselves in a box or limit themselves. It can be different for them. They can write a different story. (interview #1)

Fostering a sense of empowerment amongst students in their classrooms was a common idea referenced by the other participants, as well. Rose expressed that it is rewarding when her

students feel empowered to take the initiative to do things related to social justice beyond high school, such as work for a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), or beyond the classroom, such as become involved in anti-bullying campaigns. Rose spoke passionately about students' efforts to become involved and make a difference. She explained:

...whether they have just graduated or go on to make that a career like working for an NGO. I've also seen kids throw themselves in at the school-level. They will throw themselves in when they see big things happening outside in the world, they understand that it does start here (in school). This student is organizing an anti-bullying campaign at our school. This student is just one example. (interview #2)

During the interviews, Hannah also spoke of the idea of empowerment. Highlighting what she noticed about a degree of empowerment present in her students once they noticed "where social justice impacted their lives," she noted:

I think the kids got conditioned to where they were not supposed to talk about their own issues, but once we made it safe for them to talk about it, how the kids would start sharing their stories, and how the other kids in the room would start to go, 'what do you mean, what do you mean that happens to you?', and being able to say, 'It's around us every single day.' That was an amazing shift when that started to happen. Being empowering in many ways, to have a safe place for some of the kids who were experiencing those issues and being able to have a place for them to be able to share and talk about it. (interview #1)

## **Urgency**

Considering best practices in teaching, communicating a sense of urgency for the content, or, at minimum, allowing students to realize the relevancy of the content, helps to encourage

increased engagement. While some students may immediately make connections and realize the importance of the content, others may struggle. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be mindful of this potential disconnect and purposefully establish connections. Throughout the interviews, the idea of urgency emerged through comments made by Anna, Jennifer, and Hannah.

Anna explained how she feels rewarded when “they (students) can learn from each other and that their opinions matter just as much as mine or any other adults.” When her ninth graders return as seniors and say, “now I get it” (interview #2), that is rewarding for her. She further mentioned that a “struggle is to make sure that they see it’s not just a stage for them to be humorous or glib about some of these big and difficult issues” (interview #2). Delving further into challenges associated with facilitating a social justice curriculum, Anna divulged an experience related to a larger societal issue and communicated its importance to ninth graders. When speaking of ethnic and religious profiling at the airport post-911, she explained:

At my old school I did teach a few Muslims and here, too. I usually ask them, ‘Do you guys want to talk about anything that you’ve gone through? Do you want to share anything? Whether it’s just something about your religion that you feel strongly about?’ A lot of kids will say, ‘Yeah our families get pulled-over at the airport all the time.’ The kids will say, ‘really, but you’re, but there’s nothing wrong with you guys.’ Then they’re like, ‘yeah, but not when you go to the airport, they don’t care’. Then the kids think, “Oh, right”. Most of the kids aren’t judged by their, they judge themselves, but they don’t have to get pulled-over at the airport. Most of them don’t have to worry about getting pulled-over because they look suspicious. So I think it forces them...most of the

students when they hear that stuff from the Muslim students or even some of the African American students. (interview #2)

Discussing this larger societal issue in the classroom with ninth graders, who rarely witness profiling or think of their classmates who follow the religion of Islam as different, can be challenging. Anna further discussed how these conversations unfold in the classroom. She stated:

I think the students are really challenged, because what I notice in their reactions is that they kind of want to say, or what they don't want to say is, 'oh that makes sense'. They have to sort of think in a different way like, 'Why is that?' It's really hard to deal with that, like what a student as a freshman wants to think about their friend with a different skin color, or if they are wearing a different style of clothing, to be judged that way.

Because they just see their friend who is on the baseball team with them or in a club with them or in their class. They are not seeing someone who is a threat or worthy of that kind of extra attention from a police office or a TSA agent. (interview #2)

Making this larger societal issue real to students and creating a sense of urgency is not only a challenge to an educator like Anna, but Hannah also referenced similar challenges during the interviews. She stated, "So the personal struggle is making sure that what you are saying is accessible to the kids. I have the benefit of age and life experience and maturity to know that what I'm saying means something. This is real. This is urgent." (interview #2). She continued by explaining how she communicates details of how she struggles with her students. She explained:

Sometimes it really hard to sit in front of a room full of tenth graders and create urgency that they don't see in their lives. That can be daunting when you're trying to create this

moment of urgency with them. You're trying to have this moment with them. You're saying, 'No! It's important, I need you to think deeply, I need you to focus!' and they're like, 'No! We're having a black out pep rally on Friday!' That's a personal struggle. How to keep that motivation and how to not get bogged down and discouraged when the kids can't always relate. But, there's an intensity. You can't be that intense every single day. There's a struggle with that. I want to be intense every single day, but give the kids time to process that intensity and not expecting them to match my level of intensity. You need to recognize that just because they are not matching my level of intensity; it doesn't mean they are blowing me off either. You can't take any of that personal. It's hard sometimes to separate and say, 'okay, they are fourteen. I'm going to have to dial this down for a minute and be reasonable in what I expect from them.' How do you dribble out a little bit of intensity and then back off. I don't want to burn them out either. I don't want my intensity to be something they take for granted to the point where it doesn't resonate anymore. You have to pick your moments of where you're going to hit hard. That's a struggle because every day I feel that intense. I feel that intense. You have to do a lot of metacognitive checks with them, like 'Where are you guys with this? How are feeling about this?' Also, realize that today's not the only day that I'm going to get to influence you. There will be another day that comes. That's a big struggle sometimes.

Highlighting themes that emerged from participants helps to further contextualize rewards and challenges associated with facilitating a social justice approach. While the ways that educators are challenged and rewarded serves to reveal their personal stories of past, present, and future, when looking specifically at teachers who teach with a social justice approach, it helps to illuminate their authentic and rich experiences along the way, as well as phases of

growth and reflection. The nature and levels of reflection are especially critical in this study, for both the researcher and participants, as it helps to provide greater insight into this theoretical approach.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter focused on data from the interviews conducted with participants throughout the research study. Examining the information that emerged surrounding their experiences with teaching for social justice in the secondary social studies classroom, I focused on developing emergent themes and subthemes to present the findings. The data was presented through descriptive narratives for each of the five participants, that included biographical sketches, as well as themes and sub-themes related to participants' stories, experiences, thoughts, and ideas that illuminated their perceptions on teaching for social justice, ways of facilitating a social justice education, experiences that prompt educators to teach for social justice, and challenges and rewards associated with facilitating a social justice curriculum in the social studies classroom.

When considering how social justice is defined, the findings revealed striking commonalities amongst participants. Along with teaching content that is often glossed over or minimized in daily lessons, participants asserted that teaching for social justice is a pedagogical approach that serves to meet the needs of students and gets students involved. Emphasizing this approach highlights learning as something students do, rather than something that is done to them (Shor, 1993). Participants discussed the key components of encouraging critical and independent thinking. Whether the approach involves using discussion, films or documentaries, journaling, sensory learning, current events, technology, poems, songs, or novels, teaching for social justice appeals to the learner and makes learning relevant. Highlighting aspects of respect,

appreciation, open-mindedness, and agency, the approach stresses the overarching theme of humanity and the need to value their classmates and others in society, even those with whom they may not agree. Since the teacher is not the keeper of knowledge in a classroom where a teaching for social justice approach is fostered, it is critical to validate student knowledge and make student experiences official. Helping to establish connections, it is important students see themselves in the curriculum. Whether addressing race, treatment, differences, or citizenship, teaching for social justice involves going beyond the mandated or required curriculum to include material that both represents students and fosters a sense of equity and humanitarianism.



## **Chapter Five: Implications of Research**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the perspectives of secondary social studies educators who identify with teaching for social justice. Participants involved in this study were able to: (1) explore their own perspectives on social justice as both a theory and pedagogy in the social studies classroom, (2) reflect on the qualities they bring to the classroom regarding social justice, and (3) familiarize others with challenges and rewards present in the classroom as they relate to teaching for social justice. With the use of qualitative methods, the study employed semi-structured interviews in an attempt to explore the thoughts and experiences of participants regarding a social justice approach to teaching. In an attempt to guide the study and prompt relevant feedback surrounding the participants' thoughts and experiences on teaching for social justice, I employed the following research questions:

- (1) How do educators who identify with social justice perceive teaching for social justice?
- (2) In what ways do educators who identify with social justice facilitate a social justice education?
- (3) What experiences prompt educators to teach for social justice in the classroom?
- (4) In what ways are educators challenged and rewarded while facilitating a social justice curriculum within the secondary social studies classroom?

### **Overview**

In Chapter Four, I utilized narrative prose in order to provide a detailed description of the backgrounds and experiences of participants as they related to social justice. In addition to the

narratives provided, I highlighted emergent themes in relation to participants' perceptions on teaching for social justice, how they facilitate a social justice education in their classroom, experiences that prompted them to teach for social justice in the classroom, as well as challenges and rewards associated with facilitating a social justice curriculum.

Chapter Five will serve to present a discussion of the major findings and interpretations from the interviews, establish connections between emergent data and themes in relation to literature on social justice education, and offer implications for further research in the field of teacher education, particularly secondary education.

### **Discussion**

In response to multiple protocol questions used during the interview sessions with each participant, various ideas, experiences, and opinions emerged surrounding each participant's perceptions of teaching for social justice, ways to facilitate instruction using this approach, experiences that prompted them to teach using this theory and pedagogy, as well as challenges and rewards associated with a social justice education. In addition to the data provided in the narratives, as well as overall themes in relation to the research questions, emergent findings and themes serve to further reinforce current literature on social justice education. Interpretations related to these connections will be reinforced in this section.

### **Interpretation of Experiences**

Even though experiences throughout people's lives are real and authentic, when shared with others, they can be subjective and may contain elements of ambiguity. However, the abundance or lack of details and reasoning behind events that have occurred in people's personal lives, throughout schooling, or in the classroom as professional educators does not diminish the importance of the experiences or the impact the experiences had on the person involved.

Similarly, the vague and under theorized nature of teaching for social justice, as highlighted by critics (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, and McQuillan, 2009), does not minimize its importance or diminish its potential within the social studies classroom. In the study I attempted to unveil not only the experiences that prompted educators to teach for social justice education in the classroom, but encouraged reflection on their lived experiences outside of the classroom, as well. My goal was not to limit our conversation to participants' experiences surrounding oppression of marginalized groups, injustices throughout society, or their thoughts on a more just and equitable society, but to encourage discourse on participants' experiences and interpretations, as well, to further inform the body of research and provide a reflective experience for social studies educators.

As illustrated below in Table 8, the following topics highlight connections and interpretations related to participants' experiences.

Table 8. Discussion of Findings

<b>Interpretation of Experiences: Common Threads</b>	
<b>Learning Alongside Students and Peers</b>	Unique, yet evident in how it unfolds in the participant's classrooms and how they internalize this process
<b>Experiences That Prompt Conflict from Within</b>	Participants alluded to or articulated their internal struggles and thoughts experienced while teaching from a social justice approach
<b>Influential Role of Family</b>	Participants' family influenced their experiences and their interest and understanding of social justice
<b>Personal Connections to Marginalized Populations</b>	Participants exhibit most interest in areas that they have personal experience

Table 8. (continued)

<b>Unequal Standing Between Teacher and Student</b>	Participants witnessed some form of injustice and faced some level of marginalization. Despite their desire to counter oppression and inequality, scenarios reflected some level of privilege
<b>Creating Critical Agents in the Classroom</b>	Through implementing a social justice approach, teachers can show the possibilities of a more just and equitable society.

### **Learning alongside Students and Peers: Influence of Behavior and Thought**

The experiences of Anna, Rose, Oscar, Jennifer, and Hannah prompted me to explore themes and ideas beyond what the transcripts specifically note. After conducting thorough analysis of all available data, I began to establish connections and develop interpretations related to participants' experiences. Such interpretations were based on both behaviors and thoughts and considered information from both outside the classroom and their roles as educators within the classroom.

For example, when asked about ways she embraces the philosophy of teaching for social justice, Anna responded by saying, I try to “embrace it by learning as much as I can and realizing that I am as much of a student as my kids in the classroom.” She continued, “By sharing that with them, it helps a little in saying, ‘I don’t have all of the answers either, but I just read this cool book or I just read this interesting news story’ and for them to see that I’m trying to figure it out as much as they are” (interview #2). Such ideas are aligned with those asserted by Nieto (2000) when she argues, “social justice is an individual, collective, and institutional journey that involves self-identity awareness, learning with students, developing meaningful relationships, developing multilingual/multicultural knowledge, challenging racism and other biases, having a critical stance, and working with a community of critical friends” ( p. 187).

In addition, Rose, Oscar, and Hannah emphasized the process of reflection that occurs in their classroom. Such reflection serves to denote a more internal form of learning about oneself and, possibly, reinforces the idea of learning along with students. While Rose utilizes movies and documentaries in her classroom, she expressed that she sometimes purposely avoids providing questionnaires or worksheets based on the film since she prefers to implement reflective writing instead. Rose explained, “We write reflections afterwards. I can have dialogue with the students afterwards. I like that. It gets me closer with the kids; they know that I am reading the information and that I get their position on something” (interview #1).

Hannah also highlighted the idea of reflecting and connecting experiences to real life. Providing a safe learning environment for students to discuss experiences concerning social justice issues, Hannah opens herself up by sharing stories related to her own life. Once students notice commonalities in her experiences and their own, while they still probably view her as being in a position of authority, she felt that they were able to let their guards down. This newfound information and these established connections served to promote a safe learning environment where students felt comfortable to share and ask questions related to social justice and injustice.

Furthermore, Anna and most other participants, despite their position of authority, seemingly attempt to avoid the potential role of oppressor in their classroom by consciously or unconsciously implementing what Freire (1970/2010) calls *praxis*. Participants feel they are able to provide real-life application and discourse regarding elements in the students’ communities such as poverty, prejudice, or discrimination while simultaneously exploring efforts that can be taken to encourage transformation, change, or improvement.

By educating with a social justice approach, participants feel they are able to encourage students to see the hierarchical structures in society and the oppression resulting from inequities throughout society, which directly connect to dynamics present in the classroom. For example, Anna facilitated a conversation on racial and ethnic profiling in airports in a post-9/11 era. With a small but present Muslim population in her school, the idea of profiling added significance to the lives of her ninth graders as it became more meaningful. If they were Muslim, or if they were non-Muslim students sitting amongst their peers who follow Islam, now this topic in the news became directly connected to them. Whether it was people of their own culture being profiled in the airports, or people who looked similar to their peers being profiled in airports, this issue that used to be a problem occurring throughout the United States was now much more relevant to them.

Real-life application and discourse was also evident in Jennifer's classroom as she guided a discussion surrounding preconceived notions her predominantly black, lower socioeconomic student population has about police officers. Supplemental and contextual to current event conversations regarding the killing of Trayvon Martin, students questioned the incident resulting in the Florida shooting of a 17-year old boy by a community security guard. As students highlighted commonalities between their race and violence in their neighborhoods, the discussions were seemingly more real; they no longer seemed to be talking about the unfortunate death of one young man, but a larger issue that directly connected to them, their families, and their communities.

While the discussion was a learning experience for students, it was a learning experience for Jennifer, as well. For Jennifer, she reflected on not only the killing of a 17 year old boy, but made connections to the many lives lost in her birth country of Ireland related to religious

persecution. Discrimination and senseless killing are familiar experiences for both Jennifer and many of her students. As a result, further considering the idea of transformation and progress, Jennifer is mindful of the need to incorporate conversations about peaceful and nonviolent strategies to counter violence and alleviate injustice.

Additionally, highlighting the idea of learning alongside her students, Hannah emphatically stated, “This is my journey, too, and I’m figuring out my life, as well. That’s where I learn from them. It sounds so cliché, but it’s so true” (interview #2). Although the phenomenon of “learning together” remains unique as to how it unfolds in the participants’ classrooms and how they internalize this process in behavior and thought, the idea of learning alongside students and peers was evident amongst participants.

### **Experiences that Prompt Conflict From Within**

Although teaching for social justice in the social studies classroom can emit controversial discussions of power, privilege, inequity, injustice, and a host of other issues, the experiences of educators utilizing this theoretical approach may serve as a catalyst for internal struggles, as well. When teaching any course in the social studies, aligning standards with social justice content and pedagogy requires a level of competency and confidence, a confidence that involves a degree of self-identity awareness. However, being aware of who we are, as well as the various roles we serve, can make us feel confident or cause us to second-guess or doubt ourselves.

As educators who travel this “institutional journey” of a social justice approach to education in the classroom, participants alluded to or articulated their internal struggles and thoughts in relation to what Nieto (2000) characterizes as “self-identity awareness.” Despite her high level of poise and courage expressed in our interviews and seemingly above average level of commitment to her students, Anna admitted she sometimes questions her effectiveness as a

social justice educator amongst her ninth graders. Questioning her personal identity and doubting her authority on the topic, she explained, “I come from a very ‘everyone is the same’ place and I don’t want to be judged as ‘just that white gal from (rural Pennsylvania) that doesn’t understand people’” (interview #2). She acknowledged and understands the ideas behind multiculturalism and the various identities of those who advocate for social justice, but questions her own effectiveness aligned with her identity as a white, Christian, heterosexual female teaching for social justice. In a rhetorical manner, she asked, “Do they (students) expect or think the conversation would be different or more valuable if I was known to be or possess, or be in one of those minority categories?” When discussing if she thought it would be easier to discuss social justice issues if she had more of a minority status, Anna stated:

I think it would be different. It might be. I don’t know if “easier” is the right word? I think maybe I wouldn’t feel judged. Then I’d wonder if people thought that I only want to talk about these issues because of my minority status in some category. But I also feel like maybe some people might see it as a positive like, “Oh, well she’s a different religion or socioeconomic group or race so she must know something personally about this.”

Hannah expressed concern related to self-identity awareness, as well. She emphasized, “Even at my age, I can still be trying to figure things out because they know that they are supposed to figure things out at their age. Throughout your life, pay attention. Listen and think. Don’t stop trying to figure this out” (interview #2). Since Hannah’s students were still learning about themselves and their identity, she used that as an opportunity to further explore her own self and understandings to more clearly examine herself and her personal internal conflicts.

Similar to Anna, the courage and commitment Hannah expressed for her students are certainly present, but the reflective, internal thought process of knowing herself (or not fully



knowing herself) is metacognitive in nature. Hannah furthered this idea by stating, “I’m not going to say that there aren’t days that I slip and fall. It happens. Again I think it’s the human condition. I think I recognize it faster. I can say, ‘Oh, that was nonsense that flew out of my mouth’ and I can check myself. ‘What I said wasn’t right’ (interview #2). This comment helps to further illuminate Hannah’s commitment to her openness to not only learn alongside her students, but her willingness to continue to grapple with her own personal conflicts in relation to social justice.

### **Experiences Associated with Personal Change and Transformation**

During the first interview, each participant provided a description of their family. Since family is part of our identity and impacts our lives and experiences in many ways, I wanted to gain a better understanding of not only who participants were and their roles in relation to family, but the experiences surrounding their family, as well.

As I began to reflect on experiences shared by participants, it was interesting to note that nearly all participants had stories that involved a change in geographic location in an effort for family members to try to positively influence or improve family identity, opportunities, and conditions. While every participant currently resides in west central Florida, all participants relocated to the region from another area of Florida, another state, or another country. The relocation, whether encouraged by the participants themselves or by their family members, was to encourage a better life in some way.

For example, Anna was raised in a rural region of Pennsylvania and relocated to Florida after receiving a teaching position at a private high school. Before relocation, she was employed as a high school graduation project coordinator and tutored a student who happened to be homebound. Afterwards, she began applying for more solid financial positions aligned with her

educational degree. Three years later, she obtained her current position as a high school social studies teacher and has been at the same school since.

Rose grew up in suburban Georgia, just outside of a major metropolitan city, but relocated to Florida with her family when she was in the sixth grade. Her father sought better employment opportunities and sacrificed by arriving before his wife, Rose's mother. Rose stated, "When we moved down here, there had been some issues. My dad came ahead of mom." She furthered her comments by saying, "My dad was having trouble finding a job. Around 1980, the real estate went crazy and rates were really, really high. He tried to become a real estate agent and was obviously not successful" (interview #1).

After being granted the opportunity to obtain a visa, Jennifer migrated to Florida from Ireland at the age of 20. Based on a lack of financial and emotional support, attending college in Ireland was not an option. After arriving in the United States, she obtained employment, earned her Associate's Degree, and was married by the age of 25.

Raised in a major metropolitan region of Illinois until the age of four, Hannah travelled to west central Florida with her parents who did so out of sacrifice. She stated, "When my kids look at me, they don't always see this history that's part of who I am" (interview #1). While her dad was in a slightly safer part of the inner-city, in relation to violence, her mom lived in an area that was ridden with gangs, drugs, and violence. Based on the dangerously present lifestyle, Hannah explained that some of her mother's high school friends did not live past their teen years.

Oscar also relocated to west central Florida, but rather than coming from another state or country like the four other participants in the study, he moved from an area in northern Florida. In his hometown, the highest employer in the county was a mill company that Oscar referenced as "the lifeblood of my hometown" and provided "the best job in town" (interview #1) as it paid

its custodians more than some of the local teachers. With a virtual economic collapse in the town at the same time he graduated from high school, Oscar strategically made efforts to relocate by enrolling in college in another area and later searched to obtain a teaching position in his current school district in west central Florida.

Upon noticing the fact that each participant relocated from an area outside of their current region of west central Florida, all of whom but Oscar were from another state or country, I considered the influence and degree of importance relocation could have had upon the participant's views of change. Since reasons for relocation were meant to change their condition, their parent's condition, or the condition of their whole family, transformation, change, and progress were seemingly critical components in their personal histories. Improving opportunities for employment, enrolling in school to foster educational attainment, or purposefully building in distance from violence and gangs served as justifications for relocation and seemingly played an influential role on how participants live their lives today both outside and inside the classroom.

Considering this information, social justice education is not only evident within the classroom practices of the participants, but has been a critical component throughout their lives, as well. Whether it was a gradual or more immediate process, overcoming adversity was very real in the lives of participants. For example, in relation to social justice, the idea of treatment took on a personal meaning for each of the participants. Along with being concerned about oppression of marginalized groups, participants and their families were concerned about transforming the conditions and positively influencing their personal lives in order to promote transformation and change. The search for an improved life and creating better circumstances than from where they had come was important for both the families of participants and the participants themselves.

Creating more or improved opportunities aligns with characteristics of a social justice education as it helps to influence equitable change and encourages students to explore the idea of societal change and a more just and democratic way of life. As participants shared their stories of relocation in search of a better place or increased opportunities, I immediately made a connection to what participants experienced and what they want for their students, as well; they want their students to arrive at a better place and have enhanced opportunities.

Reflecting on how they have experienced change in their own lives, especially in relation to treatment, marginalization, and oppression, seems to encourage participants to make connections between their lives and the lives of their students, as well as their personal search for transformation and change and transformation and change for a more equitable society. While experiences for change may differ and relate to family structure, community conditions, options for schooling, or employment opportunities, a common thread amongst participants was positive transformation and change. Helping them to better connect to students, participants not only reflect on these personal histories, but share components of these experiences, as well. Further connecting to research, even when only briefly implemented in conversations during class, participants discussed their life histories and experiences with students in a way that unleashes an “approach to schooling” (Grande, 2007, p. 317) which can encourage the development of critical consciousness in their students. This approach is further enhanced by focusing on employing a pedagogical approach to liberatory and emancipatory education to identify and question hierarchical structures in society that perpetuate oppression.

### **Influential Role of Family**

Connecting to the fundamental components of relocation, another aspect of the experiences that was similar between participants was the influential role of family within their

lives. While family background was not the focus of this study, during the interviews, given their lengthy discussions and frequent references to family, it became clear participants' families not only influenced their experiences, but influenced their interest and understanding of social justice, as well. Moreover, I noticed participants highlighted how their life experiences extended beyond the circumstances of their families or tended to take a different direction than their family members.

Anna has a twin sister who is a secondary educator, as well. They currently live in the same area in the state of Florida and were raised in the same community in Pennsylvania throughout most of their youth. The nature of their relationship was illuminated in a comment made during our first interview. Anna commented, "We're not the kind of family that sees each other all of the time, but in terms of our PA family, I'd say we're very close....They're really a little wonderful spirited family." (interview #1). Anna's values related to life and work were mostly impacted through interactions with her father, mother, and grandparents. Her father and mother promoted and mandated chores throughout their household. Anna remembers her father saying, "If the only job that you can have is taking someone's trash out, then you are going to do it. You're going to be happy about it." She continued to share that even if a chore was unpleasant, she and her sister helped out regardless; it was what was expected. Anna furthers this idea by saying, "My whole family is that way, nothing is beneath you" (interview #1).

In a similar manner, Oscar's mother played a key role in his life as far as providing values related to work and life. Raised with three other siblings, his mother was a no-nonsense type of woman, yet caring and willing to listen to her family at any given time. He explained that she accepted no excuses when it came to academic progress and success in school and earned her G.E.D. later in life in order to model success and not hypocrisy for her family.

Therefore, this idea of commitment to personal transformation and change and the commitment to overcoming adversity was consistently modeled by his mother.

Along with Anna and Oscar, similar emphasis was placed on the influence of family by Rose and Jennifer. For example, Jennifer spoke of being the first in her immediate family to earn a college degree. Jennifer's family was comprised of brothers and sisters that were considerably older than her and offered her support throughout much of her youth. She explained that her father was 51 years old when she was born, suffered from alcoholism, and was not "present" throughout most of her childhood. As she reflects on her life today, she asserted, "I'm very strong-willed, very self-disciplined. I've never struggled with addiction. I'm very lucky. I think those experiences...I don't think I consciously chose never to drink, but I saw the impact alcohol had, I never drank. Here I am now and I never drank alcohol" (interview #1). Her mother died of cancer when she was eight years old and she remembers feeling sad about the fact that she didn't have a mom during most of her childhood and continues to think of her to this day. With the absence of her parents, her sisters served as unofficial guardians and Jennifer distinctively remembers her sisters signing papers and various documents that her peers would have simply asked their parents to sign.

While Oscar and Anna highlighted the positive influence of family, while Jennifer's associations are more negative in nature, she associated good coming out of her troubled childhood. To some degree, based on her family background and childhood experiences, there is an impact on her life today as it relates to social justice. For example, her deep concern for nurturing students and providing support to students who come from non-traditional families or witness addiction is important to her as is treating others with constant kindness and concern.

Similar to Jennifer, Hannah highlighted ways that her family background serves as a counterexample. Throughout the interviews, she emphasized there is a difference between her socio-political views and those of her parents. As previously mentioned, Hannah emphasized her parents were conservative, socially and politically, partly because of a military background in her family, but also because of a will to achieve goals independently when things become difficult. She emphasized, “I think they became so conservative because they saw in themselves, no excuses. Look where we came from, if we could do it, they could do it. That has been, that is my parent’s paradigm” (interview #1). Throughout the interviews, Hannah continued to highlight instances where she had respect for and appreciated her parent’s history and values on life, but identified differences between them. She discussed how having differing socio-political views than your parents can have an impact on a person to some degree. However, Hannah articulated that she uses these differences to her benefit by highlighting her own views while teaching from a social justice approach, honoring her parent’s history of achievement in the face of adversity, and communicating their legacy to her own children today.

While experiences in relation to family differed in context and in positive and negative tones, all participants spoke of the influential role of family. Whether it involved facing challenges resulting from the death of a parent and a father suffering from alcoholism, paying witness to religious persecutions, being raised in poverty by a mother who earned her GED as an adult, or hearing stories related to the ills of poverty, drugs, gangs, and violence, facing adversity was a very real component in the lives of participants and their families. However, overcoming adversity was also a critical component as was the influential role of modeling the model of how to respect and appreciate difference and cultivate potential in others. How participants interpreted their experiences surrounding their family background, whether they agreed or

disagreed with values and ethics modeled, goals of education or employment beyond what their parents achieved, or avoiding lifestyles and vices of their parents appeared to have an influential role on their own personal development as well as their interpretations of social justice and their interest to incorporate such an approach in the classroom.

### **Personal Connections to Marginalized Populations**

Not only did every participant communicate experiences highlighting personal connections between themselves and the concept of social justice (and injustice), they furthered conversations by highlighting marginalized demographics with whom they personally have direct connections. Reflecting back on interview data, it appears participants articulate and exhibit the most interest in areas where they have personal experience and direct connections.

For example, Anna, a white Christian female from a homogenous region of Pennsylvania, participated in a study abroad program during her undergraduate years. Her experiences in Russia and Cuba are noteworthy as she appreciated seeing education from a different perspective and in different countries. Learning the history of Russia, speaking some level of Spanish in Cuba, sharing high school-age experiences with her Russian host sister, learning about the educational curricula in Russia and Cuba, and the appreciation for education in other countries had a great impact on how Anna viewed the world during her college years. She expressed her high school experiences in the United States did not stress the value in being a world citizen like the other countries she visited.

While Anna's experiences were influential during her undergraduate years and as she studied Russian in college, they continue to be influential today. Currently teaching World History, Anna's perspective on social justice lends itself to a more global, human, and civil rights approach. Incorporating experiences from her travels and her interest in the world at large, Anna



is concerned with highlighting injustice in Darfur, Sudan, Rwanda, and Armenia, as well as ethnic and religious profiling in relation to the Islamic population. While Rose also spoke of the Holocaust and genocide, out of all of the participants, Anna placed the most emphasis on global and human rights and a world view.

While Rose also spoke at length about her interest in the Holocaust, she alluded to her father's interest in the Holocaust and a book he had in their home when she was a child. She also consistently highlighted civil rights issues in relation to African Americans and immigration issues in relation to the Latino community. It is interesting to note that her father had ties to the black community when she was a child and Rose has spent a large portion of her adult life working in a school with a large immigrant population.

Further reinforcing this idea of direct connections, as of recent, Rose has expanded her social justice lens to include sexuality. Rose explained her son identifies as homosexual. Well before her son explained his sexuality to his mother, Rose consistently let it be known to her students and colleagues that "everyone should be treated the same regardless of their differences." However, it is more recently these differences have expanded to explicitly include sexuality. While reminiscing on a discussion held years ago in a college course, Rose expressed admiration for a former Pope who washed the feet of those suffering from AIDS in Argentina and further expressed her belief in equality for homosexuals.

An additional experience that stood out during our interviews was when Rose, who is typically reserved and calm in nature, angrily expressed discrimination against a homosexual student at her school. Rose was adamant administration manipulated the eligibility requirements in order to legally and justifiably discriminate against a nominee for homecoming court. She explained last year an administrator approached her and contritely stated, "I just want you to

know that I know that she (homecoming court nominee) got suspended yesterday so you have to remove her from the (homecoming court) ballot.” Rose responded, “She did not get suspended.” Nevertheless, Rose was instructed to remove the student from the ballot. Rose further investigated and found that the student was not suspended, however, administrators were fearful the student would attend homecoming dressed like a boy. The potential of having a girl, dressed like a boy, crowned queen was seemingly too much to handle, so the administration wanted to be proactive and eliminate the possibility in advance. While the student did attend the dance and was dressed like a boy, even though she was never officially suspended, she was not permitted to have her name on the ballot as a homecoming queen nominee.

As the only educator to her knowledge to inquire about this discriminatory act surrounding sexuality and gender, Rose witnessed harm resulting from both action and inaction by other stakeholders (Kumashiro, 2000). As a result, connecting to the ideas of Ndimande (2004), considering the actions and inactions, careful steps should be taken to consider the existing marginalization and oppression and explore ways to counteract them, especially since the role of educators is to provide a safe learning environment for all children. Ndimande (2004, p. 202) further argues, “It becomes important to interrupt hegemonic tendencies, including those that manifest themselves through educational institutions.” Considering this, the administrative staff at Rose’s school was perpetuating the manifestation of hegemonic tendencies through both action (demanding the student be removed from the ballot) and inaction (refusing to act on the reality that the student had never been suspended). While Rose employed efforts to try to counter this oppression by acting with “a sense of... agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, and the broader world in which we live” (Dixson & Smith, 2010, pp. 1-2), the student was still marginalized and Rose’s efforts were

silenced. Despite the outcome of this discriminatory act, it is important to note social justice advocacy does not always result in justice. The unfortunate reality is that injustice does, at times, prevail.

The majority of Oscar's comments related to teaching for social justice aligned with historical and current challenges facing the African American community. It is also interesting to note that Oscar was the only African-American participant and he was also the only participant who taught African American History.

Along with historical and current discrimination faced by African Americans, Oscar also supplemented a small, but significant portion of his conversations related to social justice with nutritional and dietary facts and ideas, when applicable to society, economics, or even politics. Oscar discussed injustices surrounding the health and nutrition of students in high school as related to school cafeterias and emphasized various controversies since the 1980's. He emphasized political, family, socioeconomic, and cultural differences in how nutrition and dietary standards are approached in America. His interest in what Americans consume has existed since he was a small child, enriched during his college career, and furthered extended into adulthood when he came in contact with various restaurant and school menus. He expressed, "I would say your eating habits start at home. Even in my own experience, there are very few things that I will eat that my mother won't eat. If my mom didn't cook it when I was a kid, you are hard-pressed to get me to eat it now." He continued, "Even something as simple as a strawberry. I've never had a strawberry in my life! My mother doesn't eat that" (interview #2). Connecting this interest in nutrition to personal experiences, it is interesting to note that Oscar was notified by his doctor years ago that he was diabetic. This diagnosis prompted him to successfully change his lifestyle and alter his diet. Since his diagnosis, he admits it has made

him “hyper-aware” of topics of conversation surrounding socioeconomic status and nutrition. As a result, he has discussed socioeconomic theories surrounding the heightened expense of living on a diabetic diet which runs counter to the lower socioeconomic status of the majority of citizens with diabetes. He also highlights the extremely high sodium present in seasoning packets of cellophane-packaged soups that, he feels, are commonly consumed by college students. Despite the unhealthy effects of a high sodium diet for anyone, connecting back to the African American community, Oscar further explained the increased susceptibility of African Americans to hypertension. Incorporating discussions surrounding nutrition and diet with his students seemingly shows his concern for injustice as related to health that aligns with what various groups of Americans consume in their diets, especially low SES and African American populations.

Connecting to the idea of health, as Oscar highlighted the importance of diet and nutrition, Hannah emphasized the idea of body image in relation to how we view ourselves and the lens through which society views our bodies. While Hannah has always had a concern for women’s rights and was the only participant to teach Women’s Studies, she recently has begun to ponder the ideas of body image and body type and how they relate to social justice. In a lighthearted, yet sincere tone, Hannah stated, “It is so interesting to me when I get to relate to kids. I make it a point to tell them, my body type is not the Hollywood body type.” She furthers this point by describing her comment as an “entry way for them (students) to share how they feel that they have been stereotyped with their body types” (interview #1). When teaching Women’s Studies and American Mosaic, Hannah has included discussions surrounding foot binding in China, birth control issues, sexual assault and many other issues in order “to try to humanize social groups, especially minority groups or groups that are underrepresented” (interview #1).

She emphasized, that the lived experience of attaining a certain body type, especially for women in the United States, is a real issue and can impact various facets of life such as employment, wages, self-esteem, and self-perception.

Connecting participants' experiences to my own, as I also strive to explore teaching for social justice and employ this approach to teaching in my classroom, it is interesting to note I have recently witnessed a similar transformation in my own personal understanding of teaching for social justice. While I have always been interested in issues related to race, culture, and gender, I recently have started to explore a new demographic in relation to my perspective on social justice: ableism. The term "ableism" as highlighted by Connor & Gabel (2010) is comparable to sexism, heterosexism, racism, and so on—is the belief that individuals with disabilities are inferior to individuals without them. People with disabilities are constantly perceived to be deficient in areas such as physical, cognitive, sensory, and / or emotional abilities which serve to deprive them of their full humanity.

I have commonly hosted pre-service teachers in their internships as they prepare to be secondary education social studies teachers. While I have hosted multiple interns in the past, it was not until recently I had the opportunity to host an intern who is physically disabled as he requires the use of a wheelchair to be mobile. He suffered an accident in his early 30's that resulted in paralysis of the lower extremities. Never hosting anyone in my classroom who was paralyzed before, I found myself asking questions related to his daily routine outside the classroom in order to gain a better understanding of his lived experience. Realizing the need to educate myself upon a not-so-familiar demographic, I immediately began to contemplate additional questions to ask and evaluate those that are commonly asked out of haste and ignorance. Attempting to increase my knowledge and develop an enhanced sensitivity has

helped me to better understand why others commit to ableism with those frequently marginalized. It has also resulted in an increased awareness of issues related to disabilities outside of the direct context of this experience. Overall, similar to participants in the study, this experience has provided me with a new lens through which to see social justice as it has further expanded my own personal experiences and direct connections.

### **Unequal Standing between Teacher and Student**

Given the established positioning, experiences of teachers and students typically involve hierarchies that influence an unequal and biased measurement of power and privilege. Lewis (2001) believes in “exploring the social construction of unequal hierarchies, which result in a societal group’s differential access to power and privilege” (p. 189), the same power and privilege consistently referenced by Freire (1970/2010). While both the teacher and students live in the world where they witness or experience social injustices; since most teachers represent the majority population (Zeichner, 2003), and most often do not belong to oppressed or marginalized groups, they often experience privileges, some of which they are unaware, and have power to either perpetuate or counter systems of oppression (Ladson Billings, 2006a).

Anna, Rose, Oscar, and Hannah were raised in various locations in the United States and Jennifer was born and raised in Ireland. Their socioeconomic statuses did not exceed middle class and they each had experiences with either direct family or community members who lived in poverty. In addition, all participants attested to experiencing or witnessing social injustices, various forms of oppression, and unequal hierarchies of power and privilege. Furthermore, all participants in the study expressed they have faced some level of marginalization in society based on gender, race, socioeconomic status, religion, or body type. Yet, during interviews with

the participants and data analysis, despite their desire to counter oppression and inequality, I began to notice multiple scenarios that illustrated privilege.

Anna provided a strong case for internal struggles she faced growing up as a white, Christian, heterosexual female, in a homogenous region of Pennsylvania, however, external struggles were not a challenge she faced. Her hometown was not a place where crime was rampant or unemployment was extraordinarily high. Interaction with members of other religious affiliations was virtually impossible in her community and racial differences were almost non-existent. Despite the vast homogeneity, lack of external struggle, and minimal discrimination, Anna still developed an interest in social justice and is passionate about employing this theoretical approach and pedagogical style in her classroom. However, such employment has resulted in an increased internal struggle. By not identifying with a minority group, based on her students' perception of minority status, she expressed concern about being judged as lacking the authority to commit to issues of injustice, discrimination, bias, or prejudice. Despite what she says in the classroom, when she leaves those four walls, she still possesses the privileged characteristics of being white, Christian, and heterosexual. Those characteristics remain evident to those who see her on the street or are in her social network. Anna expressed few people outside of her school have knowledge of her passion for social justice and commitment to facilitating a social justice approach in the classroom. Therefore, given her privilege, Anna is able to either perpetuate or counter systems of oppression as noted earlier by Ladson-Billings (2006a).

Similar to Anna, other participants experience privileges associated with their personal demographics, as well. For example, while Jennifer has elected to teach at a school with a predominantly black student population from low SES backgrounds and Rose works at a school

with a large population of both Latino immigrants and African American students from low SES backgrounds, despite what stance they take in the classroom, when they go out into the world, they are still seen as white, middle-class, heterosexual females. In fact, outside of Oscar, all participants in the study benefit from many privileges of being associated with the dominant group. However, Oscar, given his African-American status faces discrimination and oppression associated with his race. Despite this vast difference between Oscar and the other participants, it is interesting to note that his view on social justice is similar to the others.

Thinking about Anna's internal struggle of the authority she has to approach issues of social justice, it is interesting to consider how students perceive the delivery of such content coming from a teacher who is a member of the dominant racial group as compared to a teacher who is a member of a non-dominant racial group. Would the message be received the same if it was delivered by Anna and Oscar? Are students less likely to second guess Oscar's reasoning for facilitating a social justice curriculum or advocating for equality throughout society or does it seem like he has a hidden agenda? Anna rhetorically asked, "Do they expect or think the conversation would be different or more valuable if I was known to be or possess...or be in one of those minority categories?" (interview #2).

The dialectic exists regarding who can advocate for social justice and what qualifies and authorized people to do so. Additionally, connecting to the idea of unequal standing in experiences between teacher and student, perceived unequal standing by a dominant or non-dominant teacher may be influential, as well. For example are non-dominant teachers perceived as having experiences that further qualifies or authorizes them to teach from this approach or do dominant teachers have more perceived power or privilege to further qualify them? While teaching for social justice is employed to authorize all knowledge as official (Ladson-Billings,



1995), some participants seemed to struggle with the idea of how their knowledge will be perceived by others.

### **Creating Critical Agents in the Classroom**

Hannah passionately discussed her desire to provide a quality education for students in her classroom based on what her parents were not exposed to during their schooling. She stated, “For my parents, I’m so mad they didn’t have a teacher who didn’t interrupt the predictability for them. They had to do it by themselves.” The predictability that Hannah spoke of lends itself to the responsibility of educators to mold increased opportunities for their students to be better prepared in the face of adversity. Teaching from a social justice perspective serves to promote a better, more just and democratic society. Hannah further explained, “How dare they experience a public education in this country and not have somebody step in and say, ‘I’m going to use education to make your life better. I’m going to use it to create the social justice that maybe you weren’t born with, but I see education as the vehicle for that’” (interview #1). Hannah expressed anger that no one planted that seed within the minds of her parents, that no one encouraged a “different mirror” (Takaki, 2008) for her parents to see themselves or their situation. Her parents’ teachers missed opportunities to embed a social justice education throughout their schooling and continued to perpetuate “the danger of a single story” (Adichie, 2009). Since her parents’ lives were filled with poverty, gangs, drugs, violence and low mortality rates amongst friends, providing increased opportunities in an educational environment to question hegemonic forces may have more positively influenced their minds, molded them into critical agents, and allowed them to imagine an alternate story.

Since active questions emerge, not from passive learners or docile listeners, but critical agents actively questioning societal sources of power (Freire, 1970/2010; Adams, Bell, &

Griffin, 2007; Giroux, 2007), it is important to emphasize, in the teaching for social justice paradigm, learning is not something done to the student but rather something they do (Shor, 1993). Considering this, even though decades have passed, Hannah continues to honor her parents' legacy and their struggles by nurturing this level of criticality in her own classroom. Speaking of her inspiration, she stated, "To get them (students) to see themselves in these stories that I tell and not let that be the end for them. It's not just a story. It impacted your life and who you are." She emphasized, "I just want to empower kids to not put themselves in a box or limit themselves. It can be different for them. They can write a different story" (interview #1).

While creating critical agents in the classroom does not guarantee a more fruitful future for students from troubled backgrounds or erase the inequity from the lives of those who experience injustice, it provides opportunities for students to imagine alternatives and to "write a different story" as Hannah noted. Through educating students from a social justice approach, a teacher can show the possibilities of navigating through an oppressive society and discuss means that may decrease their vulnerability to hegemonic forces in their lives and communities.

### **The Influential Nature of Exposure**

A study was conducted by The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (2010) that reported a feeling of unpreparedness of educators to work with students from socially and culturally diverse backgrounds. Despite this feeling of unpreparedness, there is a heightened mandate for a prepared force of educators to emerge from the various colleges of education with an arsenal of skills, experiences, and content knowledge, especially during an era of exponential increase in racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in schools today. Cobb-Roberts and Agosto (2011) assert, "Schools and colleges of education are responsible for preparing pre- service and in-service professionals (i.e., teachers, counselors, administrators) to meet the needs of an

increasingly diverse society” (p. 7). Therefore, it is critical social justice remains at the core within an institution that maintains a culture that is conducive to teaching and promoting diversity (Cobb-Roberts & Agosto, 2011). Instilling knowledge and skills related to diversity and social justice have the power to encourage educators in the classroom to develop an increased confidence that may result in enhanced energy, creativity, and commitment to implementing a social justice teaching approach. When thinking about such preparation, it is important to consider the plethora of new graduates entering the profession with relatively high levels of privilege (i.e., white, educated, middle class, heterosexual, and Christian) who should come to acknowledge a potential communication barrier (Murray, 2010) and avoid the destructive nature of a deficit-based approach (Oyler, 2011) to educating students in their classrooms. Every participant involved in this study identified with at least four of the previously mentioned privileged characteristics of being white, educated, middle class, heterosexual, and/or Christian.

Rose and Hannah, both white, educated, middle class, heterosexual, and Christian came from the same local university, enrolled in courses in the same college of education, and completed their internship experience in the same school district. Rose specifically mentioned a professor that taught her how to appreciate Global Culture, as well as an inclusive view of American Culture. She stated, “There were some activities that she had us do, concerning cultural differences. I haven’t been able to work it into my class, yet, but the idea was there.” Her face seemed to light up with excitement as she reminisced on the usefulness of the course. She furthered her ideas by saying, “You have those things in the back of your head that everybody doesn’t see things the way that you do. That relates. You want everybody to broaden

their perspectives” (interview #1). The exposure Rose had in this class influenced her to broaden her perspective.

Alternatively, Hannah remembered enrolling in a diversity course and described her resulting frustration. She stated, “I imagine if you didn’t know anything about diversity, it was probably shocking, but if you know something about it, I was almost offended at how superficial it is.” She remembered assignments that prompted students to illustrate how an educator would differentiate instruction based on diverse conditions, yet only remembers discussing English-Language Learners. Hannah further explained, “I remember a tiny chunk about how you should also be cognizant of ethnicity and race, but then I don’t ever remember talking about it. We read some books; we did some presentations, but nothing life changing.” Hannah’s comments further reinforce Epstein’s (2009) assertion that dialogue about racism, both historically and present-day, is challenging, especially in classrooms consisting of multiple races or those where the student and teacher have different identities or interpretive frameworks. In Hannah’s class, rather than discuss race, while alluded to, the topic was essentially avoided. Hannah explained when she enrolled in upper-level courses in the college of education she recalled “a few pit stops about diversity.” She explained, “We might have read some articles related to diversity or a few conversations, but no strategic focus on it as far as I can remember. Even if it was there, isn’t that revealing?” (interview #1).

While Rose and Hannah’s experiences differed, they both valued courses aligned with diversity, cultural perspectives, and multiculturalism and visualized the potential to connect the content to the classroom. As highlighted by Ah Lee (2011), teacher candidates’ conceptualizations of teaching for social justice are not necessarily based on context. Professors within the college of education, who work with teaching candidates such as Rose and Hannah,

should consider using and building on what their students bring to the program. If they are to assume teacher candidates' bring understandings that are socially, politically, and historically constructed, such understandings must be utilized and built upon (or deconstructed) in order to influence and be influenced (Cochran-Smith, 2004). While there is no one best way to understand and prepare teacher candidates for socially-just teaching, to have a knowledge base to guide teacher education practices, it is critical to know more about teacher candidates and how they construct their understandings of such matters aligned with teaching for social justice.

Reflecting on the experiences of Rose and Hannah, I noticed the unique nature of their internship experience, especially in comparison to the other participants. Based on their assigned responsibility to teach social studies elective courses that focus on the history and oppression of marginalized groups in society, the internships of both Rose and Hannah provided ample opportunities for the incorporation of multiple issues related to social justice. While the majority of interns are assigned core courses, such as American Government, World History, or United States History, while social justice content can be infused in the curriculum of those courses, they are not the same as teaching courses where social justice curriculum represents the curriculum. Rose explained, "I got to pilot, during my internship...they were starting a new course: American Mosaic. So I was teaching it before my cooperating teacher!" American Mosaic incorporates units of content aligned with the Civil Rights Movement, Holocaust History, and history of African Americans, Native Americans, and Latin Americans. Rose explained how she watched her cooperating teacher model the first unit of study and began teaching independently afterwards. She expressed excitement that since the course was being piloted, there were no assigned textbooks during that time, only suggested lessons. This

provided Rose with the opportunity to experiment with the curriculum and create lessons of her own.

Hannah also shared a similar experience. During her internship, Hannah also was assigned to teach an elective course, sociology. Sociology is an elective course that covers units of content aligned with how people interact throughout society. Her middle school social studies teacher also served as a cooperating teacher during her internship and encouraged many discussions with Hannah surrounding curricular content of this course and tangential issues connecting this course to social justice. Hannah remembered, "...we'd (Hannah and her cooperating teacher) have conversations about it as it came up. We were definitely teaching the classes that lend themselves to social justice."

During the first few years of Rose and Hannah being in their own classrooms, they not only continued teaching elective courses aligned with topics that naturally lend themselves to a social justice education, but thoroughly enjoyed the experience. After Rose illustrated a commitment to Holocaust History, through attending conference workshops at a national conference and developing a component within the American Mosaic curriculum, she was provided the opportunity to teach the course as a new teacher at her school. Hannah's opportunities were similar in that she was provided the opportunity to teach elective courses aligned with social justice components such as American Mosaic, History of the Holocaust, and Women's Studies during her early years of teaching. She explained, "So I remember early on, recognizing that I needed to bring my stories into it, but there was a certain part of me that had to think about what my stories were." She further explained, "I told you about my family and my background, but I had to think about places where that would fit in. I had to think about the kids that I was teaching and what stories would be most relevant to them" (interview #1).

Interpreting the interest and level of preparedness of both Rose and Hannah to create inclusive and democratic classrooms could seemingly stem from their exposure to courses on diversity, teaching courses naturally aligned with marginalized populations during their pre-service / internship experience, and the seamless opportunity to continue teaching courses aligned with social justice components once they embarked on their teaching career.

Given the continually changing demographic and the continued educational inequity in our schools, taking into account the participants' experiences, exposure seems to be a critical element. It is interesting to consider, had Rose or Hannah not been placed with cooperating teachers who were open to diversity or had they not been assigned to teach elective courses that naturally align themselves to exposing historical and current injustices, would Rose and Hannah embrace teaching for social justice with the passion they do today? While their backgrounds appear to be influential in their interest, this exposure during their internship experience seemed to be highly influential in the development of their pedagogical approach. Although the background of educators cannot be changed, the exposure and training they receive can be designed to include information and training that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Such exposure can then potentially connect to Freire's (1970/2010) idea of *conscientização* that highlights how individual and collective consciousness can be altered when individuals learn to both recognize and challenge contradictions within social, political and economic structures. This idea of recognizing and challenging socio-political contradictions to influence consciousness helps to further highlight the benefits of incorporating social justice as a critical component in the social studies classroom. If Hannah or Rose had not been exposed to the things they had, would they have had the ability or the desire to challenge existing contradictions and embrace transformation and change? Such exposure not only encouraged

them to unveil alternative options for individual and social growth (Shor, 1999), but unveil these options to their students, as well.

### **Inclusive and Practical Nature of Teaching for Social Justice**

Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, and McQuillan (2009) highlight that teaching for social justice is a subjective concept that is viewed as ambiguous by many and, although it may be widespread, given its under-theorized and vague meaning, there is a likelihood it exists only in name. Commonalities emphasized by participants in the study seem to contest this perception by underlining the inclusive and practical nature of teaching for social justice. For example, when considering how social justice is defined, the findings from the study revealed prominent commonalities amongst participants. Along with explicitly teaching content that is often glossed over or minimized in daily lessons, participants asserted teaching for social justice is a pedagogical approach that serves to meet the needs of students and encourages students to become involved. Emphasizing this approach highlights learning as something students do rather than something that is done to them (Shor, 1993), participants discussed the critical components of encouraging critical and independent thinking. Whether the approach involves using discussion, films or documentaries, journaling, sensory learning, current events, technology, poems, songs, or novels, teaching for social justice appeals to the learner and makes learning relevant.

Highlighting aspects of respect, appreciation, open-mindedness, and agency, the approach stresses the overarching theme of humanity and the need for students to value their classmates and others in society, even those they may not agree with. Since the teacher is not the keeper of knowledge in a classroom where a teaching for social justice approach is fostered, it is critical to validate student knowledge and make their experiences official and authentic. Helping



to establish connections, it is important students see themselves in the curriculum. Whether addressing race, treatment, differences, or citizenship, teaching for social justice involves going beyond the mandated or required curriculum to include material that is representative of students and fosters a sense of equity and humanitarianism. While Chapman, Hobbel, and Alvarado (2011) argue, “For many teachers, social justice remains an espoused ideal with little practical application” (p. 539), findings from the study seem to challenge this argument by highlighting the inclusive and practical nature of teaching for social justice as both a content and pedagogy.

Participants agree with Adams, Bell, & Griffin (2007) in that teaching for social justice is all-encompassing of a large range of practices and perspectives. As Hannah expressed in the interviews, there is not one sole method of defining the concept, but rather there is an element of interpretation involved. However, the interpretations of participants still had multiple commonalities. For example, participants consistently highlighted that teaching for social justice involved both content and pedagogy. While participants frequently referenced content such as race, treatment, differences, and citizenship, they consistently made connections to the overarching idea of humanity. This connection helped to further reinforce the idea that this multi-layered concept is centered on valuing the human rights of all people and can be employed by various “educators who set at task the fostering of a more democratic society through classroom practices” (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009, p. 30).

Considering the criticism of teaching for social justice in that critics contend the theoretical approach is vague and ambiguous in meaning and exists only in name (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, and McQuillan, 2009), given participants present a relatively clear and explicit explanation of this theoretical approach, the contradiction establishes a connection to ideas fostered by critical theory that is worth exploring. Critical theory lends

itself to teaching for social justice in that it seeks to expose power dynamics, highlight and challenge hegemonic structures that result in continued oppression and marginalization, and strives to bring about a more just society (Merriam, 2009). It is provoking to consider critics may argue against the usefulness and practicality of teaching for social justice in attempt to further reinforce established power dynamics and hegemonic structures, thereby, continuing to oppress and marginalize underrepresented populations. Attempting to encourage the continued silencing of marginalized populations, rather than promoting awareness and emancipatory knowledge to identify and question sources of hegemony with the intent of empowering oppressed groups and promoting democratic change in relation to marginalized populations (Freire, 1970/2010, McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007), perhaps critics attempt to portray this theoretical approach as weak and fallible in attempt to discredit it as both a content and a pedagogy. While teaching for social justice may be broad in nature, in an attempt to be inclusive, it is not by definition unclear or vague and it is not by theoretical approach impractical, but rather it is an inclusive and practical approach to foster democracy and promote equity in the classroom.

### **Strengths of the Study**

Considering strengths of the study, employing qualitative methods for data collection was constructive as it served to promote the collection of rich and descriptive data. In addition, utilizing semi-structured interviews provided me the opportunity to serve as the primary research instrument in order to design, collect, and interpret data and create a detailed piece in order to illustrate the experiences and understandings of participants in relation to teaching for social justice. During the initial stages of this study, after establishing questions to guide the research, I was able to continue a path of inquiry by developing interview protocols for both interviews to

purposefully guide discussion to explore the research questions and the overarching theme of teaching for social justice. I found nearly all the designed interview questions resulted in the delivery of in-depth and rich explanations from participants. I was then able to use these explanations and stories as data to further explore, illuminate, and interpret teaching for social justice. Also in relation to qualitative methods, an additional strength of the study was the opportunity to reflect on my own research and the experiences of myself and the participants within a researcher reflective journal. As highlighted by Janesick (2004), “The qualitative researcher is always dealing with lived experience and must be awake to that experience and for that experience” (p. 103). I feel the researcher reflective journal encouraged me to be “awake” and further in-touch with the experiences as it served as a strategy to further clarify what I witnessed, heard, thought, reflected on, questioned, pondered, and interpreted.

### **Implications of Research**

Implications of the study are based on the findings and my interpretations as the researcher. The following section will be used to highlight recommendations for other researchers and social studies educators who may want to frame future research on similar topics, as well as how I may continue to explore this line of research in the future. Additionally, included in this section are recommendations for both teacher education programs and social studies teacher education programs regarding the implementation and facilitation of a social justice approach to teaching. It is especially important to note the purpose of my research was not to simply find answers to the research questions, but to explore the topic in such a way that I could inform others of the experiences and beliefs of those who are proponents of social justice. This research is meant to provide a pathway for further inquiry on the topic of teaching for social justice at various levels and is not just exclusive to secondary education or the social studies

classroom. That same pathway for further inquiry may be framed as experimental practice, implementation of pedagogical approaches in the classroom, or proposed thoughts and reflection on the evolution and implementation of critical pedagogy.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

During the time I completed this research study, I worked full-time as a secondary social studies teacher during the day and attended graduate school in the evenings. While I would have been partial to the idea of supplementing the interviews with classroom observations of the participants, my circumstances served as an inhibitor to this action. I feel the opportunity to observe participants in the classroom and in their natural setting could have served to further enhance the research study by providing the opportunity to not only verify the implementation of a social justice curriculum, but observe how the approach was facilitated. What occurs in the classroom real-time could also help to provide further information and enhance the provided data for the interpretation process. For example, three common pedagogies of facilitating a social justice approach highlighted in the interviews were discussion, use of current events, and employment of critical thinking. Observations would allow me to see and hear how these strategies were prompted within the lesson, whether all or most students participated in these activities, or if their promotion and implementation provided opportunities for students to critique the issues within the content of the lesson. An evaluative component could be placed within the research to measure the use and effectiveness of pedagogies employed while implementing a social justice approach. Despite my inability to conduct observations for this study, the silver lining of my circumstances was serving as a full-time teacher provided me the opportunity to live in the world of education as it occurred. When my participants spoke of an educational initiative taking place in their classrooms or throughout the state or nation, I was able

to identify and connect with that movement real-time. I was also able to converse with participants about practices they implemented in the classroom and content they extrapolated from the curriculum with minimal misunderstanding or without information being lost in translation. I myself taught African-American History, American Government, American History, Advanced Placement United States History, and Advanced Placement Government which added a level of familiarity with the curricula, benchmarks, and standards.

In addition to incorporating observations to encourage more well-rounded research with multiple facets, prospective researchers (or I, myself, as a future researcher) may consider combining qualitative, semi-structured interviews with artifact analysis to explore an additional type of data. As participants are able to discuss and reflect on their means of facilitating a social justice curriculum in their social studies classroom, researchers could ask participants to bring lesson plans, assignments, projects, or samples of student work to the interview sessions. For example, two common topics highlighted in the study, across the varied curricula of participants, were citizenship and race. A researcher could potentially analyze assignments and lesson plans and ask participants to explain how, when, and why such strategies and/or content were implemented in their classroom. For example, using audio recordings of the Billie Holliday song, “Strange Fruit” could be first supplemented with lyrics. The teacher may then further the lesson with a lyrical analysis chart for students to think critically and connect the content with their personal background and understanding of the topic. In terms of reflective practice, artifact analysis could benefit both the researcher and participant. The researcher would benefit through heightened clarity of instructional practices and the participant could potentially benefit from thoroughly reflecting upon how and why (s)he elects to facilitate certain strategies of teaching and learning.

Implementing focus groups on teaching for social justice is another approach worthy of exploration when considering areas for future research. While participants can potentially be influenced by what others say, focus groups would provide participants the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and consider how content and pedagogy used by others could be employed in their own classrooms. Such an approach would provide participants the opportunity to learn from each other as teachers while simultaneously reflecting upon their educational practices aligned with a social justice approach. For example, in a focus group, Jennifer could potentially be asked to explain how she utilizes the journaling approach to provide a reflective opportunity for her students. After hearing her comments, another participant, such as Oscar, may decide to use the idea within his own classroom. For example, he could decide to employ such a strategy to provide students the opportunity to reflect after Oscar Brown, Jr.'s "Bidem' In" activity. Likewise, a focus group could provide Jennifer the opportunity to hear a different perspective on race after she discussed how to intervene with a student that used the "N" word in the hallway. Such dialogue would provide opportunities for participants to hear different perspectives, ideas, and beliefs related to a common topic.

Another potential benefit of facilitating focus groups for participants who follow a social justice approach would be to discuss teacher and administrative support systems and hierarchical structures within their own circumstances. As these teachers of social justice promote emancipatory thought in their own classrooms and allow students to explore means to navigate dominant structures in society, it is seemingly empowering when the teachers are able to find justice and equity in their own workplace. For example, Rose and Oscar remain embattled in the face of an unsupportive administration, yet, at times, showed resilience in the face of rejection. If Rose's yearly struggles or issues of concern with a lack of administrative support were able to

be voiced amongst other teachers who may face similar challenges, potential solutions may arise and further reflection could be encouraged.

### **Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs**

Researchers, teacher educators, teachers, and administrators may find information offered throughout this study useful for several reasons. The study may prompt further dialogue related to secondary educators who teach for social justice, provide new theoretical and pedagogical knowledge surrounding the process of educating tomorrow's youth or aspiring teachers, or serve as a roadmap to assist administrators in the process of hiring new teachers. Despite these stakeholders' involvement in the process of influencing and molding educators, I would like to focus on recommendations for teacher education programs as that is where I believe a significant difference can be made in our current educational system.

In order to create an effective, inclusive, and proactive curriculum with foresight, teacher educators expose themselves to not only current trends in research, but theories and pedagogy such as teaching for social justice. Part of the process of improving this curriculum, especially within social studies teacher education programs, could involve highlighting the importance and controversial nature of diversity and equity within classrooms, continue providing instruction related to best practices in social justice content and pedagogy, as well as encouraging discussion of ideas and experiences aligned with this approach.

Combined with effective strategies and methods of best practices in the classroom, teacher educators may consider exposing pre-service teachers to social justice content and pedagogy and allow them to explore literature aligned with this approach. Effective strategies and methods of best practices in today's classroom are implemented for all levels, but minor updates to the curriculum could make the difference for the teacher candidates entering some of

the most diverse classrooms to date. For instance, highlighted by Lee (2011), Banks (2008) includes social justice oriented approaches by integrating students' diverse cultures into curriculum, creating learning environments to reduce prejudice and oppression, developing equitable pedagogy for all students, incorporating multiple knowledge construction processes, and getting involved in empowering school culture and social structure. In order to embrace this theoretical approach, it may be worthy to consider making such curricular objectives an integral part within a quality methods course in a college of education and command exploration of effective instructional techniques in alignment with a teaching for social justice approach.

Realizing how controversial topics aligned with a social justice approach may be in many classrooms, in both secondary and higher education settings, teacher educators should not shy away from effective instructional techniques that support this approach of teaching. Courses should explore face-to-face instruction whenever possible and highlight marginalized and minority populations and provide ideas on how to reduce prejudice and oppression. Additionally, allowing for and encouraging safe and honest discussion of misconceptions and clarifying truths of societal inequities and oppression, or possibly involving teacher candidates in community service activities amongst the stakeholders of the schools where they may teach in the upcoming year may be helpful in facilitating a social justice approach.

Following these approaches for future leaders of the classroom could be an opportunity to explore literature embedded with a social justice education. With the availability of electronic readers, teacher candidates are able to cover more reading material than ever before. Therefore, assigning various titles aligned with social justice topics, combined with subject area content, may add a convenience never before experienced as compared to generations who only had access to hardcopies of texts. While there is no formula for the topics of readings to assign, they



should directly relate to and include areas of interest for the teacher candidates. Allowing choice through a list of titles chosen by the professor may be a beneficial approach. The professor may provide titles capturing issues related to students with a multiracial identity, classroom experiences of speakers of English as a second language, topics of revisionist history or historical misconceptions, race and politics, challenges of new teachers in diverse classrooms, or articles of teaching for social justice in various subject areas. The process of providing topics that most educators may encounter or experience is just as important as the freedom for teacher candidates to self-select pieces in order to model a more democratic and equitable approach to a social justice education.

Finally, it may prove advantageous if teacher education programs inform pre-service teachers of the experiences of others who are currently teaching for social justice in the classroom. By the time teacher candidates are serving in the capacity of interns or first year teachers in the classroom, if they have not had previous exposure, it may ultimately be too late to develop a fundamental understanding of the values and benefits of a social justice approach to education as they may be overwhelmed with work or distracted by multiple responsibilities. Therefore, highlighting this approach as teacher candidates are learning about professional practice and exploring the type of teachers they want to be may be influential and motivating.

Inviting speakers into the classroom may help to communicate real-life experiences connected to creating effective and nurturing learning environments in the face of a changing demographic. If possible, speakers could be stakeholders in the community such as administrators, involved and concerned parents, qualified teachers, and current interns. Such a wide-range of stakeholders committed to the equitable education of all students could serve to illustrate the various degrees of those who support teaching and learning for social justice.

While teacher candidates typically still have an untapped energy and are hopeful about the future of education, such speakers can discuss the issues present in schools with an urban multicultural population or lower-socioeconomic background, answer questions related to negotiating curriculum and high-stakes testing or social justice content (Agarwal, 2011), or provide clarification regarding their experiences as a new educator (Johnson, Oppenheim & Suh, 2009) or parent invested in a social justice approach.

Just as using a “heroes and holidays” approach to multicultural education dilutes the meaning and effect of promoting equity, so does only inviting speakers from schools with oppressed and marginalized students within their classroom. The range of stakeholders who can honestly and authentically speak upon issues surrounding educators in an environment that appreciates a social justice approach is wide and full of diversity, as well. Therefore, it is critical such diversity is exhibited to pre-service teachers. For example, amongst the participants in this study, Anna was not only raised and educated in a homogenous environment, but the school where she teaches is predominantly white, wealthy, and Christian. The depth with which she can discuss her perspectives, means of facilitation, and experiences on teaching for social justice has nothing to do with her involvement as a teacher or stakeholder in so-called urban or inner-city schools, because she has none. Yet, her level of caring, humanistic, and multicultural approaches to illustrating social justice issues to all students affords her just as much relevancy as someone who was raised in a multicultural environment with economic and socio-cultural challenges, making it vital to broaden the scope of identities of those sharing experiences with pre-service educators.

## Conclusion

Echoing a statement made by a local school board member, Ladson-Billings (2006b) asserts, "Patriotism is not what you say; patriotism is what you do" (p. 588). Connecting this idea to the study, it is interesting to think of teaching for social justice as not only something teachers say, but also something teachers do. While this study served to further investigate the overarching theme of teaching for social justice, it was also an effort to more clearly understand how secondary social studies teachers who identify with this theoretical approach and pedagogical style identify with and facilitate teaching for social justice as both a content and pedagogy. While findings revealed commonalities in how participants define and interpret social justice as both a content and a pedagogy and how they facilitate a social justice approach in the classroom, findings also highlighted similarities in the influential power of experiences in the lives of participants and the role these experiences played in both their personal and professional lives. Connecting to the idea of experience, the idea of exposure was also a seemingly powerful element in that content and people with whom participants were exposed influenced their personal interpretations and understandings. Findings also revealed teaching for social justice is not always implemented easily and without challenge or resistance. Although rewarding, such an approach takes courage and commitment and requires standing up for what you believe in. Participants emphasized even when others do not back or support them, they try to maintain a sense of urgency and hold fast to giving voice and empowering marginalized and oppressed groups. While many are critical of this framework, the study serves to argue teaching for social justice is inclusive and practical in nature and serves to promote equity and justice.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol 1

- (1) Talk to me about where you grew up?
- (2) Please describe your family.
- (3) Can you briefly discuss your program of study and degree in undergraduate school?  
Graduate school?
- (4) How long have you been a teacher?
- (5) At how many schools have you taught? Which subjects have you taught?
- (6) From your perspective, how is social justice defined?
- (7) How did you first become familiar with the idea of teaching for social justice?
- (8) What experiences influenced your understanding of this style of teaching?
- (9) Discuss how you became interested in social justice.
- (10) Was there a person in your history that influenced your desire to teach from this  
approach?
- (11) In what ways did your educational training prepare you to teach in this manner?
- (12) Discuss your experiences as an educator teaching for social justice?
- (13) In what ways do you facilitate teaching for social justice in the classroom?
- (14) Describe activities you have used in order to facilitate teaching for social justice.
- (15) When you think about teaching for social justice, which demographics come to  
mind?
- (16) Throughout your experiences, how have you incorporated these demographics  
in your lessons?
- (17) In your opinion, what characteristics make teaching for social justice successful?

## **Appendix B**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol 2**

- (1) Why is it important for you to teach for social justice?
- (2) In what ways do you see yourself embracing this teaching philosophy?
- (3) What learning outcomes or goals do you strive for when teaching for social justice?
- (4) What positive experiences or rewards have you had when teaching in this manner?
- (5) In what ways have you struggled with teaching for social justice?
- (6) In what ways does the curriculum cater to teaching for social justice?
- (7) In what ways does the curriculum limit teaching for social justice?
- (8) Are there other challenges?
- (9) What influences has this style of teaching had on your students?
- (10) What influences has this style of teaching had on you as an individual?

## Appendix C

### Recruitment Email

I would like to formally invite you to participate in a research study titled: *Reflections in the Classroom: Perspectives on Teaching for Social Justice from Secondary Social Studies Educators*.

Based on the selection criteria, you may fit the description of an eligible participant for this study. I would like to not only capture your stories and experiences surrounding the theory and pedagogy of teaching for social justice, but allow you to reflect on your own practice in the classroom, and eventually further inform others in the field.

If you self-identify with the criteria and decide to participate, the next step in this process will be to attend the first of two sessions in which I will: *provide and discuss the attached IRB Consent Form, discuss the nature of the study, and conduct the first of two interview sessions*.

*Attached, you will find the selection criteria form intended to inform you of characteristics that you may/may not align yourself with for this study. If you know of another teacher that fits the following criteria, then you may redirect this form to them, as well. Please notify them to contact me at the following email address if they are interested in participation in this study: [gsamuels@mail.usf.edu](mailto:gsamuels@mail.usf.edu)*

**Please See Attachment.**

## Appendix D

### Selection Criteria Form



### Selection Criteria Form

#### *Reflections in the Classroom: Perspectives on Teaching for Social Justice from Secondary Social Studies Educators*

#### USF IRB Study # 13302

**The purpose of this research study is to describe and explain the perspectives of secondary social studies educators who identify with teaching for social justice.** These perspectives will then be used to explore how participants developed an interest to teach for social justice and how they facilitate a social justice education, as well as explore potential successes and challenges of this phenomenon. Along with exploring the thoughts and experiences of participants, the study will also provide participants an opportunity to engage in discourse that could possibly result in further informing their own professional practice.

#### **Questions to be used within this study include:**

- ✓ How do educators who identify with social justice perceive teaching for social justice?
- ✓ In what ways do educators who identify with social justice facilitate a social justice education?
- ✓ What experiences prompt educators to teach for social justice in the classroom?
- ✓ In what ways are educators challenged while facilitating a social justice curriculum within the secondary social studies classroom?

For my dissertation study, it is important that I create a prospective pool of participants for the interview process. **Therefore, if you self-identify with the following criteria and would like to participate, then please contact me at [gsamuels@mail.usf.edu](mailto:gsamuels@mail.usf.edu):**

- ✓ have taught for three years of more
- ✓ currently teach at least one social studies course
- ✓ acknowledge concern with topics related to oppression of marginalized groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion)
- ✓ incorporate topics within lessons related to oppression of marginalized groups (i.e. race, sex, gender, SES, or religion)
- ✓ promote the identification of injustices throughout society
- ✓ acknowledge a concern to encourages students to think critically about mainstream curriculum

- ✓ promotes the identification of injustices throughout society
- ✓ are concerned with creating a more just and equitable society

## Appendix E

### Informed Consent to Participate in Research Form



### Informed Consent to Participate in Research

#### USF IRB Study # 00013302

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called: *Reflections in the Classroom: Perspectives on Teaching for Social Justice from Secondary Social Studies Educators*

The person who is in charge of this research study is Gregory Samuels, also known as the Principal Investigator. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Michael J. Berson.

This study will be conducted at a location of your convenience, during non-work hours.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain the perspectives of secondary social studies educators who identify with teaching for social justice

#### **Study Procedures**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in two one-hour semi-structured interviews and an additional meeting (optional) in order to verify transcripts and themes, for approximately one hour. The first interview will occur during Summer 2013 and the second interview will take place during Fall 2013. Research questions may include questions about personal history, formalized schooling, educational experiences, professional experiences, beliefs about social justice, feelings and attitudes about



the social studies curriculum, and feelings and attitudes about oppressed and marginalized populations.

Transcripts for the first interview will be made available for participant review before the second interview. Transcripts from the second interview will be made available during Fall 2013.

With your permission, the interviews will be taped and transcribed by Gregory Samuels. To maintain confidentiality, you will be given a pseudonym in all transcriptions and you will not be identified by name on the audio tape or transcriptions.

The audio files and transcriptions will be locked in Gregory Samuels' home. Each participant will be offered a copy of their own audio files and a copy of their own transcriptions. The master audio file and transcriptions will remain in Gregory Samuels' possession and will be destroyed five years after the after the close of the dissertation study.

### **Total Number of Participants**

Five individuals will take part in this study.

### **Alternatives**

You are not obligated to participate in this research study and may cease participation at any time throughout the study.

### **Benefits**

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study. A potential benefit of participating in the study could be an increased understanding of dynamics surrounding teaching for social justice in the secondary classroom which could lead to further informing your personal understanding and practice of this theory and pedagogy.

### **Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. In other words, the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study and I do not anticipate participants will experience psychological distress and/or discomfort during the interviews. If discomfort is experienced, participants can select to stop the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time.

### **Compensation**

You will be compensated \$40.00 in the form of a gift card to local grocery store, if you complete all the scheduled study visits. If you withdraw for any reason from the study before completion, you will be compensated with a \$20.00 gift card to a local grocery store for each completed interview. During the study visits, all food and beverage will be paid for by Gregory Samuels.

**Cost**

There will be no additional costs to you as a result of being in this study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are: The research team, including the Principal Investigator and other research staff. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study such as the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP) and the USF Institutional Review Board may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are conducting the study in the appropriate manner. They also need to ensure protection of your rights and safety.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name, or anything else that would let people know who you are.

**Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate, will not affect your job status.

**Who to contact for questions, concerns, or complaints**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, Gregory Samuels can be contacted at (813) 283-8600 or [gsamuels@mail.usf.edu](mailto:gsamuels@mail.usf.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

**Consent to Take Part in this Research Study**

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study and authorize that my information as agreed above can be collected/disclosed in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

---

 Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

---

 Date

---

 Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study
**Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/ she understands:

- what the study is about;
- what the potential benefits might be; and
- what the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. This subject does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. This subject is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give informed consent.

---

 Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent / Research Authorization

---

 Date

---

 Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent / Research Authorization

**Appendix F**

**IRB Certificate of Completion**

**Certificate of Completion**

**Gregory Samuels**

**Has Successfully Completed the Course in**

**CITI Responsible Conduct of Research**

**On**

**Friday, July 20, 2012**

5/19/2013 1:06:25 PM

## Appendix G

### IRB Letter of Approval



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC033 • Tampa, FL 33613-4799  
(813) 974-5648 • FAX (813) 974-7091

July 19, 2013

Gregory Samuels, Jr., M.Ed.  
Secondary Education  
4202 East Fowler Ave.  
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**

IRB#: Pro00013302

Title: Reflections in the Classroom; Perspectives on Teaching for Social Justice from  
Secondary Social Studies Educators

**Study Approval Period: 7/19/2013 to 7/19/2014**

Dear Mr. Samuels:

On 7/19/2013, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents outlined below.

**Approved Item(s):**

**Protocol Document(s):**

[Protocol\\_V1\\_07.12.2013](#)

**Consent/Assent Document(s)\*:**

[Consent\\_V1\\_07.11.2013.pdf](#)

\*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D.".

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board

## Appendix H

### Sample from Researcher's Reflective Journal

239 words

Interviews Done...Data Analysis Begins... October 06, 2013

Revisiting Anna Twice!

As I took notes on the very intimate conversations between Anna and I, it gave me a slightly different amount of information what was going on in that room. Obviously she allowed me to peek into her youth, adolescence, and adulthood, but also trusted me with what made her the teacher she is today. There seemed to be no uneasiness during our conversations and I wonder if this was because I was a teacher as well, social studies teacher, high school social studies teacher OR because I was another human inquiring into her life OR was it because she was anxious to unload her experiences, perspectives on teaching for social justice, and accomplishments thus far?

Either way, this interview brought out a lot of ideas and details. I feel that the very first interview could have been shorter as it lasted more than 1.5 hours! No big deal as it was worth it. There were not awkward moments and it very quickly developed into a conversation about life and education.

What influenced her perspective on teaching for social justice?  
 Who influenced her? Grandpa, Mom, Dad, Aunt, etc.  
 Did travel impact her idea of differences amongst people? Maid in Cuba.  
 Is there a degree of being an Upstander? Grandma.  
 Does everyone value the challenge of hosting difficult conversations in class?  
 Creating critical agents in the classroom, was it nurtured since college or did she create it fresh?

## Appendix I

### Sample from Researcher's Field Notes

**Pseudonym:** Jennifer (her choice)

**Environment:** middle school, suburbs, circa 1950's, welcomed transfer population from inner-city neighborhood, predominantly black, low-ses population

**Current Issue:** Trayvon Martin characterized a moment of injustice, but believes in justice system, expressed disappointment over verdict

**Raised:** Northern Ireland, experienced religious persecution, amongst frequent murder of Catholics by UVF and IRA, geographic location and religion were extremely relevant

**Family:** Youngest of ten children, father was 51 when she was born, alcoholic, not very present as father, mother died when she was eight years old of Cancer, siblings consumed emotional and financial support

**Opportunities and Advancement:** gained opportunity to obtain visa at 19 years old, came to U.S. and enrolled in community college, earned Associate's degree and was married by age 25, switched from business background to education (Appreciative and Proud)

**Beliefs:** inclusivity in the classroom, provide voices to those left out, speaks out against "N" word, makes silenced history known in lessons (women and blacks especially), pop culture is appreciated and used when necessary, cares for those different than her, hates to see marginalization and oppression, proactive in creating pride for blacks and female student population, similar to religious persecution and hatred in Ireland)

**Professional Development:** read *Teach Like a Champion* (pedagogy in the classroom) and attended trainings to gain more effective strategies for teaching, enrolled in Florida Joint Institute for Civics (grant and professional development)



## Appendix J

### Sample from Researcher's Transcripts

*Hannah: Second Interview*

*September 16, 2013*

*Café (3:35 pm)*

*Greg:* Why is it important for you to teach for social justice?

*Hannah:* I could teach for social justice because it's part of my curriculum. I could teach for social justice because I'm trying to meet someone else's expectations. I always see being a teacher...why it's exciting to be a teacher is because you are trying to influence students at this time in their life in which they are trying to find out who they are. I think that influence has a big effect on them as adults. It's that hidden curriculum, that piece that you're teaching that underlies all of your motives of why you're doing what you're doing. That ultimately, as I go out and become these democratic citizens and start to make choices that's going to impact other people. I feel like I want to represent a voice that represents someone that they might not hear somewhere else. Because I can't trust that someone else is telling them that. I don't know (PAUSE). But to be a really well-rounded citizen, I think you have an obligation to consider social justice. I'm a social studies teacher and that's about developing citizens so I just feel like I need to do it, it is important to do it. I guess some of that relates to my family background and knowing the impact it has on real people. That there is a face to it, but it's also about my belief of what a democracy is as a place where we have an obligation to protect and value every citizen. I want my kids to think about what every citizen means, I want them to think about the faces of people when they get to one day make decisions for our country (CERTAIN).

*Greg:* In what ways do you see yourself embracing this teaching philosophy?

*Hannah:* When I talk to my family, I'm the one that represents social justice (EMPHASIZED). They know when they say things that are just flat out...not social justice, not equitable, things that are biased, things that are against diversity. They know to look to me and my social studies teacher is going to come out. It's funny because even when I train, I find myself using the phrase, "I'm going to go social studies teacher on you for a minute" and I think what I really mean by that is...that's where I can't stop myself. I know this a social studies thing and I probably think about this more than anyone else on the planet, but when I hear that I can help but

say, “this is what I’m hearing you say, let’s talk about the implications of this How does that impact others? How does that impact you? It’s kind of like now it is so ingrained in me and only reinforced by teaching it and seeing the impact it has on people and kids. I feel very emotionally invested when I teach these classes because I think to teach them with any kind of fidelity...to teach them in a way to teach them the way I would want somebody to teach my own kid... you’ve got to really put yourself in the lesson. You’ve got to think deeply about what you’re saying (SINCERE). When I stand front of kids and try to tell them these things, when I try to shift to their thinking, I think it shifts my thinking because I have to run through the whole process in my head. I have to start by confronting my own biases. I have to think of where did this come from and scaffold backwards from there to break this down so that I can put them in their right place and I can have kids put them in their right place. It’s intense and it can be really hard (SINCERE). I think that maybe teachers struggle to accomplish this because it requires so much metacognition and so much self-reflection. You have to be so open to realize that “just because I realize this and I’m saying this doesn’t make me a bad person, it doesn’t make anybody a bad person. It means that I’m a human and this is how I contextualize my world.” So when I talk about how I see myself embracing social justice, I think I’m just so much more acutely aware of where it slips into things, just a normal everyday conversation, and that obligation to confront it and say something about it.

*Greg:* That’s very interesting. I understand.

*Hannah:* I almost started to think...I wonder if I all the while have a content bowl and a social justice bowl. Kind of like a skill bowl. Because there’s your content, but always as a partner to that content, there was a bigger idea about how we treat each other, and I think I taught both concurrently.

*Greg:* I understand. They would sort of ride along together.

*Hannah:* Exactly. You are going to use this piece to get you to this piece and you’re going to use this piece to get you to this piece. You play them off with each other to kind of move the kids along.

*Greg:* I understand.

*Hannah:* One does not supersede the other, but at other times one is going to supersede while the other takes a back, but you’ve got to Davihave both at play or it’s not going to work.

### **About the Author**

Gregory L. Samuels is currently a secondary social studies educator with ten years of experience in the classroom. He has taught AP U.S. History and American Government, AP Macroeconomics, American History and American Government Honors, Law Studies, African American History, and Economics. Earlier in his career as an educator, attending training in San Francisco under the staff of the *Teachers Curriculum Institute* provided him the opportunity to train secondary educators throughout Hillsborough County in Tampa, Florida about this approach to interactive learning. Other professional development opportunities include co-designing online book studies for teachers in the School District of Hillsborough County, implementing interactive learning workshops at Professional Study Day, and serving to co-design and co-facilitate trainings under the Project ELECT grant (federal grants awarding over \$2 million) and Project INVEST grant. Mr. Samuels holds a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of South Florida and is pursuing a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction within the Social Science Education program at the University of South Florida. Since 2009 he served as a cooperating teacher for four interns from the University of South Florida's College Of Education. He has presented on his research interests of teaching for social justice and technology in the social studies classroom at national conferences such as NCSS, ISSS, and SITE. His published works are within the proceedings of The Councilor, FCSS Trends and Issues, SITE Online Journal and *Social Studies Research and Practice*.