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ACTUALIZING SOCIAL JUSTICE:
AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF A PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL

A Dissertation Presented

by

CAMILLE LEE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2010

Student Development and Pupil Personnel Services
Social Justice Education

ACTUALIZING SOCIAL JUSTICE:
AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF A PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL

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CAMILLE LEE

Approved as to style and content by:

_____
Pat Griffin, Chair

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Barbara Madeloni, Member

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Alexandrina Deschamps, Member

                              _____
                              Christine McCormick, Dean
                              School of Education

DEDICATION

For Dad

All he ever asked was for me to
make room for him in my life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing my doctoral studies and dissertation has been a long and difficult journey. Many obstacles have challenged me during the near decade that it has taken me to complete this dream. I eventually quit counting the number of times an event beyond my control nearly halted this project. The Universe, at times, seemed against me as one life event after another hindered my progress. Many times I had no choice but to make these ancillary events the top priority, and consequently, I often questioned whether or not I should continue on this path. I lost confidence, motivation and drive more times than I can count. However, in spite of all the obstacles and road blocks, a flicker of light remained that somehow kept me focused on and trudging toward my goal.

That guiding beacon was the encouragement and support I received from numerous people in my life. I may have finally finished this project, but I have not done it alone. Although only my name appears on the cover of this dissertation, it belongs, in a certain respect, to many individuals. It is the result of collective efforts from my advisor, committee members, parents, siblings, friends, and the project participants.

I am most deeply indebted to my advisor, Dr. Pat Griffin. I admire Pat greatly and feel that I was mentored by the best. She is a distinguished scholar, and I had the fortunate opportunity to be her research assistant for two years. She was my Chair up until her retirement six years ago, but true to her commitment she continued to stay with me until I finished. I am exceptionally fortunate to have had an advisor who stood by me through many mishaps and crisis situations. She empowered me to finish this dissertation. Chances are that had she not been willing to continue to advise me after her retirement, I

would never have completed this dissertation. I thank Pat for her gentleness, patience, flexibility and genuine caring. She never judged and pushed me just enough when she knew I had to juggle other priorities. For this, I cannot thank her enough and am forever grateful.

The other members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Barbara Madeloni and Dr. Alex Deschamps, also gave generously of their time and expertise to better my work. I thank them for their contribution and good natured support. It was a pleasure to work with these fine educators who are both personally committed to social justice. I thank Alex for coming on board so late in the process without even knowing me and contributing so much personal passion to my defense. Barbara helped me tackle the challenge of completing a dissertation long distance. At one point, via the telephone, Barbara generously went through my comps line by line for over five hours. She also helped me structure and develop my writing and ideas. At my defense her question, "How do we institutionalize disruption?" will stay at the forefront of my own social justice work.

I will be forever grateful for the summer I spent in London with Brandon and Josie. Soon after my arrival, Brandon and I developed a productive routine. After commuting in on the tube and bus, the morning would start at the London Business School coffee shop for my caffeine boost. We'd then climb the three flights of stairs to Brandon's office where we would write our daily agendas on the white board (not that we ever completed all our goals). After listening to "The Eye of the Tiger," we would begin our first thirty minute work session. I would just get started when the computer's sheep would baa telling us it was time for a break. It was a bit of a struggle to adapt to

Brandon's short, but intense, ADD work sessions. The orange juice breaks at the executive education center always came at the most needed moments. Our daily lunch outings were always the highlight of the day and I experienced some of London's finest eating establishments (however, we will skip the salt beef sandwiches next time). I will always cherish this time that I had with my little brother, both of us in the midst of the academic experience, both of us working together and experiencing the daily successes and failures. He thanked me one afternoon for the role I played in supporting him as he was growing up. He mentioned how I turned him into a star baseball catcher when I gave him knee pads to wear. With them, he was no longer afraid of the ball. He also reminded me how well I prepared him for his baptism. It is interesting how the tables turn when we grow up and I am now learning from him. He has become a fine academic and I admire him greatly. I appreciate his patient mentoring, especially his willingness to engage in discussions of social justice while sitting in London's finest institution of capitalism.

When we arrived home in the evenings, Josie turned the childcare over to Brandon, put on her academic hat, sat with me, and reviewed the work I'd done that day. Her guidance and mentoring were invaluable. We went through so many revisions and reorganizations that I can't count them all. At times I wanted to say "Isn't this good enough?" But Josie pushed me to create the best product I possibly could. When I hit bottom, she was my constant unwavering cheerleader. She never let me entertain thoughts of quitting. I thank her for sharing her own dissertation experience with me. She spent so many hours reading multiple revisions, suggesting additional directions and pushing me to a more thoughtful analysis. Josie is my role model. In addition to being the

have completed this work before I lost my dad. He so wanted to see me finish this degree,

and I wanted to share this accomplishment with him. It is to him that I dedicate this work.

ABSTRACT

ACTUALIZING SOCIAL JUSTICE:

AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF A PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL

MAY 2010

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Researchers and k-12 practitioners have been struggling with inequity and diversity issues for the past four decades. These struggles have produced multiple philosophies, theoretical perspectives and educational approaches—each with strengths and limitations. The various approaches to addressing diversity indirectly and implicitly address, but have not managed, the systemic changes necessary for education to be socially just. Ideally, all diversity approaches should result in academic achievement and social change—the goals of social justice education. Past research has mainly focused on crisis intervention strategies or on meeting individually-based needs rather than on systemic practices and strategies at the school or district level.

Toward this end, the purpose of this study was to explore how social justice goals are manifested in one school. The specific objectives were as follows: 1. Explore how the different members of the school community describe or define social justice. 2. Examine what current programs the participants believe support social justice-related goals. 3. Investigate current practices the participants believe to be socially just.

This qualitative case study used interviews, document review and observations of administrators and teachers at the research site (Middle School). This study was designed to be exploratory in nature. Through the syntheses of the literature, I developed a tri-focal lens framework for social justice education which I use as an analytic tool. From the analysis, I offer a description of Middle School's efforts to implement social justice goals. The findings of this study indicate that implementing social justice education theory in real contexts is a highly complex and evolutionary process, but not impossible. The purpose of this study never intended to establish a privileged binary of theory over practice, but rather I set out to explore the complexity of the intersections—the convergences and divergences of theory and practice. And, as is usually the case when moving between theory and practice, the study reveals the necessary trade offs and unintended consequences of well-intended decisions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

<u>Background of the Study</u>

After 14 years of teaching high school and more than 5 years of studying and

researching the possibilities of social justice education in schools, I find myself believing

that, if education does not embrace change in favor of justice, our democracy is in serious

jeopardy. In the late 1990s, I experienced firsthand the damaging effects of bigotry and

injustice as I fought in Utah's legislature and in its courts to establish a gay-straight

alliance at East High School in Salt Lake City, Utah. My students and I faced institutional

discrimination and often found ourselves in a hostile and oppressive environment. The

experience taught us lessons about hegemonic privilege and the limitations of our power,

and the experience catapulted me into the social justice arena and into my studies. And it

was there that I realized the limitations of single-issue focus and identity politics.

Also, more recently, as I have supervised teachers in training for the University of

Massachusetts Amherst, I see the lack of social justice awareness in the new generation

of teachers. Because I personally know the University of Massachusetts Amherst is

among those schools that *do* see the importance of social justice, I am even more alarmed

about new teachers and administrators emerging from schools of education which only

give a politically-correct nod to addressing the challenges of diversity. Across the

country, new educators, along with their mentors, often face the frustrating challenge of

educating a changing population within institutions incapable of serving the needs of

these populations. They simply are not trained to be aware of and value "the other," or

the marginalized, (e.g., students of color; those living in poverty; girls and women; students with disabilities; students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender; students belonging to non-mainstream religions or other marginalized groups).

In addition to seeing their struggles, I have witnessed the devastating effects of the "No Child Left Behind" legislation's focus on testing and punishment of "failing schools." I have read article after article that fail to challenge the premise of "the achievement gap." In addition, I have seen the unequal distribution of resources continue to worsen. Their distressing results on programs and students have strengthened my sense of urgency for creating change.

My frustrations with this country's K-12 educational system have served to clarify the need to focus on the essential goal of education: academic achievement for *every* student. This "academic achievement for everyone" (especially given its problematic definition and measurement) is not the reality of our system. My experience and study have also made me realize that in order for education to be meaningful for all students, it must serve as a vehicle for social change, and students must see themselves as the agents for change. This change has the possibility to affect the individual, the institution and the society as a whole. This change, a goal of social justice education, is rarely expressed in traditional education. However, I believe these aims (academic achievement and social consciousness and change) can occur through a socially just educational system. My study proposes that social justice education is a process; it is not simply what schools teach, it is what they are (or are becoming).

The primary defining components of social justice education are identified by early social justice researchers/educators, Adams, Bell and Griffin (2007). These researchers posit that social justice education is both a process and a goal that includes:

> full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs; … a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure; …a society in which individuals are both self determining (able to develop their full capacities), and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others); …and involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole. (p. 3)

A socially-just education draws the institutional silence of oppression out of the dark corners where it has incubated for decades and places it in the forefront. In addition, a socially just education requires dedicated educational practitioners to alter their approaches by knowing the complexities and intersections of multiple identities and committing to successful implementation of individual and systemic transformation. At that point, the educational system can shift from a construct that continues to reproduce and perpetuate the status quo to one that overcomes personal, cultural and societal oppressions to make academic achievement and social change a reality for all students. Additionally, it seems to follow that academic achievement will improve if students are exposed to an education that is equitable and just, are encouraged to participate as fully integrated members of a learning community, and are expected to become agents of change.

Unfortunately currently what is happening in schools is not socially just and is shortchanging all of America's youth. Every level of education, from the top decision maker to the individual classroom teacher, is faced with the challenge of educating a population who is prepared to step into a global community with flexible personal and

intellectual skills. Those deeply invested in education know that, as demographics shift

and economic disparities expand, existing problems exponentially increase. Therefore,

they have generated myriad approaches addressing the increasing diversity to deal with

their concerns. Some schools across the nation are addressing racism, sexism, classism,

heterosexism, able-ism, religious prejudice and attempting to stem the tide of their

devastating effects. However, they often barely treat the symptoms and rarely set about

eliminating the root cause of these symptoms of oppression. It is almost as if our students

are being treated by stopgap measures which simply hope for the best. Consequently, our

students continue to receive an unjust and inequitable education which threatens our

democratic society.

The institution of education—unfortunately still modeled on 19th century

structure—is not designed to meet challenges presented by the 21st century, and current

approaches are inadequate. What is needed in education is a striking paradigm shift; we

educators need to rethink and retool our educational perceptions. Toward this end, I use a

framework of social justice education as an analytic lens to examine one school's

attempts to actualize social justice goals. In analyzing one school's attempts to address

and eliminate the unjust and discriminating elements entrenched in our educational

systems, I envision creating the foundations for developing social justice education

practice for K-12 schools where academic achievement and social change intrinsically

are entwined.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how social justice goals are manifested in

one school. The specific objectives are to identity how social justice is described and what social justice issues are addressed in a particular school, and to generate solutions to institute systemic change. The study places theory and practice side by side, without privileging one over the other, in order to see how they inform each other and how both manifest within the school community. The intent of these aims is to enable participants to name and identify examples of oppressions, to think critically about the situations at their schools, and to be able to expose existing inequities that they may never have identified or considered before.

In this descriptive case study, I do the following:

1. Explore how the different members of the school community describe or define social justice.

2. Examine what current programs the participants believe support social justice-related goals.

3. Investigate what current practices the participants believe to be socially just.

Significance of the Study

Researchers and K-12 practitioners have been struggling with inequity and diversity issues for the last 40 years. These struggles have produced multiple philosophies, theoretical perspectives and educational approaches—each with strengths and limitations. The various approaches to addressing diversity indirectly and implicitly address, but have not managed, the systemic changes necessary. Ideally, all diversity approaches should, but rarely do, result in academic achievement and social change—the goals of social justice education.

Studies to date have focused on single approaches and their impact (Banks, in Spring 2001; Grant & Lei, 2001; Kailin, 2002; Sleeter, 1996), but such studies are limited in focus from a social justice viewpoint in that they have not examined the complexity of schools applying a variety of diversity approaches. My study provides the occasion to discover the impact of a school's interrelated attempts to address social justice related goals. It examines how diversity programs complement or conflict with one another, ignore root causes of inequities, and/or, in fact, exacerbate marginalization within the school community.

This study utilizes a social justice education framework, developed from a synthesis of the literature to analyze what the school is attempting and what it is achieving. This framework acknowledges the pervasiveness of oppression, multiple identities and the intersections of oppression, and the interplay between individual and systemic change. The findings of this study provide insight into a school's attempts to address inequities. A premise of the study is that the foundation of any meaningful plan to create socially-just schools lies in understanding how a school community talks about diversity, how it sees academic achievement *and* social change as possible educational goals, and how it might unwittingly contribute to perpetuating inequities.

Therefore, a significant contribution of this study is to broaden the scope of discussion of the potency of oppression within our society and within our schools. By providing a vehicle to foreground oppression and to "break the silence" which usually surrounds it, this study aims to provide the educational community with a greater understanding of power, privilege and oppression.

Another significant contribution of this study is the identification of needed new skills—pedagogical skills for adapting instruction to demographic shifts and diversity within the school community—and, therefore, inform teacher- and administration-preparation programs. Finally, this study contributes to the body of social justice education research by encouraging members of the educational community to analyze their own situations and to generate solutions that see academic achievement intertwined with social consciousness and change. The community will have the opportunity to understand the background, to gain the awareness, and to integrate the perspective of a social justice education framework. Consequently, the lasting effect of this study will be the school's ability to filter future educational programs, policies and practices through a social justice lens.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVENT LITERATURE

<u>Introduction</u>

The phrase "social justice education" has moved from higher education theory

and research to the vernacular of K-12 educators; one only has to peruse education

catalogues for teachers and practitioners to see the multitude of "social justice education"

books and curriculum materials offered. But without better definition, clearer focus and

sturdier framework for implementation, social justice education may join "Teaching for

Tolerance," "Multicultural Education," "Equity Education," "Anti-Bias Education," and

other approaches that may have been significant in individual classrooms, but have not

been able to effect systemic change.

In both theory and praxis, the definition of social justice education is both

"multiple and contested" (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 22). From academic literature to

faculty lounges, the nature of injustice is discussed much more frequently than the idea of

social justice (Wade, 2004). While other theorists continue to grapple with their own

definitions (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002; Gale, 2000; Goodman, 2001), rarely do they

dispute the primary defining components identified by early social justice

researchers/educators, Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007).

Many contemporary Americans believe that the concept of social justice is

passé—that it is an obsolete trend (in that it has been realized) and no longer has any

meaning in today's society which is presumably built on the ideals of democracy,

freedom, and justice for all (Sommers, 2001). They might argue that the 20th century was

an era that paved the way for a more equitable society. At first glance, one may agree, especially when we highlight the progressive civil rights legislation passed in the 20th century. During the past 100 years schools have officially become desegregated; women have received the right to vote and encouraged to make decisions governing their bodies; interracial marriage has become legalized; disabled individuals have demanded and received equal access to public facilities, including mainstreaming into regular education. Racial discrimination is no longer acceptable due to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, educational equality of opportunity for girls and women in federally funded institutions was mandated by Title IX, and gay men and lesbians can serve in the armed forces (albeit secretly) and be legally married in a few states. Indeed, the past hundred years of legislation depicts a lustrous picture of the status of the "other."

However, upon closer examination, what appears to be grand improvements wanes in the face of evidence that reveals that those from marginalized groups have not made, after all, great sociopolitical strides at the dawn of the 21st century. People of color are still disproportionately represented among the poor in the United States. Euro-American males are still more likely to be hired for top leadership positions and to receive greater compensation than their minority and female counterparts. In the last decade numerous states have prohibited gay marriage; and many individuals with disabilities, especially those in the lower socioeconomic class do not yet have access to the services they need. And, most significantly, what politicians and others erroneously call "the achievement gap" continues to widen between white and minority students.

Thus, while advancements and equality of marginalized groups' is mixed, institutionalized "ism's" (sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, etc.) continue

to make equality elusive (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Sommers, 2001) for a large population in America. In addition, the United States, for the past eight years experienced an "era of intensified old track-right conservatism … in which the hard-won gains of the civil-rights and women's movements, such as affirmative action, civil-rights legislation, and public education, to name a few are seriously threatened" (Kailin, 2002, p. 63). As we celebrate what has been accomplished, it is especially critical to not lose sight of what has yet to be done in order to achieve equal educational opportunity for all students, regardless of their "otherness" status. In spite of the decades of a multitude of mandated educational reforms implemented in public education, the needs of the "other" continue to outpace most changes.

In this chapter I address the problems and challenges—identified by previous research—that are currently faced by contemporary K-12 public schools. In addition, I assess some of the approaches that have been taken to address diversity and inequity in K-12 schools and their subsequent failures to sustain systemic change.

<u>Challenges</u>

Policymakers, administrators, educators, and parents have become increasingly alarmed about the proliferation of problems and associated challenges that permeate public schools. There has been a slow deterioration in the ability to sustain the mythical 1950's high schools (which were based on white, middle class, Christian, heterosexual values and ideals) over the past several decades as educational institutions have been changing.

These factors have led to specific challenges, such as eroding financial support, ill-equipped teachers, standardization of education, shifting demographics, single-parent families, increased levels of poverty, and the widening of the income gap. These challenges have forced schools and government officials at the local, state and federal level to address the current plight of public education in the United States.

I believe these challenges are the result of inequities in opportunities for students to succeed in school. For example, researchers, policy makers and educational officials have coined the term "achievement gap," or "racial achievement gap" to signify the widening gulf between the test scores of white, predominantly middle-class students and their impoverished and non-white peers (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Banks, 1993; Barnes, 2004; Barton, 2004; Carbo, 1995; Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; English, 2002; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Moore, 2004; Nieto, 2004; Noguera, 2004a; Talbert-Johnson, 2004; Thirunarayanan, 2004). But, in reality, the idea of an "achievement gap" is, according to Love (2004), a tool which "serve[s] to obscure white privilege and cause it to appear as normal, natural, and ordinary" but in reality is a "majoritarian achievement gap" (p. 229). According to Love's analysis, those making educational decisions see the achievement gap "from a deficit perspective of the 'failure' of African American children to perform the same as white children" (p. 227). She argues that this insistence on the gap is, in reality, "the most recent incarnation of the white intellectual superiority/African American intellectual inferiority that is the mainstay of mainstream American culture" (p. 227-228). However, many researchers (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Noguera, 2004b) have argued that the achievement gap is one of the greatest challenges facing educators today. Because educators claim the widening gap in

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test scores as one of the most pressing problems confronting educational systems and because researchers haven't necessarily challenged the premise, "the achievement gap" and its consequent inequities continue as major concerns in education today.

Therefore, despite not addressing the systemic problem of the inequities which then result in an "achievement gap," schools have been both bombarded and driven by a wide variety of reform models. Although the intent is admirable—based on the aim of helping all students achieve—these countless "innovative" ideas, for the most part, have failed to sustain systemic change. In fact, some solutions have actually increased the inequity because they have not addressed the problems' core issues. Consequently, inequities have worsened, and until educators and policy makers are willing to go back and reexamine through a social justice lens why reforms haven't worked, inequities will continue to multiply.

In the following section, I have placed some of the problems/challenges that persistently plague the public school system into six categories that examine how these challenges promulgate inequity and oppression: 1) increasing diversity, 2) teacher preparation, 3) financial support for public schools, 4) the conservative political movement, 5) legislation and policy, and 6) marginalization of the "other."

<div align="center">Increasing Diversity</div>

Changing Demographics

As the United States moves into the 21st century, the numbers of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in public schools are increasing exponentially (Carbo, 1995; Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Frankenberg, Lee, &

Orfield, 2003; Kailin, 2002; Major & Brock, 2003; Shapiro, Sewell, & DuCette, 1995).

The statistics show that as of 2004 approximately 35-40% of all public school students

were from a culturally diverse group – many of them being what Nieto (2004) calls the

"language minority population" (p.209). Between 1990 and 2000, the white U.S.

population grew by only 3%, while the number of Asians increased by 9%; Blacks by

21%; and, most profoundly, Hispanics, by a change of 61% (Zhou, 2003). Based upon

this data, several researchers have predicted that by 2040-2050 the percentage of

culturally diverse students will increase to 51% and whites will become, for the first time

in the nation's history, a minority of the population (Futrell, Gomez, & Bedden, 2003;

Hodgkinson, 2001/2002; Kugler, 2002).

Also adding to the changing demographics is the variety of family structures in

which students live. Single parent, same-sex, inter-racial, inter-generational and foster-

care families require educational environments to deal with issues for which many

educators and administrators are not prepared. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered

students are also self-identifying at younger ages than in the past, which adds additional

challenges that need to be addressed (Lee, 2002).

Special Education

Special education, or programs of compensatory and remedial education, was

created to increase the academic achievement of disadvantaged, disabled and /or

gifted/talented students (English, 2002).

Despite being well intentioned and lavishly funded, special education, for the

most part, has not worked. For one, minorities are over-represented in special education

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courses (Talbert-Johnson, 2004). The Harvard Civil Rights Project (1999) found that African-American and Latino students are about twice as likely as white students to be enrolled or labeled as special education students. Likewise, minority students are under-represented in gifted and talented programs (English, 2002). Consequently, special education legislation has resulted in an increase in inequity (Carbo, 1995).

Teacher Preparation

Lack of Diverse, Qualified, and Prepared Educators

Evidence demonstrates that the more students see themselves reflected in those who are teaching them, the better they are able to relate to what they are learning (Sommers, 2001). Unfortunately, many students do not have such an experience. Currently the majority of public school teachers at both the elementary and secondary level are lower-middle class, white, mono-lingual women of European descent (Cooper, 2003; Major & Brock, 2004; Talbert-Johnson, 2004). Although many African American teachers entered the public school system during the civil rights era, many have subsequently left the profession, and few minority teachers have stepped forward to replace them (Gurskey, 2002). Consequently, only 14% of teachers are minorities; and in 2002, 85% of pre-service teachers/students enrolled in undergraduate teacher education programs were white females (Hunter & Donahoo, 2003).

A number of researchers suggest that these non-minority teachers are often not equipped to be effective with diverse students (Cooper, 2003; Major & Brock, 2004; Talbert-Johnson, 2004). Many educators have not deeply explored either societal or personal attitudes, prejudices and biases; therefore, they are unprepared to effectively

deal with diversity in schools. An obvious reason is that teachers' lives and experiences are vastly different from those of their students—particularly in urban schools. Teachers are likely to favor students with cultures similar to their own (Anyon, 1997). Middle-class white children have social skills, behaviors, and attitudes that such teachers find familiar and, therefore, appropriate while that is often not the case with minority students.

Financial Support for Public Schools

<u>Unequal Distribution of Resources</u>

A growing body of research reveals major discrepancies in funding allocations for schools that serve economically disadvantaged student populations versus those that serve students who come from a stronger financial base. Schools that serve the former tend to be located in urban areas and over the past two decades have received funding at disproportionately lower rates. The evidence of these discrepancies is well documented in various studies in multiple ways.

Per pupil expenditures in urban schools are less than the national average (Spring, in Strouse, (Ed)., 1997) while class sizes are larger (Barton, 2004). Overall, educational conditions are substandard (English, 2002; Futrell, Gomez, & Bedden, 2003; Talbert-Johnson, 2004, Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004) with inadequate technological resources (Futrell et al., 2003) and classroom equipment. Additionally, the learning environments in these schools are less supportive (Brown, Anafara, & Roney, 2004) with curriculum offerings of lower quality with fewer instructional, staff, tracking and special education resources available (Darling-Hammond, French & Garcia-Lopez, 2002).

The Conservative Political Movement

Curriculum and the Conservative Agenda

Ties between the traditional curriculum offered in most public schools and the

reduced levels of achievement among those students who fall into the "other" category

are important to examine. When historically-marginalized populations are included in the

traditional curriculum, it is often in a negative, stereotypical, or subordinate and

marginalized role that feeds the fallacy that members of the dominant group are

inherently more important to society (Nieto, 1994). Thus, perpetuated is the myth that

one race, class, gender, ability and sexual orientation is superior over another. Curriculum

is, therefore, a powerful tool in reinforcing or challenging the status quo.

Conservative educators (Schlesinger, 1998) believe that education should deliver

a common culture belonging to everyone. In this view, the common culture should

contain a set of core values based on Western European civilization and should be the

means for achieving national unity (Shor, 1992; Spring, 2001). Conservative educators

tend to prefer the more static, formal body of knowledge encompassed in a classical

curriculum arguing that it "is crucial for all members of society to know in order to keep

society from falling into chaos" (Beane cited in Brantlinger, 2003, p.172). Students who

have roots in ignored populations are consequently denied an equal educational

experience and opportunity. Because they do not see themselves represented in the

curriculum, they do not see the connections between themselves and the possibility of

being active and influential participants in society.

<u>Testing and the Accountability Movement</u>

Whether known as standardized, high stakes, or accountability based testing, these are controlling and authoritative tools when utilized as the sole measure to determine the success of students, teachers, and schools. The bias of standardized testing hurts minority, poor and special education students (Anguiano, 2003; Kugler, 2002) and maintains dominance and marginalization (English, 2002). In addition to other shortcomings, because "achievement testing consistently shows a bias towards variables of wealth, educational levels, linguistic dexterity, and vocabulary breadth (all highly intercorrelated), [it] cannot be considered neutral to those same factors" (English, 2002, p. 307).

Legislation and Policy

<u>Law</u>

The *Brown* (1954) decision and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002) serve as bookends to a veritable alphabet soup of educational law— IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act 1975), EHCA (Education for all Handicapped Children Act (1975), ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act 1989), Title IX (1972), Title I (1965), etc. For the last fifty years, legislation and courts have attempted to keep the promise made by public schools: "that all children regardless of race, socioeconomic status, gender, creed, color, or disability will have equal access to an education that allows them to enjoy the freedoms and exercise responsibilities of citizenship in our democracy" (Wood, 2004, p. vii).

The most recent legislative effort to address inequities in education is the No

Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The goal of NCLB is to

raise the achievement levels of all students and to close the "achievement gap."

According to Wood (2004), "Americans were promised that as a result of the targets,

incentives, and punishments associated with NCLB we would have higher quality and,

more equitable, and more accountable public schools.… By placing high-quality teachers

and schools and identifying 2014 as a target date for every child to become competent as

measured by standardized tests, quality schools would be mandated" (p.xi).

Another problem/challenge associated with NCLB's high-stake testing, now

being realized by schools across the nation, is immense. Those students who traditionally

have been left behind—students of color, new English learners, students living in poverty

and students with disabilities—are precisely the ones who are at greater risk to fail

(Darling-Hammond, 2003). Because funding is associated with Adequate Yearly

Progress (AYP), schools not "passing"—usually those with populations of greater need—

lose federal funding. According to Neil (2004), this "one size fits all" solution "is the

time bomb ticking at the center of the public education system" (p. 119).

Even with the passage of dozens of laws and the expenditure of billions of dollars,

schools still are not effectively addressing the existing problems and challenges. Time

and time again, only too late, we find "institutional and government policies purportedly

committed to the same goals of providing all children equal access …often [turn] out to

be strikingly different from (and sometimes even diametrically opposed to) one another

in implementation and ramifications" (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 7).

Marginalization of the "Other"

Perhaps the most significant problem/challenge plaguing the public school system is the continued marginalization of the "other." Marginalized students, those who face institutionalized oppression and the lack of power and privilege, continue to find themselves in an environment battling obstacles such as negative stereotypes, low expectations and preconceived ideas of what intelligence looks like. These obstacles often leave the "other" resigned to impotence, resigned to anger and silence. His or her marginalization is, in fact, reality. This marginalization manifests itself in existing hegemonic concepts, theories, and practices, which are discussed below.

Deficit Theories

Current learning theories may also contribute to marginalization of the "other" in public schools. For example, deficit theory is the mindset that the poor success rate of low—income and ethnically diverse students is due to "alleged intrinsic characteristics of the group itself," such as genetic inferiority, parental apathy, bilingualism, etc. (Cummins, 2003, p. 41). Educators use the deficit theory to excuse their inability to teach marginalized students (Carbo, 1995) and see low results as individual rather than systemic problems (Cummins, 2003). Consequently, "by focusing first on what they perceive to be students' deficits, educators risk making inaccurate assessments of children's strengths and weaknesses." This focus on students' poor results distracts from schools taking responsibility for how poorly prepared they are to serve all of their students (Knapp & Shields, 1990, p. 754).

Meritocracy

Another way schools marginalize students is that the idea of meritocracy is mirrored in our schools. Core to the hegemony of the American dream is the belief that we live in a meritocratic society.

This concept of meritocracy implies that students begin schooling on an equal playing field, and their success depends on their effort. A related belief is that students' lack of success is due to their lack of effort, ambition, or poor parental support (Banks, 1993). As s result, educators repeatedly fail to identify schools "as vehicles of social reproduction that limit the ability of students who come from families with few socio-economic resources to gain the knowledge, skills, and cultural capital needed to advance at the rate of their privileged peers" (Cooper, 2003, p. 103). Schools tend to offer more advantages or chances to those already privileged—white wealthy children. Therefore, the myth of meritocracy perpetuates marginalization and keeps students in subordinate positions.

Cultural Capital

Educational institutions also marginalize students with their narrow view of what is valued in society's cultural economy. Marginalized students' own cultural capital has not much worth in their schools. Pierre Bordeaux, a French sociologist, helped to articulate the theory of cultural capital by postulating that a certain "language" and set of social behaviors associated with the dominant sociological group are passed from one generation to the next. The success of other groups is related to their ability to understand and mimic the culture of the dominant group.

The cultural capital which students bring to school plays a fundamental role in determining educational attainment and success (Romanowski, 2003). In the U.S. students who come from middle and upper class families possess the greatest cultural capital in schools because school culture reflects society and generally espouses and adheres to the values of the middle and upper classes. Campbell (2001) writes, "When a child comes to school from a middle-class family, that child already has learned values at home that closely match the school's values advocated by teachers. The child knows much of the culture of the school upon entering" (p. 109-110).

As our schools become increasingly diverse, many students are entering them with low levels of cultural capital owing to the fact that they are members of minority and immigrant groups. Gale and Densmore (2000) explain, "the cultural capital of the dominant group is acquired through laboring within its midst and over extended periods of time, yet neither of these modes of acquisition are readily available to marginalized groups" (p. 92). Students from marginalized groups are "at a distinct disadvantaged because they are disfavored in the distribution of cultural capital" (Romanowski, 2003), leading to decreased student achievement, lowered expectations, higher drop-out rates and overall academic failure for large numbers of students.

Lowered Expectations

Generally, where adult expectation of student performance is low, so is the level of student achievement. Gale and Densmore (2000) posit that "teachers tend to hold lower expectations for those students whom they perceive have limited ability" (p. 111). Moreover, research indicates that "teachers perceive white children as more capable,

expect more from them, and are more supportive of their efforts to be academically successful" (Nilsson et al., 2004, p. 28). Likewise, Anyon (1997) found that students in lower socio-economic neighborhoods were treated and taught differently than children from middle-and-upper economic backgrounds. She found that the role of teachers in schools in lower socio-economic neighborhoods is more of a manager, overseer or disciplinarian compared to teachers in higher socio-economic neighborhoods that encourage their students to use analytical and cognitive skills while working independently and cooperatively on projects. Indeed, female, minority, immigrant and poor students often receive inferior instruction that sets them up to fail in future academic endeavors and to enter positions in society that are the least respected and rewarding

Teachers, often despite training, still have lower expectations for girls, especially in the sciences and math. Girls usually begin in lower grades by out-performing their male classmates. But, by graduation—due to socialization, less teacher attention, test biases, and decreased self-esteem—their SAT scores are as much at 50 points lower than the boys'. Although some individual teachers are becoming more aware of how they perpetuate the problem, the myth of low expectations is systemic in educational institutions.

Accelerated Courses

Illuminating marginalization, various studies have shown that under representation of minority students (with the exception of Asians) in accelerated classes is one example of schools' failure to integrate all students into successful academic paths (Barton, 2004; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). The percentage of minority students

matriculated to advanced placement, accelerated, or college prep courses serves as a good measuring stick of positive educational achievement among these groups because such courses are generally viewed as the apex of high school offerings.

Therefore, the percentage of minority students matriculated to advanced placement, accelerated, or college prep courses serves as a good measuring stick of positive educational achievement among these groups because such courses are generally viewed as the apex of high school offerings.

Another obstacle emerges regarding access to, and enrollment in, accelerated courses for Hispanic and African-American students who attend multiracial high schools with a relatively high student enrollment of accelerated courses. Despite attending high schools with an overall high student enrollment in accelerated courses, Hispanic and African-American students remained under-represented in accelerated courses. This phenomenon, called "schools within schools," is prevalent throughout the public school system (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004, p. 22).

Dropout Rate

If enrollment in accelerated classes is an indication of academic potential, then the dropout rate is an indication of failure for marginalized students. According to Orfield of the Civil Rights Project (1999) at Harvard University,

> Many urban high schools have become 'dropout factories' that send hundreds of students off the figurative cliff each year. Halting this flow needs to be the top priority of any high school reform efforts. Yet we continue to invest more funds incarcerating high school dropouts than in programs back to keep them in school and out of trouble. (p. 1)

The Project found that 50% of Latino/a and African American students would not earn a regular high school diploma. Of all students, Latino/a students have the highest dropout rates (Moore, 2004; Lee & Burkam, 2003).

Tracking

Another problem/challenge that contributes to marginalization is tracking. Tracking is an approach by which students are sorted or separated by their achievement level and is an almost universal practice in public schools. Although tracking does enable a few students, it disables the rest because the majority of students spend their entire academic career in assigned middle or lower tracks of the system. Students are assigned to educational tracks that most often correspond with their economic-class standing, meaning that the lower-track populations are very brown, black, and poor and the high track are white and affluent. Therefore, the tracking system may be the most "undemocratic mechanism of mass education" (Shor, 1992, p. 140).

Assimilation/De-culturalization

Another problematic strategy often used to educate "the other" is assimilation, which is the emphasis on one unified culture–the American culture. In public schools assimilation is encouraged with the intent of producing students with the same ideals and values in order to build a productive workforce that can help maintain dominance in the global economy (Cochran-Smith, 2003). In its extreme, assimilation meant housing Native Americans in boarding schools forbidding the use of their native languages. On a

lesser scale is the unspoken, insidious insistence that minority students blend with the majority.

The result of this assimilation approach perpetuates inequities and prejudices by ignoring, devaluing and misunderstanding students' diverse cultures. As noted earlier, privileging the traditional curriculum is one of the ways that inequity is perpetuated. Too many students may have to pay a price, such as shedding their ethnic attachments and losing their native customs, language and ethnicity to become acceptable Americans of (Kailin, 2002).

English-Only Instruction

Non-English speaking students are particularly marginalized by English-only education, which is the practice of legislators, administrators and teachers insisting on English as a primary (and often the only) means of instruction. In most classrooms, this traditional strategy forces students to rid themselves as quickly as possible of what is perceived as the "burden" of speaking another language (Zhou, 2003). As a result, bilingual education has been eliminated in a number of states; only 19% of language minority students receive instruction in their native language (Nieto, 2004). Therefore, with their language and culture marginalized and seen as a burden, even the most dedicated non-English speakers find their education difficult and obstructive. All too often they fall far behind and opt to drop out of school.

<u>Colorblindness</u>

Colorblindness is another strategy for attempting social justice through ignoring differences that perpetuate marginalization. Well-meaning educators in an attempt to be fair, will say, "I do not see color, I see students all the same." However, this ideology that is seen as a positive approach to fairness, in the end serves to ensure that social justice will never be achieved (Applebaum, 2001). Quite often, in a colorblind school, differences not celebrated nor even acknowledged result in accepting the dominant culture as the norm which constantly perpetuates the institutional practices that systematically favor some groups over others (Howard, 1999; Nieto; 2004). These colorblind attempts tend to deny individual identities and render certain groups invisible. Colorblindness—which in actuality goes way beyond "color" or race and extends to blindness of all differences—perpetuates disadvantage by assuming we are all alike (Gale & Densmore, 2000). Ultimately this practice "masks unequal power relations and entrenches existing inequalities" and runs counter to the aims of educational equity (Ng, 2003, p. 214).

<u>Integration</u>

The plan to integrate schools (*Brown v. Board of Education,* 1954) offered terrific hope for greater equality of educational opportunity. However, half a century later, minority students are still largely segregated in American schools, and the degrees of separation continue to grow (Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2000; Frankenburg, Lee, & Orfield; Kailin, 2002; Kugler, 2002; Lee, 2004: Moore, 2004; Nieto, 2004; Page, 2004; Sommers, 2001; Spring, 1997; Talbert-Johnson,

2004; Valverde, 2004). Many scholars have dubbed this trend toward re-segregation as

"second generation segregation" (Spring, 1997, p. 232). Some explanations of this trend

are the flight of white people from urban centers (Kugler, 2002), economically-

segregated neighborhoods (Kugler, 2002; Page, 2004), and federal court decisions

(Frankenburg, Lee, & Orfield, 2002). Hunter and Donahoo (2004) contend that "one of

the main reasons *Brown* failed to initiate effective remedies and end segregated schooling

in the United States is because the Supreme Court simply lost interest in supporting,

reviewing, and achieving school desegregation" (p. 342).

Marginalization, together with the other problems/challenges previously

discussed, creates a system of public education which fails to meet the needs of all its

students. Seeing the societal drain intrinsic to a failing educational system, some

educators, academics and policy makers have, in fact, challenged the authority of the

status quo by arguing that many students are not well served by the prevailing set of

truths annunciated through de facto policies and practices. Their alarm about the

inequities in education has led to the development of a plethora of programs aimed at

addressing many of the challenges of diversity I have discussed. While the programs are

certainly well intentioned and, in some cases, somewhat successful in creating more

equitable schools, each of the approaches to addressing diversity fails to provide an all-

encompassing framework that speaks to the depth and breadth of the

problems/challenges.

Approaches to Addressing Diversity

K-12 educators and researchers have been grappling with inequity and diversity issues for over four decades and these efforts have produced multiple philosophies, theoretical perspectives and educational approaches. The following section discusses some of these different approaches, outlining their focus, terminology and rationale, along with a brief critique of how they meet or fall short of the goals—academic achievement and social change—of social justice education. Figure 1, The Approaches to Addressing Diversity Overview, offers a summary of this section (p. 46). It is a summation of my view of several diversity programs. Across the top of the chart are essential components of social justice education, illustrating how each approach addresses these elements. The chart also lists the major strengths and limitations of each approach. The bottom row briefly illustrates how social justice education addresses *all* these aspects and is, therefore, all encompassing and further reaching than any other current approaches.

Multicultural Education

The history of multicultural education (MCE) reveals the continuous struggle with inequity and discrimination. MCE, first described in the 1960's, was built on the concept of cultural pluralism; and initially, had a powerful commitment to equity (Grant & Lei, 2001; Nieto, 1999; Spring 2001), a promise made by the common-school movement in the late 1800s, which had never been fulfilled (Nieto, 1999). Therefore, MCE was a going back to the ideal of schools offering an equal education for all (Nieto, 1991). MCE emerged out of academia, became popular in public schools in the 1980s, and appeared in

divergent representations. In some respects, it was merely a curricular reform movement. It became "a kinder gentler form of assimilation with some expansion of a commitment to mostly cosmetic pluralism" (Gordon & Newfield, 1996, p. 86-87). Another expression of MCE took the form of teacher in-service workshops, with the belief that educational reform would come through teacher sensitivity, curricula change suggestions and pedagogical applications (Sleeter, 1992). Unfortunately, rather than integration into the overall curriculum, MCE became a ghettoized option in most schools of education. It is more a specialty area with the rest of the curriculum paying lip service to it. Nonetheless, because of its palatability (i.e., by not looking at oppression and power structures) it has become the most widely recognized form of diversity education, albeit not without controversy. Prominent researchers continue to look at multiculturalism bringing multiple, philosophical and theoretical perspectives. Sleeter and Grant (1988) classified their findings into five groups ranging on a continuum from encouraging assimilation to promoting social justice. Likewise, Banks (1996) also recognized different strands of MCE which range from the dissemination of information about "heroes, holidays, and food fairs" on one end to programs that concentrate on the dissection and deconstruction of domination and oppression, systemic transformation and inclusive identities on the other.

Finally, Nieto's (1999) view of MCE comes closest to the principles of social justice education. For her it is "embedded in a sociopolitical context" (p. xviii). MCE emphasizes the basic tenets of Critical Pedagogy, which recognize the political nature of education and challenge "both its content and form" (p. xviii). As a program designed with comprehensive school reform in mind, the characteristics of MCE are anti-racist,

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offering a "basic education for all students that permeates all areas of schooling, that is characterized by a commitment to social justice, and critical approaches to student learning" (Nieto, 1999, p. xviii). In addition, MCE, according to Nieto, includes addressing multiple identities, as well as sexual orientation, which is rarely identified in other approaches. However, while most of her work focuses on race and ethnicity implying a single-issue approach, ultimately, she sees transformation on an "individual, collective and institutional" level as the end result (p. xviii).

Multicultural education was revolutionary in its beginnings, facing severe criticisms and backlash. Over the years it has continued to be ambitious and has made a mark as the most well-recognized approach to diversity issues. The strengths of MCE are its familiarity and its popularized and mainstreamed curricula in teacher-education programs. In addition, several theories of multicultural education have socially-just components, focus on roots of oppression, and have served as stepping-stones leading to institutional change.

However, MCE is not without its weak points. With the exception of Nieto, most theorists and practitioners do not explicitly put academic achievement in the forefront. These well meaning educators implicitly believe that academic improvement will naturally follow cultural awareness and sensitivity. Unfortunately, this hopeful assumption has not been supported by research as evidence shows the achievement gap continually widening. (Although, as I have previously noted, "achievement gap" is neither the language nor the measurement I would use.) In addition, the concepts of MCE have remained trapped—largely in theory—and disconnected from actual practice. For example, Banks worries that the primary goal of MCE has become merely "content

integration" (cited in Spring 2001, p. 114). Nieto's (1999) research has shown that MCE is most often "implemented as curriculum and practices that are little more than ethnic additives for cultural celebrations" (p. xvi). She describes these methods as merely "window dressings" (p. xvi). Most emphatically, Fitzgerald (2000) argues that MCE has become "diversity run amok" (p. 11).

Educational practices have lagged woefully behind the ideals of Nieto's sociopolitical approach, Sleeter and Grant's reconstructionist approach, and Banks' empowerment approach. While MCE theory is solid, the translation into practice has not been fully realized. The gap between theoretical frameworks and the *practice* of MCE continues to widen due to a variety of issues. Moreover, "in spite of the increasing popularity of multicultural education and abundance of multicultural curriculum materials, the mainstream understanding and practice of multicultural education remain[s] at a superficial level" (Grant & Lei, 2001, p. 222).

Diversity Education

The umbrella term "diversity," used in educational programs such as Diversity Works (2005), grew out of a heated argument regarding the single-issue focus of race and ethnicity in other equity programs. Along with being inclusive of race, gender, ethnicity, class, culture, disability and age (Shapiro, 1995), diversity education also moves beyond the concepts of acceptance and tolerance and has adopted a celebratory approach. For this reason, the slogan "Celebrate Diversity," has become virtually omnipresent in K-12 schools. Diversity vocabulary includes *cooperation, community, respect, group inclusion, celebration, cultural awareness, individual change, interpersonal dynamics, mission*

statements, and *school climate*. According to the Diversity Works, Inc. website, a cultural

diversity program "is a particularly useful model for predominantly white or mono-

cultural institutions that are experiencing changing student and community demographics

and are also concerned about gaps in achievement, retention, and graduation of culturally

diverse or minority students" (diversityworksinc.net, April 2, 2005).

The positive factors of diversity education are the promotion of cultural

awareness and respect as it includes multiple identities and moves beyond tolerance to

celebration. However, "diversity" itself has become a buzzword with the slogan

"celebrate diversity" meaning almost anything (Goodman, 2001). Also, diversity

education essentializes identities, meaning that one member of a group is representative

of the entire group and acts as a band-aid for the majority while covering up underlying

issues contributing to the problem of inequity.

Teaching for Tolerance

Created in 1991 by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching for Tolerance is

an educational program primarily aimed at decreasing youth violence and hate crimes.

Teaching for Tolerance defines tolerance as "a way of thinking and feeling—but most

importantly, of acting — that gives us peace in our individuality, respect for those unlike

us, the wisdom to discern humane values and the courage to act upon them"

(teachtolerance.org, April 2, 2005). Teaching for tolerance vocabulary includes *ending*

hate, dismantling bigotry, anti-bias activism, and appreciating and *understanding*

diversity. Its website teachtolerance.org is a valuable educational resource providing

educators with educational materials that promote respect for differences and appreciation of diversity.

An abundance of media (journal, web site, and published curricula), name recognition, and large national membership are strengths of the Teaching for Tolerance program. Moreover, its action-based focus on safety is designed to protect non-mainstream students. On the other hand, its name is a major limitation implying that tolerance is the end goal. Although the philosophy and action promotes acceptance, celebration and advocacy, the name still implies only tolerance. While the concept of tolerance sounds like a step in the right direction, in *Love the Sin*, Jakobsen and Pellegrini (2003) recognize that our best response is to move beyond tolerance as an end in that it only perpetuates the problem. They argue, "[T]olerance doesn't really fight the problem of hatred; it maintains the very structures of hierarchy and discrimination on which hatred is based …. Another way to put this is to say that tolerance sets up an us-them relation in which 'we' tolerate 'them'" (p. 50). In addition, the focus of the program is primarily on the "other," (providing a safe space for, protecting, and educating about the marginalized) rather than focusing on the dominant group, enabling them to understand how their privilege feeds the problem and/or the solution.

<center>Anti-Racist Education</center>

One program that most clearly mirrors a social justice education approach is Anti-Racist Education. However, because of its single-issue focus, anti-racist education falls short of providing the all encompassing framework of social justice education.

Anti-Racist Education specifically and deliberately focuses on racism as a systemic problem. However, Kailin (2002) reminds us that systemic change must begin at an individual level. "The assumption underlying anti-racist pedagogy for teachers is that it is necessary for them to confront racism in their backgrounds and their backyards in order to become conscious of how it is expressed in their teaching practice and their interactions with students of color, as well as with white students" (p. 18). This approach's vocabulary includes terms such as *racist constructions, institutionalization, subordination, hegemony, justice, empowerment, deconstruction/reconstruction* and *self-examination.* Pedagogical approaches include reconstruction of the curriculum and school environments in order to make education culturally and politically relevant to all students.

A strong point of Anti-Racist Education is that it explicitly (by bringing to the forefront the word "racism") addresses racism on a systemic level and challenges power structures. Nevertheless, its sole focus on race, failing to see connections between and among other oppression, is a weak point.

Anti-Bias Education

Anti-Biased Education actively challenges stereotypes and biases by taking "an active, problem-solving approach that is integrated into all aspects of an existing curriculum and a schools environment" (adl.org, May 1, 2005). Anti-biased terminology includes *unlearned behavior, decreased conflict, examine biases, correct misinformation* and *eliminate discrimination.* In the attempt to be all inclusive, anti-bias education not only addresses race and ethnicity, but also includes gender, language, religious diversity,

sexual orientation, physical and mental abilities and economic class. Teacher training and curriculum materials promote addressing misinformation and confronting biased behaviors when they occur.

The advantages of the Anti-Bias Education approach is that of all the other perspectives, it includes the greatest number of multiple identities including sexual orientation and it is action oriented in confronting and challenging biases. However, it ignores the root causes of oppression and instead focuses mostly on challenging personal and not systemic bias and stereotypes.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Programs

Several organizations and programs focus on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) issues in k-12 schools, but the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has emerged as the most prominent nationwide. The mission statement of GLSEN states that it "strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression" (glsen.org May, 22, 2005). Founded in the 1990's the organization focuses on creating "safe schools" for all students. *Respect, tolerance* and *safety* are terms typically associated with the organization. GLSEN is primarily policy and action oriented (i.e., sponsoring the "Day of Silence" action, establishing gay-straight alliances, and surveying nationwide school safety), but it also provides comprehensive curriculum, resources, networking and teacher training programs (glsen.org).

The state of Massachusetts has been on the forefront of promoting safety for gay and lesbian students. The Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Youth was founded

in 1993. Students demanding safety in their schools sparked the creation of this then

cutting edge and highly successful project. Governor William Weld responded by

forming a Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth—the first commission of

its kind in the country. As a joint effort with the Department of Education, the Safe

Schools committee, presented several recommendations for increased student safety and

decreased student suicide. The first recommendation invited schools to develop policies

protecting gay and lesbian youth from harassment, violence, and discrimination. The next

encouraged schools to offer training to school personnel in violence and suicide

prevention. The third recommendation supported schools to offer school-based support

groups for gay and lesbian students. Most of these groups became known as gay-straight

alliances, which included heterosexual allies alongside their lesbian and gay peers. The

fourth and final recommendation encouraged schools to provide school-based counseling

for family members of lesbian and gay students. Some of these recommendations have

been more successful than others—with the formation of gay-straight alliances taking the

lead. (http:/www.doe.mass.edu/hssss/program/ssch.html, May, 30, 2005). Along with

providing training, technical assistance, and regional conferences, the Safe Schools

Project also provided financial support to individual schools to initiate violence

prevention programs, to fund gay/straight alliance mentor projects, and to improve the

middle-school climate. At the height of this program a significant number of schools

throughout the state were involved in some way with the project.

Sadly, after 10 years, a new Governor cut most of the funding for this project and

forced the Safe Schools Project to eliminate most of its staff and support services. These

cuts were a significant loss for gay and lesbian students in Massachusetts who had been

highly supported by the program. But on a broader scale it was a loss country-wide because Massachusetts was seen as the leader on the forefront of programs for GLBT youth in schools. This loss also highlights the precarious position of progressive education when it comes to funding.

Creating visibility, safety and respect for students and faculty are all strengths of GLBT programs. Focusing on a single issue and ignoring the underlying causes of oppression limits such programs.

Disability Awareness

Most disability awareness programs were created after 1977 in direct response to inclusion laws requiring that children with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment. Most programs utilize terminology such as *understanding, inclusion, awareness, advocacy, assistance* and *mainstreaming.* Along with increasing students' and educators' awareness, disability awareness programs focus on tolerance and acceptance. Most programs (such as "Children with Disabilities" at Oracles Thinkquest Education Foundation and "The Kids on the Block" at Easter Seals) are aimed at elementary schools.

Visibility, inclusion and advocacy are the benefits and strengths of disability awareness. In theory, disabled students should no longer be isolated or set apart from the mainstream population. This inclusion is primarily due to policies enacted because of activism encouraged by disability awareness programs. However, being single-issue along with focusing on disability rather than ability, are shortcomings of such programs.

Prejudice Reduction

The primary focus of prejudice reduction programs (e.g., Center for Prejudice Reduction, Understanding Prejudice, National Coalition Building Institute, Diversity Council, etc.) is to "educate students and employees about issues of discrimination, harassment, prejudice, and diversity" (ncbi.org, May 2, 2005). Prejudice-reduction terminology typically includes the following: *respect, acceptance, appreciation, self-awareness, empowerment, empathy, self-esteem,* and *dialogue*. Many prejudice reduction organizations provide workshops, educational resources, and teacher training programs. While racism is a primary focus of any prejudice reduction program, most proponents acknowledge that inclusion of other discrimination issues enhances their programs.

Addressing discrimination and stereotypes is a strong point of prejudice reduction programs, whereas ignoring the root causes of the above problems is its weakness. Prejudice reduction also focuses on individual change rather than systemic change.

Although all of the above approaches and programs have been successful (in increasing awareness and sensitivity about the other, addressing discrimination, and promoting visibility, safety and respect) to some degree and have brought about some individual and classroom changes, ultimately they have not created overall systemic change. Change has been difficult because of the lack of resources, a strong conservative opposition, and poor preparation of educational leaders in dealing with diversity. Nevertheless, these programs have been steps in the right direction; they have built the foundation that has moved us to the point where we can now look at what theorists are saying about the fundamental characteristics of social justice in education

	Multicultural Education	Prejudice Reduction	Teaching for Tolerance	Diversity Education	Anti-Bias Education	Anti-Racist Education	LGBT Programs	Disability Education	Social Justice Education
Addresses the Pervasiveness of Oppression	Theory only	Not addressed	Not addressed	Not addressed	Not addressed	Focus on racism as a systemic problem	Not addressed	Not addressed	Specifically addressed, at the forefront
Explores Multiple Identities and Intersections of Oppression	Primarily race, occasionally gender, class, and ability; rarely sexual orientation	Primarily race and ethnicity; minimally other groups	Focus on race and ethnicity; some sexual orientation, ability, and religious diversity	Race, gender, ethnicity, class, culture, age, and ability	Inclusive of all groups and identities	Race and ethnicity only	Sexual orientation only	Ability only	Completely inclusive
Examines Interplay between Individual and Systemic Change	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual and systemic	Individual	Individual	Both individual and systemic
Academic Achievement	Direct, explicit (Nieto only)	Indirect, implicit	Indirect, implicit	Indirect, implicit	Indirect, implicit	Indirect, implicit	Indirect, implicit	Indirect, implicit	Direct, explicit
Social Change	Continuum; assimilation to social justice	Interpersonal and inter-group conflict resolution, empathy	Encourages anti-bias activism; aims to reduce hate crimes; personal responsibility	Promotes celebration of differences	Encourages an active problem-solving approach; aims to decrease discrimination	Confronts racism	Educational programs; school groups	Promotes awareness and advocacy	Promotes actively on all levels
Strengths	Popularized component of teacher ed., stepping stone for social justice	Addresses stereotypes and discrimination	Well known, wide spread media and marketing, action oriented	Promotes teaching cultural awareness and respect	All inclusive, action oriented, inclusive of multiple identities	Addresses oppression	Promotes visibility, safety, and respect for all	Visibility, inclusion, and accommodation	Addresses oppression, includes components of all approaches
Limitations	Gap between theory and practice; superficial; focus is race, celebrate diversity	Does not address root causes of oppression	Name (tolerance) implies tolerance only	Celebratory approach, essentializes identities, acts as band-aid for majority	Ignores root causes of oppression, only challenges stereotypes	Race only, conflicted over inclusion of other identities	Single issue focus	Focus on disability rather than ability	Term is controversial, uncomfortable and threatening to status quo

Figure 1. Approaches to Addressing Diversity

Social Justice Education Framework

Ideally all diversity approaches should, but rarely do, result in academic achievement and social change. This section explores the components of a social justice education framework, whereas further study demonstrates the results of applying specific

strategies within that framework to achieve the desired results—academic achievement

coupled with social change. For example, as we've seen in the previous sections, the

approaches to addressing diversity indirectly and implicitly address, but have not

managed, the systemic changes necessary. I envision a social justice education

framework that addresses the components that can achieve such results (see Figure 2).

The framework encompasses three major components. The first component addressed the

pervasiveness of oppression—the wide-spread institutionalization of domination,

privilege, and power. The second component explores multiple identities and the

intersections of oppression—the lack of fixed essences and the how this lack of essence

plays out in a system of oppression. The third component examines the complex interplay

between individual and systemic change—the symbiotic relationship of the two types of

change.

Throughout, I refer to this three-component framework as consisting of a trifocal

lens with the following analogy in mind. When aging eyes need correction, eyewear with

a one-lens prescription is rarely adequate to clarify vision. Often glasses are constructed

to provide lens prescription for multiple corrections—for near sightedness, for far-

sightedness, and for intermediate correction. Called multifocal lenses, these lenses

provide for the wearer seamless and progressive correction from the top to the bottom of

the lens, resulting in clear vision. The social justice education framework utilizes this

concept of a multifocal lens in the same way: no one lens will adequately "correct"

education; however, all three when "seamlessly" constructed will.

For this reason, I believe that for an educational system to be truly socially just,

with the goal of achievement and social change intrinsically entwined, it must contain

these three components as a trifocal lens through which all policy and programming

decisions are made. Throughout the remainder of this review I provide an overview and

description of each component as a lens of the trifocal lens followed by a rationale that

speaks to the necessity of incorporating a social justice framework in schools. I then

present examples of what schools are currently doing that are contrary to a socially-just

philosophy.

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                    │ COMPONENTS  │
                    │    OF A     │
                    │  TRIFOCAL   │
                    │    LENS     │
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| Addresses the Pervasiveness of Oppression | Explores Multiple Identities and Intersections of Oppression | Examines the Interplay between Individual and Systemic Change |

RESULTING IN

| Academic Achievement | ←-------coupled with ---------→ | Social Consciousness and Action |
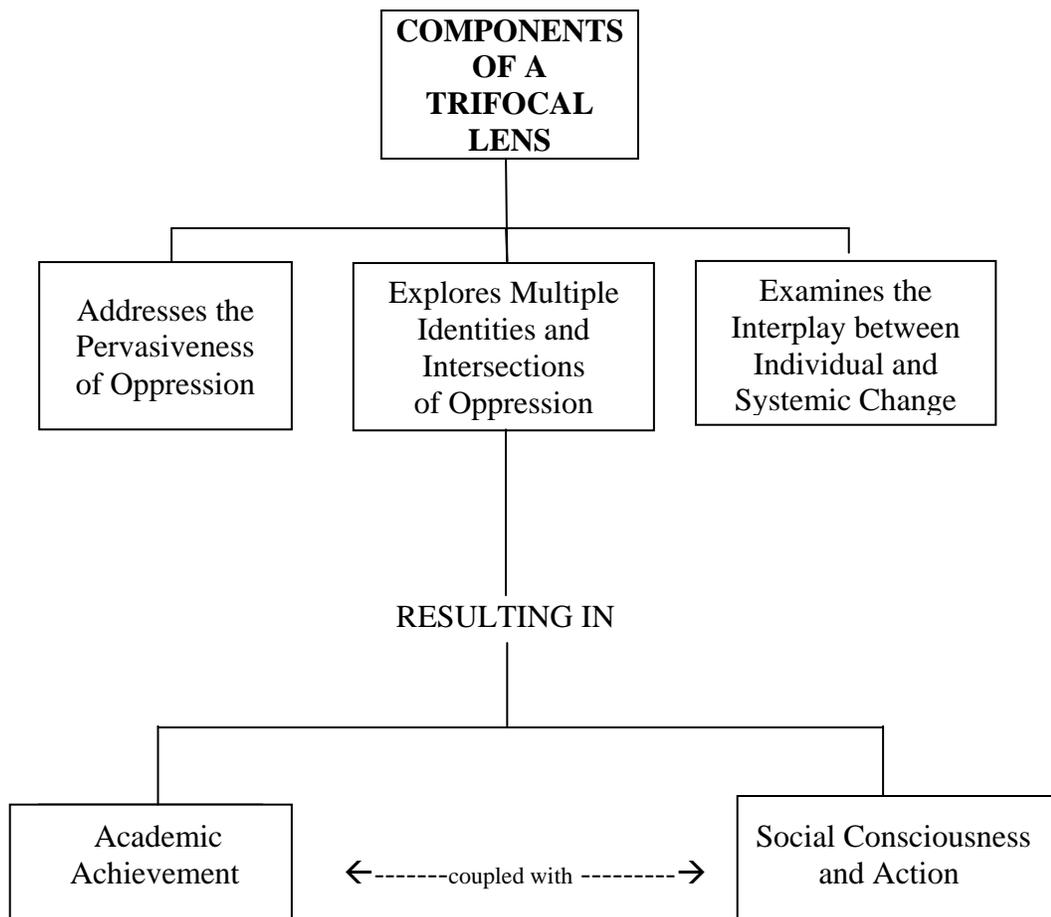
Figure 2. Social Justice Education Framework

The Pervasiveness of Oppression

The first component through which to address social justice education is one that recognizes and addresses the over-arching issue of oppression. Typically, when people hear the word "oppression" they view it in the most extreme sense. For example, Adams et al. (2007) refer to the image of the master beating the slave. They go on to say, "The political movements for equality of the past few decades have succeeded in challenging some the most glaring abuses of power. Yet, while advances have been made, the basic

relations of domination have been remarkably resistant to change" (p. 11). Similarly Young (1990) notes how general patterns of inequality continue to be reproduced even in the face of deliberate efforts to change them.

Oppression occurs in many different societal arenas—sometimes it is overt, but most often it is subtle. Numerous examples are found in the economic arena: the so-called "glass ceiling" for women, people of color, and those who are disabled; the correlation between poverty and race, made glaringly apparent in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, the widening of the gap between the "have's" and the "have not's;" the obvious disparity of resources for social services, including education in urban schools and highly populated minority communities; the constant worry of senior citizens and gay and lesbian employees losing their jobs due to a lack of protection; the resistance of employers and lawmakers to providing living wages; disappearing pensions and lack of universal health care. All of these are examples of economic oppressions.

In this country, the economic elite control the political landscape and exacerbate economic oppressions. Evidence of oppression includes cuts to social services and aid to all marginalized groups. For example, many health insurances will not cover women's reproduction choices but do so for men; or the widespread acceptance that the poor don't require (nor deserve) quality health care. We also see political oppressions perpetuated in the reelection of legislators who are reluctant to pass hate crimes bills which include sexual orientation and presentation; the tendency of some court decisions' inability to distinguish the line separating church and state, that is, creating voucher systems which use public funds for religious schools; faith-based services which ignore discrimination laws; and battles to include the teaching of "intelligent design." Political oppression made

visible in the under-representation of minorities and women in policy-making positions, whether in Congress or on school boards. Profiling, vigilante groups controlling the borders and inconsistent immigration policies are also examples of political oppression.

In the social arena, oppression exists despite policies that might indicate otherwise. Funding for housing, inaccessibility (elevators, ramps, wide aisles, etc) in private arenas, second-wave school segregation and a resistance for affirmative action efforts are examples of how our current society resists change. Likewise, claims of our country being a "Christian nation" disregard religious diversity and mock atheism. Social moralism leads to a lack of addiction treatments and medical care. The "war on drugs" and the variable enforcement of drug laws result in the exceptionally high and non-representative incarceration of minorities.

The instances of societal oppression whether economic, political, or social are innumerable. To best understand the specifics of oppression, we need to comprehend the systems that support and perpetuate these oppressions. Systems of oppression most often include the following characteristics: 1. unequal power relationships, 2. social construction, 3. systemic perpetuation, 4. normalization, and 5. sense of privilege. In order to fully understand these systems it is important to analyze the characteristics, define the terminology of each in terms of social justice and explore how each currently manifests within schools.

Unequal Power Relationships

Systems by their nature include power structures. Oppressive systems create hierarchies (by converting differences into inferiorities) and survive by unequal power

relationships. (Adams et al., 2007; Goodman 2001). Goodman reasons that naming the dynamic—that is, seeing systems constructed as oppositional binaries—will reflect the relationship: dominant/subordinate, agent/target, privileged/marginalized, oppressor/oppressed, advantaged/disadvantaged, majority/minority. So when examining sexism, the agent/target (privileged/marginalized, etc.) translates to the dyad of men/women; racism, black/white; ableism, (understood or assumed) able/disabled; heterosexism, straight/gay; and religious oppression, Christian/non-Christian. The hierarchal nature of these dyads sets up relationships in which one group will benefit (sometimes unconsciously) at the (sometimes complicit) expense of the other.

Social oppression involves a relationship between an agent group and a target group that keeps the system of domination in place. Recognizing the importance of collusion to the system of oppression does not mean that targets share equal responsibility for their situation with agents or that they collude willingly. Rather, the collusion of targets is the result over time of agents taking control of the institution (Adams et al., 2007).

Educational institutions, as mirrors of society, are one of the most far-reaching systems of oppression. Although schools have never been institutions of equity or equality (Banks, 1993), those with power in the decision-making positions seem to have little awareness of the systemic factors that contribute to an equal (or unequal) playing field. According to Brantlinger (2003): "Through their roles of concerned parents, responsive school officials, and dedicated school board trustees, the college-educated class may believe that they design schools as meritocracies in which all children have opportunity to realize their potential and get ahead" (p. 190-91). These decision makers

believe that if they consider everyone equal, the playing field is neutral and impacts all students equally. For instance, standardized tests are age and grade determined without consideration of differences in prior preparation or language-speaking skills. Nevertheless, "this belief in neutrality is an attempt to conceal the unequal distribution of power" (Ng, 2003, p. 215). Traditionally, school leadership (administration, boards, etc.) is controlled by middle-class white males whose decisions are not (or cannot be) questioned by marginalized groups (Anguiano, 2003). The governing boards do not have proportional representation of the non-privileged, although they may include token representation. The school board may seek out a Polynesian board member, but that member's cultural differences are expected to be subsumed by white culture. Consequently, the group least affected by the reform usually makes reform measures. Spring, in Strauss (1997) emphasizes, "political power is the key to having a school system serve a group's educational interest" (p. 244). For example, privileged parents, flexing their political muscle, demand the best resources and the most access to the highest quality educational experiences. Because of this power, those students who are already advantaged end up getting the best educations. Less-influential parents have similar wants for their children, but for a variety of reasons they do not have the assertiveness to insist that their voices be heard. These less-influential parents are not represented for numerous reasons, such as language, class, economics, cultural understanding; therefore, they have no power. Many have become resigned to an unjust social system. They have internalized the belief of "life's disparities [so] they tend to expect school inequities and do not feel entitled to make demands" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 13). An example of this internalization is when Christian holidays have become so

entrenched in school's daily lives that non-Christian parents despair at any attempt to get schools to acknowledge the oppression such celebrations create for their students. Jeynes' (2003) study examining the effects of parent involvement on children's academic achievement verifies that although it is well known that parental involvement is critical to students' success, it is even more vital for minority students in all academic areas. The conundrum is that it is more difficult for minority parents to involve themselves due to the systemic oppression that they face.

Unequal power and its effects manifest themselves in the unequal and inequitable funding of education. It has been long understood that disparities in student achievement correlate with the character and quality of the school (Brantlinger, 2003). The schools that poor, working class, immigrant, inner city and minority students attend are significantly under-funded. Most of these students attend large urban schools, which spend far less money per student than suburban schools. (Carbo, 1995; Kugler, 2002). Under-funded schools will most likely have inadequate libraries, a sparsity of enrichment opportunities, a lack of physical-fitness equipment, as well as less-qualified teachers and administrators. The disparities in resource distribution have sparked a call for equal funding. On its face, this equality looks fair. But on further examination it is evident that those with greater needs require greater resources; they need equitable, not equal, distribution of resources.

The effects of unequal access to power undermine all facets of the educational system, from the top decision makers down to the individual classrooms, where students have very little voice in making decisions about their own educations. The socially-

constructed hierarchal ladder of domination/subordination which is the underlying theme

of oppression is replicated throughout the entire educational system.

Social Construction

As a construction, oppression is not without intention; consequently systems of

oppression are not without intention. "The creation of dominant/subordinate group

binaries (or hierarchies) is not purposeless. It represents an important set of

interdependent relations: superiority needs inferiority, normality/abnormality,

success/failure, ability/disability, winner/loser. The role and status of dominant groups

hinges on the existence of subordinates" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 4). These characteristics

(ie. normality or superiority) are not inherent, hereby making the status deserving. "These

are socially constructed and reproduced social dynamics" (Goodman, 2001, p. 6). These

relationships keep the system of domination (and oppression) in place.

Schools, as much as any other institution, reflect the social constructions of

American society. Much of what I have considered above as social constructions (belief

in meritocracy, movement toward equality as opposed to equity, low expectations, etc.)

are the mainstays of the educational system and are deeply embedded, institutionalized,

and inherently unfair to the diverse populations served by schools. Cultural capital is

another social construction, and educational practitioners often "confuse the lack of some

forms of cultural capital as the lack of ability and intelligence on the part of culturally-

different students" (English, 2002, p. 306). Additionally, the almost sacred status of

standardized test scores as evidence of learning unfortunately masks the inherent

systemic discrimination and dismissal of educational differences. (Hunter & Bartee, 2003).

Equally constructed is the traditional view that teaching is a politically-neutral profession, which basically serves to transmit "universally," accepted truths. This neutrality translates to transmitting the norm, or the hegemony, of the majority. In many curricula, current bodies of knowledge represent an education that is sexist, classist, racist, etc. and ignores other historically- marginalized populations and "venerates middle or upper economic class values, whiteness and maleness. This type of education disaffirms students of color, female students and students who come from lower social class backgrounds" (Giroux, 1991, p. 58). For example, in science education, the current trend encouraging more females to choose science careers has primarily resulted in curriculum add-ons. Instructors will perhaps highlight a few contributions made by women scientists. Sometimes described as the "add women and stir" (Maher, 1999) approach, this technique ultimately does little to affect systemic change because the underlying masculinity governing the field of science is never questioned nor deconstructed.

Deconstruction of the social norms requires dialogue along with safe spaces for this dialogue to occur. However, most schools have created (whether unwittingly or not) communities of silence where acknowledgement let alone critical analysis of diversity (or lack thereof) is discouraged. This silence is especially notable regarding the issue of sexual orientation. Silence—usually coupled with unspoken threats and fear— surrounding sexual identity and orientation is unfortunately pervasive in most schools.

This social construction of oppression is not only problematic but consistently perpetuated.

<u>Systemic Perpetuation</u>

The perpetuation of oppression occurs through individual acts as well as through institutional and cultural practices. From a social change-perspective, those from privileged groups are particularly responsible for oppression. They have access to resources, information, and power that can either block or help facilitate change. For example, the exclusion of people with disabilities from many jobs does not require overt discrimination against them. Business-as-usual is sufficient to prevent changes. "Physical barriers to access go unnoticed by those who walk up the stairs, reach elevator buttons and telephones, use furniture and tools that fit their bodies and functional needs and generally move in a world that is designed to facilitate the passage" (Adams et al., 2007, p. 11).

Apfelbaum, a Jewish refugee to France during World War II, theorizes that dominant groups develop standards based on their own characteristics and customs and expect others to emulate their styles and assimilate to their customs whether it's feasible for them or productive for society (Brantlinger, 2003). These influential groups also create myths about human features related to race, ethnicity, class, and gender that mark, label, brand, and stigmatized others as outsiders (Applebaum, 2001). Dominant group members imply that outlooks within their collective are homogenous and that outsiders have little in common with them (Shanahan & Jones, 2003). Their power is maximized when the *us/them* binary is seen as fundamental and irreversible (Bourdieu, 2003).

Applebaum (2001) points out that centering one group simultaneously marginalizes the other. Due to their low position in status hierarchies or history of unfavorable relations with dominant groups, peripheral groups have little access to goods and services (Talbert-Johnson, 2004).

Educational institutions, perhaps more so than other more flexible systems, perpetuate oppression since those in power institutionally discourage questioning the status quo. Current social-justice research demonstrates, as Freire (1985) reveals, "it is society that shapes education according to the interest of those who have the power" (p. 13). Education traditionally is complicit in the systemic perpetuation of existing power hierarchies. Transformation to a socially-just education system requires critical analysis of the status quo and "the deconstruction of the grand narrative" (Foucault, 2001, p. 131). Nevertheless, educational practitioners are socially encouraged to be apolitical (Kailin, 2002) and to conform rather than reform; in fact, conformity to institutional ideology, rules and authority without critique of their underlying assumptions (Adams et al., 2007) is highly valued by those with the most power within the education hierarchy and therefore implicitly rewarded.

One particular damaging trend in education, which illustrates the lack of critique and the resulting systemic perpetuation of inequities, is the use of standardized testing. NCLB mandates testing as a means of measuring learning outcomes, seemingly without questioning the racist, repressive, and exclusionary theories behind standardized tests which "have frequently been used as a basis for segregating and sorting students, principally those whose cultures and languages differ from the mainstream" (Nieto 1995, p. 145). In the past, standardized testing has been utilized to successfully promote

privileged hegemony, and for that reason it stands to reason that testing will continue to do so because the methodology, motives, and underlying assumptions of the tests have not been analyzed critically through a social-justice lens. Educators are often intimidated by the powers that be and are reluctant to question or resist (especially since federal funding is involved) the emphasis on high-stakes standardized testing.

Teachers especially are socialized (and trained) to see teaching, curricula and testing as being neutral and certainly not racist, sexist, heterosexist, Eurocentric, etc. For example, elementary teachers continue to use pictures of a white mother and father and children to represent the term "family" without acknowledging how many of their students simply do not see "family" in that same way.

Educators' lack of critical analysis of the status quo may be shaped by their resistance and reluctance to change not only how they "do" education, but they also resist altering the "what" of curricula content. In spite of individual efforts by teachers in most schools, curriculum is not challenged nor does it embrace a broad scope of methodologies to meet the specific needs of a diverse student body. For example, teachers may not take into consideration that the heroes they are teaching may in no way resemble or resonate with their students. How is an American Indian student to respond to Columbus if the Euro-centric viewpoint of his "discovery" is perpetuated? Nor do textbooks represent the make-up of a class: a study by Sadker and Sadker (1994) found that history books were likely to have four times more male illustrations and pictures than females. Educational methodology continues to not address different learning styles; teachers often group students by ability, failing to recognize the benefits of low-achieving students' exposure to high-achieving students who can model mastery of learning tasks. Instead, "low-

achieving students have only one another to observe and imitate" (Knapp & Shields, 1990, p. 756). Teachers also miss the point that the high-achieving students are positively affected as well. Likewise, teachers are reluctant to question the validity of current testing. For instance, the under-achievement of low-income, bilingual, children assigns the deficit to the children or to the specific schools. Trifonas (2003) argues that by framing underachievement in this way, "we expel culture, language, identity, intellect, and imagination from our image of the child. Similarly, these constructs are nowhere to be found in our image of the effective teachers of these children, nor in policies that might guide instruction" (p. 47). Consequently, the skills of the dominant ideology are valued and therefore privileged. In other words, "schools have largely served to maintain the privileges of European American upper-class males by intentionally or unintentionally withholding educational opportunities to lower-income students, female students and students of color" (Sommers, 2001, p. 12).

In fact, teacher education programs which encourage change and which encourage teachers to be resisters to oppressive and failing curriculums by "examin[ing] underlying political and economic forces which maintain the status quo at their school sites," are rare. Rare enough to make UCLA's program which develops novice teachers as change agents an exception to the rule rather than common practice (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 223).

Also many changes specifically designed to address diversity commence without a real critique or interrogation of the "origins of inequities and how they are perpetuated," (Sommers, 2001, p. 61), the collective consequences of such approaches, or the technical as opposed to the "critical or epistemological aspects of teaching" (Cochran-Smith, 1991,

p. 285). In addition, the lack of recognition of (and therefore the lack of responsibility for) the relationship between power and knowledge—Foucault's "regime of truth" (Sommers, 2001, p. 64) in most remedies, "ensures the domination of white upper-class males and thus antidemocratic values" (Sommers, 2001, p. 41). Consequently, unless educators denounce dominant ideology and structures of domination, schools as social constructs will continue to reflect and reproduce society's oppressions.

Normalization and Internalization of Oppression

        Normalization and internalized oppression are mutually dependant on each other and make-up the fourth characteristic of systems of oppression. Normalization is the false belief that the customs, actions, language and attitudes of the dominant group's hegemony are the norm and represent how society "should" be organized. Hegemony, according to Gramsci, Foucault, and others (Adams et al., 2007) is the commonly accepted social view created by the dominant group so successfully that the view is accepted as part of the natural order. According to Foucault, "Hegemony helps [us] understand power as relational and dynamic, something that circulates within a web of relationships in which we all participate, rather than as something imposed from top down" (p. 11). In addition, Adams et al. point out that every-day normalization is established when attitudes and social roles are internalized, consequently (and without questioning or challenging) reinforcing systems of domination.

        The normalization of oppressive systems (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc.) is fueled by and therefore perpetuated by internalization. We often think of oppression as something or someone out there doing the oppressing. On further examination, Adams et

al. note that "oppression resides not only in external social institutions and norms, but also in the psyche as well" (p. 5). It is important to understand that both groups (agent and target) internalize attitudes that contribute to and maintain systems of oppression. For example, the idea that people with physical disabilities cannot (or are not expected to) contribute to society can be internalized by both the abled and disabled alike. Homophobia and heterosexism are ingrained by our society in both straight and gay people. Both internalize the fear, hatred, and marginalization but in different ways and with differing consequences. The subordinate group internalizes the acceptance of the status quo by incorporating negative images of itself which are advanced and encouraged by the dominant society. This acceptance (of the non-acceptance) sparks feelings of inadequacies and self-hatred and results in paralysis, resignation and powerlessness. This inability to act perpetuates the norms of the dominant group.

Similarly, agents internalize domination as well. Prejudices and feelings of superiority and privilege are accepted as the norm and therefore believed to be universal and correct. The agents then perpetuate the status quo by colluding with the system. For example, the controversy regarding same-sex marriage classically illustrates internalized subordination and domination. Many lesbians and gay men accept the unavailability of marital rights, reasoning that because they have chosen an "alternative lifestyle" they do not deserve what others have.

In schools the normalization and internalization can be seen in deficit theories and in the belief that some students can't learn. These represent internalized oppressions. One change in perception that must be examined at all levels is the belief that all students from all backgrounds *can* learn and are not inherently deficient. Prevalent across the

nation is the belief that many marginalized students (i.e., non English-speaking, disabled, economically challenged, culturally different, racially different, etc.) do not have the ability nor the capacity to learn (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Cooper, 2003; Garcia & Guerrera, 2004; Kugler, 2002; Valverde, 2004). Likewise, gender stereotypes continue to influence beliefs about learning. For example, former Harvard University President Lawrence Summers (2006) fell into this stereotyping trap and was quoted in the *Boston Globe* saying that "innate differences" explained why most top scientists and mathematicians were male. Consequently, due to political pressure, he later retracted his statement and resigned in February, 2006.

A serious consequence of educators believing that certain students cannot learn is that less-than-rigorous curriculum is seen as the answer (Barton, 2004). Much of the literature documents that teachers expect less of their marginalized students than that of their affluent white classmates. Hence, many reforms seem to stall because "in some instances manifestation of caring and concern seemed to disguise lowered teacher expectations; that is, they appeared to have written off the learning potential of their [marginalized] students" (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, p. 160). For example, teachers who teach students who are at risk of failure often use individual seat work with students constantly practicing basic skills and repetition. Because of these low expectations, urban schools will often have fewer accelerated (gifted and talented, college prep and enrichment) programs. Physically disabled students (with cerebral palsy or mild Downs Syndrome, for example) may be relegated to special education programs regardless of their mental capabilities. Carbo (1995) challenged that a lack of rigor is exactly what these students don't need. She argues that those students who are challenged with

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meaningful content, problem solving and academic real life application make far greater progress that those who receive basic skills instruction.

Currently schools undertake attempts to counteract the pervasive perception that not all students can learn. These endeavors to change educators' attitudes and stereotypes (often single-day teacher workshops), are usually systemically ineffective because any occurring change is usually personal, rather than institutional. In addition, current pre-service education programs usually devote very little class work to examining the would-be teachers "fairly naïve and…stereotypical beliefs about urban children" (Schultz et al., 2004, p. 27). Talbert-Johnson (2004) argues that most white student teachers "bring little awareness or understanding of discrimination" (p. 27) especially regarding racism, sexism, able-ism, heterosexism, class-ism, and religious and gender oppression.

The internalization (and normalization) of the belief in deficit theories is another common bias that has detrimental impact on education (Cooper, 2003). Currently, if students do not meet the expected norms, they are expected to adapt; and if unable to adapt, they are considered the ones who are deficient (Carbo, 1995). Likewise, if reform programs fail to achieve desired results, deficit beliefs are likely to be reinforced. "In this outdated paradigm, not knowing English is a deficit; limited life experience is a deficit; being a hands-on learner is a deficit; and requiring demonstration and modeling in order to learn is a deficit." (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, p. 151) The list of 'deficits' is dangerously long. Too often students who cannot adapt easily are placed in remedial and compensatory programs, or they are placed in low tracts, and given inferior, overly simplified objectives and materials, and undemanding and repetitive skill work (Carbo, 1995). Students' finding themselves "deficient" are often labeled "at risk,"

"underachievers," "likely to fail," "trouble makers," and "slow learners," which only serve to internalize the deficit theories (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, p. 151) in both teachers and students.

Coupled with the belief in deficit theories is the mistaken, but deeply embedded, belief in meritocracy. Normalized and internalized in the educational practitioner and in the educational system is the perception that failure is the student's fault and success comes from hard work. (Banks, 1993; Brantlinger, 2003). These beliefs are taught (and therefore reinforced) in our schools. Students are led to believe that if they fail, it is their own fault (and theirs alone) because they are lazy, un-ambitious and apathetic. (Banks, 1993). Again, changes are likely to be unsuccessful due to failure to examine internalized educational beliefs.

Because we have so normalized (and therefore have internalized) a Euro-centric, white heterosexual culture, educational scholars see that an educational paradigm shift must take place. This shift must be in the education system's comprehension of cultural relevancy in both curriculum and pedagogy. Examining and understanding the diverse cultural values, beliefs and practices of the school population are essential for successful schools (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Lewis-Charp, 2003; Major & Brock, 2003).

> This [cultural relevancy] includes knowledge of second language acquisition theory and pedagogy, use of culturally relevant curriculum, the propensity to validate the students' home language and culture, engagement in reflectivity and professional growth, a clear sense of [teachers'] own ethnicity, and a commitment to student advocacy. (Major & Brock, 2004, p. 8)

However, many educators do not bring a cultural lens or framework to the work they do with students and school programs. Many educators cannot see how the normalization of their own (educational, sociological or linguistic) experiences colors their own

expectations and definitions of success. For example, in their study of teachers' cultural

competence, Garcia and Guerra (2004) found that "because participants were generally

unaware of the interactions between culture, cognition, [and] teaching and learning, their

existing multicultural knowledge was applied in a very limited way to issues of

curriculum, pedagogy, classroom management or parental involvement" (p.161).

Traditional school activities such as proms for straight kids, "sex" education meaning

"heterosexual sex", and adding "Lady," or -ette to girls' sports names are all so

normalized that the exclusionary and diminishing consequences are rarely considered or

addressed.

Oppression Through Privilege

Privilege is another characteristic of systems of oppression. McIntosh (1990)

speaks of privilege as an "unearned asset" (p. 31). For example, privilege allows one to

take for granted that the color of one's skin—if white in the US—will not cause suspicion

or be the reason for a traffic stop. Marriage is not a special right if one is heterosexual,

and a college education is not unthinkable if one is upper-middle class. Brantlinger,

(2003) goes on to point out:

> White people do not see skin color as a privileging force, men do not see
> masculinity as advantaging them, affluent people do not name the benefits of
> financial assets, and scholars do not see how their cultural and social capital allow
> them to dominate professional organizations. (p. 4)

McIntosh (1990) sees privilege as an invisible knapsack that we carry obliviously

throughout life. The backpack contains the provisions of life: the assets we can count on

cashing in on as we go through life. Because of privilege "many doors are open for

certain people through no virtues of their own "(Grant & Lei, 2001, p. 35). Nevertheless,

privilege does, but should not go unacknowledged. We can become aware of how privilege operates and is perpetuated within systems, as well as become aware of how privilege allows others to utilize it either to the betterment or detriment of others.

Schools mask the oppressiveness of privilege with silence or denial (McIntosh, 1990). Schools find it unproblematic to address the needs of students labeled "disadvantaged" without defining or identifying what is meant by its binary mate— "advantaged" students. Educators tend to focus on students' "lack" without acknowledging the privileged position of those in power who presumably define the meaning of "lack." McIntosh argues, "[educators] keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subjects taboo" (p. 36).

To be fair, what looks like silence could actually be educators' lack of awareness of the privileges associated with gender, race, socio-economic status, ability, and heterosexuality. For example, the power of privilege is denied when educators teach (and treat) diverse students by neutralizing differences, asserting that gender or race, for example, is irrelevant. Howard (1999) discusses a white elementary teacher's response during a multicultural workshop: She says,

> I don't understand all this talk about differences. Each of my little kindergarten students comes to me with the same stuff. It doesn't matter whether they're Black, Hispanic or White, they each have a brain, a body, and a family. They each get the same curriculum. I treat them all alike. And yet, by the end of the year, and as I watch them move up through the grades, the Blacks and Hispanics fall behind, and the White kids do better. They all start with the same basic equipment. What happens? (p. 25)

Howard goes on to discuss the teacher's "innocent confusion" and the harms of seeing students as coming to school with "all the same stuff" (p. 25). Trifonas (2003) asserts, "Neutrality is an attempt to conceal the unequal distribution of power" (p. 215).

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Unfortunately very little focus is placed on the self-awareness of privilege required of teachers and administrators. Such awareness requires "reflection, courage and planning" (Polite & Saenger, 2003, p. 275). Likewise, students need to be conscious of privilege. As McIntosh (1990) points out, White students "think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see 'whiteness' as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation" (p. 35). Talking about privilege, rather than silence or ignorance, is essential for a democratic education system.

Privilege also comes into play when we look at the link between academic success and parental involvement. Research consistently reveals "a relationship exists between school system effectiveness, the socio-economic status of families in the community and the educational level of parents" (Bainbridge & Lesley, 2002, p. 424). However, parents without the necessary cultural capital (i.e. understanding the school system and language skills) and time (because of multiple jobs or limited time off) are effectively removed from the equation. This marginalization greatly diminishes these parents' presence in their children's academic experiences and their power in schools.

Most schools do not assertively seek the active presence by poor and minority parents. For that reason, parents from privileged groups are more visible and more effective in securing resources and quality education for their children. "They have access to resources, information, and power that can either block or help facilitate change" (Goodman, 2001, p. 2), so consequently students of privileged groups receive

better educations. Continuing the status quo of funding public schools through local property tax base ensures better schools for privileged students and poorer ones for marginalized students. Nevertheless, persons of privilege, as Goodman points out, can make powerful allies who can "influence decision making, allocate funds, share needed skills and knowledge, and be role models for other dominant group members to support equity" (p. 2). Ignoring privilege hurts everyone involved in education.

<center>Explores Multiple Identities and Intersections of Oppression</center>

Social justice education is more than knowing about or even taking action against oppression. Without combining the other areas—exploring multiple identities and intersections of oppression and examining aspects of individual verses systemic change— social justice education would prove to be limited, as are other perspectives that currently address diversity. Social justice education would be limited in that it would not allow for the level of consciousness to be developed that would allow for meaningful understanding of the multiple causes of social injustice. It would be like looking at the failures associated with the response to the 2005 Katrina hurricane catastrophe as a single cause: such as blaming only poverty, or blaming only race, or blaming only the Bush administration. No one aspect is solely to blame, but rather the multiple aspects are contributing factors and all are to blame. Instead of only identifying and naming oppressions—in a sense laying blame—social justice education to be successful must also look carefully at how multiple identities and intersections of oppressions impact educational reform. Seeing the importance of multiple identities and intersections of oppression constitutes the second component of my social justice education framework.

Before focusing on the complexity inherent in conceiving multiple identities, education practitioners must challenge their beliefs about the "essence" of an identity. Well-meaning efforts such as holding a multicultural assembly, acknowledging black history month, or including a "minority" author, artist or scientist only further entrench the idea of essentialness of certain groups. Educators often believe they are addressing diversity without allowing that even within a single social group a diversity of perspectives and realities are represented. Sommers (2001) warns, "We cannot ascribe fixed essences and treat people as 'representative' of given cultures, and even genders. Treating them as various and situated, we have to take into account a diversity of perspectives and realities (p. 34).

For example, educators often base academic expectations built on a belief system of assumptions about a specific group. They may believe that education is not important to Hispanic families, that African American students come from poverty and are therefore under prepared, or that language difficulties—such as a speech impediment or non-American accent—indicate a lack of intelligence. Then with these assumptions, they may teach and treat all students from those groups identically. Students may also feel invisible within their own group and feel they are not known for who they really are. Individual students cannot reach their potential as fully developed multi-faceted human beings if they are trapped within the box of representation.

Multiple Identities

Once educators have moved beyond the essential representational approach to dealing with diversity, they must grasp the idea of multiple identities. The concept of

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multiple identities acknowledges that all students have more than one identity and belong to different social groups that often overlap one other (Adams et al., 2007; Grant & Lei, 2001; Shapiro, Sewell, & DuCette, 1995). For example, a student may be both Black, male and gay; or White, female, and disabled, or transgendered, Christian and Latino. Or a student may be White, male, and heterosexual. In other words, individuals all experience life based on more than one identity. Therefore, many students find that they must compartmentalize much of their school experience, not knowing where they fit. A coalition-building effort between different minority focused clubs (GSA's, Black Pride, Disability groups, etc.) is rare. A student may be asked to choose between a bible study club and a gay/ straight club as the clubs don't allow or value multiple identities— Christian and lesbian—and the complexity of the intersections.

Intersections of Oppression

Where these identities meet are the intersections, and those intersections are multi-faceted and complex. Applebaum (2001) asserts, "as individuals, our personal identities are an intersection of countless group affinities and are composed of membership in diverse and often conflicting social groups" (p. 57). The conflicts are understood by looking at oppression. Students can experience both dominant and subordinate or privileged or oppressed status concurrently (Adams et al., 2007; Applebaum, 2001; Sommers, 2001). Young (1990) observes that "group differences cut across individual lines in a multiplicity of ways that can entail privilege and oppression for the same person in different respects (p. 42). However, an individual who is a White, male, Christian, able-bodied, and heterosexual holds the greatest inherent social capital

and power. Another student who is White, male Christian, able-bodied, but homosexual could be marginalized—the other privileged identities ignored—as homosexual. Nevertheless, if students have several target identities, they will most likely experience what Adams et al. (2007) call "intersections of oppression" (p. 5). Grant and Lei (2001) use the expression "interrelated nature of oppression" (p. 230). McIntosh (1990) uses "the interlocking of oppressions" (p. 35). Regardless of what they are called, these intersections question the validity of a hierarchy of oppression where one oppression is seen as trumping all others.

It is important to recognize that in social justice education commitment there is no "hierarchy of oppression," a phrase coined by Lorde (1996). For example, racial oppression is not any more severe or odious than religious oppression. Regrettably many approaches have a tendency to pick up only one issue (or one oppression) which reinforces differences constructed along lines of gender or race and ability" (Trifonas, 2003). For example, anti-racist education has many components of a socially just application. However, the program insists that racism is by far the most egregious and stands atop the ladder of oppressions. A socially-just educational system realizes "no one form of oppression is the base for all others, and no simple definition includes them all, but all connected within a system that makes them possible. Social justice education believes that eradicating oppression ultimately requires the struggle against all its forms, and that building coalitions among diverse people offers the most promising strategies for challenging oppression systematically" (Adams et al., 2007, p. 6).

Understandably, this recognition of multiple identities and intersections is very difficult. In a classroom for example, teachers do not see their students' multiple

identities just as their students do not see the teacher's multiple identities. Students do not

acknowledge a teacher's middle-aged male, heterosexual status; they see only

teacher/authority figure. Likewise, teachers often overwhelmed by sheer numbers tend to

see a classroom full of students who if they work hard enough all have an equal

opportunity to succeed.

Therefore, unless education embraces a multi-faceted concept of identities along

with their complex intersections, it will continue to apply broad-cookie cutter approaches

and/or resort to add-ons to accommodate (and marginalize) differences. A socially-just

education is neither of these but is an interplay between individual and systemic change

that challenges the status quo at its very core. Therefore, the third component of social

justice education focuses on this change.

The Interplay Between Individual and Systemic Change

The final and essential component of a socially-just education addresses the need

for change on an institutional level as well as on a personal level. The complex interplay

between individual and systemic change necessarily must be integrated into the

educational system in order to achieve an equitable education for all students.

Individual Change

Educational practitioners must experience individual change and understanding

regarding social justice before they can influence systemic change. At first glance,

personal change seems to be about identifying discriminating attitudes, behaviors, and

prejudices within individuals. Usually the intent of this introspection comes with creating

teachers who are more sensitive toward the "other."

Much of what is being accomplished in schools currently through various

approaches to addressing diversity is directed at developing this individual sensitivity.

Adams et al. (2007) point out that at the personal level, change is directed at beliefs or

behaviors of the person rather than at system practices. They speak of "conscious or

unconscious actions or attitudes that maintain oppression. Examples include harassment,

rape, racial/ethnic/religious slurs, and behavior that excludes targets" (p. 18). These, of

course, are important attitudes to address. Prejudice reduction, teaching for tolerance, and

anti-bias education, for example, offer workshops for teachers and students that focus on

concepts such as respect, self-esteem and dialogue. The goal is to increase acceptance

and empathy toward marginalized students. Most workshops provide teachers with

strategies for specific classes or groups of students. Diversity education goes beyond

acceptance and tolerance and focuses on cultural awareness and the celebration of

"differences." Schools utilizing such a program will offer ethnic food fairs, assemblies

and other "awareness" experiences for students.

Addressing inequities and raising awareness and sensitivity are admirable

accomplishments. However, without raising an individual's consciousness regarding the

root causes of injustice and inequity, the programs cannot implement the widespread and

systemic changes necessary. In a socially-just education, sensitivity is not enough;

educators must go through the process of developing what Shor (1992) calls "critical

consciousness," (p. 26); Bartolome (2001) calls "political clarity" (p. 55); and Leistyna,

(2001) "presence of mind." (p. 55). Bartolome discusses this process as a way for

individuals to recognize "possible linkages between macro-level political, economical, and social, variables and subordinated groups' academic performance at the micro-level classroom" (p. 55). This process will allow for individuals to recognize their place in pervading hierarchal structures. The process enables them to recognize how race, class, gender, economics, sexuality, and ability affect their perceptions of the world and, in turn, their classroom practices.

Individual educators must also examine how such prejudices lead to inequitable learning experiences. For example, teachers who believe success can be explained by the metaphor "pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps" must examine how the metaphor fails to explain how "structural inequality sometimes gets in the way of individual efforts" (Nieto, 2004, p. 37). They must examine the idea that oppression cannot be based on meritocracy alone; because for subordinates, oppression is always connected to their social group membership. This reflection may allow individuals to unlearn beliefs and prejudices. Not only must individuals go through a process of unlearning, but they must also gain an awareness of the need to dismantle unequal power structures that maintain oppression. This personal change is crucial in order to attempt systemic changes.

Systemic Change

Individual beliefs and behaviors are hurtful and damaging, but it is institutional discrimination, "that leads to detrimental practices and policies…. The major difference between individual and institutional discrimination is the wielding of power, because it is primarily through the power of the people who control institutions such as schools that oppressive policies and practices are reinforced and legitimated" (Nieto, 2004, p. 37).

Understanding that oppression and discrimination are embedded within systems, and not just within individuals, makes it possible for educators to see the damaging effects that social injustice has on their students.

Nieto (2004) illustrates this difference with an example of one being prejudiced against tall people. As an individual, one can say hurtful comments to tall people and exclude them from friendships but do very little to hinder their life progress. But if someone is in power, along with others who dislike tall people, then s/he can influence policies, laws and institutions that limit choices and progress of tall people. Therefore, systemic racism (or any of the other –isms) has a much more far-reaching negative impact on its targets than individual beliefs.

Therefore, to change a system, the entire organization must change and must be willing to change. All members invested in transforming an educational environment would need to apply a more inclusive model for change, such as what Bailey Jackson (Jackson & Hardiman, 1994) coined as the Multicultural Organizational Development (MCOD) model. Although typically applied in corporate settings to address racism and sexism, the MCOD model addresses the cultural, institutional, and individual aspects that are applicable to schools. Driscoll (cited in Ouellett, 1998) defines MCOD as an "organizational transformation effort that has as its primary objective the creation of socially-diverse and socially-just organizations" (p. 54).

Jackson and Hardiman (1994) lay out a vision of what systemic change would entail. He says individuals alone cannot change systems. Systemic change is a dialogical process involving a diversity of vision, perspective, and language—as the words we have now may be inadequate to create the just system needed. He stresses that such a

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transformation is a process and requires "a lifelong commitment to social justice and social diversity" (p. 117).

Ouellett (1998), in his yearlong application of MCOD in schools, found that systemic transformation is only possible if the interventions "focus on the entire system. This implicitly acknowledges organizations are organism-like in that effort to change any one part necessarily must influence the whole body" (p. 54). He, too, sees it as a continuous process that must come from the top down as well as the bottom up.

Currently in schools, unfortunately, change for social justice is still very much an add-on approach. Or it is a "one-size fits all" solution. Or it focuses on the "other" and not on everyone. Or it is an issue-driven program that fades when the issue dies or the participants move on. Or it fails to examine the hierarchy of power. Or it gets lost in the standards movement and other oppressive structures that dominate. Or it is decided upon by an elite group, excluding most voices. Or it gets lost in the silence of institutional oppression. Or it seems unfeasible because the injustice is so entrenched in the system and the freedom to change seems impossible.

To conclude, change—both on the individual and institutional level—is necessarily intertwined. Systemic transformation cannot occur without individual change as its foundation. But individual change is not enough. This interplay of change is on-going and eventually includes every aspect of the organization.

Conclusion

What is currently happening in schools is shortchanging all of America's youth. Those closely invested in education know that as demographics shift and economic

disparities expand, existing problems exponentially increase. Therefore, they have generated myriad approaches to address their growing concerns. Schools across the nation are sometimes only superficially addressing racism, sexism, heterosexism, able-ism, religious prejudice and attempting to stem the tide of their devastating effects. Granted, these efforts are certainly not without merit. However, they often barely treat the symptoms and rarely set about eliminating the root cause. It's almost as if our students were being treated triage units which hope better, more intensive attention will be available later. Unfortunately, to extend the analogy, ineffective care early on usually has devastating lasting effects; receiving an unjust and inequitable education is as life threatening as receiving inadequate medical care.

In this literature review, I have presented the current the problems and challenges faced by k-12 schools and indicated how researchers have found students' learning and achievement to be adversely affected. I have also examined the efforts currently being made to rectify these problems. In pointing out the limitations of current programs, I have underscored the idea that it is imperative to implement systemic change. I have presented as a possibility for change a trifocal lens framework, which addresses the fundamental components of social justice education.

What the research for social justice education suggests is that an overarching educational approach requires nothing less than a paradigm shift. We need to rethink and retool our educational perceptions. To this view, this framework of social justice education is specifically constructed to expose, address and eliminate the unjust and discriminating elements entrenched in our educational systems. A socially just education draws the institutional silence of oppression out of the dark corners where it has

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incubated for decades and places it in the forefront. A socially just education also requires dedicated educational practitioners to alter their approaches by knowing the complexities and meeting points of multiple identities and committing to successful implementation of individual and systemic transformation. At that point, the educational system can then shift from a construct that continues to endlessly reproduce the status quo to one that overcomes personal, cultural and societal oppressions to make academic achievement and social change a reality for all students. With a social justice education program in place, every level of education, from the top decision maker to the individual classroom teacher, will meet the challenge of educating a population who will be prepared to step into a global community with flexible personal and intellectual skills.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using the review of the literature above as a point of departure, this chapter presents the overall research design and methodology of my study. I also describe the individual participants, the school, the town involved in the study, and describe the value of the study to the participants. I continue by explaining my data-gathering techniques, management procedures and analysis strategies. Finally I address ethical considerations and the steps taken to safeguard trustworthiness.

The Research Questions

The following question is central to this study:

How do social justice goals manifest in one school?

Three sub questions guide the study:

1. How do the different members of the school community describe or define social justice?

2. What current programs do Middle School participants believe support social justice-related goals?

3. What current practices do the participants believe to be socially just?

Overarching Approach

The approach of this investigation is a descriptive case study utilizing qualitative research methodology. The questions this study poses lend themselves to a qualitative approach because according to Merriam (2001) "qualitative researchers are interested in

understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6). By studying an education community in a real and natural setting, a qualitative researcher can "produce knowledge that is useful in addressing recurring social issues" and can "become part of the process continually making choices, testing assumptions and reshaping [her] questions" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 5).

My research questions lend themselves to a descriptive case study as "case study is appropriate when the objective of an evaluation is to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of a program" (Merriam, 2001, p. 39). As Merriam (2001) points out, one strength of case study research is "[it] offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situation, the case study results in a rich and holistic account… (p. 40).

Research Site and Participants

Rossman and Rallis (1998) suggest that the ideal research site includes the following characteristics: "(a) entry is possible; (b) there is a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, structures of interest, or all of these; (c) strong relations with the participants are possible; and (d) ethical and political considerations are not overwhelming, at least initially" (p. 86).

Middle School (renamed for purposes of anonymity) where I chose to do my research met each of these characteristics. At the time of my study, Middle School community had already entered into a process of applying social-justice concepts and was

using some social-justice vocabulary. They were consciously attempting to implement socially just principles (regardless of the school's terminology) into Middle School's policies, programs and practices. Middle School was at that time led by a school leadership team who was interested in this project and actively encouraged faculty to participate. The community was open to the discovery and analysis process and to the possibility of change.

This study is single-site specific as my research questions focus on a specific school community. Since my study is based on a single education community—a bounded system—the most purposeful selection is the case selection. Therefore, according to Merriam (2001) once I agree upon the case (the specific school), "the sample *within* the case needs to be selected either before the data collection begins or while the data are being gathered…" (p. 65). The criteria which determined my sample selection and sample size within the school are the following: 1. Participants represent adequate numbers of each strata of the school community 2. Sampling "continues until no new information is forthcoming—when the point of redundancy is reached" (Merriam, 2001, p. 65).

Twenty-three adults volunteered to participate in this study. This group consisted of the superintendent of the school district, another central office administrator, the principal and the co-principal, a school counselor, two educators who directed special programs, an English Language Learner (ELL) teacher, and fifteen other teachers from a range of different subjects. Thirteen of the participants were female and 10 were male. Five identified as a persons of color, the rest as White. One identified as lesbian, the

others did not disclose their sexual orientation. All appeared to be able-bodied. Other social identities were not addressed.

In the next section I discuss the context pertinent to this case study. Specifically, I describe the school, the community in which it is located, and the reasons I chose the site for my research.

<center>Description of the School and the Community</center>

Middle School is located in a rural, agricultural area in New England and is situated within a diverse community offering numerous educational and cultural opportunities. According to the chamber of commerce website, the town enjoys a tradition of open, professional government; a high level of government services; quality education; support for open space and agriculture; and respect for its history dating back to its settlement in 1759.

The town has a population of approximately 35,000, with 79 percent being White. The minority population that makes up the remaining 20% is mostly Asian, Black, and Hispanic or Latino, and the average family income is $44,994 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

The community is located in a university corridor and has a strong tradition of promoting higher education and is host to two colleges and a university, one of which is often a contender for being one of the highest-rated liberal arts college in the nation. Intellectual capital is highly valued, and 69% of all adults in the community have a bachelors or graduate degree. As well as being highly educated, the majority of the residents are politically progressive. As of October 2006, 49% of voters registered as

Democrats, 45% were unaffiliated or belonged to other parties and the remaining 6% were registered Republican.

The educational institutions employ more of the public than any other industry. Most evenings are filled with some kind of community activity connected to one of the colleges or the university. This commitment to education is evident in the community's generous and consistent financial support for its excellent library. The superintendent of the school district described the educational bent of the town by saying

> What I admire and appreciate in this debate-filled town is the willingness of most everyone to listen and to learn. At the end of the discussion, the debate, or the day there may still be disagreement, but it is an informed and objective disagreement.

The town is among relatively few of its size in New England that has maintained its original method of governing. The town's government is highly unique in that it hasn't moved to a <u>mayor-council</u> or <u>council-manager</u> form of government. Instead, it has maintained the traditional <u>town meeting</u> (legislative) and <u>select board</u> (executive) organization with the town meeting made up of elected representatives of each precinct in the community. The select board hires a town manager to handle the day-to-day administrative details of running a town. In both 2003 and 2005 a group of citizens sought to abolish the 254-member town meeting with a new charter that would create a directly-elected mayor and a nine-member town council. The charter was rejected by voters both times. This unusual town government demonstrates how strongly the members of the community value a participatory form of government.

The Town is filled with culturally diverse shops and cafes. The Town is proud of the many social action projects, volunteer work and political activity attended by its

citizens. Any weekend will find citizens working on behalf of refugees, demonstrating in the street, and gathering in diverse groups for fairs, festivals and rallies.

Middle School belongs to a school district that also hosts five elementary schools and one high school. The values of the community are reflected in the school district's mission statement: "Our mission is the academic achievement of every student learning in a system dedicated to social justice and multiculturalism." The district educates a diverse population of approximately 4000 students, including native speakers of more than 25 languages. Middle School has approximately 600 students in the seventh and eighth grades. Most of the students live a significant distance from the school, evidenced by the 33 busses that serve Middle School each day. The school provides a wide variety of experiences for students in its 20 after school clubs. At the time of my study, the school had one principal and one co-principal who were both serving in interim positions while the district searched for a new leader. In addition, the school employs 62 teachers and support staff at the school. The school's faculty is highly professional with a large number of teachers with master's or doctoral degrees. Also indicative of its values the community, university and colleges have a long history of supporting the school, and many university and community members have donated countless hours to the schools in this town. The school district central offices and superintendent's office are housed inside Middle School's facilities and not in an expensive, elaborate building offsite.

Recently, the community has begun to experience changes in its demographics with pockets of extraordinary wealth as well as growing enclaves of low-income families. A steady migration of low-income families from several nearby economically-depressed communities is an emerging challenge to the school district. So too is the vibrant

language diversity that is evident in the town. Like many school districts, an achievement

gap is masked by the good standing of the district and the stellar performance of a

majority of the students on the mandatory state tests. A school district central office

employee describes the changing make-up of the community and the impact it has.

> We have lots of kids coming into the district that are English language learners or on free and reduced lunch. And this town is not used to this. They don't know what to do. What do you do with subsidized housing and poor people? In the last five years, [the town's] changed dramatically.

The community has a long history of social action, and many of its long-time residents

reach out to assist new residents. For example, while I was collecting data, the

community was organizing a benefit dinner in support of several refugee high school

students, who had recently crossed the border from El Salvador. The district employee

stated,

> Here's the side of the community that I love. There are new clothes coming in from all over the community, quietly, to the outreach worker who takes them to the kid who tries them on in a bathroom, who goes home with the big sweatshirt and the shoes and people do it quietly and don't make it a big deal.

She also discussed why she thinks the community does this kind of work.

> It is like a percolation occurring that is a result of a very, very, enhanced intellectual community coming together with what's morally right. In a system which has always sent kids to Harvard and all these other wonderful schools around, you've got people who really care. They want their kids to go to Harvard and Brown, but they also care pretty deeply about other people's kids. And they don't usually look away from other people. So they're dealing with the morality of it all. And it's been unbelievable.

Her following statement tellingly acknowledges that she also sees the community's

struggle to accommodate its changing demographics:

> I mean this is a beautiful community. This is a grassroots community and it's an intellectual community, but, there is a huge divide in this community. Huge. Huge.
> And we're trying to bridge it. And maybe it'll happen.

I chose Middle School as my research site for several reasons. First, the school has a history of addressing many of the issues that I identified in the literature review regarding approaches to diversity. Next, the district and specifically Middle School were working on multicultural initiatives and had in place two mandatory anti-bias trainings for faculty, and a middle-school gay/straight alliance. Finally (and most compelling) Middle School principal called me and offered her school as a research site because she was interested in my project. I had inquired about the possibility of research because I had learned that faculty regularly talked to students about race as a social construct, so I knew some social justice concepts were already in place. But the school's willingness to further address the issues was of paramount importance. I wanted to do a study in an environment that was not hostile or indifferent to the goals of social justice education. Middle School seemed to be a good place to begin asking my questions. Also the school climate—for faculty and students—was very conducive for an academic study. The student body as a group was respectful and kind to each other—and seemed very different from my previous experiences in a middle school setting. The teachers and administrators saw Middle School as a very positive place to work. The co-principal shared the following:

> Both the educational community and the community in general [is a positive and progressive environment] which makes it in many ways a safe environment or a safer environment to try things, to push the envelope a little bit, and I think that's great. I think that's why a lot of us come here to work, even though it's a very tough place to work because there are very high expectations for everyone. But at the same time there's opportunities to push the right [socially just] things for kids.

The openness, the willingness and the access afforded me made Middle School an excellent site for my research.

<u>Value to Participants</u>

Since my research focuses on the importance of social justice in our educational

systems, the study must be socially just in its development and its execution. Griffiths

(1998) insists that educational social justice research must result in social justice and be

conducted in a socially-just manner. Also, social justice *in* educational research creates "a

learning educational research community by and for everyone in it and for everyone

connected with it" (p. 95).

Griffiths (1998) lays out 10 principle of social justice educational research based

on a solid social justice foundation. She elaborates how these principles guide the

research design, define the reciprocity of the relationship between the researcher and the

participants, and characterize the meanings in the findings. I also believe these principles

express the value of the research to the participants (as well as to me—the researcher and

to the broader education research field). "The principles are as follows.

1. Improvement
2. Knowledge and learning
3. Radical change of any of the beliefs and values is possible
4. Collaboration and consultation with the immediate research community
5. Openness to a wider community
6. Openness to political groupings and perspective
7. Reflexivity about own position and interests
8. Reflexivity about own understanding and values
9. Perfection in research is not to be found
10. Taking responsibility as part of the wider educational research community"(p. 95-97)

The potential value of the research ranges from the individual (a student, a classroom

teacher, a parent) to the entire system (a hiring policy, an inclusion program, a mission

statement, etc.). Participants may see value on a personal level in the form of new

knowledge, empowerment, dialogue about issues, a sense of camaraderie established by

shared insights and change, and finally motivation to take action on a systemic level. By involving participants from all levels within the educational community in focused discussions and discoveries about social justice, I bring the value of involving a multiplicity of voices and allow those voices to influence the course of the research. Having an ownership and an active part in the direction the research takes encourages participants to become more engaged in needed change, to be more willing and to have more courage in addressing equity issues, and to understand the consequences of perpetuation of marginalization of "the other."

Data Collection

Collecting data in case studies "is a recursive, interactive process in which engaging in one strategy incorporates or may lead to subsequent sources of data" (Merriam, 2001, p. 134). The data-collection process tended to be ongoing, with one piece of information often informing me of other places to look. I utilize a methodology known as triangulation to enhance the overall credibility. Triangulation consists of using multiple sources of data or multiple methods to confirm findings (Merriam, 2001). Therefore, I use three data-collection techniques: semi-structured interviews, participant observation and document review.

Interviews

I use semi-structured individual interviews—to gain a better understanding of how participants perceive or define social justice, the in-place programs and practices that contributed to a socially-just school—as my first technique. The interviews were

guided by a set of questions, leaving order and exact wording open. I presented each

interviewee with a written description of the study and a consent form to sign giving

special attention to maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. Twenty three adults were

interviewed at least once with each meeting lasting from between 25 minutes to 2.5

hours. The length of the interview was determined by the participant as some felt they

had more to offer than others.

Observations

Observation of the participants is the second data-collection method that I

utilized. Merriam (2001) discusses how the data from observations varies from that of

interviews in that "observations take place in the natural field setting instead of a location

designated for the purpose of interviewing [and] observational data represent a firsthand

encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather that a secondhand account of the world

obtained in an interview" (Merriam, 2001, p. 94). Throughout the study, I integrated

myself within the school community by attending a faculty development day,

departmental meetings, faculty meetings, spending time in the halls, lunch room, library,

and school office. I attended several school board meetings and community events

sponsored by the school. The recorded observations gave me access to contextual

circumstances of the school community.

Document Review

Finally, in order to fill out my knowledge of Middle School and its population, I

searched for data in relevant school or community documents. Texts were able to give me

a more holistic and historical context of the development of programs and policies and strategies. The public aspect of the texts also gave me insight to the relationship of the school, district and larger community. The documents I collected for this study came from a wide range of sources: mission statements, public relations materials, newsletters and student and community newspapers, memos, training manuals, school administration memos and notices, the superintendents weekly e-mail to the community, school and district websites, family handbook, professional development guiding principles, school and district profiles, minutes from meetings, and employment application documents.

<u>Data Management and Analysis</u>

Once gathered, I analyzed the data using the method Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) call interpretational analysis. This is the process of "examining case study data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied" (p. 453). I made extensive use of coding for deciding what evidence would become a category by doing as Rossman and Rallis (1998) suggest and organize the data into manageable chunks through arranging and rearranging. As words or phrases that illustrated and elaborated each of the themes became clear I placed them into matrices in order to discover the overarching patterns in the data. To generate new understanding and allow new perspectives to emerge, both the collection and the analysis of data should occur simultaneously (Merriam, 2001). Consequently, I began analysis while I was still conducting interviews in order to determine questions for follow-up interviews and probes. This process entailed transcribing field notes, interview tapes and notes, and other materials. Throughout the process, I utilized a social justice framework

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lens as an analysis and evaluation instrument (see Figure 2). Using the tri-focal

framework as an analytical tool, I could begin to see how theory and practice inform each

other. As I started to construct meaning from the data, I then evaluated "the plausibility

of [my] interpretations and tested them through the data" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.

182), and I made decisions as to which data were significant and which were not.

Trustworthiness

Producing research in a reliable, valid and ethical manner is always a researcher's

primary concern, and the trustworthiness of the research was critical to the success of this

investigation. Trustworthiness, or "the means to confront the threats to validity and

reliability" (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 1998, p. 141) is the term utilized to guarantee

that the study (1) conforms to standards for acceptance, (2) conforms to the standards for

competent practice, and (3) has been ethically conducted. The intent of ensuring

trustworthiness is so that the findings of the research can be in some way useful;

therefore potential beneficiaries must believe and trust in its integrity and credibility

(Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

To ensure trustworthiness, I used a variety of methods for collecting data, such as,

individual interviews, participant observations, and document review. In addition, I kept

field notes in a journal. As peer debriefing suggests, I sought out several colleagues to

read, discuss and comment on my research. Finally, I looked at my own bias as the

researcher by identifying, analyzing, and owning my biases, assumptions, cultural

perspectives and worldview.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in a qualitative study is a "primary instrument" in both the collection and the interpretation of data (Merriam, 2001, p. 20). Secondary then would be the relationship the researcher develops with the participants. Specifically I saw my role as I worked collaboratively with the participants as one in which I was open to and sought out different perspectives concerned with the research. In that role, I was committed to the principles of social justice and to questions about power asking "who has it, how is it exercised and how is it manifested" (Griffith, 1998, p. 117). Therefore, it was crucial that I treated the participants and their responses with respect and dignity. In addition, I was aware of my own position of power. I was critical of my own social identities and perspectives. As a qualitative researcher it was imperative that I be flexible, "have an enormous *tolerance for ambiguity*" (Merriam, 2001, p. 21) and be willing to challenge my assumptions. My relationship with the school community influenced the future of social justice change within that community, so I had a significant responsibility to maintain the integrity of the study in those relationships.

The researcher must also identify assumptions that he or she begins with. My study is based on the following three major assumptions that shape my research questions, research design, and methodology: 1. Schools are currently utilizing practices that are not socially just, and many district/school workers are unaware of inequities or feel paralyzed in creating change. 2. A real-life practical solution needs to be conceptualized that will move K-12 schools away from implicit oppressive structures and inequities and toward social justice. 3. Systemic change in schools requires a paradigm shift; and to facilitate that shift, a social justice education framework can be utilized to

analyze and assess current schools practices and serve as a blueprint in making systemic transformations.

Along with my assumptions, my own social identities are relevant to my role as a researcher. They, along with my values and politics, construct the perspectives that I inevitably have acknowledging these identities helps "to unmask any bias that is implicit . . . [and] also helps to provide a way of responding critically and sensitively to the research" (Griffith, 1998, p. 133). My social identities are complex, yet some of the complexities (and intersections of identities) are exactly what led me to my interest in social justice: I am a white, middle-class, educated, mono-lingual, lesbian. I am a former public secondary school teacher, a social justice activist, a product of the system I am studying and a financially struggling graduate student. Consequently, I occupy spaces of privilege and spaces of oppression. The usefulness and validity of my research depends on how my conscious clarity regarding my perspectives drives my research findings and analysis.

<div align="center">Ethical Considerations</div>

"Ethical issues cannot be avoided in research" (Griffiths, 1998, p. 134). For that reason, as I consider the ethical concerns of this study, it's helpful for me to see how an ethical standard will came into play in each stage of my data collection and analysis.

First, collecting data from interviews "involves forming and keeping human relationships" (Griffith, 1998, p. 135). The participants needed my assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. I ensured that the participants had given their informed consent. I took measures to assure participants that I would not deceive them about the study and that they could refuse to respond at any point. However, I needed to realize that

at times "respondents may feel their privacy has been invaded, they may be embarrassed by certain questions, and they may tell things they never intended to reveal" (Merriam, 2001, p.214. Therefore, the question of informed consent would "have to be revisited regularly, and judgments made and remade" (Griffith, 1998, p. 135).

Second, "Observations should be conducted openly. Participants should know that they are being observed" (Merriam, 2001, p. 215) and I made efforts to be visible when I was making observations. I also acknowledged that situations may arise when my observation may create ethical dilemmas. Furthermore, I was conscious of the ethical issues of educational research and my own ethical philosophies.

Third, I treated documents that were not public with the same confidentiality and anonymity I extended in interviews. Documents that were public and available to anyone still require an ethical treatment in order that data are collected and reported contextually correct and complete.

Finally, in the data analysis the decisions I made about which data to include and which to disregard reflected my ethical commitment to the study. I was aware of my own perspectives and limitations throughout the process. As Deiner and Crandall (1978) emphasize, "There is simply no ethical alternative to being as nonbiased and accurately honest as is humanly possible in all phases of research" (p. 162). In the end, the validity and value of the study depended on the ethical behavior of the researcher; ultimately I was the responsible party.

CHAPTER 4

GENERAL FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In this chapter I present the results and analysis of the research through the

participants' responses to the research questions and the major themes that emerged from

the data. These results are derived from analysis of the interviews, study of pertinent

documents and examination of observation notes. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the

three sub-questions that guided the study. I examined the data through the perspectives of

contemporary social justice education theory, particularly as it is synthesized in the

trifocal lens outlined in Chapter 2. This type of examination provided the opportunity to

compare and contrast the participants' views and practices of social justice with

established theoretical frameworks to better understand relationships between theory and

practice.

This study revolved around the central question which explored how social justice

goals were manifested in one school. However, in order to build a foundation for this

focal question, it was imperative that I look at the following three sub-questions:

1. How do the different participants in the educational community describe or

define social justice?

2. What current programs do Middle School participants believe support social

justice- related goals?

3. What current practices do the participants believe to be socially just?

For each question I described and analyzed the participants' responses and the

themes that emerged. The definitions, programs and practices I analyze here do not

necessarily adhere to strict categorical boundaries—in reality, there is complex interplay between them. "Setting high expectations," for example, can be considered part of the definition and/or practice of social justice education for some participants. For clarity and heuristic purposes, however, I divide the discussion into the sub sections of definitions, programs and practices. Throughout this chapter, I rely heavily on the participants' own words to scaffold the analysis.

Definitions

The first question is "How do the different participants describe or define social justice?" In coding the data regarding this question, I found that four main categories emerged from participants' responses. In this section I explore the four major themes—access for all, academic achievement, integration, and leveling the playing field–that represent how the participants defined or perceived the concept of social justice. These categories emerged as I read through the interview transcripts and counted the number of times different words appeared. I formulated the above categories based on these counts. Each category is briefly described below.

Social Justice is Access

The word "access" came up consistently throughout the data gathering phase of my research. I found it repeated in almost every interview and printed document, and it had obviously become common vocabulary for the members of Middle School. Nearly every participant defined social justice in terms of "equal access" and related it to the following three areas: equal access to educational opportunities, equal access to

curriculum, and equal access to "high status knowledge and skills." I describe each of

these variants of access and subsequently discuss how they relate to social justice theory.

<u>Access to Equal Educational Opportunities</u>

For some interviewees, "access" referred to Middle School providing equal

educational opportunities. For example, one veteran language arts teacher defined social

justice like this:

> I guess what it means to me is that we're providing educational opportunities so that everybody has access to them and nobody's left out. And, it's kind of like a bigger version of the school's logo 'Every Student, Every Day' that is featured on the school web page.

Another long-term educator stated,

> Social justice simply means, in lots and lots of ways, the idea of equality. And that is what our school is allegedly all about—not only equal treatment, but equal access to things. And our school, I think, bends over backwards to do that, providing everybody with whatever she or he wants. I mean, hopefully what you need, but also what you want.

One of the school counselors took a broader view and related access to the variety of

aspects of students' lives. He said,

> In general [social justice is] giving everybody equal access to resources-places to live, jobs, all sorts of resources that are available. It means making resources more available to everybody, not just a select few. And you know, equality [means] as far as in terms of the legal system people aren't being judged by the color of their skin, how much money they do or don't have, their job title or things of that nature. More equality for more people. To me, the bottom line is people feeling that they have access to whatever it is they want to have access to. In all aspects of life pretty much.

His pragmatic desire to help every child believe that he or she has access to a college

education was evident, and he encouraged all of his students to set their sights high.

Several teachers took into account their students' individual backgrounds when

describing equal access. A social studies teacher said, "[Social justice] means that basically there are equal opportunities for all kids regardless of their background and regardless of their parents' education or their socioeconomic status and with everything that they bring to us, we provide an equal opportunity for all of them." For one of the math teachers, the first thing that came to his mind was "making sure that the education is equitable and available to all students, especially along the lines of ethnicity and that kind of thing. But I think also it is important to think about socioeconomic differences between students." She was highly concerned that an eighth grade math class was often assigned based on the student's family income level. A physical education teacher also spoke of "equity across all groups, not just one specific group." She was specifically alarmed about equality issues among girls and women in the educational community. Another teacher spoke of her students having access to their dreams and suggested that the opportunities and resources should be available and accessible to students to assist them in "reaching for the stars." And, finally, a science educator put it as "making sure that there's equal opportunity for success for all kids." The availability of educational resources and opportunities for all students was of major importance to these educators.

Among the respondents, equal access was also discussed in terms of fairness and democracy. One social studies teacher related social justice to the Constitution, rights, freedom and democracy. When asked to describe what social justice meant to him within the context of education he said, "I think of fairness. Fairness for all. Democracy stands out big when I think of social justice. I think about what it really means to be just. I think of teaching fairness and teaching with responsibility." The superintendent spoke about social justice in the same manner and acknowledged that he may sound idealistic, but for

him "social justice means delivering on the Constitution." He highlighted the fundamental principles and inalienable rights in the Constitution and said, "I don't take any of that lightly." Another participant related it to the Pledge of Allegiance and said, "For me, it's simply about liberty and justice for all."

Equal Access to Curriculum

For other Middle School educators, "access" related to access to the curriculum. For these participants access to the curriculum meant that all students were able to enroll in all of the courses the school offered, that all students were somehow represented or were able to see themselves in the curriculum, and that presentation of the material was differentiated to meet the learning styles and abilities of all students in the classroom. For example, one teacher said,

> To me, social justice means two things. One is making the curriculum accessible to everyone so that everyone's able to access the curriculum and be successful in the curriculum. And then the other aspect is making the curriculum representative or interesting to a variety of groups. So you know, to social classes, race, and gender all that stuff. So people see themselves in the curriculum.

An administrator informed me that the language arts teachers were "working to make sure that books in their curriculum have a broad readability level so a child reading at the third grade level and a child reading at an adult level will both be able to access the curriculum." Although this seems like standard practice for educators to provide materials for students with differing abilities, this administrator declared that,

> This wasn't always the case. If they read *Gulliver's Travels* and couldn't read it, well, that's the way it goes. So that's a social justice piece, and now teachers have had training in how to look at the books in order to decide if they reflect a variety of viewpoints, times in history, social perspective, etc., so that's definitely an aspect of social justice.

For these participants, making the curriculum accessible as well as relevant to every student was a crucial element of social justice.

Experts in the field of social justice highlight the importance of making the curriculum relevant to all students and offer methods to accomplish this goal (Brantlinger, 2003; Kailin, 2002; Major & Brock, 2004; Nieto, 1994). I discuss this relevancy further in sections that follow.

Equal Access to High Status Knowledge and Skills

For many of the educators in this community, the overarching connection to access came from the message from the superintendent insisting that every child have "access to high-status knowledge and skills" (which was never fully defined). He spoke of the power that comes through academic success. Many educators with whom I spoke had embraced his way of thinking about social justice. A science teacher, who had been working on social justice issues for years, agreed with the superintendent.

> I just think it's a huge thing. And I do think I go back to what the superintendent has said. And he has said so many wonderful things. And one of them was that a socially-just curriculum is one where you provide access to high status knowledge and skills.

The teacher had also used this language to describe social justice at the district-wide in-service day where the superintendent had "rolled out" the social justice vision.

Although another teacher (in the science-focus group on that "roll-out" day) did not necessarily share the superintendent's vision, she shared her thoughts and clearly delineated social justice from multi-cultural experiences. She also asked several thought-provoking questions of the group. She said,

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I think there is a tendency in [Middle School] to provide too many multi-cultural experiences that take away from the curriculum. I really think that the most important thing that we can do to improve social justice is to provide kids with high-status knowledge and skills. I like these ideas and I think they are valid and good, but, I think we really should be putting our time into figuring out how to make high status knowledge available and accessible to all kids. I think that's really the big conversation we need to have. Why are some kids not being able to access all we have to offer? What can we do about that? To me, that's the social justice right there. We have to figure out how to get these kids on board.

She also shared a personal story with the group.

I have two daughters who are only a year apart. One went the high track and one the low. The differences in their education got more extreme every year. The doors that are open to my older daughter who took the high track are many and the doors that are open to my younger daughter are slamming shut one after another. To me, that is a social justice issue. I think what happened to those two has a lot to do with what was demanded of them in school. What the expectations were.

This mother and educator clearly saw the connection of academic success to the quality of experiences—and therefore power within society—available to her daughters. Two other employees understood the connection of knowledge to power similarly. According to one math teacher, for example, "In the realm of education, what [social justice] means is access to knowledge and access to the power that knowledge brings for everyone." In this same way, a counselor, who worked with a variety of special-needs students, stated,

But the current definition[of social justice] that I like the best is that all students have access to and are skilled in or trained in as much as possible. And the belief that it's possible for them to have it all. That they can have access to high-status jobs, to high- status education, to all those things that are based on having skills and knowledge.

A writing teacher emphasized that it was her responsibility to figure out how to make "high- status knowledge and skills" available and accessible to all kids. This same teacher also worked hard to make sure that everyone was included in the decision-making aspect of the educational community. A counselor spoke about how it "shouldn't matter what zip

code they live in, what zip code they were born in, or what zip code they move to; they should all have access to an equal education and not just the select few." A math teacher wanted all of his students to have "access to knowledge and access to the power that knowledge brings." Other educators spoke of an "equal opportunity for success for all kids" and a belief that "it is possible for all of them to have it all." Perhaps it was the English Language Learning (ELL) teacher who consistently witnessed the greatest number of examples of students who were not receiving access to high- status knowledge and skills. She regularly fought to

> provide access to the population that is most underrepresented in certain areas. Because the group of students that we are talking about is either mostly in ELL or special education or they've been categorized as problematic or as trouble makers; they are the ones that get most detentions. So the overrepresentation of these negative areas is obvious and the underrepresentation in terms of access to the advanced academic classes is consistently lacking.

Language such as "high-status knowledge and skills," "fairness" and "access for all" had clearly become institutionalized from the top down—as in most education programs—among teachers and administrators at the time I conducted this study. This type of institutionalization appears to signal a systemic shift away from conventional educational discourse toward a more socially just discourse—one that on its face seems to resonate with the trifocal lens. However, the participants' use of these terms falls short of complete convergence with social justice theory. First, when entertaining the idea of equal access to "high-status knowledge and skills" social justice theory demands that we ask the following crucial questions: Whose high status knowledge and skills? Who determines what defines high-status knowledge and skills? Who benefits from these skills? Is oppression perpetuated by asking the marginalized to accept the dominant view of high status knowledge and skills? Are particular cultures or ways of being ignored or

silenced by asking people with certain identities to assimilate into the dominant way of

viewing the world? Without asking these questions, the requirements of the trifocal lens

cannot be adequately satisfied. If the idea of high-status knowledge and skills is

uncritically accepted, multiple identities and intersections of oppression are obscured.

While social justice-language usage indicates the willingness of the middle school to

move toward social justice, future studies will be necessary to see if the way their

practices play out are in fact socially just.

In addition to critiquing definitions of academic success by asking the above

critical questions, it is also worth examining how the participants used the words

"fairness" and "equal" in relation to the word "access." All of these educators used the

term "equal" or "equality" frequently and passionately as they spoke with me. In

addition, some of them also used the word "equity." These two words, "equality" and

"equity," were seen as indistinguishable and interchangeable and none of the participants

delineated between the two terms as do social justice practitioners (Krause, Traini, &

Mickey, 2001; Secada, 1989). Making this distinction, however, is necessary for a robust

conception of social justice. Secada makes the argument that equality is not synonymous

with equity, and not all educators conflate the two. An educator's blog described her

method of teaching the difference between these two terms. She describes how she asks

all of her students to sit in a circle, to take off their left shoes and to throw them into a

pile in the center of the circle. Once the shoes are all piled up she begins to randomly

redistribute them, giving one to each student. Then she asks the students to put on the

new shoes. Inevitably the complaints begin. "This isn't my shoe!" "It's too big." "It's too

small." "This doesn't fit me." Whatever the specific complaints, very few students are

actually happy with their newly mismatched shoes. The teacher asks the students why they are troubled. She tells them that she did everything fairly in that each one of them have two shoes—one for the right foot and one for the left. "But they aren't the correct shoes" the students will say. The teacher then tells them that she just wanted to treat all of them equally and fairly and points to a boy with large feet and a nearby girl with small feet and says, "He'll have more shoe than you will." And without a doubt, someone unknowingly gets right to the heart of the issue. The teacher wraps up the lesson by explaining that it doesn't matter who has *more* shoe but that they all have the *right* shoe (laradavid.blogspot.com/.../difference-between-equity-and-equality.html).

As this example illustrates, equality and equity mean very different things. Equality means that everyone gets the same outcome—two shoes—without regard to individual differences—large or small feet. Equity means everyone gets the same quality of outcome—shoes that fit their individual needs; what is right for one person may not be right for another. Krause et al. (2001) expand this notion by arguing that equality focuses on the individual and the circumstances surrounding him or her. The promotion of individual freedom, choice and opportunity are celebrated. Equity, on the other hand, deals with differences based on membership in social identity categories such as race, sex, social class, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, etc., and address whether a given state of affairs is just.

Evans (1993) contends that if we pursue only equality in education we are actually perpetuating the oppression of the marginalized groups. He believes that educators should not give every child *an equal* chance, but should give every child the *best possible* chance to develop her or his skills and talents. Therefore researchers have

proposed that the goal of equity can only be obtained through the institutionalization of inequality which often plays out in policies, practices, and programs, offering different things for different groups (Evans, 1993; Krause et al., 2001).

It is equity, not equality, which compels us to look at the issue of justice. Secada, (1989) in discussing the concept of equity, gauges the results of our actions directly against the standards of justice. In other words, it doesn't matter if our actions are in the form of decisions we make, strategies we create or policies we enact; fairness is ultimately about justice. Secada maintains that it is "equity that inhabits the ground between our actions on the one hand and our notions of justice on the other" (p. 81). For example, he contends that "the heart of equity lies in our ability to acknowledge that even though our actions might be in accord with a set of rules or laws, their results may be unjust" (p. 68). He goes on to propose that "to ask a question based on equality, without first asking if that along which the equality is being measured is desirable and just, is to miss what equity and equality is all about" (p. 74). For example, one Middle School science teacher discussed the actions he took to make sure that all of his students had equal access to a rigorous and engaging curriculum and to fair methods of assessment. His examples of fairness included making modifications and accommodations for students and providing more organizational support for some. It is important to equally challenge and support each student and evaluate his or her progress in an impartial way. All of these standards and measurements may be fairly in place within this school, but if the curriculum, assessment methods, accommodations, or modifications are not critiqued (for bias that may encourage or sustain elitist, racist, sexist, heterosexist, etc. attitudes or

behaviors), then although these actions may seem equal or fair or even equitable, they may not promote social justice.

Social Justice is Academic Achievement for All

A great majority of the participants in Middle School's community defined social justice in terms of academic achievement for all and linked social justice to student learning, which is supported by social justice theory. They genuinely believed in the school district's slogan "Every Student, Every Day." The superintendent told me about the shift that had occurred among educators regarding the expectation that every child would learn. Apparently, (in the recent past) the loss of some students who simply "slipped through the cracks" was accepted as being inevitable but that phenomenon, he said, was no longer acceptable. He described the shift: "It is no longer OK thinking that it's enough for 80% of the kids to make it and not worry about the other 20%. Those days are over and we've got to take the success of *every* student seriously." As the leader of the school community he believed it was his job to "ensure that every single one of those students who enter our schools in kindergarten, in seventh grade and as new ninth graders, walks across the stage at the end of the 12th grade, gets a handshake, a diploma, and then is off to college." Although the goal of all students reaching graduation should be a crucial component of educational philosophy, the superintendent informed me that this view is a change, not just for his school district, but for the whole country. In the past, educators hoped that every child would succeed but reality had taught them that there would always be a few who just couldn't learn and ultimately would not succeed.

In focusing on academic achievement for all, the participants in this study were rejecting deficit theories of learning which assume that marginalized students are inherently deficient in areas such as genetics, parental concern, English language, relevant life experience and cultural capital. While these educators did not invoke the language of the deficit theory specifically, their articulated philosophies and professional decisions clearly reflected a rejection of this conception. As such, their actions converged with social justice theory, which views deficit theories as contributors to marginalization of the "other" in public schools (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Cooper, 2003; Garcia & Guerrera, 2004; Kugler, 2002; Valverde, 2004). In later chapters I address Middle School's ability to implement these goals by examining its programs and practices.

The participants at this school regularly spoke of every child being successful and used the term "for all" frequently. For example, one writing teacher took very seriously her job of "helping every kid succeed." A science teacher relied on the "Every Student, Every Day" slogan to remind him to strive to make sure all of his students were getting their needs met. He spoke about how hard it was to put "achievement for every kid" into action, but was "deeply committed" to doing it. A science teacher who had been heavily involved with a group which was working on reducing the achievement gap especially took this view to heart. He explained,

> I think the part we're trying to live and put into action is achievement for every kid. And it's hard. But it is the one thing that I'm focusing on all the time. It's the one thing that I keep coming back to that I feel is a priority. I really believe in [academic achievement].

The co-principal used the language of the achievement gap in describing his view of social justice. For him it was about "the product" and about "opening doors." He shared,

[Social justice] is about achievement gaps and things like that. It is preparing students to have the skills and the liberal arts exposure and all of those different pieces by the time they graduate so that they have an opportunity to take those skills and go to the college they want or do the job they want.

It is important to note that this was the only participant who recognized that college was not the only measure of success.

In the rejection of deficit theories, Middle School's definition of social justice education converges with the theory of social justice. As the trifocal lens suggests, the participants are disrupting the normalization and internalization of oppression. Deficit theory is normalized by the false belief that the dominant group's ways of teaching and learning should work for all students, regardless of their background or life experiences. This normalization of deficit theories becomes fueled by the internalization of these dominant beliefs and ways of teaching and learning (Adams et al., 1997). Consequently, this cycle reinforces systems of domination and oppression. Although the belief in deficit theory becomes internalized by both the dominant and marginalized groups—by both groups believing that the "other" cannot learn—it manifests separately within each group. Those who achieve at a high level gain privilege and power, and those who don't achieve remain marginalized.

I discovered several other outcomes that resulted from highlighting academic achievement for all and by rejecting deficit theories. The first was that the educational community was setting high expectations for all its students. Research has shown that teachers set lower expectations for students whom they perceive to have limited ability (Anyon, 2001; Gale, 2000; Nilsson et al., 2004). The participants in this study were not doing this. They clearly expressed high expectations of all of their students and had a deeply held belief that all students could learn. The teachers were encouraged from the

top down, to set the bar high for all students. The superintendent agrees with Carbo's (1995) argument that demonstrates the benefit of setting high expectations for the students who are struggling the most—those who are most at risk for failure. Carbo contends that a lack of rigor is exactly what these students don't need. During the induction of the Social Justice Commitment Program (which will be discussed in the next section), the superintendent emphasized how setting high expectations was a part of his commitment to social justice. He said that it was time to stop enabling some students by accepting a D grade as the best they can do. He strongly believed that

> The most socially-just work we can do is to ensure high achievement in mathematics for all of our students, not just some of them. We need to make sure that all kids are taking calculus, taking Latin, picking up violins and learning how to work in groups and survive in a competitive world. We need high expectations with rigorous content. It's pushing kids as far and as fast as we possibly can.

It is important to note that every student taking calculus, Latin, and playing the violin does not fit an equitable model. Therefore, as the Social Justice Commitment matures so might the definition of what qualifies as a "rigorous," as well as whether being able to "survive in a competitive world" is/could be a narrow view of "high expectations."

A Middle School science teacher was also on board with the superintendent's view. She wanted to see every student take chemistry and be able to understand the concepts. She stressed that supporting students to reach this goal was what doing social justice-work was all about. Other teachers were also taking this message to heart and described several strategies they used to convey their high expectations to students. A science teacher tells her students,

> Yes, it is important for you to learn this, I expect that you're going to learn this, I'm going to hold a high bar for you, and I'm going to help you get there. That to me is a socially- just thing to do.

Another teacher also speaks of holding high standards for everyone and says, "I don't ever, ever think, 'oh well, this student just can't get it' and throw in the towel. You know that's just not OK to do." A math teacher also practices setting high expectations for all students, but goes a step beyond and says that the "biggest part of setting high expectations is in communicating to students what those expectations are." He continues by sharing a practice that he has found effective:

> It is so important to highlight the importance of sharing with students what the expectations are, what the goals are, and then giving them ways to hold themselves accountable and also as a teacher holding them accountable for whether they've met the goals of what you're teaching. And I build into my curriculum ways that kids can check to see what they have learned. You know, have I met this goal or have I accessed this knowledge? Do I now have this broader knowledge and know how I can use it in the real world?

Another outcome that resulted from educators rejecting deficit theories and believing that all students can succeed was that educators could look at academic failure as a system-wide breakdown rather than as individual student failure. This view also coincides with the trifocal lens as it looks at the complex interplay between individual and systemic change. Research has shown that if students do not meet the expected norms, they are typically expected to adapt to the system; and if unable to adapt, they are considered the ones who are deficient (Carbo, 1995; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). This unrealistic expectation of adapting to the dominant norm continues to perpetuate the deficit belief and continues to keep lower achieving students in a marginalized position. Because the Middle School community was working against the normalization and internalization of the belief that some students can't learn and were not blaming that underachievement on the child's deficits, it was able to ask questions that would lead to socially-just practices: What is the *school* doing wrong? How are *we* not meeting the

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needs of the failing students? What do *we* need to do differently to make sure that this

student is successful? How does the student define success? What does the student think

is important?

Middle School was avoiding using labels such as underachiever, at-risk, slow

learners, etc. and was attempting to instill (in all students) the belief that they could be

successful. A social studies teacher exemplified this practice of looking toward the

system and away from the student for needed change in the following way:

> It is the idea that for me to be a successful teacher I have to ask myself what do I
> need to do to help this student achieve? I can't see it as the kids fault [if they are
> not doing well]. It has to be my fault if they are not learning and I have to
> question what I am doing – not blame it on what the kid is not doing. It is my job
> to see how to reach every one of them. If I decide that this is the body of
> knowledge and skills that I want them to have, then I have to ask myself, what do
> I have to do to make sure that they have that body of knowledge when they leave
> here.

A third effect resulting from this school's focus on academic achievement and

rejection of deficit theories is connected with the previous outcome of looking beyond the

individual to explain failure. This outcome resulted from the adults in Middle School's

educational community entering into the individual-change process. Social justice

researchers contend that educational practitioners must experience individual change and

understanding regarding social justice before they can influence systemic change (Adams

et al., 1997; Kailin, 2002). This interrelation is reflected in the third component of the

social justice lens. This individual change was taking place by educators looking at their

own internalized oppression and beliefs regarding the deficit theory. They were exploring

their own conscious and unconscious attitudes and perceptions regarding low achieving

students and had an opportunity to unlearn prejudices and beliefs. The educators in this

case study were experiencing some of the individual change that is necessary for a system

to be socially just. They were able to begin to connect macro-level variables of oppression such as race, class, gender, economics, sexuality, etc., to their own individual classrooms which is a critical component of the social justice framework (Bartolome, 2001).

Social Justice is Integrated into Every Aspect of the School

Several teachers complained about the district's Social Justice Commitment and felt burdened by having to "do one more thing." They saw it as an "add on" to all of the other work they were asked to do. However, the majority of the educational community saw social justice as being an essential part of the school. In fact they defined it as being an "integrated aspect" of the school environment. They saw it as what they do day to day. In a district-wide science meeting, one science teacher who had been incorporating social justice work into her curriculum for years told her colleagues who were complaining about the new Social Justice Commitment the following:

> We don't need to take it on as an extra piece. It should just be a part of what we are already doing. It should be a part of the content, a part of the process, even a part of the interactions that we have with kids every day.

The principal eloquently shared her view regarding social justice as reflected in every aspect of the school and the education process:

> It's the songs we select to sing, the food we choose to serve, how kids are greeted on the bus, the comments we put on report cards, how we encourage participation in class, how we respond to kids when they give a correct answer, when they give an incorrect answer. All of that is about social justice. How we respond to a child around a discipline issue, and how we share that with their parents. It's all of that. It's all about social justice.

Her counterpart, the co-principal, agreed,

> I think social justice needs to be integrated within every structure, every piece, and every corner of the school. It needs to be integrated in every part of professional development. So whatever we're doing, there should be a social justice understanding within it. And I don't think it always has to say social justice. In some ways I don't want it to. I don't want to stop planning our curriculum and instruction and start *doing* social justice. It needs to be part of it inherently.

An ELL instructor also recognized how vital it was that social justice be incorporated into the entire school experience. She stressed how important it was for social justice to be "multi-level and multi-layer for her English language learners. She said, "Social justice has to come from the women who receive the students and parents in the front office, from the women in the cafeteria, from the bus drivers from the custodians. It has to be everywhere." To these educators, social justice must be integrated into all levels of the educational system. It is, however, interesting to note that this educator did not see the social injustice of her use of gendered language which represents the challenge of actualizing stated social justice goals and commitments.

Integrating social justice across all levels of the institution is consistent with social justice theory. Even though a number of participants reflected on knowing that social justice should be completely integrated, several examples showed glaring evidence that it was not included in all aspects of this school district. For instance, for the above faculty members who viewed The Social Justice Commitment Program as an "add on" or "one more thing we have to do," it clearly was not integrated. Another faculty member spoke of not seeing social justice included in the cafeteria choices for herself or for the students who were also non-meat eaters. She asked,

> Even if you're looking at the smaller things like the fact that vegetarian students have trouble getting lunch there in the cafeteria. If you don't eat meat there's no

lunch. I know that because I'm a vegetarian and I go down to the cafeteria and there's nothing. And my students who are vegetarian go down there and they're like 'yeah, I didn't bring lunch today and all I can eat is cheese pizza.' So where is the social justice in that?

Several other participants questioned the district's commitment to treat its non-certified staff justly and mentioned an issue that was currently in the news about the school districts cafeteria workers. They expressed their dismay about the school committee's recent vote to lay off all 20 of its cafeteria workers and outsource the school's nutritional program to a multi-national conglomerate. One educator commented,

The institution as a whole is blind to so many issues of social justice. Yes, they are bogged down in budgetary decisions and so forth, but where's the social justice in privatizing the cafeteria? Where's the social justice in putting the cafeteria workers through having to resign their jobs with the school and then re-sign with a private corporation that's going to immediately lower their wages? That is blindness on the part of the institution. And this happens all the time.

For these participants this decision was an obvious example of social injustice and evidence that the Social Justice Commitment was not extending across all levels of the institution. The positive side, however, is that the educators are thinking of the school as a community where unless it is applied to everyone social justice doesn't exist.

<center>Social Justice is Leveling the Playing Field</center>

At the core of the American dream is the belief that we live in a meritocratic society. Many of the study's participants reflected this value by their belief that social justice meant leveling the playing field and creating equal opportunities for all students. For these educators one way to address privilege is to envision a level playing field. One science educator who had been actively involved for years with social-justice work expressed her irritation with colleagues who, not recognizing the challenge of actualizing

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social justice goals, felt that they couldn't "do social justice" in their science classrooms. She countered these frustrations by arguing that "at the very least we can provide level playing fields." An ELL teacher also spoke specifically about social justice for her students and said that equity was the first thing that always came to her mind when discussing the education of her students. She endeavored to "level the playing field and to provide access to the population that is most underrepresented in certain areas and overrepresented in other areas." A math teacher agreed with the others and talked about how "we have social constructions based on race, based on sexual preference, based on disabilities, based on weight, based on height, based on age, based on lots and lots of things." To him, social justice was about "trying to even out that playing field as much as possible by taking away those social constructs whenever appropriate." The metaphor of a level playing field dominated these educators view of social justice.

Although these educators were all deeply committed to the idea of social justice, they failed to realize how their unoriginal vision of a level playing field was in direct opposition to social justice. They did not articulate an understanding of how the belief in equalization through the creation of a level playing field actually perpetuated the pervasiveness of oppression and diverges from the first component of the tri-focal lens which addresses the pervasiveness of oppression. For example, they did not recognize that if everyone is considered equal then the playing field is also deemed equal. This view then leads to a belief in neutrality which one social justice scholar argues "is an attempt to conceal the unequal distribution of power" (Ng, 2003, p. 215). For these educators this belief in neutrality under the guise of leveling the playing field adds to the complexity of implementing the school's social justice goals.

The math teacher mentioned above whose strategy for leveling the playing field was to "take away all social constructs" was well meaning in his approach to equalization. Nevertheless, his desire to alleviate all social constructs based on social categories and identities seemed to be utilizing an advanced form of colorblind strategy (blindness to all differences) to achieve social justice. This strategy is commonly used to achieve educational equality by ignoring the differences that perpetuate marginalization but in the end are unjust. Applebaum (2001) reminds us that this ideology is commonly seen as a positive approach to fairness, but instead serves to ensure that social justice will never be achieved. This approach renders some individuals invisible and assumes we are all alike by not only failing to recognize social identities and the value that their recognition and inclusion can bring to the classroom, but also fails to see that the default "neutral" identities are all the dominant ones—white, male, middle class, heterosexual, able bodied and Christian. The "leveling the playing field" approach also completely dismisses the possibility of multiple identities and how they intersect. This dismissal guarantees that the dominant ("neutral") culture will continue to remain the norm by entrenching existing inequalities. Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the non-existence or denial of social identities is that it closes the door to any possible dialogue surrounding the analysis of power and privilege, marginalization and domination, or hierarchies of oppression. If we don't have any social identities then we can't address how different ones overlap or intersect and how this manifests in the world. We can't understand that we can be both privileged and marginalized at the same time nor understand what that means in advocating for others. We can't build coalitions among groups if there are no groups nor can we analyze how some institutional practices systematically favor some

groups over others. All of these issues pertain to the second part of the trifocal lens, which addresses multiple identities and intersections of oppression. If we can't acknowledge social identities then we can never reach a socially-just stage where we address multiple identities and intersections of oppressions.

<p style="text-align:center">Programs</p>

In the next section of this chapter, I describe the different programs that were currently in place in Middle School that the participants believed address social justice goals. Instead of focusing on the ideas of individual participants (as I do in the above definitions section), this section looks more broadly at the school or institution. However, the following list of programs was generated directly from the participants. And while the school offers a wide variety of different programs, these are the programs they specifically identify as contributing to a socially just school. After providing a brief description of each individual program, I discuss and analyze two programs—The Social Justice Commitment and The Latino Outreach Program—in greater depth. I have chosen to highlight these programs for two reasons. First, these programs have particular relevance to the district/school's social justice goals. Second, the programs clearly illustrate the challenges and opportunities associated with instituting social justice initiatives.

<p style="text-align:center">Advisory Periods</p>

At first glance the recently established advisory-period program looked like the traditional home room. However, it was designed to be much more than just a period for

daily roll taking. Each teacher was assigned to lead an advisory period that met for twenty minutes at the beginning of each day. The teacher met with the same twelve students all year in order to form a personal connection with each student. The idea was for each Middle School student to known well by at least one adult. The teacher leading the advisory group officially became his or her students' individual advisor and advocate.

Family/School Partnership Program

The Family/School Partnership Program is dedicated to building community among Middle School's students, families, teachers, and administrators. The goals of this program are to facilitate education and discussion forums around issues facing the families of Middle School students to fundraise in order to support school programs, and to support school activities. This program has regular evening meetings where attendees are asked to bring ideas, insights, suggestions and criticisms to share.

Inquiry Groups

This program was instituted to provide an avenue for Middle School faculty to collaborate and work together on a wide range of school issues. The inquiry groups met once a month, and the students had a later starting time on that day. Educators grouped themselves (three to ten individuals) based upon common interests and went through a process of inquiry-based research. They posed a question or an issue they wanted to investigate and created a name for their group. Next they decided on a process for collecting data that addressed their problem. After they have analyzed the data and come up with conclusions they presented (to the rest of the faculty) what they learned and

provided recommendations. For example, an Achievement Gap Inquiry Group had identified nine students of color who were not achieving at grade level. They designed a qualitative research study and enlisted the help of an outside interviewer from the local university who interviewed each student and gave the transcripts back to the inquiry group. The inquiry group was evaluating the interviews and was in the process of coming up with recommendations at the time I was in the school. The Inquiry Group Program provided an avenue for community-based decision making. Other Inquiry Groups were focused on improving literacy, increasing numeracy skills, designing a non-traditional grading system, evaluating the school's schedule, instituting peer mentoring and improving the school climate.

<center>The English Language Learners Program</center>

The English Language Learners (ELL) Program was designed to assist all of Middle School students who were either deficient in English language skills or who did not speak any English. The ELL program was housed in a self-contained classroom where students would be assigned to a specific ELL teacher who utilized a pedagogical approach that addressed language acquisition in different content areas. Their level of English-language aptitude determined how much time students would spend in the ELL classroom. The ELL program provided only language arts education and did not cover other subjects; ELL students went to regular classes with their teams for all other content areas. Often an ELL teacher or an assistant would accompany ELL students to these other classes. The program also provided tutors for individual students. While I was there, the

program employed tutors who spoke Japanese, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, and Korean.

The Pipeline Project

The Pipeline Project was a newly-forged partnership between one of the local liberal arts colleges and the Middle School. It was specifically designed to increase school success and college access for underserved and underrepresented students. The mission of the Pipeline Project is to build skills, competencies and confidence among students, enabling them to achieve in honors/advanced-level classes and, if they choose, enroll and succeed in college. The partnership consists of multiple components—after school tutoring is provided by college students at Middle School, parents are encouraged to become involved with their children's academic pursuits, and a summer program is conducted to support students in a variety of ways.

The Social Justice Commitment Program

When I began to collect data for this case study, the school district was in the process of introducing the new Social Justice Commitment Program. This initiative was designed to be a district-wide incorporation of a social justice philosophy. The intention was to integrate socially-just principles and practices into every aspect of schooling and the educational institution. I was introduced to this new initiative at a district-wide development day for the secondary staff. This project had been in the works for several years and was a culmination of a long history of multicultural, equity, and diversity work in the district. Partly due to the historical work that focused on equity, diversity, and

multiculturalism, the schools in the district were prepared to accept the Social Justice

Commitment Program. Therefore, it is important to pause at this point and to discuss the

historical work that undergirded the launch of this unique and progressive program.

Central to my understanding the work that had gone into the Social Justice

Commitment, is the district official who served as the Coordinator of English Language

Education. She was a middle aged, white woman who held a doctoral degree. Prior to

holding this position she had been a principal, guidance counselor, and an adjunct faculty

member at a local college where she did multi-cultural training for the school district in

which she was currently employed. Currently she oversees the education of all the

students who come into the district as English-language learners which makes up sixty

percent of her contract time; the other forty percent is dedicated to the Social Justice

Commitment Program. She told me that her position had come about in order to "work

on social justice for the district to see if we can get this social-justice-commitment

template into a form that people can have next to their desks and start using next year."

She was referring to a printed document titled *The Social Justice Commitment* that was

designed to be a handbook for practitioners of social justice education from preschool

through high school. It contained practical suggestions that teachers at all different levels

could use in their classrooms to promote social justice. This staff position, printed

manual, and the induction of the Social Justice Commitment was the culmination of a

long history of equity work in the district.

When The Coordinator of English Language Education first entered the district in

1993, an initiative called the Cultural Diversity Advisory Group was already "very

active." She described it as "a school system initiative to celebrate people in the schools

who paid attention to the diversity of the student body." At this time the group consisted

mainly of people of color from the community and the school system. The Coordinator

had been a school guidance counselor at this time, and she said "I suddenly found myself

surrounded by some very brilliant minds. They were mostly long-term Black teachers in

the system, who basically took me under their wing and said, you know, we really need

to have leadership that is cross race and interdisciplinary and we want your help." Several

prominent professors of color from the local University also became very committed and

involved in this program. The Coordinator described the privilege she had working with

them and shared how these scholars "gave time and energy and wisdom to every project

in the school system. They came to budget meetings and spoke, even back then, to the

necessity for equity and excellence." Several long time, prominent community activists

were also involved in this program. The Coordinator described how these passionate

individuals attended school committee meetings and "watched everything operate." The

principal of Middle School also reminisced about her early experiences that demonstrated

the long history of diversity work that so many people had been passionate about for so

long.

> When I first came to [the Town] I was on one of the first k-12 multicultural
> committees. I worked with people who showed me the way. They opened my
> eyes. They challenged me. They asked me the questions. That's where I met the
> people who I think are some of the mothers and fathers of this town's cultural
> diversity. I learned a lot fast. I incorporated a lot of what I learned into my
> classroom and into my curriculum. At the time we were challenged to review our
> materials, to look for bias both in the curriculum materials we were using, as well
> as our instructional practices and the tools we used to assess kids-both locally
> designed teacher-made tests and commercially prepared standardized tests.

By the following year (1994), the Coordinator of English Language Education

was supporting an additional endeavor which she called Cultural Identity Groups. She

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was part of a 17 member multi-cultural team of people from the local university and the

school district who consciously worked "starting affinity groups with kids of color and

then blending groups across the years and grouping kids from different backgrounds."

These groups were designed to "create an experience where students and adults built

strong relationships with each other based upon positions of feeling affirmed in who they

were."

Four years later in 1997, a new initiative known as Becoming a Multi-Cultural

School System (BAMS), emerged. This program was derived from the multicultural

education movement in which many of the school district's employees were actively

involved with at the time. BAMS took several forms. The district's mission statement

(which is still currently used) was rewritten to reflect a multicultural philosophy. It

contains a set of guiding principles and strategies that are utilized in the goal of becoming

a multicultural school system. BAMS goals and strategies were also placed on the district

website and the application for new hires included a question regarding a potential

employee's commitment to multicultural education. The superintendent described the

many components of BAMS quite succinctly:

> There was an initiative over ten years ago that focused on becoming a multi-cultural school system. It is the mission statement of the district right now and contains a set of guiding principles and a set of strategies, some of which were delivered on, some which weren't. Some that permeated the system, some that didn't. So whether it was implementing intervention programs, implementing clubs and activities for kids or interest groups, creating mandatory anti-bias training for teachers, or infusing multi-cultural education into the curriculum—BAMS just became part of the culture.

Several controversies surfaced around the adoption of the BAMS vision, but they

were finally set aside as BAMS ran its course and the Social Justice Commitment began

to emerge. Several teachers spoke of the mandatory anti-bias trainings that were offered

during this time. Most teachers greatly appreciated the information and felt that the

trainings needed to be offered again to the new teachers who had been hired since the

original trainings. However, one teacher shared an example of some resistance she had

seen to the trainings.

> We used to take those two anti-bias courses. To me they were really interesting, but there are some people that really hated them. I think that it was because it was mostly philosophy and it wasn't hands on. It wasn't focused on what can I do in my classroom and I think that when you're a practitioner who's facing however many kids you're facing a day, you want concrete ideas about what you can do in your classroom.

Another controversy regarding BAMS erupted several years ago and it took the

form of an argument between a large group of educators who believed the BAMS title no

longer fit their situation. They strongly believed that all the work they had done had led

them to a place where they were now "being" and no longer "becoming" a multi-cultural

school system. Essentially a significant group of educators felt that they had now arrived–

they had achieved the status of being a multicultural school. The Director of English

Language Education said that "people got a little fed up with BAMS because of the

continual discussion about whether we are going to "be" one or are we going to

"become" one? One social studies teacher said, "Then someone said what do you mean

'becoming'? Aren't we there? We're not becoming anymore. I mean we've been doing

this 10 years, 15 years. Aren't we now a multi-cultural school system?"

However, a smaller group of educators had a different viewpoint and entered

into an argument against "being." They strongly believed that much work remained on

"becoming" a multicultural school system. Most of the comments I heard regarding this

"still a work in progress" viewpoint were, not surprisingly, from the few teachers of

color. One of the ELL teachers asked me, "Have you read our mission statement? There

is a line in it about the BAMS initiative. I am so glad they use the word 'becoming' because we're not there yet. We still have a long way to go." Another teacher of color shared her feelings about the argument between "being" and "becoming." She said,

> I think we are in the process of becoming but we're not there yet. I have so many stories I could tell you that would show that we are not there yet. One incident happened just last week. An event occurred that showed how much discrimination still exists for people of color in this district.

She went on and shared an experience of how her ELL program had been disregarded and "set aside" as not being "as important" as other programs in the district. This occurred through a scheduling issue in which she felt that the students of color did not get what they needed and were treated unfairly.

It was not surprising that most of the individuals who felt that they had not arrived at being a multicultural community were the teachers of color. As social justice theory proposes it is most often the individuals who sit in a place of privilege who are not able to see the inequity and discrimination that exists (Adams et al., 1997; McIntosh, 1990).

Although the language and concept of social justice was beginning to surface among specific members of the school community through programs such as BAMS and other efforts, the Coordinator of English Language Education believed that the arrival of a new superintendent in 2003, helped fuel the action component of the social justice movement. She spoke about his desire to more directly impact instruction in the classroom. She shared his vision of the creation of *The Social Justice Commitment* document**.** He wanted to "take our good intentions and transfer them to seven columns on a grid that can specifically put things in place to allow the school system to do a better job with *all* its kids. To create a document that was user friendly for us so that we can make sure that the language of social justice was there intentionally for students." The

desire to get social-justice knowledge and practices into the classroom eventually led the

superintendent to create a committee headed by The Coordinator of English Language

Education to produce *The Social Justice Commitment* handbook.

The Social Justice Commitment was sparked from the superintendent's concern

about the patchwork approach students were receiving regarding social justice education.

He described the randomness of the instruction;

> The intentional work and knowledge students received in social justice tended to
> be almost an accident depending on which teachers they had. Some students
> would say, "If I read the 'Invisible Knapsack' one more time I don't know what
> I'm going to do." Some students would say, "that's all I ever get is BAMS work
> and social justice work." But other students didn't know what BAMS or the
> 'Invisible Knapsack' was. It depended on the content area. It depended on the
> teacher. It depended on the curriculum."

The superintendent's vision was to create an avenue for working toward social justice.

He said,

> We needed to see what we could do to make sure that we were intentional in our
> expectations, in our vocabulary and in our concepts with students beginning in
> kindergarten and through the years so that we could make sure students are
> learning concepts of tolerance, justice and injustice, what do they learn about
> concepts of privilege? When do they learn about symbols? When do they learn
> about the language the adults have learned over time so that they can navigate the
> territory as they go through the schools together and move into college?

The Coordinator told me that the educational community always struggled with

the idea of multiculturalism and that the "social justice terminology just came upon us."

She shared that the concept of social justice emerged between the experience educators

were having at the anti-bias trainings and the work of the educators connected to the

social-justice movement occurring at the local university. The local university had

recently established a Social Justice Education program through its School of Education.

Several local professors had written and published a book about teaching for social

justice, and the Coordinator believes that this university influence helped the shift from using the language of multiculturalism to using the language of social justice. She believes that this is where the seed got planted among the members of the initial Social Justice Commitment committee. Her passion about social justice was evident in the following words:

> I think it became clear to us that this [work within the district] was not a multicultural issue. This is a social-justice issue. I hate the word "issue". This is not just an issue. This is a focus on humanity. This is serious stuff. This is very serious stuff. It's taking people's spirits, kid's spirits, and demarcating them on the basis of not giving them what they need in schools. And I think that as a person who continued to do the work in the system, as a White person, it became increasingly clear to me that this is a social justice issue. So, I think I was really at a point that I wasn't going to be in this system any longer and talk about anything but social justice.

For over a year a small group of educators led by the Coordinator of English Language Education, worked to create *The Social Justice Commitment* document. Although their intention was to involve as many educators as possible in its production, ultimately, the educators' suggestions were never included in the final document. Because this program came from the top administrative offices in the school district, most of the school's staff had not even heard of the Social Justice Commitment Program until the kickoff on staff-development day in January of 2007. Several members of the Social Justice Commitment committee spoke to the teachers at the staff-development meeting. Their message was one designed to motivate and encourage each staff member to make a personal commitment to the vision. The Coordinator stressed that the vision no longer belonged just to the committee. She said, "I want to say we are on a collective journey. This is not about the Social Justice Commitment group any-more; it is really about our

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collective efforts." Another committee member spoke about the evolution of this document.

> I want to thank all of those very smart and dedicated professionals who had a hand (and a heart I might add) in getting us to this point today; from the early days of the Cultural Diversity Advisory Group to BAMS and now to Social Justice. These initiatives with slightly different names and all the different people involved over many years are inextricably linked in equity, multicultural, anti-bias, civil rights, and now social justice chain of commitment that has kept children and their success at the core of their professional lives.

The educators were sent off after this roll out of the Social Justice Commitment and asked to use the handbook as a touchstone for meeting the needs of *all* students.

It is important at this point to note how the long history of doing equity work had primed the institution for the Social Justice Commitment. The superintendent's earlier statement demonstrates how it became acceptable –it became ok- to have multicultural education as a part of Middle School's cultures when he described the BAMS program. The fact that it became OK for multiculturalism to become a part of the culture provides evidence of the institutional work done over time getting people acquainted with diversity and equity issues. Perhaps the superintendent summed it up best when I tried to credit this program to his leadership by saying "I'm just another link in the chain. It certainly precedes me. Obviously many links came together to get to this point."

Jackson and Hardiman (1994) state that in order for a system to change, the entire organization must be willing to change. In Middle School's case, change evolved slowly and over time through a variety of avenues—both on the individual and institutional level. Many factors contributed to the Middle School community being ready to accept the Social Justice Commitment. First, the larger community played a role by its historical commitment to progressive beliefs and practices, to higher education, and to intellectual

pursuits. The Multicultural and Social Justice Education programs at the local university were influencing factors (as well as the mandatory district anti-bias staff development trainings). Also, an unspoken commitment to a spirit of cooperation versus competition existed in the district, which is a view that leans toward social justice. The superintendent said,

> There are a lot of people here in the system who really don't like competition. They'd much rather see kids playing ultimate frisbee than basketball. They are into the new games' philosophy. They wonder why we have to be so competitive. We don't tout our successes. We don't do PR beyond just letting the newspaper know we're having a little something going on at the school. But we don't overtly go after awards and we don't have big celebrations about student achievement. So I have to say to them that we're not your typical suburb. You know, this is not suburbia, USA. That's just not who we are. We don't make a big deal out of sports teams' successes. We certainly are not Texas sports. I mean not anywhere close to that.

In the same manner, the principal shared with me that student government positions were not chosen through the standard school-election process that occurs in most schools. At Middle School, the student leaders are nominated to student government positions by their teachers. And as social justice theory recommends, the group of student leaders was representative of the diversity of the student body. In this case, the eradication of competition allowed for more socially-just practices to be present.

The impact of the BAMS program was also far reaching. A white, male science teacher who enthusiastically supported the BAMS program shared how it had impacted his work;

> There's been this effort to create teaching objectives that meet some of BAMS' goals. For example, I have questioned how to bring under-represented groups into my science class in terms of showing their participation in the field of science? How do I make sure that my instruction is including not just White males, but African-American women, or other minorities? How do I make sure that I represent the contributions that many different cultural groups have made to science?

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Although he was using what Maher (1999) calls an "add on"— "add women to science and stir"—approach, he was beginning to think critically about equity and diversity or at least inclusion. This approach is a commonly-used strategy for encouraging more females to choose science careers–which is what this science teacher was hoping to do.

I returned to the school in the late spring of 2007 to conduct interviews and follow-up on the introduction of the Social Justice Commitment. Although not nearly enough time had passed to evaluate the outcome or effect of the Social Justice Commitment, I was interested in how the participants had accepted the program. The participants' disparate responses followed three main themes. First, a large group of educators doubted the district's sincerity and commitment to the social justice initiative. Second, a smaller number commended the district's approach to social justice and praised *The Social Justice Commitment* handbook and initiative. Lastly, most all participants spoke of a lack of clarity regarding the Social Justice Commitment and felt that in its present state it was not useful. I wondered how many of the participants had even read the document.

Although none of the participants were openly hostile or negative about the need for a social-justice vision, many of the participants expressed cynicism and skepticism regarding the district's sincerity with regard to the Social Justice Commitment. One educator with thirty years of experience in the district had been involved in many initiatives throughout her career and was fairly pessimistic about any new program. She had not heard any mention of the program since the staff-development day in January and saw it as "something the district feels it needs to address and now that they have done it—had the big roll out day—they can now just tuck it away for a while." Another long-

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time educator who exhibited a "hands off" approach to most district ideas confided that she also did not think "it had ever even been brought up again." She continued, "It's all talk as far as I'm concerned because I haven't seen anything else come across my email from any administrator or heard anything about continuing on with it." A history teacher who was actively involved with diversity issues had the same view: "It's like when we had the social justice talk on the curriculum day, it was only for half a morning. So only a quarter of the day was devoted to it. It just felt like it was window dressing. It didn't feel like it was sincere." Another high profile teacher acknowledged that the "social justice stuff is good, but this is just another thing the district is asking us to do that they are not going to back up with resources, like time and money for trainings." She believed that there are "a lot of good things in that manual, but I haven't seen any follow-up in the last four months. You have to put resources into making something like this happen and so far it's not happening." She added, "We have people on staff in the superintendent's office who are grant writers. So if this is such a big important thing, then why aren't they writing grants for training money and for experts to come in and do trainings?" This lack of follow-up led her to question the district's commitment. I asked the health and physical education teacher if she had heard anything mentioned in faculty meetings pertaining to the Social Justice Commitment since the winter. She answered,

> No, our faculty meetings are really controlled. I hate faculty meetings. I'd rather go have a root canal somewhere. It is not faculty bringing issues up that need to be discussed with other faculty members. It is a controlled situation where the administration brings up issues that they want us to work on. And social justice has not been addressed unless I've fallen asleep. It is just not an issue there.

This same educator was willing to work with the program but felt that the district needed to provide an avenue for faculty to become more familiar with *The Social Justice*

Commitment document. She offered the following suggestion and was disappointed that

the district did not follow through with this kind of support:

> I could see [the district] easily backing up this social justice thing by giving us
> released time for the faculty in our district to go and take training classes. And put
> some of that stuff into action and have a real action plan in the classroom and a
> check-in where we could talk about what we tried to do and what we learned. We
> could talk about what we are trying to do and this is what happened. This is what I
> am going to change. And have it over the course of a year, or at least a semester.
> That would be them putting their money where their mouth is. But nobody wants
> to hear that. We're on budget cuts.

This lack of follow through is why she doubted the district's ability to make the Social

Justice Commitment a successful program. Another social studies teacher felt that an

honest attempt was made initially but then said "You know we got together, we talked

about it, great. But then it didn't go anywhere. There was no follow up on it. So it felt

kind like we were doing it just to do it. A lot of people asked, what's the point of this?"

One participant emphatically said, "You know, it's not enough. It's just in a book." The

Latino Outreach Program Director was skeptical but was willing to give the district some

time to work on the program. She simply said several times "We'll see. We'll see." We'll

see."

Although many participants shared their doubts regarding the district's dedication

to the Social Justice Commitment, I also heard from a strong group of educators who

thought that the district was making a sincere and genuine attempt to incorporate a vision

of social justice into the institutional system. These participants' responses ranged from

"at least we are talking about [social justice]" to "I really believe that the district's goal is

to have social justice more embedded into the culture of Middle School, and I think the

administrators are making an honest and sincere effort to make it happen." A female

science teacher who had been actively working on equity and justice issues in her

classroom for years supported the program and said of the handbook, "It is a wonderful document. There's a lot of good in it. A lot of great ideas included." She was hopeful that the district would continue to move forward and that the initiative would eventually consist of "more than just a document–more than just something to read." She was glad that "at least this system has a day for [social justice] and at least people are talking about it." The student adjustment counselor also believed that "social justice really is part of the district." She saw the leadership as being sincere and genuine in their attempts to infuse an active vision of social justice into the educational system. A new guidance counselor admitted that although his understanding of the initiative was lacking, he had heard a lot of people talking about it, and he thought that professional-development training had been scheduled in the future that would focus on the document. His understanding was that the initiative was being developed "to help us deal with race, people's cultural awareness and things of that nature." He spoke enthusiastically and was looking forward to learning more about the Social Justice Commitment. Another science teacher was somewhat confused about the program but thought that the most important part of the Social Justice Commitment was trying to put "achievement for every kid" into action.

Finally, the ELL teacher who was somewhat skeptical was also patiently waiting to see what would actually result from the program. She acknowledged that much more work needed to be done but was grateful that social justice was a part of Middle School's mission. She expressed this gratitude by calling it a "blessing." She said,

> The blessing is that we are talking about it. The blessing is that it's in people's mouths and thinking. The blessing is that it's becoming collective perhaps. How committed people are is a different story. But when you have a document that is public and you present it to an audience the way they did – that is progress. I mean we need to give credit to the fact that it could be worse in terms of nothing happening.

In addition to both positive and negative views about the Social Justice

Commitment was a general feeling of the lack of clarity about the program. Almost every

interviewee spoke of their confusion about the usefulness of the document, their lack of

understanding of the overall vision and expressed a widespread sense of a lack of

direction in how to put the program into action.

One participant expressed her sense of confusion regarding the term "social

justice." She talked about it being an "abstract" term and said,

> I think [the term social justice] needs to be more explicitly described for people in order to understand what it means, what it looks like so people can use it. So when you have a vision or philosophy of social justice, I think we have to have an understanding of what it means and what it looks like in the classroom? And what it looks like in other areas of the school?

Another participant agreed that he needed more guidance: "Honestly, I don't have a

detailed understanding of what the Social Justice Commitment i**s** from the school."

Another said "I don't know exactly what to do to realize that kind of vision." When I

asked a science teacher about the document he paused and said "Yeah, it would take me a

little while to find it right now. I have no idea what to do with that thing." Other

participants were frustrated with the lack of training that had been offered regarding the

use of the document. Although they thought it was a good idea they expressed the

following complaints: "This training, I think, would have been more effective if it had

been structured a little bit differently. We needed more time for discussion and a clearer

agenda," "There wasn't any way I was going to be able to do anything with it." "I think

it's never really been presented to people." "It needs to be more formally presented to

people." "Since it was never really presented I think it will be just put on a shelf and not

looked at again." "You know, I think it really required more effort than just putting out a

wonderful manual." "We need a real action plan about using it." And finally, "We need more time." A couple of teachers were even defensive about the presentation of the document because they felt like it was an "add on." They were upset that they were being asked to do "another thing" on top of all that they were already required to do. Perhaps the ELL teacher expressed the most overarching concern. She was worried about the sustainability of the commitment. She asked very pertinent questions that are core to the systemic change piece of the tri-focal lens: "How long will it stay? Is this program sustainable? When will it end?" She shared her frustration with programs that she called "short trends," by the following: "I always say that when the money's gone, the program will be gone. I don't want to be part of that. I'm tired of being in short trend things that end. It has to be consistent, and they have to find a way to fund it forever." She wanted to see the Social Justice Commitment become institutionalized but doubted that it would last.

In viewing the participants' responses to the Social Justice Commitment Program and its historical development several issues related to the trifocal lens emerge. Particularly relevant to the success of the program is the third component of the lens—the interplay between individual and systemic change. Adams et al. (1997) contend that individual change must precede systemic change. In the case of the Social Justice Commitment Program, a number of individuals experienced changes in their attitudes and priorities, but as the controversy surrounding "being" or "becoming" a multi-cultural school described above suggests, the changes were not complete or systemic. Many participants had gained a basic understanding of social justice concepts regarding power, privilege, marginalization and oppression during the two mandatory anti-bias trainings.

However, the ambivalence and lack of focus on the part of many participants signal that the changes had not yet become systemic. As this case suggests, the interplay between individual and systemic change is highly complex and difficult to access after such a short interlude.

If the Social Justice Commitment Program were ever to become truly systemic—and truly socially just—it would need to be developed and presented in a more inclusive way. Administrators, teachers, staff members, parents, students and other community members must have representation in the process. This representation is necessary for the entire community to feel a level of involvement and ownership with the program. The vision must be system-wide. As Jackson and Hardiman (1994) recommend, systemic change can only occur through a top down and bottom up partnership—which clearly did not happen in this case since most of the participants were not even aware of the program until its induction.

This top-down approach also violates the first component of the trifocal lens which focuses on the pervasiveness of oppression. The lack of inclusion signals the presence of an unequal power structure. Anguiano (2003) acknowledges that unequal power relationships are perpetuated when the group least affected by the reform is the one making the reform measures. It is interesting to note that several of the teachers of color specifically talked about how they were not included in designing a "reform measure project" that was aimed at helping the students of color. It's also interesting to note the focus on students of color instead of on all students.

Although parts of the tri-focal lens were missing, Middle School is making a commendable effort of addressing social justice in a way that very few schools are.

Social justice language such as power, privilege, and marginalization was being used and a handbook had been printed. A portion of staff-development day was set aside for the Social Justice Commitment program and financial resources had been made available for a staff position. Issues of social justice were made visible and concrete through the introduction of the program. However, as will be discussed later, the missing, essential components are the hands on tools necessary for translating goals into action.

<center>The Latino Outreach Program</center>

The Latino Outreach Program was created out of a need to better serve the Latino students and parents in the Middle School community and had been in place for approximately eight months prior to my visit to the school. The Latino students were reportedly achieving at the lowest level of all other minority groups in the school. According to a science teacher, the poor statistics from the statewide-proficiency tests played a major part in the superintendent's commitment to create this program. She said, "The African American group of students is for the most part faring better than our Latino group in the school system. The data from the MCA's [Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessments] showed that this group [Latino students] was struggling the most." One of the co-principals described how the program came about and the conscious intent of putting resources into helping students who were struggling. He said,

> A group of educators, parents, and community members from the region and outside our town as well that the superintendent put together to look at this issue and to come up with an action plan for different things that could be done and a couple of those [ideas] were put into place. And then this summer the superintendent said let's put our money where our mouth is and let's try to hire someone who can really focus in on this group.

The superintendent organized a group of Latino staff and community members to

brainstorm how the school could better reach Latino students and families. One of the

Latino math teachers praised the superintendent's efforts;

> I've seen honest efforts from the superintendent to reach out to the Latino
> community. He created a committee that met and talked about Latino
> achievement and about how   we can be doing things differently for our Latino
> students. A student panel talked to teachers about their experiences-what it's like
> to be Latino in the school system and what is not working. I think [the
> superintendent] is definitely a politician, but I think he's got his head in the right
> place. You know he comes to just about all the evening cultural events, which I
> find impressive.

This brainstorming meeting spearheaded by the superintendent resulted in funding

an educator to serve as the coordinator of the new Latino Outreach Program. A Latina,

Spanish speaking, school counselor was moved from her counseling position into this

capacity. Although this new assignment required additional work, the coordinator was

enthusiastic and encouraged to see the Latino community being better served. She was

impressed that district officials felt that the success of the Latino students was important

enough to fund her position. She told me "the school system was concerned that so many

of the Latino kids were either dropping out of school or not passing MCA's, so we

realized that it was important to focus more on the academic success of these kids."

The Latino Outreach program serves targeted students who were not getting

services elsewhere and was designed to teach students how to best navigate a culture of

power and how to advocate for themselves. These were, for the most part, students who

struggle academically and who were not being tracked by another adult. They were the

students who traditionally fell through the cracks. The Latino Outreach Coordinator's job

description focused specifically on outreach, but within that definition she performed a

multitude of different tasks. When I asked what a typical day looked like for her, she

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responded, "Every day is different." Over the course of the school year, outreach had

primarily evolved into meaning academic support. As Coordinator she acted as a liaison

with individual students' teachers. She asked the teachers questions such as, "Did this

child show up to work with you after school? How is so and so doing in your class? What

concerns do you have? How are things going?" She consistently communicated with

teachers, tracking the progress of the students on her caseload. She worked one on one

with students, helping them with their school work, teaching them helpful study skills,

and reading with them. She observed the classes in which her students were not doing

well. One teacher shared how helpful the Latino Outreach Coordinator had been in

getting his students to stay after school for extra help:

> They're very sweet boys but they would be falling through the cracks without the
> extra help. They are like little slippery fish. They say, can't stay today. Gotta go
> home. And they need to have someone who can work with their parents and say,
> yes, you're going to stay today and this is what you need to do. So [Latino
> Outreach Coordinator] is good with that.

Most importantly, the Latino Outreach Coordinator made individual connections with

students. This strategy is in line with one of the recommendations in *The Social Justice*

Commitment handbook:

> Build a strong, positive, relationship with every student who is achieving below
> grade level. These students, even more than others, need to know that their
> teachers like them, believe they can learn, expect them to learn, and will do what
> is needed to help them succeed. They need to know that no one belongs more than
> they do.

The Coordinator believed the most critical part of her job is to let young people know that

they had someone who cared about them. She asked the students question such as "Do

you have a place where you can work at home? What do you need to be able to

understand what's going on in the classroom? How are things going?" She shared how much her students like the personal attention, even though they rarely admit it.

> I have a handful of kids who actually like it that I'm checking in on them and know that I'm aware of how they are doing. They like it that I have that kind of information. And the crazy thing is that they actually don't know how they did on a certain piece of work. They just don't know. But, they're always interested in what I have to say to them. I have their term project reports and I have their grades and their records to go over with them. I always see a twinkle in their eye because I acknowledge them. And I say good for you. This is wonderful. And I ask them about their strengths and their interests. Everybody likes a little attention.

The Coordinator acknowledged that "if I were not on them they wouldn't be getting things done." While this attention is admirable, in order to accomplish social justice education goals and as the program matures, it needs to move to the next step which is teaching the students to advocate for themselves. As students move through the educational system they may not always have someone to speak for them. All students should learn what advocating for the self looks like and learn how to engage in the expectations of the system. The most important and socially-just aspect the program can teach is that students care for themselves and can speak up for themselves.

In addition to the academic work with students the Latino Outreach Coordinator also communicated regularly with parents. Most of the parents of her students do not speak English as their first language (and some speak little or no English) and the Coordinator reached out to "bring them into" the school community. She stated, "I feel like part of my job is making inroads with families, inviting them in, getting them very involved." Social justice research consistently reveals a strong relationship between parental support and involvement and academic achievement for their children (Bainbridge & Lesley, 2002; Jeynes, 2003). One study examining the effects of parent

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involvement on children's academic achievement verifies that although it is well known that parental involvement is critical to students' success, it is even more vital for minority students in all academic areas (Jeynes, 2003). The conundrum is that it is more difficult for minority parents to involve themselves due to the systemic oppression that they face. Having political power in a school system is central to having one's interests and needs met (Spring, 1997). Privileged parents can demand the best resources and the most access to the highest quality educational experiences for their children. The study participants at Middle School recognized this fact and were hoping that the Latino Outreach Program could "bring more [Latino] parents into" the system. Many participants reported about how difficult it was to get marginalized parents involved in the school. The co principal especially expressed his frustration with the following:

> We've struggled with getting all parents involved. We've tried many different ways. The Latino community is probably the hardest to get involved. Last year we didn't make MCASS. We had to put letters out to all the parents letting them know that we had not passed and that the state had put us into corrective action. Asking if they had any questions or thoughts on this, please contact us. We didn't have one parent of a Latino person contact us and they were primarily the students who had done poorly.

As just one of the many systems they are trying to find their way through, navigating an unfamiliar school system can be overwhelming for many of these parents, and the Latino Outreach Coordinator helped them learn the norms of the educational process. The Coordinator shared that the great desire these parents have for their children to receive an education, but they often feel unable to advocate for their students. Brantlinger (2003) believes that since these parents lack privilege pertaining to language, class, economics, and cultural understanding, they do not have any power. Often they will internalize their oppression and believe that they are not entitled to make demands.

The Latino Outreach Coordinator assisted these parents in gaining information and

skills—such as knowing who to talk to and how?—that are taken for granted by the

dominant group. Parents without the necessary cultural capital (i.e., understanding the

school system and language skills) and time (because of multiple jobs or limited time off)

are marginalized by the system and have less presence in their children's academic

experiences. The Coordinator ultimately taught parents what power they can claim by

clarifying that it is not only all right to call a teacher but it is a part of the give-and-take

partnership that is the goal of U.S. education. She provided very specific guidance:

> I think parents need to be told it's OK to ask a question if they see something that they
> are concerned about. It is OK to question teachers and challenge them if problems
> occur. It's OK to criticize a teacher." She tells them, "You're not offending anybody.
> It's OK to show up at school. You just need to make an appointment.

The Latino Outreach Coordinator served as both a student and parent advocate on

a regular basis. For example, she related a story of a student who had been falsely

accused of bringing a knife to school. This incident had been permanently recorded on

his school records as a violation. Even after he had been found innocent, the parents who

spoke little English were not able to get the report removed from their son's school

records. It took the involvement of the Latino Outreach Coordinator to resolve this issue.

In addition to providing academic support, acting as a liaison, and being an

advocate the Latino Outreach Educator occasionally even provided transportation to

those in need. She related the following incident:

> A mother of one of my students was diabetic and had a doctor appointment. She
> doesn't have a car and had no way to get there so I drove her. If somebody needs
> something like that then I just do it. It's not the focus of my work, but
> occasionally it happens.

The Coordinator also makes sure that her lower-income Latino students have a computer at home. She created a system where old computers that the school was no longer using could be used in the students' homes, enabling most of her students to have a computer in their home. She sent a letter in Spanish to each family on her case load making them aware of this opportunity.

Social justice theory supports the creation of special programs that focus on the "other", but Kumashiro (2000) contends that this focus is only the first step, and the second step includes a focus on teaching the dominant group about the other. Bringing visibility to the "other" focuses on the similarities across groups in order to develop empathy for the "other". The Latino Outreach Coordinator had the opportunity to do some of this "Education for the Other" by becoming a cultural-awareness educator for the mainstream educational community. She shared that she often had to educate her colleagues about the Latino community:

> You know it's interesting; in our [Latino] countries, you can show up anytime you want to school. That's not a problem. You don't need an appointment, you just show up. But, you never criticize the teacher. The teacher's always right. So teachers here don't often understand the Latino culture and how it works. In my country being a good parent means feeding your kid and taking care of their physical needs and sending them to school on time. You even help them with their homework if they need to. But you leave the education up to the school and you certainly don't question the teacher. It's rude to question the teacher. Who do you think you are to question the teacher? They know. That's what they went to school for. What's the problem? Don't you know better? It's just that out of the box. And it's engrained in me, but it's almost embarrassing for me to say that. But it's so engrained. And Latino students are taught to look down when a teacher is talking to them. It is a sign of respect. It means that you're acknowledging that person's authority and you are showing a sign of respect for that person's authority. You're being respectful by looking down. If you look up, you look up in their eyes, you're challenging them. You don't do that. You get in more trouble. And here [in the U.S.] it's just the opposite. And then the sad part is that the Latino kids get in trouble here for behaving that way. So, you know, both sides don't know what's going on with the other. And here the poor kid gets blamed for it.

By default, educating the mainstream, not just the Latino population, and attempting to bridge the cultural gap became part of the Coordinator's job. Therefore, she was utilizing this second approach when she was informally teaching her colleagues about Latino cultural practices regarding education.

The Latino Outreach Program had not been established long enough to determine the impact it was making in terms of the achievement of Latino students, but it was providing students with an adult who cared about them, knew their culture, and made individual connections with each of them. It was a program that was focused on the "other", which was what these marginalized students and parents needed.

That being the case and within the scope of social justice education, I did not see evidence that the Latino Outreach Program moves beyond the established paradigm. The program offers to give different information and skills to Latino students and parents. But nowhere in the course of my study did I see or hear evidence of the relationship being reciprocal which raises important questions: What can the coordinator and program learn from the students and parents? What aspects of Latino culture would in fact benefit the Middle School's culture? To be truly socially just, can the Latino Outreach Coordinator expect "the other" to adapt to get along? The program—and this movement was not evident in the interviews—needs to move toward involving all levels within the school. As it seems now, the coordinator acts as a very thinly-stretched conduit between an entire population (of students and parents) and the school. School administrators, faculty and staff would all need to be equally involved in discourse with the target population for the program to be socially just.

Practices

In the last section of this chapter I describe the different current practices in place in Middle School that the participants believed addressed social justice goals. This list of practices was created from the participants' responses. After providing a brief description of each individual practice, I discuss and analyze two practices—scheduling and selecting and presenting curriculum—in greater depth. I explore in detail the strategy used to design the school's schedule and look at how the practice of building a schedule can either contribute to or detract from social justice theory. I also examine the practices of selecting and presenting curriculum that individual educators believed to be socially just. I analyze these particular practices because both were brought up repeatedly by the participants and were a focal point of their social justice efforts.

Heterogeneous Grouping

All of the classes in Middle School were completely heterogeneously grouped, except for eighth-grade math. The system had been de-tracked several years before I began my research meaning that a tiered system where students are sorted or separated by their achievement level was not in place.

Collaboration

Middle School teachers were given opportunities to work together regularly. Several programs were institutionalized that provided the educators time to develop and integrate curriculum, team teach, discuss issues regarding students and meet with parents.

The focus was on teachers spending time together rather than being isolated in their individual classrooms.

Curriculum Differentiation

Middle School had widely adopted the teaching practice of differentiation. Curriculum differentiation is a broad term referring to the need to tailor teaching environments and practices to create appropriately-different learning experiences for different students. Differentiation is designed to be used in heterogeneous classrooms where a wide variety of achievement levels exist.

Teaming

The practice of teaming was designed to create smaller learning communities within a large school. Middle School accomplished this by splitting the school community into six teams consisting of seven to ten faculty members and approximately 90-100 students each. Teaming enabled the students to be with the same teachers and students for a good part of the day.

Setting High Expectations

The Middle School faculty had instituted the practice of setting high expectations for all students. The participants clearly had high expectations of all of their students—not just the high achievers—and had a deeply-held belief that all students could learn. They communicated these expectations to students regularly.

Scheduling

Building a school schedule is an immensely complex process and is a necessary task of every educational institution. Other middle schools traditionally follow a seven period schedule and each day consists of seven timed periods that are approximately 50 minutes in length. Students attend the same seven classes for the same amount of time every day. Middle School had previously been involved in a middle school-reform program called Turning Points that encouraged middle schools to re-design their schedules to better fit the needs of a middle-school student. The schedule at Middle School had been through several different models by the time I began my research. The school had finally settled on one that centered on a rotational design and was, according to the principal, "being driven by a social justice lens." Each student was assigned eight classes but only attended six each day. The classes rotated each day with each class being held for an equal amount of time—52 minutes. In analyzing the format of this schedule, I determined that the benefits of this arrangement converged with social justice in the following five ways.

<u>Access to All Classes</u>

First, this schedule correlated with the participants' definitions and perceptions of access. They overwhelmingly viewed the schedule as being socially just because it enabled every student, including those in special education or ELL, to have the opportunity to take any course at the school; every student had access to every course offered. In the past, students who needed some kind of extra support, such as special education or ELL, would not have enough space in their schedules to take music, art, a

foreign language class or any other elective. The principal was especially proud of the schedule and said "We've opened the door for all students to access all types of curriculum." She went on to say,

> It's huge and it has many, many implications. For example, it recognizes that a child who has English as a second language may also want to, need to, benefit from being in the orchestra. And those are not mutually exclusive, but they had been in the past.

One of the counselors spoke of the advantage of students being able to take a world languages class and related this to social justice; "The way the schedule is designed this year gives students a wider range of classes to take. And I think a world language class is a great way to introduce people to different cultures and different languages." A math teacher shared his view about how unjust the old schedule had been; "With the old schedule, kids with IEPs and who needed special services were not able to access most of our offerings. Talk about socially unjust." He explained to me that before the new schedule students ended up in different groups by default: orchestra for one group and band for another. As a result, these groups of students ended up taking most of their classes together. The math teacher explained the inequity in this kind of grouping.

> The orchestra team was high powered with lots of family involvement. There were few socioeconomic differences in there and they had consistent parents who were highly involved in their education who were always communicating with the school. You know, the fact that a kid shows up knowing how to play a violin in seventh grade speaks volumes about their home life. So need I say more?

The fact that the rotational schedule had become institutionalized and well accepted by the faculty is most likely a major factor contributing to how most of the participants used the word "access" in their definitions and perceptions of social justice education.

A second advantage of this rotational schedule was that any student needing extra support in terms of special education, ELL or a second math class could get this assistance. The schedule was built around providing for all of this support. For certain students, a half time support class that met three out of every eight days was also included. Students who did not need any extra support took a study hall class during this time thereby setting up a situation of equity instead of equality by providing different levels of assistance for a variety of learning needs.

Small Learning Communities

The creation of small learning communities, which are supported by social justice research, was a third benefit of the schedule. The schedule allowed for structures to be put in place that supported personal connections. Students are more successful when they can learn with a small group of the same students and with the same teachers; such groupings allow for students' their strengths and weakness to be better known. Within each team were four faculty members who represented the four major core academic areas: science, language arts, social studies and math. This structure enabled the students to be with the same people for a good portion of each day and allowed teachers to work together by sharing the same group of students. The schedule accommodated the four teachers on the team to work together collaboratively for 1.5 hours each day. The educators took this time seriously and used it to plan integrated curriculum, discuss problems concerning specific students, meet with parents, etc. One educator described the experience with her team in the following way:

We meet every day. We're a tight team and I think we work well together. We're very supportive of each other. I depend a lot on my team for any kind of questions I have. Anything that happens I can run by my team. I can say, this is something that happened to me. How should I handle it? You know, that kind of thing. We talk about the kids all the time. We joke about them. We kind of make fun of them as adolescents, but we never say anything negative about them.

Quite regularly other professionals met with the core teachers and formed partnerships with the team. For example, the art, or music, or physical education teacher met with the team to integrate curriculum or offer insights into particular students. A math teacher acknowledged the benefit of this partnership:

> For example, with art, the kids would have art for a third of the year and that art teacher would come to our team meetings and would help us with specific students. Oftentimes those integrated studies teachers would bring things to the table that the other teachers wouldn't see. You know in an art class or a PE class or a drama class, kids can be very different from how they are in a traditional core course, especially if it is their favorite class. That teacher may see something that we are missing.

One of the social studies teachers was extremely happy with working with the teaming approach and shares what his team did.

> We might meet one day with a guidance counselor to talk about certain students. One day might be to talk about long-range planning, integrating curriculum, activities, things like exhibitions. One day might be administrative activities. One day might be a kid day, talking about certain kids, having parents come and talk with us. Anyway, we work with those same core kids, so we get to know those kids a little bit better because we're hearing from a variety of teachers how they are doing in different classes. And we all have those same kids who we can actually work with during the course of the day.

Another educator expressed how the teaming approach got parents more involved in their children's education.

> When working with our teams, we, we would talk about a student who was struggling in one or more of the classes. And then the next step is to get together with the counselor. Then we'd reach out. We'd start making the phone calls and we'd start getting a hold of those parents and we'd have them in for meetings and that's how we get them more involved. We say, "Hey look, what we're doing isn't working. What can you tell us about your son or daughter that will help?

How can we come up with a partnership with your family to help this student succeed here?

In addition to teaming, the small-learning communities also allowed for the advisory groups described earlier. The advisory period was a twenty minute block of time at the beginning of each day when one teacher met with the same (approximately twelve) students each day for the entire year. It was incorporated into the schedule primarily as a means of making possible the personal connections with students which are important in social justice education work. A social studies teacher described the advisory period :

> It's not just taking attendance. It is twenty minutes long. We only have twelve kids and the teacher and the kids get to know each other in a more meaningful way than just touching base with each other. The kids get to know each other really well, and they get to know me really well.

Each day of the week was set up differently, based upon the teachers' assessment of what needed to occur for students to be better acquainted with by at least one adult in the school. On Monday advisory groups typically shared the highs and lows of the weekend. Other days focused on academic check-in plans for the week. Some days members of the group played a game or worked on a social action project such as recycling for the school. The teacher leading the advisory group officially became his or her students' individual advisor and advocate and was the teacher students could go to first if they were having a problem.

Another structure that strengthened personal connections between teachers and students was a concept known as looping, which is having seventh graders move as a group on to eighth grade with their same teams of students and teachers. So their English, science, math and social studies teachers would accompany them into the eighth grade. The same teacher would teach that same team the following year which allows a teacher

to facilitate learning and assessment more consistently. A social studies teacher described the advantages of looping:

> You see the same students for two years and you start off the eighth grade year hitting the floor running because you don't need to spend time getting to know the kids. You already know who they are. You can actually start the first day of school with a project. So I think it is a socially just way to run a schedule because kids are known by an adult who will advocate for them. You get to know their strengths and weaknesses and are able to work with them better. You form really strong relationships with these kids.

Another language arts teacher shared that if, in the past, she felt that her students had not perfected their essay writing skills by the end of the year she worried about her students advancing to eighth grade. However, with looping in place she was now able to see the same group of students for the following year and start where they had ended in seventh grade.

Collaboration

Collaboration was the fourth benefit that I identified from the structure of the schedule. The teaming approach was designed so that the four core subject teachers had the opportunity to work together each day for a 90 minutes period and was not considered to be a teacher's preparation period. They received their preparation period on top of the period they spent as a team. They valued this time to work together professionally. One educator shared, "The teaming approach and working together with my colleagues is like we are actually professionals, and I know my teaching has improved significantly since we have been doing this." Unfortunately the teachers who were not a part of the core subjects were not able to participate in this collaborative opportunity.

Finally (also consistent with social justice philosophy) the school was primarily

heterogeneously grouped, except for eighth grade math. The system had been de-tracked

several years ago even though tracking is an almost universal practice in public schools.

Because tracking only enables a select few, it marginalizes most of the students who

typically spend their entire academic career in assigned middle or lower tracks of the

system. Shor (1992) contends that the tracking system may be the most "undemocratic

mechanism of mass education" (p.140). When I spoke with the co-principal he stated,

"The major piece of work that we have done that I believe is social-justice work is de-

tracking." Because de-tracking is so difficult to accomplish in that it has been

institutionalized for so long, I questioned him about how they had been able to

successfully achieve heterogeneous grouping. He shared how it had been a long process

and much more complicated than just placing students with different abilities into the

same room. It had been accomplished very thoughtfully and intentionally and had

required extensive training. He explained,

> [De-tracking] really is a product of probably six or seven years of work of
> aligning curriculum, changing how we look at instruction. Changing how we look
> at students. We had to have many pieces in place before we could de-track. If you
> say, yup, we are just going to throw everybody into the same group and hope for
> the best, will not work. You have to be deliberate about what the curriculum looks
> like, what does the instruction look like? How do we make sure that we are
> raising the ceiling and not lowering it?

The leaders of the school had a vision of academic success and heterogeneous grouping,

and the teachers worked through many of their beliefs and attitudes about how students

learned. Eventually almost everyone in the school was on board with the commitment to

de-track. One math teacher was especially enthusiastic about this movement away from

traditional tracking because he was most committed to helping the lower-level students reach grade level:

> I see tracking as a race and income construct and just can't buy into it. I'm personally an advocate for some of the students who even in our present system aren't succeeding and tracking would leave those students further and further behind. I feel really strongly that it is much more important and it's much more a passion of mine to try and help those students who are not succeeding in our present math classes more so than these ones who you know maybe need a little bit more of a challenge because they are already the high achievers. Because I see those students who need more challenge, they find a way to get the challenge. They find a way to succeed. And maybe they don't get into Harvard every single time, but you know what, there are a lot of great colleges that they're still going to get into. Meanwhile these other folks who have had a system that was set up for them to fail can have a different experience.

The math teacher was aligned with the vision of focusing primarily on the students who are currently below grade-level standards that was presented in the new *Social Justice Commitment* handbook which states: "**Our primary mission** with regard to <u>academics</u> is to see that <u>every student</u> achieves at least at grade level standards and gets the instruction and support needed to learn and perform at least at that level." (p. 80) As the School Committee adopted the following statement, they also realized that even though educators must still offer challenging material to the accelerated students, the top priority must be accelerating the learning and achievement of the neediest students, especially if grade-level standards are to be meaningful.

As could be expected, some parents in the district who believed their children were gifted and talented, created some pushback to this movement. I asked the co-principal how he responded to the parents who were critical of the de-tracked system— the parents who would like to see a tiered system reinstituted. He responded with the following:

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You have to put data and research in front of people. One of the important things to show is that students are going to be ready for calculus by the time they get to high school. That we are still addressing the standards that we were in the separated accelerated class and students still have access to them. The question that has to be asked is, is the instruction there? You say the accelerated standards are in the class, but are you actually teaching them? That's a very complex issue to tease out but our teachers have been committed to learning how to differentiate their teaching to reach all students. It is complicated, but it can be done. But, you know, I think you have to go to data and research and put it in front of parents. So what does the research show about de-tracking? And what are the results we are getting? Are kids doing worse on [the state-wide mandatory tests?] Are there fewer kids getting into Algebra by eighth grade? How are those students doing? And there has absolutely been some push back on de-tracking, but I think it's gotten better from year to year.

Along with the inherent benefits of this schedule I also discovered, by talking with the participants who were not a part of the four core-subject teams, disadvantages that were also imbedded in the system, or how the schedule was seen as unjust. These "off-team" (those not teaching science, math, language arts and social studies) teachers shared their frustration about feeling left out of the system—that somehow they as faculty were not as important due to the "nonacademic subjects they taught. To them, it was as if an *us/them* binary system had been created.

In enumerating the dangers of hierarchies of oppression and the *us/them* binary that is seen as fundamental and irreversible, Applebaum (2001) points out that centering one group simultaneously marginalizes the other. When this occurs, the marginalized have little access to power and privilege. Although this scholar is exploring macro-level instances of oppression, evidence that this *us/them* binary was playing out at a micro-level in Middle School was obvious. Even though the "off team" educators I spoke with did not use the *us/ them* binary language, their stories exemplified this situation.

One of the health and physical education teachers expressed feeling less valued due to the subjects she taught. She said, "I think one of the problems that irritates me the

most, especially when I was at the high school, is the belief that your subject matter is more important than my subject matter." She shared that regardless of how significant P.E. might be,

> If you did any of the electives or health or P.E., then you were less than. And a lot of times I know that some kids thrived because they had a P.E. class to go to. That was their highlight of their day because they had the energy to burn and that was one of the things they could excel in because they were physically gifted. But I did feel the inequity for physical education. P.E. is really important, especially with obesity and heart disease and diabetes being such problems. There's probably not an administrator around who will say that P.E.'s not important, but they're not going to put any priorities into it.

One of the ELL teachers expressed experiencing similar feelings when she accompanied one of her ELL students into a core team class. She clearly saw the injustice that was occurring:

> And when we do inclusion model and go with our students into a team classroom, teachers like me are sitting in the back of the room. We become para-professionals. We become a flower on the wall because it's not our classroom. Because it's the main teacher teaching the class and we become the helpers in the classroom. So as far as social justice and equity goes, some teachers don't have it either.

This educator also felt discriminated against because she was not "a part of the team."

Echoing the physical education teacher above, she said,

> If you are a member of the team, then you have more status. If you've been perceived in a particular way to be ELL or a special education teacher, then you're not seen as a professional. You're not considered by the main teachers as a teacher. You're just this person that's helping the kids that don't have access to language. We are not seen at the same level.

The ELL teacher recognized that she was in a disadvantaged position. "One of the disadvantages of teaming is that you become an outsider if you are not part of the team. You become one of the "others." She was frustrated that she did not have the opportunity to collaborate with her colleagues as the four core-subject teachers did.

In addition to these "off team" teachers feeling marginalized, I also noticed how unknowingly these teachers were internalizing the oppression they were feeling. Adams et al. (1997) note that "oppression resides not only in external social institutions and norms but also in the psyche as well" (p. 5). These social justice educators explain how attitudes and social roles are internalized, consequently (and without questioning or challenging) reinforcing systems of domination. They speak to the importance of understanding that both groups (agent and target) internalize attitudes that contribute to and maintain systems of oppression. The subordinate group internalizes the acceptance of the status quo by incorporating negative images of itself advanced and encouraged by the dominant society. This acceptance (of the non-acceptance) sparks feelings of inadequacies and self-hatred and results in paralysis, resignation and powerlessness. This inability to act perpetuates the norms of the dominant group.

As an observer, I could not recognize in these teachers internalization to this extreme. Nevertheless they did occasionally express the idea that what they taught wasn't enough. The physical education and health teacher said she thought other teachers compared the teachers who taught academic subjects to those who didn't; "they will say 'Oh wow, you must be really smart if you teach chemistry [or any other academic subject]. Oh, you teach P.E.; you must be a dumb jock. 'So the stereotypes come through." She also shared how she would often use teaching health over physical education to gain status since health was perceived as a more academic subject. She was also an out lesbian which played into the stereotypes even more; although she was liked and accepted by her colleagues and lived in a very liberal, open-minded community. She described the following:

When I am teaching health and P.E. and knowing the negative stereotypes about P.E., and also being a lesbian teaching P.E. I've been the only lesbian in the district for P.E., high school or middle school since I've been here. So there's more lesbians in the English and math departments, but the stereotype of being less than is really, really strong in P.E. I have to deal with that. When I say that I teach health and P.E., I would always put health first which I thought gave me some clout.

It is interesting to note that a hierarchy of oppression exists in content or subject areas. Non-academic subjects are regularly undervalued by all of the educational community—students, parents, teachers and administrators. Math and science privilege runs rampant in educational institutions, exposing education's complicity with the perpetuation of existing power hierarchies—capitalism. Complicity in maintaining the privilege manifests itself in universities offering professors higher salaries in these fields and providing more funding for research and in secondary and elementary schools giving faculty leave time to enroll in science and math methods trainings and making larger supply budgets available to teachers in these fields. The privilege in these fields is rarely questioned or challenged. Both science and mathematics have inherent masculinity and governing power structures which need to be critiqued and deconstructed before institutions can be socially just. However, Evans (1993) who writes specifically about physical education which is not seen as legitimate subject matter, as it is not seen as academic asserts that raising questions about the nature of knowledge hierarchies is easier said than done and requires addressing questions about the social and status hierarchies upon which knowledge hierarchies are contingent. This researcher states,

This [questioning] will bring to the surface deep-seated values, vested interests, and difficult issues of authority, power and control. It will mean examining how knowledge is selected, legitimated, and transmitted and how these processes infuse the identities of young men and women. (p. 23)

The marginalization of non-academic teachers created by the new rotational schedule makes necessary the next step, that of questioning the privilege enjoyed by certain academic areas.

As I began this study I certainly did not anticipate that something taken so for granted as a schedule would emerge as a focal point of Middle School's efforts to incorporate socially-just principals and practices. Nevertheless, as I compiled my data I realized that the rotational schedule created access to the curriculum for all students, provided extra support for those who needed it, built small learning communities, and allowed time for teacher collaboration and de-tracking. These were all in line with attempting to address the pervasiveness of oppression—the first component of the trifocal lens. These elements of the schedule provide for a more equitable learning environment. Small learning communities allow students' voices to be heard and provide opportunities for increased parental involvement. De-tracking makes possible the school's goal of academic success for everyone. Teachers are encouraged and feel valued through the creation of teams and collaboration. Each element recognizes the pervasiveness of oppression existent within institutions—especially within education.

Unfortunately, the unconscious *us/them* binary system that had been created between the academic and non-academic teachers was where this schedule diverges from the trifocal lens. Having a group of educators feel marginalized and internalizing their feelings of being less than because they taught non-academic courses was an unintended result of teaming. This result was also an example of how general patterns of inequity continue to be reproduced even in the face of deliberate efforts to change them (Adams et al., 1997).

In attempting to apply the other two lenses—which are increasingly complex and problematic—the schedule does not address multiple identities nor the intersections of identities and oppression: no-where does it address how identities of "gifted" or "remedial" students are handed down by the system, how these identities are internalized, or how multiple identities have a tendency to be overlooked. The overarching framework of the schedule attempts systemic change—and in many ways surpasses what is happening in most schools—but the real changes in personnel's approaches and interpretations remain individual.

Selecting and Presenting Curriculum

The second practice that I saw emerging from the interviews is the pedagogical approach to selecting and presenting curriculum. This section will be organized in two parts. The first focuses on how the participants decided what counts as knowledge and subsequently chose curriculum. The second part addresses the teaching methods used by the participants to impart this knowledge.

<u>Selecting Curriculum</u>

An important aspect of pedagogy is deciding what counts as knowledge. By embracing a social-justice pedagogy educators can consciously challenge and disrupt the "commonplace." For this challenging to occur, educators need a safe place to create and implement proactive solutions that change the conditions of people's lives. They have recognized that some pedagogical approaches can challenge, reveal or expose the status

quo while others reinforce, conceal or obscure the status quo. They actively work toward

the first result since the latter continues to perpetuate oppression, exclusion, and injustice.

When designing and choosing their curriculum, many of the teachers at Middle

School had been incorporating socially-just principles for years. Many of the participants

spoke of being intentional in deciding what and how to teach. A veteran language arts

spoke of how consciously her colleagues thought about the choices they were making:

> I think that there's always been a real thinking about what should be in the
> curriculum and how it should be included. And how do we make sure that
> everybody feels included in the curriculum and thinks about the big questions
> about racism and sexism and all of that stuff. And that it's conscious. Let's talk
> about it. Let's get it out in the open and let's think about the consequences of it. I
> think that that's always kind of permeated the curriculum.

Even though the teachers did not provide many specific examples, they discussed

how all students needed to see themselves within the curriculum and how it must be

illustrative of a wide variety of social groups. For example a science teacher said,

> I think a piece of social justice is making the curriculum representative of a wide
> variety of groups. I try to bring different social classes, races, genders, all that
> stuff into my curriculum so that people see themselves in the curriculum.

The English Department was also working toward this goal of inclusion. One of the

department members explained,

> We've spent a lot of time as the English Department, as I think all the
> departments have, thinking about how to make sure the curriculum is
> representative of all groups of people. When we do those literature circles, we
> make sure that there are characters in the book, heroes in the book, who are of
> different ethnicities or that their stories take place in different parts of the world.
> So the kids can see themselves in the books. Their social class and race and stuff
> like that.

Brantlinger (2003) maintains that students who have roots in ignored populations

are often denied an equal educational experience and opportunity because they do not see

themselves represented in the curriculum. Because of this invisibility, they do not see the

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connections between themselves and the possibility of being active and influential

participants in society. The health teacher was particularly aware of including students

from these marginalized groups:

> I think I try to take everybody who is not in the privileged group and make sure
> they are included in the curriculum, in the language, in the reading, fully included.
> And I don't do it just for me to be teaching it but for the other students to learn to
> have the acceptance of each other and all groups. No matter who they are.

As is consistent with social justice philosophy, (Brantlinger, 2003; Nieto, 1994;

Shor, 1992; Spring, 2001) a socially just curriculum requires not only inclusion of all

groups but also an awareness of the importance of the relevance to students' lives. The

participants were not always clear how they incorporated their students' connections with

the curriculum and what they were learning to their own lives or the broader society. Nor

was it clear that curriculum was chosen with the knowledge that the subjects they taught

could not be divorced from the real world. Nevertheless a science teacher had another

way of looking at making his curriculum relevant to his students' lives. He said,

> I don't have a lot of goals associated with political activism or participating in
> democratic things. That's not as much a part of my intention. I think now more
> strategically in terms of trying to draw kids in than to think of creating activists.
> But the idea of showing them the relevance into their life of what we're studying,
> you know. And so if I show them that something that is happening related to our
> topic is an injustice or it's potentially an injustice or it's an ethical dilemma or has
> a moral dimension to it, then I think it's good. But I'm doing it more to get them
> interested in the subject more than I'm trying to get them to pull the levers of
> power or become activist or something.

I found it interesting that this educator was emphatically against "creating activists" but

also knew that if he brought what was real to these students he would be more able to

motivate them. What is real to most adolescents is fairness and equity and justice; and

when educators incorporate social justice into the classroom, students are more

interested.

Many of the participants were also including multicultural content in their classrooms which Nieto (1994) champions. She reminds us that curriculum is a powerful tool in reinforcing or challenging the status quo and educators must use it in a way of creating change. I recorded the following statements in a science department meeting regarding bringing multicultural content into classrooms:

> So a piece of social justice is looking at the books we use and deciding if they reflect a variety of viewpoints, times in history, social perspective, races, and ethnicities. Whenever I am requesting a video I need to make sure it is not always focused on the European-American background, or if that it at least has a woman rather than a white guy that is up there saying 'oh yeah, listen to him, he is important. He's got good things to say.' The choices I make in telling kids who I think is important is important. I need to have a nice diverse background of resources and not just a bunch of white males.

> I try to find people to come and talk who represent a more diverse background, especially from universities and colleges. They can talk about their research and also how they got to be in their position. They can be an inspiration to minorities. We can't personally bring that story to our students. We [as white male educators] can't be that face. But we can make that face available to them by reaching out to different resources.

> I always try to think about how do I bring underrepresented groups into my science class in terms of showing their participation in the field of science? You know, how do I make sure that my instruction is including not just White males, but African-American women or whatever, and that contributions are not only made by this one particular group of people.

It is interesting to note that while all of the above respondents were white males, each demonstrated a growing awareness of their own privileged positions.

The intention to include a more socially-just content was not always met with consensus. A social studies teacher brought up the tension that existed in his department regarding teaching geography versus teaching culture in the social studies' curriculum. This teacher pushed for focusing more on culture and less on geography; others in his department wanted the focus to be on geography. He explained his reasoning:

> I figure, who cares about geography if it's not about people. This is not a class in science. This is not a class on biomes. You know the [statewide tests] says kids have to know all of the countries and their capitals, but who really cares about that?

He continued by explaining that he wanted to include multiculturalism in his course content. His focus was to be more than names, numbers or facts—all of which are easily accessed and which require little or no critical thinking:

> I want to teach kids about different cultures. Not just to compare and contrast us with everybody else but to look at the rest of the world with a critical lens. Look at the conditions in other parts of the world and ask why these places have these conditions? Why is their economic system the way it is? And looking at cultures and trying to talk about the idea of equity. We're doing Africa right now. We're looking at Darfur, we're looking at the African slaughter. And I want my students to think critically about that. Who are the people involved? How are power and domination and oppression playing out somewhere right now in the world?

I was impressed by how many educators in this school were including social justice topics in their curriculum. The state requires that each educator adhere to a strict set of standards for each subject area. The participants acknowledged these requirements and used them to guide their planning but were not limited by them and were extending the curriculum to bring in social justice topics. One social studies teacher said "We use the standards and the frameworks, but we certainly don't follow lock step to the state."

The co-principal shared how he encouraged the faculty to "look at the world through a critical lens" when thinking about curriculum and pedagogy. The following examples demonstrate how social justice topics were being brought into the curriculum and are evidence that participants in this school were looking critically at social justice pedagogy.

The principal said, "A shared vocabulary is an important piece" in doing social justice work, and many of the teachers were bringing some of this vocabulary into their

classrooms. As mentioned before, the superintendent mentioned the students who were reading the "Invisible Knapsack" which introduces them to the concept of white privilege.

A math teacher was struggling to bring concepts of social justice into the math curriculum but with a lot of thought was able to do it. He said,

It can certainly be challenging to get social justice into the math curriculum. But it can be done, especially with things like statistics, percentages and probability. You can look at racial profiling, unemployment and the national debt through both a mathematical and a social justice lens.

Esposito and Swain (2009) discuss the importance of social-justice pedagogy helping prepare students to effect change in their communities and the broader society. They contend that "social justice pedagogy provides marginalized students with the tools to aid in effecting change" (p. 39). One of the ELL teachers shared a social action project that provided her English language learners with this experience:

I want my students to see that everything we are doing is connected to the community. My students wrote to the company that made the antacid Tums. They analyzed the label and contacted the laboratory. They identified the racism in the label about the difference between black and Anglo women getting osteoporosis and suffering calcium loss. There was inherent racism in the label and the students studied it and took action. And you know what, to their success, the company changed the labels two years later.

Another teacher described how her students created public-service announcements that were focused on social-justice issues. She believed that providing her students with an opportunity to "hear their public voice" was what social justice was all about.

A social studies teacher agreed and shared his philosophy about getting students to connect with the community they live in:

Teaching with a focus on social justice involves getting students out into the community. One of the units I do is really well received, I even got a Teaching Tolerance Award for it. I have my students go out into the community and

interview recently-arrived immigrants. It had to be somebody who was not born in this country who lived here. And then they would use those interviews to create a first-person narrative about the immigrant's experience coming to this country. Then they'd put together these artist books. They're actually a structure that looked like a house and they would all come together to make a city. So it was like a city of stories. It was symbolic coming together. And it was great!

An English teacher explains about directly bringing issues of discrimination and injustice into her classroom. She consciously presents issues of racism, sexism and other "isms" and initiates discussion with her students. She relates these conversations to the climate of respect that permeates the school. She says,

> Let's talk about [oppression]. Let's get it out in the open and let's think about the consequences of it. I think that when you give kids a chance to think about that stuff, and talk about it and relate it personally, they act differently. I think when it's kind of hidden and not talked about, that's when you get the unacceptable behaviors.

One of the most exciting examples I learned about was a school-wide project which involved every student called exhibitions. This project was completely integrated into the four-core subjects. Each grade chose a theme, and each student asked a question pertaining to the theme. He or she then collected data and presented his or her results and analysis in a fifteen-minute power-point presentation. These presentations culminated in a school-wide year-end program to which parents were invited. A science teacher discussed the students participating in the project when race as a social construct was the theme:

> I showed the students a video called *Race: The Power of Illusion* at the beginning of the year. Then we talked about experimental design and I brought scientific racism into the conversation. We talked about when you have an experiment that you need to quantify the independent variable. Can you quantify race? You can't quantify it so basically anything that's race based is bogus. From the very beginning I want my kids to know that. I talk about how there really is no such thing as race, that it just doesn't exist. There are different skin tones for different people, and there are genes that are in certain populations but that is not the same as race. I talk about how it is problematic to talk about how black people are all

this or that. And we talk about reasons why people would do that. Why would you lump a whole group of people together and why would you say they are this, they are that and we talk about the political reasons for doing that.

The Student Adjustment Counselor also utilized a critical approach with her practices. She provided opportunities to challenge the status quo by looking at issues of poverty and classism. She explained an activity that she does with her students that looks at the distribution of wealth in this country. She sets up a scenario that models society in which a small percentage of the students control most of the financial resources. She told me that she thinks the students "really get it at a gut level" when she does these types of concrete activities.

The above examples allow for students to have heightened socio-political awareness and instills in them critical consciousness. These types of pedagogical approaches also help develop the teacher's awareness of the subtle and glaring injustices found in the curriculum, the school and the larger society. This type of critical analysis is congruent with social-justice theory and educators' use of social-justice language shows movement towards addressing the pervasiveness of oppression as seen in the first lens of the framework.

While I found most encouraging the consciousness of incorporating diversity and inclusion in the curriculum; nevertheless, teachers will necessarily need to move beyond mere representation, especially if they are going to incorporate the second component of the trifocal lens—exploring multiple identities and intersections of oppression. At this point in Middle School's social justice development, the teachers were still very much using a traditional multicultural "heroes and holidays" approach. For many participants, the inclusion of "the other" was subordinate to the traditional dominant representations in

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the curriculum. They have not yet moved beyond inclusion to truly valuing integration. The interviews also exposed how change within the school was primarily within individual teachers rather than real systemic change.

Presenting Curriculum

In addition to determining what counts as knowledge, pedagogical practice also explores the most effective way to get this knowledge across to, or solicit it from, the learner. In other words it explores teaching methods.

Because of the school district's overarching focus on academic achievement for every child, Middle School had widely adopted the practice of differentiation. This teaching practice was discussed by the participants more than any other practice. As previously discussed, differentiation is a broad term referring to tailoring teaching environments and practices appropriately for diverse learners. Differentiation was necessary as Middle School had a de-tracked system and each classroom had a variety of academically diverse students—from those who struggled to those who learned at an accelerated pace. The teachers in this study said that while it was extremely difficult, they ultimately believed they could meet the needs of all their learners by differentiating their instruction. They had received extensive training in learning how to put this practice into play in their classrooms. Again they indicated they were very intentional in what they were doing. One teacher said,

> The ideas behind [differentiation] are so important. You really have to think about what you are doing a lot. You have to think about, okay, where is this kid and what do I have to do to get them further down the road? If you're going to teach a differentiated class, it's a lot of work. It's hard to do. And to do it really well, there is a lot of work and knowledge involved. You can't just do this, and do this, and do this, and it works. It is much more complicated than that.

The participants shared how differentiation worked in their classrooms. They began

each lesson by setting the same learning objective, concept or task for all students to

master. But then they employed different methodologies for different ability-level

students to meet the objective, learn the concept, or complete the task. In the end, the

equivalent outcome would be accomplished at differing levels of expertise. When I

asked a science teacher what this looked like in his classroom, he shared the following:

> Let's say for example that I want my students to understand the concept of
> density. I have several different inquiry learning activities that I use to help them
> learn this concept. For the ELL kids or the kids who really have a difficult time
> understanding science concepts I use a very simplistic activity where they
> compare the density of coke and diet coke. Then, most of the students perform an
> inquiry-based experiment with eggs and salt. This is a little more complex. I give
> the students who are considered accelerated a really difficult task around
> designing a boat that extends the concept of density into the area of water
> displacement. So in the end they all learn the same concept; it's just pitched to
> them at different levels.

This teacher explained to me that in the end all of his students gain an

understanding of the concept of density, but they all learned it in a slightly different

approach. This educator had been in the classroom for many years and noticed that with

traditional methods of teaching he would have some students "who could just never get

it." However, with using differentiated methods, he rarely had a student who could not

explain the concept of density to him.

When I asked the teachers what specific strategies they used to differentiate their

teaching they shared the following examples:

> It takes a lot of thoughtful work to differentiate. Some people think it means just
> preparing three different handouts. But that's not at all what it means. It could
> mean having a question that's more open ended that can be accessed on different
> levels. It could be in the literature circle units we do, where there are eight books
> on the same subject matter and some of them are easier and maybe some of them
> are more difficult to read. I certainly can't summarize in a little piece.

I feel like I get a little bit better every year at differentiating my instruction. Having props for kids who need props and having extension for kids who need more of a challenge. It feels like it's frustratingly slow, but it feels like I'm making progress. When I'm working with my seventh grade science teacher colleagues, that's something we chip away at all the time. We try to share ideas [for differentiating] and incorporate them.

Our English teachers are working on making sure that books in their curriculum have broad readability. They choose a particular theme and different books so that a child reading at the third grade level and a child reading at an adult level will both be able to access the curriculum. That wasn't always the case. In the past they may have read *Gulliver's Travels* and if you couldn't read it, well, that's the way it goes. So that's a social justice piece and now teachers have had training in how to look at the different accessibility levels in choosing the books they use.

Periodically through the year I did self selection where kids chose whatever book they wanted to read. I mean there were certain things in the curriculum that I needed to assign to them, but they also had choices. So that's one way to do differentiation. I think another way is using cooperative learning. There are a lot of cooperative-learning techniques that you can use if you have some differentiated materials to get kids to work together in small groups. And it's not about the smart kids teaching the kids who are struggling. Cooperative learning is way more complex than that.

Every assignment I give usually has a variety of options involved within it. It's about trying to work toward kid's strengths. So I think that's another way to do it.

Every classroom teacher that I spoke with brought up differentiation and directly related it to social justice. Although differentiation may be an effective and successful teaching practice, it remains to be questioned whether or not differentiation is a socially-just practice. This study did not look at exactly how students (for example, in learning the concept of density) were identified for placement in the different activity groups or how stereotypical learning stigmas were avoided.

Differentiation was originally introduced to Middle School faculty with the goal of getting all students performing at grade level, but due to a recent parental concern over the Social Justice Commitment and de-tracking, teachers were beginning to look at how they could differentiate their instruction to provide more challenges to the accelerated

learners. A social studies teacher said, "We've spent a lot of time on differentiation in terms of making sure the lower level students can access the curriculum. But lately we've been focusing on the higher end kids to make sure that we're challenging everybody."

In addition to curriculum differentiation, several other teachers shared examples of other pedagogical approaches that are supported by social justice research. A math teacher discussed the importance of clearly communicating the learning objective to his students each day. This strategy is in line with one of the strategies recommended in *The Social Justice Commitment* handbook which reads as follows:

> Provide students with a written content objective for every lesson. Students should know what they are expected to learn in each lesson. It helps them focus and lets them self-evaluate as the lesson proceeds. It also helps teachers focus on what it is they are teaching and creates a learning focus rather than an activity focus for the teacher and the class together.

The math teacher shared how he emphasizes objectives in his class:

> I think that one of the things that I've found that has been effective is sharing with the students what the goal is, how they are going to reach the goal and then having them reflect on whether they've met the goal. And if they haven't met the goal, what they need to do either with my support or what they need to do as an individual to hold themselves accountable for getting that knowledge. I always post what the goal is for the day and we talk about the goal before the class starts.

Emphasizing another aspect of teaching social justice, a science teacher shared her feeling about how allowing students to work on big projects at home is unjust:

> I'm a scientist and I like the idea of science fair, but when it [the project] is done at home, it's not socially just. Kids don't all have the same resources at home. You come in to the science fair and you look at things and it's clear who's had help and support and who hasn't. And that's not right. It's not fair. And the only way I think it's fair is to do it in class and not let them do it at home where their parents can do it for them. I always provide the same hands-on experiences for all kids here.

One of the physical education teachers shared several examples of practices that she felt were socially just. She told me that she never let the students choose their own

teams. As she put together the teams, she spent a great deal of time thinking about "how to make them as equitable as I can by looking at race, gender, height, weight, and skill level." She also shared how she doesn't treat all students the same when they are playing games. She said that she will always call a penalty if a student with good basketball skills travels or double dribbles. However, if a novice does the same thing, she will often let it go. She explained,

> Yesterday I had a girl who is really self conscious and doesn't like to play, but she was playing. She was trying really hard but she was double dribbling. She was traveling. You know what? I just let it go. She was really trying. She was having fun and she had a smile on her face. I wasn't about to stop her. I'm going to let her play.

> One thing I'm doing with swimming classes this year with all my students is teaching them the butterfly stroke. All the kids in my classes are learning it and they are really proud of themselves when they get it because they believe that only the kids on the swim team can do it. So this is the first time I have provided an extension to all my students and they are getting it!

She recognized that skill level will increase with playing time, and playing time will increase only if the student enjoys herself. This teacher recognized the relevance and value of when to call fouls, demonstrating her awareness of the difference between equity and equality which converges with social justice theory.

Also in line with the high-achievement expectations within the academic classes, the physical education teacher shared an example of her "setting the bar" high for her students in physical education by teaching them difficult skills. Her practices are in accordance with researchers who have shown that students who are underachieving need challenging, rigorous content, and not a "dumbed-down" curriculum. They promote setting the bar high for all students (Barton, 2004; Carbo, 1995).

One positive aspect of differentiation and other conscious pedagogical practices was that these teachers were clearly rejecting the "one size fits all" approach to curriculum and pedagogy that is so commonly found in most schools (Neil, (2004). As demonstrated previously in the analysis of curriculum choices, the socially-just teaching practices occurring within Middle School remain primarily within individual behaviors. Nevertheless the individuals committed to social justice do find support within the school-wide framework. In most schools, nationwide, curriculum is not challenged nor does it embrace a broad scope of methodologies to meet the specific needs of diverse student bodies (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Lewis-Charp, 2003; Major & Brock, 2003). However, Middle School has in place the commitment and vision to challenge the status quo.

In concluding this chapter on the findings of my study I found the participants were very conversant in the language and concepts of social justice education. Each interviewee could come up with a personalize description of social justice. However, as I moved to examining the programs and practices I found that Middle School's actualization of goals and definitions into action proved incredibly complex and problematic. Because much of the reform came in the form of top-down programs and were not presented as practical, hands-on, classroom-ready materials, teachers were unable to actively translate the goals into practice. Time constraints, time-honored traditions, and lack of critical knowledge assessment skills also contributed to the difficulty in implementing social-justice education goals.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a synopsis of my study, a summary of its findings and contributions and suggestions for future research. The conclusions here are related to the social justice tri-focal lens framework I presented in Chapter Two, which synthesizes current social justice education theory into three components necessary for social justice education. My findings indicate that Middle School's efforts to incorporate a social-justice vision converge with the tri-focal lens in some areas and diverge in others. My analysis of this convergence/divergence reveals ways in which theory and practice may inform one another in educational and research contexts.

Summary of Study

The literature pertaining to social justice education theory and practice demonstrates the following: 1. Social justice has become a buzzword, but is often used without conscious intent. 2. Problems of inequity and marginalization are widespread in U. S. schools. 3. Over the past four decades, despite attempting multiple approaches to addressing diversity, schools are still sites of inequity, marginalization and have yet to achieve lasting systemic change. After examining a broad scope of literature, I developed a social justice framework consisting of three different components—addressing the pervasiveness of oppression; exploring the multiple identities and intersections of oppression; and examining the complex interplay between individual and systemic change—that social justice education experts suggest contribute to a socially just school.

The implementation of this tri-focal lens, according to current theory, ought to culminate in both academic achievement and social action and change.

Using this lens as a point of departure, this qualitative case study explored how social justice goals were manifested in one school. Specifically, I examined how administrators and teachers defined or described social justice and what programs and practices the participants believed contributed to a socially-just school. I compared participants' responses and my observations of the school with current social-justice theory to identify ways in which theory and practice intersect with and depart from one another in this particular context. The following sections summarize the relationships between theory and practice that emerged as I analyzed the data through each component of the tri-focal lens.

Addresses the Pervasiveness of Oppression

The first component of the tri-focal lens addresses the pervasiveness of oppression. According to my findings, Middle School did this by providing equitable access to resources, changing the structure of the schedule; increasing faculty awareness of social justice issues, resulting in conscious curriculum choices; and utilizing social justice language in district-wide publications, websites and programs. Likewise, the school examined traditional educational inequities and initiated remedies to address these inequities by establishing a rigorous school-wide curriculum, eliminating ability-tracked courses, incorporating differentiation, and establishing the Social Justice Commitment and Latino Outreach Programs, as well as others. The culmination of all this is a school with a community of dynamic dialogue. This dialogue is necessary to expose the denial

of the effects of privilege and to make visible the oppressions so long rendered invisible. These are all movements toward addressing unequal power relationships and the systemic perpetuation of oppression.

Nevertheless, as is the case in so many attempts to change paradigms and to challenge the status quo, remedies—because of the complexity and pervasiveness of social injustice—often create further imbalances within the system. For example, while the practice of schedule restructuring created access to all courses for all students, promoted collaboration among faculty, and built smaller learning communities, it also gave rise to a hierarchy among the teachers who were not a part of the four core academic subjects. Teachers whose subject matter was not considered core came to occupy a peripheral position in the school which reinforced normalized and internalized oppressions regarding which disciplines were privileged. In this way, Middle School's efforts to address the pervasiveness of oppression did not fully converge with the first component of the tri-focal lens.

This lack of full convergence is evident as well in the practice of establishing high expectations for all students. As discussed, this practice is an implicit rejection of deficit theories, which resonates with the first component of the lens and acknowledges the differences between equity and equality. However, calling these expectations "high status" reaffirms and reinforces the dominant culture's ideas of what constitutes knowledge, how success is defined, and what success looks like. If success looks the same for everyone, the system offers students an equal but not equitable knowledge base. Assuming that "high-status knowledge and skills" culminates in power does not

acknowledge the unequal power structures that permit some to define what constitutes "high-status knowledge and skills" for others.

<u>Explores Multiple Identities and Intersections of Oppressions</u>

The second component necessary for an education framework to be socially just—exploring multiple identities and their intersections—did not seem to be present or visible in Middle School's social justice efforts. Nowhere in the school publications, on the website, or in my interviews did I see or hear language that recognizes that students (and everyone else in the educational community) possess and occupy positions of multiple identities. While faculty can speak of the social construction of identity, such as race, and can identify how arbitrarily particular characteristics can be attributed, faculty misunderstand the logical relationships of these constructions if they advocate "getting rid of all the social constructions," as did one math teacher. This teacher, speaking to the concept of leveling the playing field, recommended overlooking all identities, which sounds very much like getting to the "essence." The participants' absolute language ("all," "every" and "no" perhaps borrowed from No Child Left Behind legislation) suggests a sort of "color blindness" or lack of acknowledgement of the differences in individual students. For example, the Latino Outreach Program (praiseworthy for its involvement of parents and advocacy for Latino students) does not recognize (nor reach out to) Latino students who are doing well in school. It assumes that if a student and her family is Latino, she needs someone to help her and her family navigate the educational system. The program makes incomplete assumptions about what it means to be Latino.

That one can be a naturalized US citizen, an excellent student and/or school leader is ignored; and, therefore, that student is rendered either invisible or non-Latino.

The faculty has become very conscious of including multi-cultural materials in their teaching, which is a gesture toward a more socially just curriculum. However, the second component of the lens requires teachers and students to do more than simply include a female or Hispanic author in the reading list; it requires them to acknowledge and explore how multi-faceted people can be and not to cast them in a single category.

Examines the Complex Interplay Between Individual and Systemic Change

The third and final (and perhaps most difficult) lens addresses the necessity for *both* individual and systemic change—not just one or the other. Individuals changing only their interactions in society cannot achieve social justice. In order for the change to be generational and overarching, all citizens and institutions must change. Because education is rooted in tradition and certain oppressive traditions have long been normalized, real systemic change has been slow coming. That being the case, Middle School has a long history of progressive change and has made remarkable advancements toward creating a socially just education environment.

Many of the changes, however, have been on the individual level. The teachers I spoke with (especially the veteran teachers who had received the anti-bias trainings) knew and used social justice language, and were committed to its ideals. They had a consciousness about how schools have traditionally perpetuated oppression and privilege, and they spoke of remedies they saw as essential to their teaching. They embraced de-tracking, inquiry groups, differentiation and access. They rejected deficit theories; were

conscious of how race, class, gender and privilege played out; and saw the necessity of across-board integration of social justice. The make-up of the educational community (progressive and highly educated) both facilitated and supported their individual changes.

But unless this awareness and commitment becomes system-wide, when the teacher retires or moves on, the progress stalls. At Middle School a disconnect existed between what the district administration (the superintendent's office) believed was taking place and what the faculty felt was really happening. For example, the superintendent believed the teachers "had done the work" because they had all attended anti-bias training that was part of the foundation for the Social Justice Commitment. But the training was completed several years prior to the time of this study and turnover in the school had resulted in the majority of faculty not having received the training. This disconnect points to the need for cyclical training and long term sustained efforts. Such efforts are necessary as support for helping teachers implement ambitious district-wide social justice goals. Also, the superintendent presented *The Social Justice Commitment* handbook in a district-wide meeting, and because the handbook was in the hands of every teacher he believed the program was off and running. But because creation of the Social Justice Commitment had involved so few faculty (and no students and staff) and was a top down decision, the ownership and real commitment to the program was lacking. Granted the handbook is a "work in progress," but unless that work is on-going and across all areas of the educational community (academic and non-academic, classified and certified, salaried and hourly, student and parent) the change will not be systemic and will continue to create and perpetuate inequities. Policies, programs, and practices have long embedded oppressions and discriminations. Nevertheless, Middle School has begun the dialogical

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process that involves the diversity of vision, perspective, and language; consequently, the individual change will continue its necessary interplay with systemic change involving every aspect of the institution.

Finally, I proposed that an educational system that embraced the three necessary aspects of the framework (addressing the pervasiveness of oppression, exploring multiple identities and intersections of oppression, and examining the interplay between individual and systemic change), by overcoming personal, cultural, and societal oppression, would make academic achievement and social change a reality for all students. Middle School's educational approach did not include the idea of "creating agents of social change" explicitly in any of their language, publications, or policies. Although I don't doubt the educators see themselves as agents of change; but it is change for the "other," not for themselves. All too often in my conversations with administrators and faculty, I got the impression that all of the work they were doing was to bring the "other" up—up to meet standards set by the privileged members of the power structure. The language of "leveling the playing field" masks the inherent systemic discrimination and dismissal of educational inequities. The Latino Outreach and the Social Justice Commitment both had aspects of "doing for the 'other,'" but not doing for the all. Repeatedly, "other" was fairly narrowly defined; no one spoke of disability, sexual identity or orientation, religious diversity. Thus, White, heterosexual, and non-disabled remained centered and powerful.

Theory and Practice in Social Justice Education

That Middle School is tackling the ever-difficult task of balancing the scales between broad cookie-cutter approaches and/or add-ons is movement toward embracing

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the complexity of individuals with their multi-faceted and coinciding identities. And, as is usually the case when moving between theory and practice, it has recognized the necessary trade-offs and unintended consequences of well-intended decisions. The purpose of this was never to establish a privileged binary of theory over practice, but rather I set out to explore the complexity of the intersections—the convergences and divergences of theory and practice.

Eight years of NCLB, budget cuts, economic downturns, and shifting demographics have left educational communities traditionally unequipped to handle anything but the slowest of changes. Schools find themselves struggling to survive, let alone thrive, in the controversial and academic atmosphere of social justice. Therefore, Middle School, with its tremendous focus and commitment to academic achievement by utilizing social justice tools is in many ways light years ahead of most schools and is to be commended highly. The school's elitist sounding "high- status knowledge and skills" may be off-putting, but any school that recognizes that all children can achieve what it sees as valuable and makes it available to everyone is moving toward having social justice education—"is putting its money where its mouth is." The special education, ELL classes and Latino Outreach Program may perpetuate stereotypes and keep power structures in place, but any school that funds, creates, and supports (through staff and released time) programs to make achievement possible for all students is making progress on the social justice pathway. And while "Every Student, Every Day" may blur the distinctions between equity and equality, the school's past and present commitment to addressing its limitations indicate that the necessary work indeed has begun.

In terms of my theoretical framework, the overarching realization resulting from the study is my recognition that the lenses are not co-lenses or elements of one lens, but rather inevitable evolutions of a more socially just lens. In other words, the first lens, addressing the pervasiveness of oppression, I now believe, has to be in place—with all its practices, policies, and pre-training—prior to the application (or real-world development) of the second, seeing multiple identities and intersections of oppressions. The third lens, the complex interplay between individual and systemic change, can then come into play. Individual change begins almost immediately with any social justice education work, as is the case with Middle school; but real systemic change requires both embracing and applying both the theory and practice of the first two lenses.

Here the lens language becomes even more problematic as a "lens" implies a fixed state (adjusting a specific prescription) and "change" by necessity is dynamic and ever-evolving. At the risk of adding another metaphor and further complicating the idea, I see social justice education as having a learning curve much like any other complex and difficult task. And now that I see that the tri-focal lens is indeed a progression of increasingly complex transformations and revolutions, I see the results—or the end to the trifocal means—are also evolutionary progressions: that one (social change) cannot occur without the mechanisms and frameworks for the other (academic achievement) first being put in place. Or, perhaps more optimistically, structural change, through a total rethinking and retooling the status quo, will result in assessing the goals of education; and, as a result, creating agents for change will gain a place in education's hierarchy of value.

Limitations, Contributions, and Future Directions

Limitations

As in all qualitative studies, this study has its limitations. I recognize the boundaries (a single-school community) of the study and realize its conclusions must be considered only in terms of the specific research site. Conclusions of case studies, according to Locke (1998), "should be held as tentative or contingent on further study. In many cases, the reason for such reservations does not lie in the discovery of some technical flaw in methodology, but in concern about how well results might generalize (be applicable) to members of a wider population" (p. 89). It is important to note that this study only provides a "snapshot" of one place in time. It marks the journey of Middle School in the spring of 2007. Since my observations, a new superintendent and principal have been hired; teachers, students, and parents have come and gone; and programs and practices may have changed. Nevertheless, the assessments and observations of that snapshot can be the springboard for future study and continued assessment.

A second limitation concerns the sample of the participants. Due to constraints at the research site, this study includes only administrators—at the school and district level—and teachers. I understand the need to involve a diversity of participants (culture, race, sexual orientation, religion, lower/upper level students, teachers, staff, community members and parents) and a diversity of programs (core vs. elective courses, extra- and intra-curricular activities, tracking, etc.). Including more diversity would provide a more accurate reading of Middle School.

Contributions

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to the body of social justice education research. In preparation for the study, I was able to sift through social justice literature and synthesize social justice theory into three key aspects. I made a concerted effort to put theory and practice side by side and to examine how one can inform the other, not how one trumps the other. This comparative examination is particularly important in the arena of social justice education because as a relatively new theory not many practical contexts exist. In addition, when I began this project other empirical studies of the practice of social justice education were extremely limited. Consequently this study is foundational and particularly relevant to others seeking to implement social justice. It may serve as a road map to schools, offering suggestions and recommendations regarding challenges they may face.

Future Directions

The results of this study suggest three areas that may provide direction for further research. These areas include:

More Diversity in the Research Sample

One of the limitations of this study was the lack of diversity of research participants. In order to get a truer picture of how social justice goals may manifest throughout the school, the voices of students, staff, parents, and community members necessarily would be included. Also, as most of these teachers and administrators were White middle class educators, further questioning of educators and students of color

would ascertain how they envision bringing about social justice and incorporating social-justice goals.

Exploration of the Meaning of Academic Achievement

Further study could explore how school systems define "academic achievement" and whether definitions shift when a social justice framework is applied. Follow up with Middle School could investigate what educators mean by "high-status knowledge and skills," what reflection and consideration goes into deciding which courses qualify as "high status," and whether these deliberations are socially just. Further studies could do broader investigation into how "achievement" currently is defined, measured and achieved in other schools and assess what changes are needed for achievement to be socially just. Also further studies are needed to explore what needs to be done (and if it is even desirable) for *all* members in a school community to be agents of change? Questions could look at whether academic success is compromised or enhanced when an element of social change is an expectation.

Examination of the Impact of the School on the Community

Further studies may wish to explore how Middle School's attempts to incorporate a social justice vision have affected the surrounding community. Many of the programs and practices were new to the school and therefore had not had time to gain real traction. Also this study's time frame did not allow me to interview the emerging group of community members who were uneasy that the focus on social justice (and helping underachieving students) diminished programs for the accelerated students. Further

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questioning of community members who felt harmed by the social justice initiative and of those who saw positive effects is necessary to assess the impact of much of what the school is doing. Some of my study noted the influence of institutions of higher learning on the school. Further studies could investigate whether that influence is reciprocal. Follow-up studies could determine long-term impact (of receiving a socially just education) on students' lives and measure subsequent social justice in their communities. Certainly it is interesting to postulate whether a school could lead the way for the community becoming a reflection of the school, rather than the reverse.

Investigation of Evidence of Systemic Change

Future study could entail returning in several years to examine whether any of the efforts Middle School initiated during my study had become institutionalized and systemic. The effect of changes—a new superintendent, principal, and new faculty—could be assessed. A study could look at whether programs and practices continue and are sustainable when principle players—mostly teachers—come and go and whether parents remain committed to the vision after their own children have left the system.

Final Thoughts

Finally, I am back to the original question that sparked the purpose for this study. I wanted to know whether—in real-world conditions which include high stakes testing, budget cuts and privatization—a school could be socially just? Can social-justice theory be implemented in an academic institution? Of course, further research is necessary to determine how those who are committed to social justice in education can begin to craft

the components necessary for creating a social justice education framework. The conclusions of this study did not completely answer my bigger questions about how social justice education theory can be put to work in schools. So further researchers need to ask the following: Can social justice educational theory be translated into pragmatic practice? Can the definitions of social justice ever be separate from practice? Are the aims of social justice and education compatible? In this study, I may not have answered my initial questions, however, that said, I believe this study reveals this much about social justice education: to be relevant in the twenty-first century, the definitions have to be flexible and ever changing; the institutions need to be more loosely structured with permeable borders, and the dialogue needs to be loud, messy and on-going. The education system in America is broken—like other institutions which have remained virtually unchanged since the previous century—and cannot in its present form truly support socially just work. Only by acknowledging that changes need to be made—and Middle School has done this—and by opening up and facilitating the discussion can real social justice transformation occur.

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF ACCESS

Principals
Middle School
New England

September 23, 2007

Dear Principals,

  My name is Camille Lee and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I am entering the data collection stage of my dissertation project, the title of which is "Actualizing Social Justice: An Exploratory Case Study of a Public Middle School." I am specifically interested in how different participants in one educational community describe social justice related goals and what practices, policies, and programs are currently employed that address these aims. I also want to understand what obstacles or supports a school encounters when trying to incorporate social justice goals and practices.

  I am writing to you to request that Amherst Middle School consider being included in this study. You have been recommended to me by two of my committee members: Pat Griffin, of the Social Justice Education Department and Barbara Madeloni, the Director of the Student Teacher Education Program. I understand that many progressive programs and ideas are happening at Amherst Middle School. I had an opportunity to spend some time observing at your school several years ago and was impressed and excited to see the focus on social justice goals and practices. I have hoped to be able to do my dissertation work at the school ever since.

  Participation in the study would consist of allowing me permission to observe selected meetings and school activities, to review documents related to these same efforts, and to conduct selected, voluntary individual interviews of school members who emerge as influential. As a past public school teacher, I understand the value of class time and do not intend to take teachers or students away from their academic work.

  While this study is designed to be descriptive rather than evaluative, it may offer the school community an opportunity to pause, review and reflect on your efforts to date. Therefore, I will provide a summary of all the information collected.

  Thank you for your consideration. I would welcome the opportunity to talk or meet with you personally if it would be helpful for you to hear in more depth about my research goals. I will contact you in the next few days to follow up.

Sincerely yours,

Camille Lee(801)
467-1769

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

ACTUALIZING SOCIAL JUSTICE:
AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF A PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL

I volunteer to participate in this qualitative study and understand that:

1. I will be interviewed by Camille Lee either individually or as a part of a small focus group using a guided interview format.
2. The questions I will be answering address my views on issues related to social justice education in k-12 schools. I understand that the primary purpose of this research is to explore how one school manifests social justice practices and goals.
3. The interview will be audio taped to facilitate analysis of the data.
4. My name will not be used, nor will I be identified in any way or at any time.
5. I may withdraw from part or all of this study at any time.
6. I have a right to review material prior to the final oral exam or other publication.
7. I understand that the results from this study will be included in Camille Lee's doctoral dissertation and may also be included in manuscripts submitted to professional journals for publication.
8. I am free to participate or not without prejudice.

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   Participant's Signature

_____   _____
Date   Date

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