

**Reflect and Inject: Using Portraiture to Enact and Analyze Context-Focused
Partnerships to Improve Teachers' Social Justice Practice**

by

Max Altman

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Doctoral Committee:

**Professor Pamela A. Moss, Chair
Assistant Professor Michelle J. Bellino
Professor Patricia M. King
Professor H. Richard Milner, IV, University of Pittsburgh
Professor Elizabeth B. Moje**

Max Altman

altmanma@umich.edu

ORCID iD: [0000-0002-2791-1299](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2791-1299)

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to two amazing women. The first, in memorial, is my mother, Denise, who raised me to be the person I am today and taught me to care for others in the sort of deep way that has inspired the social justice approach taken in these pages. I can only hope that my work, at its very best, will come even close to having the kind of impact on others that my mother had on every person she knew. The second, in honor, is my wife, Katherine, who has been my partner and constant source of support and challenge in work and life for the last thirteen years. I couldn't have done this without you, Katherine. I love you, and I will always be there for you as you have always been there for me.

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Abstract

Teaching that supports ideas of social justice is often difficult to enact, particularly for teachers who may have few models for the process of developing such instruction. In this dissertation, I address the development and analysis of three semester-long partnerships between myself and three high school teachers interested in improving their social justice practice. The design of these partnerships, and of the work teachers and I did within them, was highly collaborative and drew primarily on teachers' ideas and understandings rather than privileging my own. Teachers were asked to conceptualize and define social justice with respect to their own classroom context, to consider ways in which they might respond through their practice to the issues they identified, and to design and implement changes that addressed these issues. My own role was that of a dynamic resource, available to support teachers and to discuss, observe, comment, assess, and challenge as per their preferences. My use of the methodology of portraiture enabled me to tell the story of our work together in order to demonstrate the process through which these teachers worked to improve their social justice practice. Further, by drawing on interviews with a principal and district leader in addition to teacher data, I was able to contextualize teachers' work within the functioning of the school and district in which they operate, with a focus on all participants' understandings of work being done at their own and other levels, the context of their school and district and its impact on teachers' work, and the relationship between teachers' classroom practice and the policies that support or constrain it. My analysis demonstrates that these teachers have substantial knowledge of their students and classroom context that supported

our work together, and teachers themselves suggested both that they found our partnerships to be impactful and that they had a desire for further feedback and discussion around their practice. I found that teachers had different ways of linking issues of social justice to their work, sometimes addressing connections between these issues and the curriculum, sometimes incorporating social justice ideas into their relationships with students, and sometimes focusing on these issues through the ways in which they supported students in interacting with one another. Further, teachers identified discussion in our work together as far more helpful for improving their practice than the simple provision of external resources and expressed a desire for further constructive conversation about their practice. My interviews with teachers and administrators suggested that future opportunities for learning might be complicated by disconnects both among teachers and between teachers and the administration in ways in which concepts like social justice, equity, equality, and fairness, as well as classroom issues like gender and politics, were taken up. I conclude with recommendations for researchers, school and district leaders, and other educational stakeholders around improving dialogue and focusing on what is good in others' practice in order to better support social justice work in education.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Social justice work is incredibly difficult, and it requires deep analysis and sensitivity. Ladson-Billings (2006b) notes: “Almost every teacher educator devoted to issues of diversity and social justice finds himself or herself confronted by prospective and in-service teachers who quickly reject teaching for social justice by insisting that there are no practical exemplars that make such teaching possible” (pp. 29-30). Indeed, while there are a number of studies that attempt to analyze and explicate the social justice-related views or methods of a teacher or teachers, these studies often focus on particularly well-respected practitioners who may have the freedom or experience to engage in a number of practices that might be off-limits to teachers in a typical school. For example, Tate’s (1995) case study teacher is able to focus her students’ work on an in-depth critical analysis of the mathematics involved in local issues, something that might be very difficult to do to the same extent in today’s school climate and likely difficult for many less experienced teachers to envision or enact in any case. Additionally, studies focusing on non-experts tend to consider their errors rather than their successes, either by analyzing the negative outcomes of particular teacher moves or by contrasting them with the practice of a more highly regarded teacher (e.g., Rist, 1970; Hatt, 2012). While such work provides excellent and thoughtful analysis of teaching in support of social justice, it also raises an important observation: for the majority of teachers in the schools of today, who may see the work of master teachers of social justice as far removed from their own circumstances, alternate approaches to the investigation of teaching for social justice may provide resources that support the

development of social justice educators in unique and important ways. The creation of such resources through deep, trusting, and respectful researcher-teacher interaction, in addition, is itself a somewhat unexplored terrain. It is this terrain that I hope to explore.

Purpose of This Study

What might “practical exemplars” of social justice teaching look like? Like Ladson-Billings, I myself have heard the concern from teacher candidates and others that although there are many examples of literature that relates to social justice, few resources exist that truly paint a picture of this work for teachers and teacher candidates. In some cases, this is because this work is written for those who already have a solid foundation of social justice education. Teachers who are just starting out may respond to such a piece with something along the lines of “This sounds great, but I could never actually *do* this” (echoing Ladson-Billings’, 2006b, “Yes, but how do we do it?”) or “How could this teacher have possibly developed this much knowledge?” One of my participating teachers from this study remarked more than once, “This stinks of the lamp” – in other words, this piece of scholarship sounds like it came from an academic theory developed over a university scroll illuminated by an oil lamp, not from interaction with real teachers and students in real schools.

Whether or not these critiques are justified (and I believe that in many cases they are) is not the point; the point is that they exist, and that in my own experience and the narrated experiences of other researchers they can be fairly common. Given that one major goal of social justice work is unquestionably to support others in working for social justice, this is clearly a concern. Much of our justice-focused research on teaching suggests that the best teachers of all students work to draw on students’ own knowledge and experiences, hold high expectations while privileging what students already know rather than what they “lack,” and make learning

relevant, manageable, and collaborative. If we can frame excellent teaching as a cooperative investigation involving teacher and students rather than a race to some “right answer,” in what ways can we put these same principles into practice in order to support improved social justice work in schools?

In one resource that I shared with two of the teachers who participated in this study, Levinson (2012) suggests that there is too much of a focus in school curriculum today on *heroes* – great men (and occasionally women) who beat all of the odds and achieved greatness in a way that most of us will *never* do, and in fact could never even imagine, often whitewashed of any character flaws or personal issues so as to serve as paragons of virtue and idealism. Instead, she argues, we need *role models* – real people, usually local, whom we might meet and interact with at any time but who are working in emulable ways to change the world around them. A hero is someone one only reads about in books or sees on television; a role model can be a mother, a store clerk, a mechanic, or a friend. In this study, I describe the work, and the struggles, of three teachers who can serve as social justice role models. These teachers were not selected for their great renown, although they certainly have varying degrees of respect within their schools and district. These are real teachers, in real public schools, constrained by the same environment many of us face, without special privileges or resources, who, like so many of us, are struggling to improve the learning and experiences of their students in a context that may not be designed to support such teaching.

This study is not about me, although I have drawn on it to produce a dissertation that in part helps me to achieve the personal goal of a PhD. Instead, it is about three teachers who are working to improve their social justice practice. During the semester we spent partnering around this goal, these teachers were willing to do something I found incredible: they shared not only

their knowledge, but also their struggles, straightforwardly and honestly, with an eye to understanding how and why these struggles came about and thinking deeply about how they might be addressed. When I sent out my call for participants, I did not ask for teachers who felt they had deep knowledge of social justice developed over many years that might benefit others. I simply asked for teachers who were interested in improving their social justice practice, and these three individuals agreed to allow me to be both an observer and a support to that process. In one sense, then, these teachers are very special: they generously gave of their time and energy to support this project because all three of them care deeply enough about issues of social justice to add yet another responsibility to their vast lists. They opened up their difficulties and triumphs, and their classrooms, to me in pursuit of an ideal they all hold. In another very important sense, though, these teachers are *not* special. By that I mean that they are like most teachers in US public schools: constrained by policy, struggling with school and student issues, working to find their own meaning for ideas of justice and equity and simply for the work of teaching in a system that can at times be confusing and profoundly frustrating. It is their struggles and difficulties more than their specialized knowledge that make these teachers ideal candidates for study.

In the pages that follow, I have paid careful attention to the ways in which I present the work of these teachers. In order to show their practice from multiple angles and with differing lenses, I have made the choice to draw on different methodologies at different times, each of which I see as highlighting a different aspect of the teachers' and my experiences over the course of the semester. The centerpiece of this dissertation consists of three *portraits* (e.g., Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) of teachers' work – pieces of prose that draw on both careful analysis and narrative device to present not only an explanation, but a story. In these portraits, I attempt to

“show” the work of these teachers as they identify and clarify their own views on social justice and work to engage in teaching practices that support these views. Following the portraits, I engage in additional analysis: a cross-case analysis that considers this work across the three teachers as well as a grounded theory analysis that incorporates the views of a local principal and district leader in order to frame the work of the teachers within the administrative hierarchy that exists in the school district. My hope is that, taken together, these different views will give readers an authentic picture of these teachers and of their work, and thus that this snapshot of the work of three particular teachers over one particular semester can support others in getting a real sense of how they might go about defining and addressing issues of social justice in their own classrooms or elsewhere.

My Positionality

As a straight, white, male, cisgender researcher raised in a working class city, I have particular ways of knowing and of understanding the world. My perceptions are also heavily influenced by my passion for (critical) social justice, with a focus on race, and my own experiences as a high school mathematics teacher in schools in the Southwest and Southeast and then as a doctoral student, researcher, and instructor at a large public Midwestern university. While I worked to minimize my own influence on the teachers’ thinking as much as was possible through a careful and open approach to their own ideas and interests, there is no question that who I am was salient to the ways in which I interacted with each teacher and to the ways in which I understood and interpreted data.

Left unexamined, one’s identity as a researcher can result in a number of “dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen” (Milner, 2007, p. 388). However, by taking care to “disclose” myself to the teachers (Rodriguez, 2010) and to be explicit about both who I am and what I wish to do with

this research, I hoped to construct a healthy and honest relationship in which these dangers could be successfully addressed. Further, as a researcher I possess a certain power in relation to those I study, which is again something I can work to carefully minimize but never truly erase. For both of these reasons, I continually worked to consider how my own particular experiences, characteristics, ideas, and beliefs may have affected my data collection, or, later, my representation of that data both in my own thoughts and understandings and in the prose I present here. Continued conversation with the teachers, and continued requests for feedback on my ideas and interpretations, was key to addressing power issues and avoiding unforeseen dangers.

Research Questions

My partnership with these teachers was focused on their own definitions of social justice and goals for improving their social justice practice. I will analyze and present as a narrative the changes in the teachers' thinking and practice, as well as in our partnership itself and the resources on which we drew to support our learning, as we worked together over time. Through analysis of classroom observations, school observations, informal discussions, field notes of our ongoing interactions, and formal interviews with the teachers, I will make apparent and explicit the changes in the teachers' (and my) thinking about issues of social justice in their classrooms over the semester, and the relationship of that thinking to their practice and the steps that they took to improve it during our partnership. I will also consider the ways in which these teachers saw these issues as being affected by local context (as they have defined it) and by school and district policy, and whether and how this changed over time. Through interviews with a principal and a district administrator, I will contextualize this thinking within the school in which two of the teachers worked as well as within the district, and in relation to the views of the principal and district administrator. I will ask the following research questions:

(1) How does each teacher's thinking and practice around the issues of social justice s/he identifies change over time?

(2) In what ways does my dynamic partnership with each teacher, as well as the resources we each bring to that partnership, shape our work together over time?

(3) What role do these teachers see local context as playing in the classroom? How do they relate local context to issues of social justice? Do these things change over time?

(4) What issues do the focus principal and district leadership identify as being salient for the focus school? In what ways do these issues support or challenge the ways in which the teachers approach social justice?

Notes and Definitions

During the data collection and analysis phases of this study, I drew on a number of intentionally ambiguous concepts in order to avoid limiting the ways in which teachers were able to discuss their social justice views (and in which I was able to understand and interpret their talk). For example, while I spend additional time elsewhere in this dissertation, especially in Chapters 2 and 7, discussing different definitions of the term "social justice", this discussion serves to highlight the breadth of the term and the difficulty of defining it rather than to identify expected or privileged conceptions of social justice. Below I address the ways in which I deferred to teachers' own knowledge and understanding in the way in which I addressed social justice and other major concepts in this study, as well as how that choice influenced the structure of my relationship with these teachers.

"Context", social justice, and teacher knowledge. One key quality of my study is that it privileges the knowledge of the teachers I worked to a very great extent (see the review of literature on portraiture in Chapter 3 for more on this choice). For that reason, any discussion of

“context” is meant to refer to the *teachers’* appraisal of their own context rather than my or anyone else’s conclusions about it. One reason for this is that scholars often employ very different uses of the word “context” in research. For example, some studies use the word to refer to one specific factor such as school location or student achievement (e.g., Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, & Kron, 2003), some position it as comprising elements of classroom situation and school culture (e.g., Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Friedman & Kass, 2002), and some broaden this definition further to include geographic, economic, neighborhood, and experiential factors (e.g., Flores, 2001). In a previous study (Altman & Rankin, 2017), I investigated urban teachers’ ideas about their own context (defined as any classroom, school, community, or state factors or issues they felt were salient to their work) and found an incredibly wide variety of named contextual factors among the four teachers I interviewed: these teachers named a total of 82 unique factors they saw as salient in their work, with relatively little overlap among the four (teachers named a mean of 31.5 contextual factors each, for a total of 126 instances overall). Thus, I argue that a researcher who defines the “context” of a study her/himself is likely to miss key factors that teachers see as important. Additionally, Sharkey (2004) argues that teachers are more likely to form trusting relationships with those who demonstrate knowledge of their contextual situations. My attempt to understand the way in which these teachers puzzled through issues of social justice, then, would be made substantially more difficult and less authentic if the ideas about the teachers’ context were based on my own thinking rather than theirs. Similarly, when I refer to the impact of school or district policies, I am referring to the *teachers’* ideas about the impact of the policies they identified as salient.

This approach applies to my social justice framework as well. Although I have particular views of my own regarding social justice (discussed in more detail in the next chapter), the goal

of this study is to privilege the teachers' understandings of social justice ideas rather than to focus on mine. In order to do this effectively, I have worked to build a framework around each teacher's approach to social justice, and then to apply that framework to observations of that teacher (see Thompson, 1984, for one example of the use of this approach in the study of mathematics teaching). In this manner, I can examine the ways in which the teachers' actions support their own beliefs about social justice rather than interpreting these actions through my or others' external frames.¹ As one caveat, however, I suggest that this openness, while I found it useful, should *not* extend to frameworks that contain or actively support harmful or otherwise damaging views/actions toward any people (e.g. a "social justice" framework grounded in white supremacy or a "social justice" framework that chastises LGBTQ students). None of the three teachers with whom I worked included such anti-justice beliefs in their frameworks, although I do challenge an occasional teacher, principal, or district leader comment or observation in the analysis that follows. That is to say that a teacher's social justice framework need not be extremely robust, but it must support rather than constrain basic ideas of justice for all people.

Researcher as dynamic resource. Another important note about the structure of this study relates to the way in which I constructed my relationship with these teachers. One key influence on the choices I have made is that the portraiture methodology is a portrait both of the researched and the researcher, as both are actors in the story being told. Thus, this study will include analysis of the teachers' experience, of my experience, and of our experience together as partners told from both of our perspectives. For that reason, I am purposely far more than an objective observer, and my actions are a part of the data just as the teachers' actions are.

However, as my ultimate goal was to understand the ways in which the teachers made sense of

¹ Note that the application of such external frames is certainly an important and valuable tool in many studies of social justice; it is simply not the purpose of this particular study.

the issues and challenges they identified as relating to social justice, these actions were intended to be responsive to teachers' interests and observations, not to dictate their trajectories. For this reason, I see my role as that of a *dynamic resource*.

I use the phrase “dynamic resource” to describe a resource that can be drawn on by a teacher that is also adaptive to the teacher’s needs. In many ways, I hoped simply to speed up the process by which these teachers were able to acquire desired information. For example, a teacher hoping to improve practice by being sensitive to what s/he ultimately concludes are issues of student status (such as the privileging by class members of the knowledge of some students over the knowledge of other students for reasons unrelated to correctness) would likely have a long process of learning ahead of him/her if acting on her/his own. First, the teacher would need to find time to reflect deeply enough on his/her practice to initially identify that a status issue exists. Next, the teacher would need to engage in a number of internet searches, or journal examinations, or conversations with colleagues, in order to determine the way in which such issues are discussed in the literature (as it is far from certain that a teacher identifying a status issue would immediately use the phrase “status issue” to describe it). Following this, the teacher would need to locate information on status issues, read through it, think about its import for his/her classroom, and then make changes in practice intended to improve the situation. This would necessarily be followed by a period of reflection to determine whether the moves have been effective, with various responses based on that determination. The process, especially for a full-time teacher, can be long and arduous.

My goal for my own work as a partner, however, was to streamline that process. Had the same situation arisen with one of my teachers (which it did not – no teacher identified student status as a classroom issue), informal discussions between us might have surfaced the teacher’s

concerns about status issues. As a doctoral student with substantial knowledge of literature on social justice and equity, I would have been able to quickly name the problem as one of status and to volunteer to provide resources on status issues, such as the work of Elizabeth Cohen (note for the purpose of this study that resources are defined as materials teachers can consult for information about some aspect of education or social justice, such as readings, lesson plans, or websites). I would then have been available to discuss these resources with the teacher (if s/he was interested in such a discussion), using my experience as the instructor of an undergraduate course focused on issues of multiculturalism and equity to support the teacher in drawing his/her own conclusions rather than simply “telling” the teacher what the literature says or means. As a constant classroom observer, I would also have been able to help the teacher talk through any status-related changes either of us observed and then to consider additional steps to take. In this way, processes that might have taken months or even longer for a teacher alone were hopefully accomplished in much less time, although with minimal changes to the process (the teacher has still identified an issue, determined its name, examined and critiqued resources, made changes, and analyzed the results).

Importantly, however, *if the teacher did not see status in the classroom as a salient issue, regardless of my own sense, I would not have done these things*. In fact, I worked during the study to *avoid* drawing my own outsiders’ conclusions about what I saw in each classroom. While there is no question that conversations I had with teachers affected their thinking in some ways (as might conversations with another teacher, for example) it was ultimately the teacher’s decision whether and how to use me as a resource (see Chapter 7 for more on what this ultimately looked like). Because of this, I considered myself to be one of a number of other resources typically available to teachers (e.g., reference books and scholarly articles, the internet,

colleagues); similar to these things, the teachers could draw on my knowledge but were not forced to do so. When a teacher was looking for a co-thinker who could spend substantial time discussing ideas of social justice and weighing in on classroom challenges, as sometimes happened, I was more than willing to fill that position. When, however, a teacher was less interested in such a partner, which also happened, I had no concerns about minimizing my own voice. Rejecting some or all of what I believe to be my social justice expertise, not wishing to discuss particular issues, and not responding to comments I made during our discussions were all perfectly reasonable and acceptable behaviors on the teachers' parts within the construct of our partnership. When teachers did ask for my own sense of a particular approach or situation I was happy to give it, but I worked to make it clear that the teachers had no obligation to act on any of my observations.

This means that the teachers' role was simply to allow me to think along with them about issues of social justice that they saw as arising in their classroom, and to take whatever steps they thought were appropriate in order to consider and address these issues. I worked to make myself available for meetings, brief discussions, email conversations, etc., as much as was desired, but teachers were not expected to do anything in particular other than to share their thinking with me as they went about this work over the course of the semester. Additionally, teachers were asked to verify and vet all of the conclusions I have drawn and actions I have taken in order to ensure that my final analysis is as faithful as possible to their actual experiences and ideas. In that way, these teachers served as the final arbiter of what is true about their own thinking and practice as well as of what resources they chose to use or not to use.

Significance

Teaching for social justice can be intimidating. Although there are a number of wonderful studies of excellent teachers who work toward social justice, Ladson-Billings (2006b) argues that the question should not be “what to do,” but instead “how we think – about the social contexts, about the students, about the curriculum, and about instruction” (p. 30). Readers of some studies may suffer from a somewhat modified version of the problems with heroes that Levinson (2012) discusses – teachers who already do excellent work that supports social justice can provide very instructive examples, but reading about them does not have the same impact as does reading about teachers who are *struggling through* issues of social justice. The focus of this study is on the *process* of thinking through these issues, on the kinds of struggles and triumphs that teachers (and researchers) face when engaging in social justice work. Further, it links teacher experience with school and district context through a consideration of the interactions between classroom action and school and district policy as well as investigations into the ideas of the school principal and district administrator around the issues through which the teachers and I struggled.

This study can best be seen as a resource to be drawn on by a range of stakeholders interested in thinking through the ways in which one might identify issues of social justice in a classroom, school, or district and then develop one’s practice to address those issues. Through my use of portraiture, this study will in essence provide a narrative interpretation of the questions, problems, and successes met with by three teachers interested in social justice work, contextualized within a school, a community, and a district, and taking firmly into account my own experiences as a researcher and partner. In this way, it will have both a specific focus, on the work of the teachers, and a wide frame, considering a number of forces identified by participants as acting on the teachers’ classroom work. Because of the connections I will draw

between these forces and the work of the teachers, this study will present a creative approach to thinking about the ways in which social justice work can take place in a real setting; this approach will be useful not only for those who wish to think about how to teach for social justice, but also to those who are interested in the relationship between classroom work and the wider environment and those at a leadership level in a school or district who wish to think about the relationships between an administrative understanding of certain issues and the understandings of particular teachers. My study will also contribute to the academic conversation concerning portraiture, a powerful but underutilized method, particularly salient in educational research, of “eschew[ing] dualisms such as ‘subjective’ and ‘objective,’ ‘reality’ and ‘philosophy,’ and ‘personal’ and ‘political’” that instead “seeks to reveal how subjects make sense of their experiences and to explore aspects of their lives and experiences that would not be illuminated, save for the portraitist’s work” (Santoro & Morehouse, 2011, p. 2679). Finally, through a meta-level analysis of my partnership with the teachers I will contribute to the conversation about how teachers can be best supported by researchers and others while still respected as professionals skilled at their craft, even as they work through a seemingly endless stream of questions and concerns.

Structure of this Dissertation

In order to consider some of the ways in which social justice has been conceptualized and approached, Chapter 2 contains a literature review focused on how researchers and others have framed and studied social justice. In Chapter 3, I discuss my methodology and the methodological choices I make for each analysis present in this dissertation, and I also present a brief review of the literature on the methodology of portraiture. It is this methodology that has informed the work in Chapters 4-6, each of which presents a standalone portrait of one of the

three teachers with whom I worked. Chapter 7 serves as a synthesis of my work with these teachers and includes a cross-case analysis of our experiences; I also work to contextualize teachers' ideas within their school and district context and ultimately to develop theory around supporting teachers' social justice work. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes this dissertation with a discussion of final takeaways, limitations, and implications for future work.

Chapter 2: Social Justice Framework

“Social justice” is an underexplored and fraught term (North, 2006) that means very different things to different people. In fact, Ladson-Billings (2015) argues that the phrase “social justice” should be changed to simply “justice” in order to better represent the broad range of outcomes that its proponents hope for.² Because of the wide variation in the ways in which people talk about the concept, this chapter represents an overview of work that relates to social justice, but I do not require the use of the phrase in that work. Further, not all conceptualizations of social justice relate to work within the field of education, nor does the field of education contain literature that touches on all possible conceptualizations of social justice. Because of this, I suggest that what is presented here represents a useful overview of scholarly thinking about social justice within educational scholarship, but certainly not an exhaustive review of all possible social justice ideas in all fields.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of several different conceptualizations of social justice present in educational literature. I organize this work into two major categories, following Moje (2007): *socially just pedagogy*, or pedagogy that is informed by ideas of social justice and

² Despite this, I have chosen to use the phrase “social justice” in this study for several reasons. First, there is no term common to all literature on this subject (or even common to the literature discussed in a single section of this dissertation), and for that reason a choice must be made, even if arbitrarily. My choice, however, is not in this instance arbitrary: I have preference for “social justice” due to a contention that “equity” is commonly used in a variety of ways in schools (this is also true of “justice” and a number of other terms that sometimes refer to this concept) and is thus more likely to be a term that is understood differently by different teachers. “Social justice” is, at least in my own experience, used substantially less in schools and thus less likely to be a cause of confusion. Nonetheless, it is a recognizable term in the literature, and thus has substantial advantage over, for example, a newly minted term of my own creation. For more on disparities in language in social justice work, see the discussion of difficulties in social justice categorization at the end of the following section.

based on a desire to give all students equitable access to learning and knowledge, and *social justice pedagogy*, or pedagogy that is *about* social justice. In other words, the former represents procedures and tactics that might support an English teacher in teaching an excellent lesson on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in which all students find relevance in the text and gain important understandings that will support future learning, but in which students do not necessarily themselves address social justice issues, while the latter might describe a lesson in which students draw on what they have learned in their English class to write a letter to the city council arguing against an unjust local policy, directly addressing a legitimate issue. Following this discussion, I comment further on the difficulties present in categorizing the varied language and meanings that arise in work on social justice by drawing on the example of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP).

I then address my own conceptions of social justice in order to position myself within this literature. Following this, I outline a number of ways in which scholars of education have approached the study of social justice, discussing the ways in which each provides a useful lens in seeing the work of teachers and others (or lack thereof) around issues of social justice that arise in education. I conclude this survey of social justice work in education by addressing ways in which scholars have discussed the supporting of teacher learning around social justice, as I have done in my own study. Finally, I summarize the themes from each of these categories with implications for supporting teachers in working for social justice.

Conceptualizations of Social Justice

I discuss my own ideas about social justice within the field of education, which are heavily influenced by critical pedagogy (e.g., Freire, 2000) and its subsequent adaptations within particular subjects or contexts (e.g., Frankenstein, 1983; Giroux & Simon, 1989), below.

However, as the intent of this study was to investigate the perspectives of three teachers as they worked through issues that *they* considered to be related to social justice, I did not argue for a particular definition in my work with them. Rather, I encouraged teachers to take the words “social justice” at face value – those who work for social justice have as a goal an increase in the justice (or equity, or fairness) present in society – and left it up to them to determine a course of action that supported this idea of justice. For that reason, in this section I will discuss a range of socially just pedagogy and social justice pedagogy conceptualizations rather than argue for the superiority of a particular definition or definitions. I will conclude by drawing on the example of CRP as a way to demonstrate the difficulty in categorizing (or often even identifying) social justice work in any systematic way.

Socially just pedagogy. Teachers employing socially just pedagogy work to ensure equitable access to student learning and to incorporate students’ own identities and experiences into the classroom. In this subsection, I will investigate two further distinctions within the category: whether the work focuses on social justice benefits for a particular group or more generally for all students, and whether it places the ultimate outcomes it describes for students in educational attainment or outside of education.

Social justice as group equity. Some work in social justice pedagogy focuses explicitly on particular groups of students and the ways in which the needs of those groups might be better met. The purposes and qualities of group membership can vary widely, and may include commonly addressed demographic issues such as race (e.g., Ware, 2006), class (e.g., Rist, 1970), and linguistic status (e.g., Gutierrez, 2002), as well as others such as disability (e.g., Zindler, 2009) or academic level (e.g., Lee, 2001). Such work generally argues that the group in question is faced with inequities that must be addressed, often beginning with such a claim; for example,

Naraian (2014) opens by noting that “the preparation of teachers of students with disabilities is premised on acknowledging the widespread inequities that have historically characterized the experiences of individuals with disabilities in society” (p. 2), while Gutierrez begins with the analysis that “although Latina/os are one of the fastest growing school-age populations in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 1998), there is little evidence to suggest that they are (or will be) adequately supported while they participate in school” (p. 1047).

Work in this category may briefly address the benefits of particular approaches or actions for all children, but this is not its point of focus, as it is with work in the following category. For example, Garza (2009) notes that “students’ perceptions of a caring teacher reinforce the importance of a supportive relationship” for all students (p. 303), but focuses his analysis on the ways in which teachers can demonstrate caring for their Latino students,³ noting that developing culturally responsive and caring practice “is more important for Latino students who are invisible in the classroom, experience more failure than success, and ultimately drop out of school” (p. 298) than it is for White students. In this way, such work may also touch on practices that are impactful for all students but particularly challenging for teachers of students belonging to particular groups, especially in cases where teachers are not actively attempting to treat members of certain groups negatively but simply lack an awareness of the results of their practice. McMillon & Edwards (2000), for example, suggest that while the white students in the pre-school class they describe already have interaction patterns that fit the teacher’s expectation, the black student they study has a culturally different approach to classroom communication. They

³ In this framework, I follow the language of the scholars I discuss when referring to groups of individuals. For this reason, groups are named differently in different places (e.g., Latino/Latin@/Latinx, white/White/European American, black/Black/African American) in order to accurately represent the wording used in the work cited. When not drawing on the work of others I will refer to these example groups as Latinx, white, and black, respectively.

argue that this teacher's idea of success "did not just involve being academically literate, but it meant being socially literate as well" (p. 117), continuing:

However, because she was not aware of Joshua's out-of-school learning experiences, she did not understand his resistance to her rules. She did not understand that Joshua was confused, not willfully disobedient. Neither did she realize that the miscommunication between her and Joshua was disabling his literacy development in her classroom. (pp. 117-118)

Social justice as universal good. Some scholars whose work touches on social justice approaches frame this work as positively affecting *all* students rather than students in particular groups. Lewis (2001), for example, argues that while examinations of the ways in which race operates with regard to students of color is an important subject for investigation, the ways in which White students produce racial meaning is also a key topic of study:

Most White students in the United States are still attending schools that are almost entirely White (Orfield, 1993; Orfield & Monfort, 1992). In fact, most live in highly racially segregated neighborhoods and have little regular, substantial contact with people of other races (Massey & Denton, 1993). As much of the recent literature on Whiteness has pointed out, it is often Whites' lack of understanding of their own roles as racial actors that stands as a roadblock to further progress toward racial justice (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Fine et al., 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Jackman, 1994; Lewis, 1998). Understanding how White students develop their racial subjectivities and understandings is crucial to understanding future possibilities for greater racial equity in the United States. (p. 782)

While racial equity, then, may not be a topic thought by many to be relevant in mostly- or all-white environments, Lewis argues that an awareness of race is important for *all* students and

outlines ways in which a lack of such awareness causes problems for White students and their families as well as for students and families of color.

Similarly, Nieto (2009) argues that bilingual education programs for linguistically diverse students are often thought of negatively, but that true bilingual education is not only effective for those students, but has benefits for all students:

In contrast to negative perceptions of bilingualism, a good deal of research confirms the positive influence of knowing another language... The prevailing view that bilingualism is a deficit for language minority students but an asset for students from wealthy and privileged backgrounds has to do *not* with the relative merits of the different languages involved, but with the sociopolitical context of education. For example, it is not unusual to find in the same high school the seemingly incongruous situation of one group of students having their native language wiped out while another group of students struggles to learn a foreign language in a contrived and artificial setting. (pp. 117-119, emphasis in original)

In this way, then, much work in this category does not focus on *equal* treatment of all students, but instead on making the argument that all students can benefit from strategies that may have impact on particular group inequities. As another example, Gutierrez (2000) notes that educational concerns for African-American students often simply reflect inequitable access to the sort of good teaching to which all students should be exposed:

Most of the collective beliefs and practices described to this point may not seem particularly unique to African-American students. On the one hand, we should not be surprised that African-American students respond to such things as accessible teachers, a rigorous curriculum, and teacher collaboration. After all, these are resources that all

students should welcome. On the other hand, many of the aforementioned practices and beliefs are the very ones that are consistently absent from learning environments where large numbers of low-income African Americans participate (Oakes 1990). (p. 97)

In this framing, then, socially just instruction is in many ways less about practices that advantage one group and more about ensuring that all students have access to advantageous teaching practice, even while in many cases acknowledging that certain groups have less such access.

Socially just instruction within and without the classroom. The second distinction I make within the category of socially just instruction is whether the ultimate goals of such instruction reside strictly within the classroom, in the acquirement of subject knowledge, or whether intentions for students go beyond subject learning to focus on other life outcomes. Moses & Cobb (2001), for example, focus on the need for high-quality mathematics education for Black students, but as a mechanism for economic participation rather than simply to ensure that they have mathematical ability:

What is central now is the need for economic access; the political process has been opened—there are no formal barriers to voting, for example—but economic access, taking advantage of new technologies and economic opportunity, demands as much effort as political struggle required in the 1960s. (p. 6)

It is clear from Moses & Cobb’s framing that mathematics simply represents a limit placed on students’ opportunity to succeed in the larger world, that “the idea of citizenship now requires not only literacy in reading and writing but literacy in math and science” (p. 12), and they draw parallels between math as a mechanism and previous mechanisms of oppression:

So algebra, once solely in place as the gatekeeper for higher math and the priesthood who gained access to it, now is the gatekeeper for citizenship; and people who don't have it are like the people who couldn't read and write in the industrial age" (p. 14).

Santamaria (2009), however, focuses on subject learning among culturally and linguistically diverse learners as the goal of differentiated instruction rather than as a step on the path to larger societal participation⁴. Her differentiated instruction framework focuses on the learning of content, the process by which that content is learned, and an end product, which she describes as an assessment. She indicates that the schools in her study were identified with such an academic focus in mind, "because both schools are reaching high levels of academic achievement and are closing achievement gaps, dispelling the myth that high levels of poverty and or CLD [culturally and linguistically diverse] student populations lead to lower student achievement." (p. 231). It is important, however, to note that many such pieces of research do still include some general allusion to the utility of subject matter knowledge beyond the classroom; in this case, Santamaria briefly refers to the way in which the practice she describes "leads to increased future participation in societal activities" (p. 227) but does not focus specifically on how subject matter knowledge can lead to such an outcome.

Social justice instruction. After describing a school that has demonstrated great success in supporting its diverse student body in reaching, and succeeding in, higher-level math classes, Gutierrez (2000) argues that such success is important but should not represent an end goal:

⁴ It is important to note here that it is unlikely that many researchers see *no* benefit to subject matter learning beyond the simple possession of subject matter knowledge. However, in this section I focus on the framing present in a particular piece in order to contrast those that express a desire for subject learning as an end goal with those that treat it explicitly as a step on the way to something else. Further, some research (e.g., Gutierrez, 2000) suggests that *teachers* often see subject matter mastery as their primary goal, and this perspective is thus an important one to consider when one is working with teachers.

Though researchers have argued for a critical approach to curricula and a more central focus on race (and class) in mathematics teaching and learning (Frankenstein 1990; Gutstein 2000; McNair 2000; Ladson- Billings 1995; Tate 1995), the approach used by teachers in Monterey's math department seems to focus more upon assimilating the students to the mainstream mathematics curriculum. Although they did not explicitly question content, people, and institutions as did some successful teachers of African-American students (Tate 1995), their teaching seems to align with other practices of culturally relevant teachers who hold high expectations for students, use cooperative groups, and use some open-ended problem solving that is related to students' realities (Ladson-Billings 1995)...However, it was not clear from interviews that a major goal was to create citizens critical of society. Rather, teachers seemed to be interested in such information to "hook" students into the curriculum. Their goals were primarily school related—developing students' capacities to perform well in mathematics classes and on standardized achievement tests, not to transform society.

In many ways, this argument summarizes the differences in approach between socially just pedagogy and social justice pedagogy. Scholars whose work focuses on social justice pedagogy, like Gutierrez here, frame students' abilities to transform society as a key outcome of this work. For example, Tate (1995), in a study of one teacher whose instruction meets this criterion, describes her work as follows:

She has constructed the program to be an interdisciplinary approach to community problem solving. Her overarching program goal is to develop students into active participants in the democracy (Tate, 1994a). Thus her classes are issue driven rather than content (e.g., mathematics) driven (p. 170).

Such teaching is often called *liberatory pedagogy* (e.g., Freire, 2000) or *emancipatory pedagogy* (e.g., Powell, 1997), and frequently draws on the groundbreaking work of Paulo Freire, whom Kohl (1997) calls “perhaps the most significant educator in the world during the last half of the [20th] century,” (p. 7), around problem-posing, cooperative education. In the same way that Gutierrez expresses concern about the limiting nature of the “mainstream mathematics curriculum,” Freire argues that participation in oppressive structures inherently oppresses students and that the solution to this problem lies outside of such a system: “The solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves.’ Such transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors’ purposes” (p. 74).

This necessity of addressing issues of oppression through sociopolitical action is one that multiple researchers who focus on social justice pedagogy discuss. For example, Dos Santos (2008) notes that when beginning with a “Freirean humanistic perspective, an approach to science education is then highlighted, which implies the introduction of socially relevant themes and socioscientific issues, the establishment of a dialogic process in classroom, and the development of sociopolitical action” (p. 361). Johnson (1995) suggests that the same approach impacts choices she made when introducing ideas of violence (notably gun violence) and death into an English class:

Paulo Freire’s (1989) work offered me ideas to begin the process...As a person new to the role of teacher, I quickly realized that the burden of conveying specific information to the students is place on teachers by the structure of the schooling process...It became obvious that the superficial nature of teacher as the ‘giver of knowledge,’ and students as the ‘patient,’ listening receptors needed to be transformed.

Further, despite its common association with subject-matter instruction, the concept of *literacy* is also often key in social justice education. Frankenstein (1983) argues that “literacy becomes an important part of a liberatory curriculum because reading enables people to gain distance from the concrete immediacies of their every day lives in order to understand more clearly how their lives are shaped by and in turn can shape the world (Freire, 1983, p. 11)” (pp. 321-322). Gutstein (2007), who cites both Freire and Frankenstein, further connects literacy to social justice work and to Freire’s method of problem-posing:

Much of Freire’s writing and practice focused on *emancipatory literacy* (Freire & Macedo, 1987)...*reading the word*—acquiring text literacy—and *reading the world*—developing a sociopolitical, historical understanding of one’s own life conditions and broader society...He [Freire] argued for education in which teachers challenged students to reflect on their lives and social realities through a political lens (read the world) and then to engage in efforts to overcome injustice (write the world). To create opportunities for students to acquire literacy and to read and write their worlds, Freire contended that teachers needed to develop problem-posing pedagogies that unabashedly serve the oppressed’s struggle for liberation. (p. 422)

My own framing. While my work during this study focused on elucidating teachers’ views of social justice and enabling them to act in ways they felt were in line with those views, it would be naïve to suggest that my personal ideas about social justice did not affect our partnership. This may have occurred in many ways, whether through my framing of questions and issues, particular resources I provided, the sorts of conversations we had around teachers’ practice, or any number of other aspects of the study’s design and enactment. For that reason, it is certainly relevant to briefly discuss my own conceptualization of social justice here.

My social justice framing can be best described as critical and advocacy based. As a former math teacher who thus often approaches questions of social justice from a mathematical lens, at least initially, I class myself in many ways with theorists like Frankenstein and Gutstein. Both have worked to adapt Freire's problem-posing education for a mathematics context and to interpret what ideas like *reading* (already discussed above) and *writing the world* might look like in practice. In the case of the latter, Gutstein (2003) writes:

There is nothing unusual about wanting students to be socially aware. But although necessary, this may be insufficient for students to become actively involved in rectifying social inequalities. Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1987) spoke of *writing* the world (and not just understanding it), which meant, for him, to remedy unjust situations. To write the world, students also need a sense of *agency*, that is, a belief in themselves as people who can make a difference in the world, as ones who are makers of history. (p. 40)

Gutstein and Frankenstein, however, both write from the perspective of an individual educator working in something of a vacuum to teach for social justice, as Frankenstein's work was at the college level and Gutstein taught in a unique school in which he was largely given free rein over his class design and enactment. In contrast, my approach, like this dissertation, is somewhat more synoptic. It is not only my experience as a mathematics teacher, but also my time as a student of policy in deep consideration of the role of stakeholders at various educational levels in supporting and encouraging social justice work, that has defined my sense of the workings of social justice in United States education. Thus, while I see teaching for social justice as an important support for the sort of change I wish to see in the United States and elsewhere, I do not believe that this single goal is sufficient in supporting meaningful change around social justice.

While the structure of the US schooling system is certainly changing in a way that it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss, many students still spend their formative educational years in classrooms that are themselves part of a larger system of schools and school districts operating under the direction of a variety of local educational leaders. I contend that a single-minded focus on teachers to the exclusion of the work of these leaders (not something I suggest Frankenstein and Gutstein do), as well as of the families and other stakeholders who make up local communities, is one that demands from many teachers something that they simply do not have the training or knowledge to provide. That is not in any way a critique of these teachers, but rather intended to suggest that our current teacher education system, from university training programs to Teach for America to Relay Graduate School of Education and back again, is not designed to prepare teachers to take on the herculean task of social justice work alone. Nor, I believe, should teachers be expected to do this work without support (hence the focus of this study).

Rather, and as will be discussed in far more detail elsewhere in this dissertation, I see the US public school system as a series of interconnected parts working in concert to achieve particular goals. Further, I believe that, while their language, contexts, experiences, and even ideologies may differ widely, the vast, vast majority of those who work in the US education system nonetheless share many major goals – student success, positive school experiences, the narrowing of gaps,⁵ increased health and wellness, etc. Thus, I see as the real challenge of US education the identification of ways in which district leaders, principals, teachers, students,

⁵ This is a good example of an instance in which framing may differ, although ultimate goals are still clearly aligned. Some (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2006a, as well as myself) critique the framing of race and class differences in performance as “gaps”, reframing the concern as something else (in Ladson-Billings’ case, an “education debt”). Framing aside, however, it is clearly ultimately true that, regardless of the mechanisms by which it occurs, both researchers like Ladson-Billings and those who use the language of gaps (e.g., Reardon, 2011) would be pleased if those gaps/debts were to be eliminated.

families, and community members can work together to achieve these goals. This is *particularly* true when ideologies and beliefs differ – the US education system cannot improve without finding a way to enable those with very different worldviews to work together to support students. A key observation here is that the teachers in my own study ranged from a liberal Catholic to a left-leaning moderate to an “Eisenhower Republican”, and all three were able to work productively with me to improve their practice with a goal of supporting their students.

In order to support a system like the one I envision, I see *social justice advocacy* as key to collaboration that can produce positive results. By this I mean the sharing of information and ideas through purposeful connections between the learning that is being done in schools and the realities of US society. While various groups may understand those realities differently, it is not necessary to evaluate them through particular lenses that may lose support from vast swaths of the population; my argument is simply for the implementation of a curriculum that applies in-school learning to the documentable realities of life in this country.⁶ Increasing the realities present in US curriculum, along with an explicit call to students as agents of whatever change they wish to see in the world, can produce a society of those who work to identify and address their issues of concern both personally and by encouraging the interest of family and friends. In this way student advocacy can accomplish further education around these issues beyond the reach of schools.

Difficulties in social justice categorization: the case of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Views of and approaches to social justice are not truly categorical, but rather reside on a number of spectra and can often differ in subtle ways. For that reason, although above I do break

⁶ I should be clear here that most “real-life” problems in use in schools, such as the building of a garden of such-and-such size with fencing at such-and-such cost, do not meet this criterion. Rather, I refer to problems that actually address legitimate concerns, like the presence of liquor stores near schools (Tate, 1995).

the approaches I discuss into rough categories, no categorization system can perfectly capture the different ideas present in social justice literature. In order to illustrate this, I will discuss varying approaches to *culturally relevant pedagogy* (CRP) and the relationship between the differences in thought among CRP scholars and the difficulty of truly categorizing social justice approaches.

Above I discuss Moje's (2007) categorization of socially just pedagogy and social justice pedagogy. While this may seem like a fairly clear distinction, it is often difficult to make in practice. To highlight this issue I show how CRP, undoubtedly one of the most popular and well-known approaches to social justice in teaching, does not belong exclusively in either category (further, its proponents do not necessarily even use the phrase "social justice"). I will outline how some approaches to CRP differ somewhat from its original framing while still drawing on the same source material.

In a seminal paper, Ladson-Billings (1995b) presents CRP as a solution to a problematic binary: while there are many studies of African American students who are academically unsuccessful, studies of those who *are* successful tend to find that "the students' academic success came at the expense of their cultural and psychosocial well-being" (p. 475). She cites as one example a study by Bacon (1981) that found that "successful students' progress indicated that they were social isolates, with neither African-American nor White friends" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 476). In response to this, Ladson-Billings instead proposes an approach to teaching that supports students in "negotiating the academic demands of school while demonstrating cultural competence" and is thus able to "provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically" (p. 476). While in this way her argument is focused on socially just pedagogy and on bringing students academic success while still supporting them as cultural beings, she also adds a key requirement that adds an aspect of social

justice pedagogy as well: “not only must teachers encourage academic success and cultural competence, they must help students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities” (p.476).

In another piece, published slightly earlier in the same year, this double focus on *both* socially just pedagogy and social justice pedagogy is made even more clear. Here Ladson-Billings (1995a) breaks CRP into three criteria: academic success⁷ and cultural competence, both of which relate to socially just pedagogy, and a *critical* (later often called ‘sociopolitical’) *consciousness*, in which students “engage the world and others critically” (p. 162). Ladson-Billings is very clear that this third criterion represents something of a shift in focus from the first two:

Culturally relevant teaching does not imply that it is enough for students to chose[sic] academic excellence and remain culturally grounded if those skills and abilities represent only an individual achievement. Beyond those individual characteristics of academic achievement and cultural competence, students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities. If school is about preparing students for active citizenship, what better citizenship tool than the ability to critically analyze the society? (p. 162)

While Ladson-Billings’ outline of culturally relevant pedagogy, then, places it in both categories of social justice teaching, it also presents a rather tall order for teachers who must *both* bring academic success and positive cultural experiences to their students and take a critical

⁷ “Academic success” was later often reframed as “student learning” to avoid associations with standardized testing and other oft-critiqued aspects of US accountability culture – see the section on approaches to studying social justice, below.

stance toward societal inequities in their instruction, something they may have little to no experience doing. For this and other reasons, there are a number of examples of follow-up CRP work that focus on only one of these aspects (often cultural competence) while still acknowledging Ladson-Billings' original framing. For example, Howard (2001) draws on Ladson-Billings while describing the work of his own teachers as an attempt to "use their pedagogical practices to create a learning environment that did not encourage students to disconnect from their cultural identities while pursuing high academic achievement." This focus on the first two criteria of CRP reflects teachers' talk in the study, which focuses on these aspects of practice but not to a major extent on sociopolitical consciousness. Later, Milner (2010) addresses the ways in which a white teacher acquired cultural competence, an explicit choice to focus on only that aspect of CRP. In a recent practitioner inquiry piece that gives insight into the way in which one teacher/researcher took up the mandates of CRP, Houchen (2013) again describes all three criteria given by Ladson-Billings, but when describing the "guiding principles" she developed from CRT and literacy theory to inform her practice provides a list from which sociopolitical consciousness is notably absent:

(1) to create strong and caring relationships with students based on mutual respect and high expectations, (2) to assess student thinking regarding their own learning needs and their cultural background to inform the curriculum, and (3) to teach metacognition and comprehension skills and strategies in multiple formats both explicitly and generatively.

(p. 98)

Similar differences arise when considering approaches to socially just pedagogy. Moje (2007) distinguishes between socially just pedagogy and social justice pedagogy in the following way:

The call for socially just pedagogy is a call to ensure that all youth have equitable opportunities to learn. In many cases, this view seeks to provide equal resources for learning, although the socially just pedagogue cannot always control access to material resources....By contrast, social justice pedagogy, or teaching to produce social justice, involves more than providing equitable learning opportunities...opportunities to learn must not only provide access to mainstream knowledge and practices but also provide opportunities to question, challenge, and reconstruct knowledge (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Social justice pedagogy should, in other words, offer possibilities for transformation, not only of the learner but also of the social and political contexts in which learning and other social action take place (Saunders, 2006). (pp. 3-4)

In a paper from the following year, however, Chubbuck & Zemblyas (2008) define *socially just teaching* as including a sociopolitical aspect as well:

We define socially just teaching as a teacher's effort to transform policies and enact pedagogies that improve the learning and life opportunities of typically underserved students (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994), *while equipping and empowering them to work for a more socially just society themselves* (Freire, 1955/1970; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; King, 2005). (p. 274, emphasis mine)

In this definition, Chubbuck & Zemblyas draw on Freire, whose work, as discussed above, is often the inspiration for approaches in Moje's *second* category of social justice teaching (social justice pedagogy). Additionally, in a paper published the same year as Moje, Goodley (2007) suggests that his own choice of the phrase *socially just pedagogies* was made in part to explore "ever-changing and constantly fluid meanings in relation to what might be termed 'socially just'." (p. 318). In this instance, he links the term to "theories typically associated with critical

pedagogy, critical theory and neo-Marxist ideas” (p. 318), approaches that also inform work in what Moje calls social justice pedagogy.

This discussion is intended to frame a choice that has already been somewhat addressed in this chapter: the range of framings of social justice and social justice approaches to education is such that even when two works use the same language, and even if they do so while drawing on the same scholar’s framing of the same theory (as with the CRP examples, above), they may still belong on different sides of any given divide. For that reason, I do not focus here or elsewhere on specific language, but rather on the substance of the investigation, which may put related works on a single subject, or even by a single author, in different categories. As discussed elsewhere, this extends as far as my choice not to require work I identify as social justice scholarship to use the phrase *social justice* at all; for example, the phrase ‘social justice’ does appear in Ladson-Billings (1995b), but is not used in Ladson-Billings (1995a).

Approaches to Studying Social Justice

Having discussed a range of conceptualizations of social justice, I now move to a question that concerns scholars interested in *studying* social justice: exactly what does one look for in such a study, and where can one find it? The complexities inherent in identifying and categorizing justice work do not exist solely in the literature. Social justice, fortunately, is rarely if ever a concept that is *completely* absent from educational work. Rather, it is an approach that is sometimes extremely purposeful and explicit but also sometimes incidental to the work of a teacher who, as Ladson-Billings (1995a) suggests, may be engaging in work that seems to be “just good teaching” (p. 159)

In this section, then, I will discuss a number of different ways in which scholars of education have approached the study of social justice or have otherwise investigated the presence

or absence of social justice in educational practice. These approaches include examining the work of expert teachers, considering differing perspectives on social justice or social justice-related topics among teachers, examining errors and mistakes in teaching that does *not* successfully work for social justice, considering the social justice work and/or views of educational stakeholders other than teachers, and discussing the challenges that face those who hope to teach for social justice and the different ways in which teachers have faced these challenges. Following this discussion, I will contextualize the approach taken in my own study in relation to these categories and address what I see as its contribution to the study of social justice in education.

Learning from experts. One common approach in literature that investigates teaching for social justice is to examine the work of teachers who are considered to be excellent at their craft. This determination of excellence can be made with the input of many different stakeholders. Powell (1996), for example, asked school administrators to identify a teacher they considered to be superior in a number of specific ways, including an ability to motivate students of all cultures, teaching in a culturally relevant way, and possessing the ability to “engage all students in meaningful learning” (p. 51), while Monroe (2009) asked a school principal to nominate several teachers who produced excellent student learning outcomes and were familiar with students’ cultural backgrounds. Ford & Sassi (2014) instead describe a process of “chain sampling” (p. 47), in which “identifying information-rich cases through referrals by knowledgeable people” ultimately led to a focus on a specific teacher recommended by a district superintendent. Further, external metrics may also be used to identify excellent teachers, such as the use of test scores by Cholewa, Amatea, West-Olatunji, & Wright (2012) as a way to identify

a teacher's "demonstrated effectiveness in facilitating the academic achievement of her low-income, African American students."⁸

Rather than use a single specific source to identify expert participants, some researchers choose to consider the opinions of multiple stakeholders at once. Ladson-Billings (1995b), for example, employed a process she calls "community nomination" (p. 471) to identify "outstanding teachers" based on the input of a group of African American mothers, but then cross-checked this list with one created by principals and colleagues that focused on "excellent classroom management skills, student achievement (as measured by standardized test scores), and personal observations of teaching practice" (p. 472), ultimately identifying nine teachers that were on both lists, of whom eight agreed to participate in her study. Howard (2001) looked to an even broader set of stakeholders, asking a group of elementary principals, parents, teachers, district administrators, and civic leaders to co-construct a list of teachers "whose pedagogical practices contributed to the academic and social development of African American students" (p. 184).

In some cases, researchers select teachers with whom they themselves are familiar. Nieto & Bode (1992), for example, draw from a range of teachers with whom they have had personal

⁸ It should be noted here that the use of test scores as a measure of excellent teaching is one that meets with substantial challenge among many scholars of social justice in education. As already noted, for example, Ladson-Billings (2006b) expresses her concern about the conflation of her "academic achievement" criterion for culturally relevant pedagogy with what she frames as negative aspects of education and educational assessment, including test scores:

When I wrote the words *academic achievement* almost ten years ago, I never dreamed that I would regret using this term. What I had in mind has nothing to do with the oppressive atmosphere of standardized tests; the wholesale retention of groups of students; scripted curricula; and the intimidation of students, teachers, and parents. Rather, what I envisioned is more accurately described as "student learning"—what it is that students actually know and are able to do as a result of pedagogical interactions with skilled teachers. (p. 35)

It is also worth mentioning, however, that in her initial search for teachers for her seminal study on culturally relevant pedagogy, discussed in the next paragraph, standardized test scores are included on a list of attributes considered by principals when recommending teachers they considered outstanding.

experience, while Bondy, Ross, Gallingame, & Hambacher (2007) contacted teachers in whose classrooms they had observed excellent teaching practice in a previous year. In some cases, in fact, the teacher in question may be the researcher him/herself, a practice often called *practitioner inquiry*. For example, both Lee (2001) and Houchen (2013) studied their own work with students and their reflections on it. Such investigations can have goals of very different scales: Lee's focused on a day of discourse in a freshman Language Arts class as a way of considering "support for the empowerment of the English departments in urban high schools through curriculum development, technology infusion, professional development, and assessment" by beginning with "the premise that students bring to the Language Arts classroom a rich array of knowledge that is useful for learning generative concepts and strategies in reading and writing" (p. 100), while Houchen's piece takes a much more narrow focus to describe her attempts to prepare a group of students for an end-of-year reading test.

A final distinction among examples of this work is the treatment of teacher expertise as either leading to particular beneficial outcomes or as worth noting in and of itself. For example, Gutstein (2007), in another case of practitioner inquiry, investigated the ways in which his teaching enabled students to both learn mathematics and develop "sociopolitical awareness" (p. 420), while Bondy et al. (2007) examined how teachers "create environments of success and resilience for students who have historically floundered in school" (p. 326). In other cases, scholars work instead to analyze or codify teachers' methods. Ladson-Billings (2009), for example, describes her attempt to distill observations of teaching practice into a sense of "what was *right* with African American students' education and what happens in classrooms where teachers, students, and parents seem to get it right" (p. vii, emphasis in original). Similarly, Milner (2010) notes that his intent is to present "a picture of how the teacher builds relationships

with his students, how he deepens his knowledge about how identity and race manifest in the urban context, and how he implements a communal and collective approach to his work as he builds cultural knowledge and cultural competence about himself, his students, and his practice” (an approach very much in line with my own choice to employ the method of portraiture for this study – see Chapter 3).

Learning from perspectives. A second common approach to work on social justice in education is to investigate the perspectives of a number of different teachers on a particular topic or issue, which can include any aspect of educational practice. While also often sharing a respect for, and a desire to learn from, the ideas and knowledge of the teachers under study, scholarship in this category has the unique quality of presenting multiple ways of thinking about issues that may at times contrast or conflict. Further, the purpose behind investigations that compare perspectives is not always simply to learn from them; work in this category can and often does take a critical eye to some or all aspects of the perspectives teachers provide.

As one example, Ready & Wright (2011) investigate the different ways in which teachers understand their students’ cognitive abilities and their relationship to race in order to consider whether “inequalities in teacher perceptions, behaviors, and recommendations for placement decisions stem from teacher and/or institutional biases or whether they are appropriate given the measurable between-group differences often present in student performance” and ultimately to challenge the “substantial body of research [that] concludes that teacher perceptions of children's academic skills are relatively accurate and that sociodemographic differences in teacher perceptions reflect empirical social phenomena” (p. 337). In this investigation, they are explicitly critical of the bias they find in teachers’ assessments of their students. Prime & Miranda (2006) follow a similar path, investigating the perspectives of eight teachers with high percentages of

students of color in their classrooms concerning these students' readiness for success in science classes and critiquing much of what teachers say in order to finally conclude that "for the most part, these teachers employed what has been described as a deficit model for understanding the problems that urban children face with respect to school achievement" (p. 526).

In a quite different approach, Brown (2004) presents a study intended "to determine how urban teachers implement several educational practices, such as instructional processes, communication patterns, working with parents/caregivers, and choosing curricula" (p. 273). While the subject of teacher perspectives is different (practice here, as compared to students in the previous examples), so is the approach: rather than focus on a critique of what teachers say, Brown instead draws from their differing responses to identify a list of practices that support what he calls *culturally responsive classroom management*, contrasting teachers' conceptualizations of practice through this frame as a way of outlining a range of fruitful approaches. In another study, Brock, Lapp, Flood, Fisher, & Han (2007) explore teachers' views on one aspect of teaching practice, that of homework, and find results they suggest are very encouraging, noting that "almost all of the teachers we interviewed made provisions to ensure that their students had the support they needed (both in terms of materials and actual assistance) to successfully complete their homework" (p. 367).

Learning from mistakes. As the logical conclusion of the spectrum ranging from the very positive approach among researchers whose work focuses on what we can learn from experts and continues into the mixed views of researchers who contrast multiple perspectives, a third category of research on teaching for social justice focuses purposefully on methods and ideas that do *not* work. This work takes a variety of forms. One such form is an analysis of teaching practice that serves to oppress or otherwise negatively affect students. Lewis (2001)

does this with regard to “colorblind” attitudes among teachers in an almost all-white school that have strikingly negative impact on the school’s few black students (and on the perspectives and understandings of the school’s white students as well). Similarly, DeCuir & Dixson (2004) draw on Critical Race Theory (CRT) to identify examples that demonstrate “the insidious nature of racism and how it manifests in a variety of educational contexts” (p. 29). Also relatedly, Hatt (2012) considers a kindergarten teacher whose practice around the idea of “smartness” is based on white, middle class cultural norms and thus highly problematic for students who are not white and middle class, arguing that it is profoundly dangerous to conflate ideas of intelligence with behavior or experiential knowledge.

A second common approach taken in work in this category involves engaging in a comparison of multiple teachers or schools that serve, respectively, as examples of ineffective and effective practice or thinking⁹. Marx (2008), for example, investigates the deficit thinking and impact of Whiteness among four popular White teachers of mostly Latina/o students. She notes that three of the four teachers, “held very negative views about Latina/o culture(s) and families that were constructed by ignorance and distance and then fed by stereotypes and mythology, all symptoms of pervasive societal racism, as well as the privileges of their own Whiteness.” However, a fourth, Ms. Currey, “was the only teacher who recognized this limitation and took actions to overcome it. She was an exceptional teacher, as her many awards attest”. By contrasting the inability of the three other teachers to move beyond their White

⁹ It might be argued that this description sounds much like the description in the previous section of work that compares multiple perspectives. The distinction is that work in the prior category, while it may be alternately critical and appreciative of the perspectives it discusses, focuses on identifying themes among these perspectives that may be encouraging, discouraging, or indifferent. Work in the present category, however, specifically presents its examples for the purpose of comparing one or more negative, wrong, or otherwise problematic instance of a phenomenon with one or more positive, correct, or otherwise helpful example. In the former, then, an overview of a variety of perspectives ultimately results in themes and analyses, while in the latter particular examples have been pre-selected as illustrative of the distinction between negative practice and positive.

privilege and societal views of their students with Ms. Currey's work to reframe her position in a way that was far more beneficial to her students, Marx makes clear the specific differences that lead to these different takeups of Whiteness.

Boaler & Staples (2008) also engage in comparison in an investigation of negative and positive educational outcomes for students, but at the school level rather than the teacher level. They contrast three California schools, Hilltop, Greendale, and Railside, examining student outcomes among the three while taking into account various student demographic factors. While Railside is both the most racially diverse school and the building with the highest percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch, Boaler and Staples note that at Railside, "students demonstrated greater gains in achievement than students at the other two schools and higher overall achievement on a number of measures" and that "achievement gaps among various ethnic groups at Railside that were present on incoming assessments disappeared in nearly all cases by the end of the second year" (p. 608). In this case, they point to a specific aspect of Railside, its teacher-designed and reform-oriented mathematics curriculum, as a major factor.

Other work in this category does not focus on teachers or schools that lack knowledge of or interest in beneficial social justice practice, but instead analyzes attempts by teachers to teach in a way that supports social justice without first developing the proper knowledge, understandings, or sensitivity. Bartell (2013), describes two different groups of teachers participating in a credit-bearing course she taught that was focused on the teaching of mathematics for social justice. While one group is successful in their attempt to plan and execute a social justice lesson, the work of the second group instead results in heavy misunderstandings on the part of students around statistics on race and the prison population. Bartell's analysis then

highlights what can go right, as well as the ways in which unexplored assumptions and hasty decisions can lead things to go very wrong, in the teaching of mathematics for social justice.

Learning from other stakeholders. While the work that has been discussed thus far focuses on observations or interviews of teachers' practice individually or within a school, some work that focuses on ideas of social justice education approaches questions from a perspective other than the teacher's. Davidson (1999), for example, interviewed a set of 49 students about their favorite and least favorite classrooms, asking participants to identify what about those classrooms made them more or less liked. She then used this interview data to investigate students' views about "teachers' interactional and pedagogical styles, characteristics of the written curriculum, and social aspects of the classroom atmosphere" (342) in order to draw conclusions about the impact of particular teacher practices and approaches on what she calls "stigmatized students". Relatedly, Garza (2009) investigated students' perceptions of the behavior of their teachers as caring (or not) as expressed in interviews and during classes.

Other work investigates questions of teaching practice for social justice at levels above that of individual teacher. Reitzug & Patterson (1998), for example, shadowed a principal for a semester in order to analyze the way in which she empowered students and encouraged their learning, while Theoharis (2010) considered "how principals committed to equity and justice understood and explained what they saw as the impact on their schools of the changes they made", focusing on the resistance six principals faced, the ways in which they responded to that resistance through their practice, and the specific ways in which they advanced their schools toward social justice teaching. Gutierrez (1999, 2000) takes a somewhat different approach by investigating the positive impact on the achievement of Latina/o and African American students, respectively, of "a high school mathematics department that has been successful in advancing its

students to higher levels of mathematics” (p. 267). In these investigations, she treats the mathematics department as a collective body, investigating strategies among teachers that support students of color in reaching high-level mathematics classes. While there is in fact a much larger body of work that investigates social justice from perspectives other than that of the teacher, such work is relatively less common among scholars who focus on methods of *teaching* for social justice.

Learning from challenges. An additional body of work on teaching for social justice, including, to a large extent, my own study, focuses in some way on the overcoming of challenges. While the idea of challenge is certainly present in all of the work I have described, scholarship in this category places the notion of challenge at the forefront. Athanases & de Oliveira (2008), for example, held focus groups for teachers who were also recent graduates of an equity-focused teacher certification program in order to identify challenges these teachers were experiencing in their first year. They focus their analysis on these teachers’ response to those challenges as well as the particular aspects of their approach that supported them in successfully responding. Esposito & Swain (2009) discuss and categorize a broad range of challenges with which seven “urban teachers who believed in culturally relevant pedagogy” (p. 40) were met in working to teach for social justice, discussing ways in which some of these challenges were overcome by teachers, while others simply added difficulty to their work. Further, Naraian (2014) investigates the “local and enduring struggles” (p. 1) of teachers of inclusion classes in which “students with significant disabilities were included with their nondisabled peers” (p. 6) drawing on interviews and field notes to assess the difficulties that arise in that context.

Other work moves beyond a view of teachers as individual actors facing and perhaps triumphing over social justice challenges to instead consider the ways in which teachers can be supported in overcoming such concerns. For example, Achinstein & Barrett (2004) consider ways in which mentors can aid novice teachers in identifying and combating the challenges they face. The study I propose is in many ways closest to work which focuses more explicitly on teachers' development and growth as social justice educators as they address challenges and think through particular aspects of their practice. Examples include Chubbuck & Zembylas (2008), who describe what they call the "critical emotional praxis" (p. 274) of one novice teacher working to employ socially just teaching practices; Picower (2011), who identifies four strategies employed by new teachers struggling to teach for social justice within what she calls the "neoliberal context" of their schools and school systems; and Bondy, Ross, Hambacher, & Acosta (2013), who consider the experience of European American teachers of mostly African American students as they work to become "warm demanders"¹⁰.

Learning from teachers: an open approach. One commonality among work on teaching for social justice is that it almost exclusively focuses on teacher practice around a particular issue (or set of issues) or method. I see this approach as often limiting, however, and in my own study I have taken a somewhat different approach. Rather than identifying social justice issues or methods of concern in advance, I instead began by determining the issues that were most important to my participants, a choice of focus that served as a guide throughout the course of the study. It was the issues that each teacher identified that were then made to be our areas of focus in order to investigate not how these teachers felt about issues I or others considered in

¹⁰ Note that I see my work as similar in *approach* to the examples given, although I do not claim to necessarily agree with the framing of all three of these pieces and specifically find Bondy et al.'s discussion of white teachers as warm demanders to be somewhat problematic.

advance to be of importance, but instead how they thought through and identified issues of social justice that mattered to them and then set about addressing these issues in various ways. I argue that this enabled me to tailor the study to teachers' wants and needs and speaks to an important area for further study – below I further discuss the ways in which scholars have supported teachers in learning more about social justice or documented others' supports in that area. For more on the ways in which I co-developed a focus on particular issues with each teacher, see Chapter 3, which discusses my methodology.

Further, I depart from much of the literature on social justice in education by beginning with the assumption that *all* teachers willing to reflect on their own practice and to work to improve that practice in the pursuit of social justice can serve as models for learning. I argue that this is particularly due to their knowledge of their own students and their own contexts, something that external actors such as researchers are likely never to have in even remotely similar ways. Thus, I do not claim to investigate the work of renowned experts who may have understandings and abilities many years in the making. Rather, I employ the generous approach often taken when learning from social justice experts to investigate the practice of teachers who do not claim such expertise, but who do care deeply about their students and possess substantial awareness of students' needs and wants. I suggest that all teachers who are willing to share their thinking as they work to improve their practice can inform our understanding of good teaching for social justice in valuable ways. Picower (2011) provides one demonstration of the ways in which even relatively inexperienced teachers, and even within an environment that constrains their work, can serve as models of thoughtful practice within a social justice context when their work is examined for goodness rather than for issues to critique. For additional discussion

around this search for goodness, as well as additional support for this approach, see the review of literature on the portraiture methodology in Chapter 3.

Supporting Teachers in Learning for Social Justice

The structure of this study implies a third category for investigation here, as my goal was not only to study teachers' social justice work but to support them in *improving* their practice in order to better address the issues of social justice that they care about.¹¹ For that reason, I now consider methods identified in the literature for supporting teachers in learning about social justice and improving their practice. In order to do this, I make two distinctions. First, I have identified four broad categories of teacher learning: *formal predesigned*, *formal adaptive*, *informal*, and *incidental*. *Formal predesigned* social justice learning includes activities such as one-time professional development experiences focused around particular issues or topics as well as ongoing work that follows a fixed plan, including many professional learning communities (see below). *Formal adaptive* social justice learning is similar to the previous category but includes a dynamic aspect that is responsive to teachers in some way. An ongoing professional development experience might be in this category, for example, if it is designed to change based on the specific topics that teachers identify as important to them. This category might also include an ongoing series of planned meetings between a researcher and a group of teachers in which the researcher changes focus based on teachers' stated needs. As work here must respond to teachers' concerns over time, it is necessarily ongoing.

Of the final two categories, *informal* social justice learning is learning that still involves multiple people and has some element of design (for example, a teacher working with a

¹¹ This intent does not imply any critique of these teachers' practice on my part; I would argue that all teachers, no matter how experienced and lauded they may be, can benefit from continued work to improve their social justice practice.

researcher or two newer teachers working on a team with a mentor) but is not enacted at pre-planned times or in consistently structured ways. Instead, teachers and others may engage in occasional phone chats, conversation at convenient but changing times during the day, periodic discussion and analysis when desired, etc. *Incidental* social justice learning, on the contrary, involves *no* formal setup. This includes works of practitioner inquiry like that presented by Johnson (1995), who outlines the way in which she began to understand the need for critical education through challenging classroom events involving students' experiences of violence in their communities, or Zindler (2009), who draws on research frameworks to retrospectively analyze the level of inclusion in her inclusion classroom, as well as a variety of other work in which researchers observe circumstances that impact teachers' thinking and knowledge but that are not purposeful or organized. Examples cited above include Chubbuck & Zemblyas (2008), who address ways in which social justice and emotion intersect for a novice teacher learning to apply social justice ideas in practice, and Esposito & Swain (2009), who discuss the histories of several teachers interested in social justice, including consideration of the ways in which their experiences in teaching relate to their social justice priorities. While such work is valuable and certainly worth studying, I exclude this final category of work from this section of the review because my focus is on purposefully working to improve teachers' social justice practice and this is by its nature the study of unintended social justice learning.

As a second distinction, I focus here only on work that concerns *in-service* teachers. While there is a large body of work that addresses pre-service teachers' social justice learning (Price, 2001; Milner, 2003; and Mills, 2012; to name a few of many), my work was with full-time classroom teachers, and it is this group I focus on here. The choice not to consider work on pre-service teachers is in part due to the limited scope of this review, but is more a function of

the simple observation that what is learned in a teacher education program and what actually takes place in the context of a classroom may be very different. Athanases & de Oliveira (2008), for example, note: “Even when teachers leave credential programs with useful preparation, early-career jobs and contexts shape and constrain teachers’ goals and practice related to teaching diverse learners. Being change agents can be a tall order” (p. 64).

Picower (2011) takes a stronger view of the transition into in-service teaching, suggesting that the neoliberal context of education produces a “state of fear” for those who “veer from the corporate-driven status quo of teaching as usual,” noting that “for teachers who explicitly want to provide a different kind of educational experience for their students, this state of fear severely limits their ability to teach for social justice because of the constant monitoring and policing of their classrooms and curriculum” (p. 1113). While the teachers in my study did not report the extreme feelings of fear discussed by Picower, they did express some concern around addressing particular issues in their classroom given external expectations, and they also noted differences (in Mike’s case, strong differences) between ideas discussed in teacher education programs and their utility in a real teaching context. Because of this, I find it reasonable to claim that the context of teacher education is different enough from the context of the actual classroom, when considering social justice in practice, that it represents a separate set of considerations.

Teacher learning. In understanding teacher learning, I take the broad approach supported by scholars such as Knapp (2003), who notes:

Opportunities for professional learning are many and varied, far more so than is generally embraced by common usage of the term *professional development*. A more inclusive and productive conception of opportunities for professional learning assumes that this learning takes place both within practice itself (as practicing professionals experiment

with and draw conclusions about their daily work) and in settings outside of practice. (p. 115)

Knapp then goes on to list various learning opportunities, including “formalized structures” (such as workshops and courses), “various informal settings” (including journals and collegial conversations), one-time experiences such as conference attendance, and “sustained experiences” such as ongoing study groups. He notes that this learning takes place both “in activities primarily designed for professional learning (usually designated as ‘professional development’) as well as other activities ostensibly for different purposes (as in collaborative curriculum development, assessment of student work)” (p. 115).

Avalos (2011) also categorizes modes of teacher professional development in her review of a decade of professional development literature in *Teaching and Teacher Education*. These categories include reflections, the use of technology and other tools, school-university partnerships, teacher co-learning (which includes teacher teams, communities of practice, and peer coaching), and “workplace learning” (which includes internal formal and informal professional development). Given that I have eliminated teacher-directed learning as a focus of this review, I take “reflections” here to refer to ongoing researcher-practitioner conversations about artifacts and experiences, as with Birrell, 1995, below. Considering both Avalos’ and Knapp’s categories suggests that there is a range of work that can support teacher learning, whether formal or informal, internal (to a school) or external, and intensive or brief.

Further, Sun, Wilhelm, Larsen, & Franke (2014) identify a number of general “characteristics of effective professional development” (p.5, as below):

a) involves active learning, (b) grounded in teachers' practice, (c) coherent with other learning opportunities, (d) focused on content, (e) involves collective participation of teachers from the same school or grade, and (f) ongoing in duration (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Horn & Little, 2010; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Sun, Penuel, Frank, Gallagher, & Youngs, 2013; Wilson & Berne, 1999).

Social justice learning. While there are certainly many studies in which researchers report on work with teachers around social justice (a number of which have already been discussed above), such studies often do not place particular focus on how teachers may have been supported in *learning* about social justice, instead either framing them as working to apply knowledge gained somehow from previous experiences to a new situation or minimizing the role of the researcher and treating the teacher's progression as a natural response to circumstances.¹² Bartell, for example, noted in 2013 that "virtually no research exists about in-service mathematics teachers learning to teach for social justice (Gates & Jorgenson, 2009)" (p. 132).

Given the range of experiences scholars suggest can lead to professional learning, I now investigate specific ways in which researchers and others have explicitly supported teachers in developing their social justice knowledge. I begin by discussing examples of formal predesigned learning, then formal adaptive learning, and finally informal learning. I conclude by situating my own study as sitting between formal adaptive and informal learning. Because of my own identity as a researcher, I pay particular attention to how researchers in particular have worked in these

¹² Note that portraiture critiques this second stance, suggesting that to minimize the role of the researcher is to ignore a major influence on the outcomes of a study. In this example in particular, it is clear from many studies that the researcher was somehow supporting the teacher in improving his/her social justice knowledge, but an attempt to focus only on the teacher's work frequently obscures the mechanisms by which this may have taken place.

ways to support teachers in increasing their social justice knowledge and improving their practice.

Formal predesigned learning. Beyond the traditional one-time professional development experiences of varying quality that many teachers commonly experience during the school year (e.g., an hour-long after-school talk by a district professional about developing culturally sensitive practice), one major focus of scholarship that discusses formal social justice learning is on recruiting in-service teachers into university courses, project groups, discussion groups, or focus groups (e.g., Athanases & de Oliveira, 2008). This might be done by awarding course credit needed for recertification, eliminating cost, or even paying teachers a stipend for attendance. Bartell (2013), for example, notes that she “offered all secondary mathematics teachers in my university’s local school district the opportunity to enroll in a course on learning to teach mathematics for social justice and receive free graduate credit” (p. 133). This course began with a discussion of social justice readings and ended with “collaborative work to design, implement, observe, and revise one mathematics lesson that incorporated social justice goals” (p. 136), although Bartell also notes (as discussed above) that a necessary absence on her part during a final planning session caused one group to implement an extremely problematic lesson, suggesting that such work must be carefully facilitated.

Working with a more narrow group, Bondy, Ross, Hambacher, & Acosta (2013) recruited teachers with whom the researchers were familiar from their earlier work at a university. Participants were asked to attend a weekly course that focused on CRP and was “designed to support the blending of theory and practice” (p. 426); in addition, they also attended “a weekly seminar with a university supervisor who observed and coached them” (p. 426). Alton-Lee, Rietveld, Klenner, Dalton, Diggins, & Town (2000) instead arranged to bring a university

program into the school of a teacher they had previously taught in university courses. This work was intended to “assist educators to reflect upon ways in which education can be inclusive in classrooms and school communities” (p. 179); their findings were used to develop case studies they suggest can then be used as supports.

The researcher-teacher communities in these examples can all be considered examples of a broader entity that may function inside or outside of a school: the professional learning community (PLC), in which teachers, and sometimes also educational leaders or researchers, meet over time to discuss particular issues. Cochran-Smith (2015) contrasts effective and ineffective equity-focused PLCs, suggesting that those that are effective “operate both within and against the accountability regime that currently dominates educational policy and practice in the United States and a number of other countries” (p. 113), while those that work only within the accountability frame tend to be ineffective. She argues that this is because in PLCs that work for real equity, “part of the work is interrogating the existing social and material relationships that create inequitable access to teachers and knowledge in the first place” (p. 113).

Flores (2007) addresses this question from the opposite view, noting that the traditional views of education in schools can contradict with teachers’ prior university social justice learning, and thus that many schools must actively work to counter this issue if teachers are to achieve this goal; PLCs and other formal professional development are one major way in which that might take place. Further, Knapp (2003) also suggests district responsibility for conducting professional development with an eye to meeting needs the school is not able to meet:

There is a natural balance of responsibilities that enables school and district to complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses in the design and conduct of professional development. For example, districts can bring to the table the capacity to

establish a common (district-wide) improvement focus and a clearer picture of equity consequences of activities. (p. 132)

Formal adaptive learning. PLCs need not be fully predesigned, and can instead be built to accommodate teachers' interests and needs as far as topics or structure. Little (2007), for example, focuses on structures that support collaborative PLC work, suggesting that a "propensity to elaborate on accounts of experience and make them the basis of consultation on problems of practice" (p. 230) was an effective method by which members of an equity-focused teacher meeting group communicated with one another. Both Flores (2007) and Gleason (2010) further expand the idea of limited PLCs to suggest that schools, as sites of communities of practice, play a major role in supporting or limiting teachers' abilities to work for social justice. Gleason argues that "[s]chools that intentionally pursue social justice hold basic tenets that frame how to design, understand, implement, and measure professional learning" (p. 48), qualities that teachers can help to shape in learning communities and take up in their own practice.

One fundamental consideration supporting this sort of work is the development of trusting and respectful relationships, often through careful work to understand and appreciate teachers' context. Sharkey (2004), for example, notes that context is a "critical mediator" (p. 280) in relationships with teachers and that teachers' use their and others' knowledge of their context for "establishing trust, defining project needs, and critiquing political factors affecting their work" (p. 288). To truly build such relationships, then, it is key to demonstrate an openness to understanding teachers' context. Hennessy, Mercer, & Warwick (2011) extend this democratic suggestion to discuss the development of a process of "coinquiry" to support what they call "equitable collaboration" (p. 1906) in a series of workshops to train teachers in the use of interactive white boards to "promote active student participation in classroom dialogue" (p.

1908). In this case, although the white boards were a product that could be used in many different contexts, it was collaborative work around their purpose in this specific place that supported the success of the project.

Methods like design-based research, action research, and collaborative planning can also contribute to work in this category. Cohen & Lotan (1995), for example, worked with teachers who implemented researcher-designed interventions intended to address issues of student status, while Argyropoulos & Nikolarazi (2009) engaged in cycles of planning, observation, and reflection with teachers of two Greek students, one of whom was deaf and another of whom was blind. Angelides, Georgiou, & Kyriakou (2008) worked to support teachers in developing more inclusive practices for their students through an extremely customized action research study in which “teachers work[ed] in collaboration for the whole process of research (initial design, data collection and analysis, conclusions, implementation of practices that arise from conclusions)” (p. 558). Picower (2011) engaged a similarly open approach in her design-based research study, holding biweekly sessions in which “teachers discussed classroom issues they faced and ways to embed social justice in their curricula” (p. 1109).

Informal learning. Teachers can also learn about social justice through relationships that are organized but do not take place in pre-planned ways. Sun, Wilhelm, Larsen, & Frank (2014), for example, argue that access to “close colleagues” knowledge and instructional practice across a network enable teachers to “distribute learning opportunities equitably to all students in the classroom” (p. 2) and to participate in the “development of ambitious and equitable instructional practices on a large scale” (p. 7):

We know that learning occurs through coparticipation in activities that are close to practice with individuals who are relatively accomplished (Bruner, 1996; Lave &

Wenger, 1991). Advice-seeking interactions with colleagues theoretically have the potential to be rich sites for teacher learning...Some of the most common topics of conversation are the sharing of materials, activities, or instructional strategies... Therefore, it is not surprising that interactions with close colleagues are more likely to develop teachers' instructional practice. (p. 22)

Further, Achinstein & Barrett (2004) found that assigning more experienced mentors to new educators could interrupt what they refer to as a cycle in which “novices become disillusioned” with their students, “growing increasingly authoritarian, even planning instruction to control misbehavior” and that impacts from mentorship can include a “political frame that identifies inequities, power, and classrooms as arenas for social change” (p. 738).

Stillman (2011) suggests that the school leadership can support informal learning as well. They find that beyond framing their schools as communities of practice, principals can also serve in an ongoing role as mediators between external accountability requirements (often viewed as limiting teachers' ability to broaden their practice) and their “equity-minded” teachers. Further, principals can provide resources when teachers need them. Lampert, Boerst, & Graziani (2011) discuss shared school resources, including instructional materials, records and record keeping methods, flexible assessment strategies, and shared spaces and shared planning time, as an important method of supporting “ambitious teaching” meant to better reach diverse learners. They note, however, that these resources are not necessarily effective alone:

What matters is how they are used. When they are used *together* by teachers to work on problems of practice toward agreed upon goals for student learning, resources like these seem to multiply the possibility that ambitious teaching will happen routinely across a

school, strengthening teachers' commitments to ambitious learning goals and improving their collective knowledge about how to accomplish them. (p. 1364, emphasis in original)

Marsh, Bertrand, & Huguet (2015) further find that supporting teachers in using data enabled those teachers to better serve classes with a majority of students of color, but suggest that more research is needed "to examine the ways in which teachers and administrators use data to foster equity in classrooms" (p. 32).

Kose (2007) discusses school-based social justice support (or lack thereof) specifically as regards the principal's ability to lead for social justice, finding that principals who effectively support social justice learning within their schools "promoted two complexly interwoven strands of professional learning content: subject matter expertise and social identity development" (p. 285). He suggests that the former strand is a necessary foundation without which social justice work cannot function, while the latter, which must necessarily be customized given teachers' unique identities, enables teachers to actually engage in the work of supporting their students through an understanding of concepts like affirming diversity and building cultural capital. A focus on the power of school leadership to affect social justice learning is further supported by Hirsch & Hord (2010), who suggest that equity enters the classroom in schools "where all staff are members of a community committed to professional learning" (p. 11). Further, Webster-Wright (2009) calls for informal community engagement beyond the walls of the school, noting "the potential impact of professionals learning through engagement with communities to address issues of social justice and diversity" (p. 706).

Researchers have also worked in informal ways with teachers around specific aspects of practice. Birrell (1995) focused on one record of practice – a reflective journal – in his work to better understand the development of one teacher who "grew up in a middle-class, mostly white

community where he had limited experiences with minority youth” (p. 139) but was currently teaching in a diverse school district in the southwestern United States. In this study, the teacher “recorded his personal thoughts, feelings, and reflections about himself, his teaching, and his students” (pp. 139-140) and Birrell would then read and discuss them with him in order to surface “deeper meanings” (p. 140) that could be shared with the teacher in addition to completing observations and interviews¹³. Taking a similarly broad but issue-focused approach, Powell (1997) worked with a single teacher, Amy, for her first *five years* of teaching, in order to analyze “Amy’s development as a teacher, as Amy and I co-constructed it” around culturally relevant pedagogy (p. 470). For this study, Powell observed Amy biweekly and they then discussed these observations and the reflections they each had. This study was informal and adaptive in its data collection as well; it initially also involved a reflective journal, but Powell notes that “because of time constraints, Amy was unable to write in this journal for more than a few months” (p. 472).

Summary. While there is certainly a broad range of approaches to supporting teachers in improving their thinking and practice around issues of social justice, several important themes are highlighted by the literature discussed here. First, this literature clearly points toward the conclusion that teachers learn better when professional development is customized and/or adapted to respond to their own needs, their own ideas, and, perhaps most importantly, their own context. Even discussions of predesigned learning focus on the ways in which teachers were supported in taking up material and applying them in their own classrooms, while one-size-fits-all professional development is largely treated as trivial if not ignored altogether in the literature.

¹³ It is important to note here that despite Birrell’s generous discussion of what he eventually calls this teacher’s “laudable, yet misinformed, attempts to help black youth improve their lives” (p. 145), the teacher’s actions throughout the study continue to be *extremely* problematic as represented in the text. In fact, I would suggest that even the language quoted just now in this footnote is problematic due to its deficit framing.

Second, much of this literature takes a multidimensional approach, suggesting that combining multiple resources or instructional methods results in far more support for teacher learning than does an attempt through a single mechanism.

Beyond these major observations, this literature also supports the claim that high-quality design alone is not enough to ensure teacher learning; both Bartell (2013) and Birrell (1995) address ways in which thoughtful researchers taking careful approaches to a study's design can still find their participants profoundly missing the point of this work when teachers do not fully understand the meaning or purpose of the social justice ideas they are discussing. This implies several additional important qualities of teacher development: first, as Cochran-Smith (2015) notes, challenging existing structures (as well as supporting teachers in understanding *why* these structures are being challenged) is key in enabling teachers to look beyond their own experience and assumptions and to think broadly about supporting their students. Second, as Sharkey (2004) and others argue, it is *extremely* important for those who are working with teachers to demonstrate an interest in and understanding of teachers' contexts in order to build the sort of trust that can enable effective communication. Research cited above on the effectiveness of mentoring by principals and other teachers demonstrates the ways in which mentors can use shared context to effectively reframe confusions or problematic interpretations on the part of mentees. Finally, this overview (and in some cases explicit comments by researchers like Bartell) supports the contention that teacher learning for social justice is heavily undertheorized; much of the discussion of supporting teachers in working for social justice begins with teachers who are already heavily inclined in that direction, and the scholars cited here frequently observe that the actual relationship between particular methods, structures, resources, etc. and teacher learning is little-known (e.g., Webster-Wright, 2009; Marsh, Bertrand, & Huguet, 2015)

Teacher learning in this study. In my own study, I have taken a heavily teacher-focused approach to learning, similar to that instituted by Angelides, Georgiou, & Kyriakou (2008), in which teachers were key contributors to all aspects of the study (which thus differed for each teacher) as we collaboratively defined social justice, filled in aspects of the study design given each teacher's interests and desires, and then co-enacted the work of the study as teachers engaged in practice changes and deep social justice thinking and I worked to support them as an observer and colleague. Further, as with Angelides, Georgiou, & Kyriakou, the teachers participating in this study had the opportunity to influence my conclusions through their assessments of mini- and full portraits (see the following chapter on methods) and their interpretations of our work together as communicated through interviews, discussions, and informal conversation. Additionally, I drew on many of the methods of supporting teacher learning described above – ongoing conversations, discussion of reflections (usually verbal, but occasionally written), the provision of a range of external resources, professional development-style talk, and the use of action and design-based approaches to our work around practice.

I see my individual focus on each teacher and incorporation of ongoing collaboratively developed action as one of the main contributions of this study to the area of teacher learning. My openness to wide variations in teachers' ideas, even those relating to social justice, the construct at the heart of this project, enabled specialized and focused learning to take place in a relatively short time. Further, my use of a range of instructional tools and methods produced a customized experience based on each teacher's preferences (for example, I provided substantial written resources to one teacher while focusing more on ongoing conversations about ideas with a second). See the final two chapters of this dissertation for more on teachers' appraisals of their learning during our work together.

Conclusion: Supporting Social Justice in Education

The narrative of social justice work in education has a number of storylines. In one sense, it is a diverse and dynamic field of researchers and school personnel who constantly challenge themselves to create better work and further develop theories and ideas with a goal of supporting the learning of students, and often much more. In another, it is a field whose terminology is ill-defined and variable, full of words arbitrarily used or not used at all depending on one's orientation and the body of work within which one sees one's own research, as well as a field in which connections between prior knowledge and learning are often tenuous if not entirely absent. At the same time, however, some social justice approaches are *very* well-defined. For example, while it may be used to accomplish different goals in different studies, the well-developed theory around culturally relevant pedagogy, based on an initial framing by Ladson-Billings (e.g., 1995a, 1995b, 2009), is common in social justice literature even when not the focus of investigation. Perhaps even more consistently, approaches to social justice pedagogy framed around problem posing are consistently described in a range of subjects and can likely be expected to draw in similar ways from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* or related works.

To outline *all* approaches to social justice in education, then, is clearly impossible in any systematic way—a search for 'social justice' on ERIC's ProQuest database returns more than 11,000 results, and this is without considering that so much seminal work that informs social justice research does not even use the phrase – both Ladson-Billings (e.g., 1995a), whose work is listed by Google Scholar as having been cited in thousands of studies, and Paulo Freire (e.g., 2000), whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has been cited by *more than 60,000*, do not say *social justice* a single time in work that has informed a huge number of studies for which social justice is a main thrust. An attempt to categorize all such relevant work, then, and particularly given the

different ways in which similar or identical concepts are used in different studies, is a fool's errand even when limiting oneself to the field of education; elsewhere (Altman, 2017) I address a range of social justice literature outside of education, although such a discussion is beyond the scope of this review.

Rather, this review discusses some fruitful approaches that have been taken in educational social justice work, including how researchers have conceptualized social justice issues, how these issues have been studied, and how teachers have been supported in social justice learning. In one sense, this is very much in line with my study methodology, which, as noted in my introduction, involves asking teachers to define issues of social justice for themselves rather than to adhere to a particular approach or theory from the literature. Given the difficulty of laying these approaches out in any organized way, I argue that this is ultimately the only feasible way to construct such a study (and, relatedly, such a review) without artificially and substantially limiting the options (e.g., by discussing *only* work related to CRP or *only* Freirean problem-posing education). I expected in this study that teachers would have come to their ideas about social justice by stitching together an overview of the concept out of a number of different approaches and experiences rather than by drawing on an established line of thinking, an expectation that proved to be the case. Our work together, much like the approach taken in this chapter, could be far more accurately described as a series of forays into possible conceptualizations of and approaches to social justice that might be useful to teachers' work than as a strictly organized investigation. As here, this enabled a survey of some social justice thinking given each teacher's social justice orientation without pushing our work down a rabbit hole.

In a sense, then, this chapter serves as the beginning of a conversation about social justice in education. For the remainder of this dissertation, I will broadly consider a number of conceptualizations and approaches to social justice by study participants, and specifically the ways in which three teachers saw ideas of social justice as functioning for them and for their students as we worked together over the course of a semester. As I have done in this chapter, I will argue that there is no way to consider this range of approaches and beliefs in a fully systematic way, although I will work, as above, to identify connections and differences between the approaches in ways that will continue to shed light on the meaning, function, and use of social justice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

There were three distinct phases to the work of this study: first it was envisioned, a work site found, and participants recruited. Next, I enacted the partnership with teachers, collecting observation and interview data while working to support each participant by providing relevant resources and facilitating conversations about their work. Some data analysis was also completed during this phase of the study: Observation data were analyzed so that I could develop initial portraits (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to share with teachers, who also shared write-ups of their own experience with me. Additionally, I engaged in open coding of initial interviews of teachers, the focus principal, and a district leader, as well as of mid-study teacher interviews, in order to identify themes for the final interviews of those participants. In the third phase, which followed the completion of the study, I analyzed the data I collected in three ways: I used portraiture to analyze my partnership with each teacher in an attempt to draw out the narrative of our work together. I drew on cross-case analysis to compare what I had learned across the three cases and to highlight important aspects of the social justice plans conceived of and enacted by the three teachers and me. Finally, I used grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014) to analyze the full set of interview data, to identify themes, and to draw conclusions about the differing social justice approaches and conceptions of the teachers, the focus principal, and the district leader. In this chapter, I first describe this study's design and intent, next discussing my criteria for selection of a participating district and participating teachers, principal, and leader within that district, and then summarizing our work

to begin the study. Following this, I discuss the different types of data that were collected and finally the different ways in which these data were analyzed.

Study Design

The design of this study rests in large part upon implications of one major argument – that teachers possess substantial knowledge of their students and of their context that is frequently underutilized and underappreciated, and that drawing on the knowledge teachers already have can produce powerful and important results for teaching practice and student outcomes. In the same way that portraiture represents a search for “goodness” in the people or place studied (see below), this study is focused on searching for “goodness” in the work of these teachers. This suggested particular approaches to several major aspects of this study. First, the work needed to be strongly collaborative. My goal was not to “teach” teachers anything; rather, it was to learn from and with them as the two of us worked together to identify the issues they cared about and to design approaches that would enable them to address those issues. My knowledge of social justice work and past experience supporting others in gaining social justice understanding was simply a resource, in the same way that book chapters were resources. The main driving force behind this study once our partnership began was the priorities and desires of these teachers.

Second, this study was not an attempt to learn from seasoned veterans of social justice practice already lauded as heroes by their principals and superintendents, nor was it intended to identify *mistakes* teachers made or to identify cautionary tales of missed success. While much can certainly be learned from teachers already widely agreed to be at the top of their practice, the suggestion here is that *all* teachers have knowledge that would benefit this study, and thus that the most important thing to look for in participants was their interest in improving their practice.

It is they who drove the study, and their questions and beliefs that formed its bedrock. Similarly, while much can be learned from observing what not to do, and what errors to avoid, when doing social justice work, the simple fact is that this work is very difficult. Anyone beginning it might be expected to make a number of mistakes, and these do not make the beneficial outcomes of such an approach any less meaningful. Thus, while all of my teachers certainly made mistakes during the course of this study, as did I, the point is that they were able to produce many of the outcomes they wanted by thoughtfully responding to any issues that arose along the way.

Finally, frequent teacher feedback and repeated checks to ensure that the two of us were thinking consistently about our work together was a key element of this study. For that reason, I focused strongly on brief, informal conversation as a way of examining these aspects of our partnership and relied on longer and more formal meetings only as a way to plan activities or discuss major issues. This made our work together more of a continuous conversation than a set of points at which to take stock and gather data, and it also allowed a forum to discuss daily happenings in the classroom, whether they be social justice-focused or not, that might otherwise have been forgotten by the time of a longer meeting. Additionally, this tactic supported my use of portraiture for this study, as it enabled me to construct a strong sense of the *experience* of being in a teacher's classroom as opposed to simply acquiring records of discrete statements and actions.

District Selection

In order to identify an appropriate school district for this study, I considered a number of criteria. First, in order to ensure a wide range of possible interpretations and understandings of social justice by my participants, I wanted a district that was diverse in a range of ways (e.g., socioeconomically, ethnically, racially, geographically, religiously) and one that was large

enough that this diversity was present throughout the district. Further, as I intended to interview a district leader, I was looking for a district whose leaders expressed some interest in the project and appeared to see it as valuable. With these qualifications in mind, I contacted several potentially eligible districts over a period of slightly more than six months. Further conversations with district personnel in districts that were possible candidates resulted in a clear conclusion about the most appropriate district for this study, one in which my ideas were welcomed and educators at relevant levels demonstrated an interest in participating and an openness to sharing their ideas about social justice: the Carteret Public Schools.¹⁴

Participant and School Selection

Due to my contention that all teachers have important knowledge of their students and context, and that this knowledge can be drawn on to support them in developing socially just practice, there was no “best” candidate or set of candidates for this study – rather, any teacher of any high school subject interested in improving her/his social justice practice, and in thinking through relevant issues with a partner (me) would have been an appropriate candidate, and no level of previous experience in social justice or teaching was desired or privileged other than through my choice to work with teachers who did not *already* consider themselves to be experienced social justice educators. In order to identify such teachers, I coordinated with the district’s director of research and ultimately with a curriculum head, who passed my request for participation along to school department heads. This communication resulted in a response from Erin, a social studies teacher who appeared to be an excellent fit for the study; once this initial teacher had been identified, I identified two additional social studies teachers, Gordon and Mike, with the help of Erin and my district contacts. The subject of social studies was kept consistent

¹⁴ All individual and group names are pseudonyms

following the recruitment of the first teacher in order to allow me to more effectively compare teachers' ideas about and approaches to social justice without the concern that subject matter may have had some sort of unexplained impact.

Two of the teachers selected for this study (Erin and Mike) taught at Brandon High School, while Gordon, who sometimes moved between schools because of a distance learning class he taught, was based at Stoppard, a nearby school located about six miles away. Since two of the teachers in my study taught at Brandon, I asked Brandon's principal, Robin Hatcher, to be my focus principal, and she accepted.¹⁵ Finally, I returned to my district contacts in order to identify a district leader who might be willing to be interviewed, ultimately finding an assistant superintendent,¹⁶ Jack Rand, who agreed to participate.

Study Setup

As much of the design of this study would be based on the teachers' ideas, concerns, goals, and desires rather than on my own, an initial phase of collaborative study setup followed my selection of participants. During this phase, I engaged in the same basic process with each teacher. First, I described the general structure of the study: supporting teachers interested in improving their social justice practice through reflections on classroom observations, providing resources, and holding discussions. I answered any further questions the teacher had and outlined the general scope of the study, some ideas behind portraiture, and my own goals for the experience. I then conducted initial interviews with each teacher in order to identify possible areas of focus for our work together. In these interviews, we discussed the teacher's views on social justice in general and how these views related to the aspects of practice s/he wished to

¹⁵ Due to scheduling difficulties and to the distance between schools, I was unable to work with Stoppard's principal.

¹⁶ In Carteret this position is not actually referred to as 'assistant superintendent' but is functionally equivalent; this title has been used to preserve anonymity.

improve. I also asked how each teacher's current self-defined classroom context influenced these views, and how he/she might be aided or constrained by particular parts of that context (e.g., local demographics, district policy, school finances, parent involvement). Themes identified from this initial interview suggested areas of focus for initial observations, and meetings with teachers during the first month or so of the study enabled us to further identify issues of concern and action plans for addressing those issues. Although plans were determined individually with each teacher and thus differed substantially from one another (demonstrated in detail in the portraits which follow), all consisted of some combination of observations, meetings, and conversations, and the discussion of various resources based on teachers' particular interests.

Data Collection

Data were collected in four major ways: through interviews, ethnographic field notes recorded during classroom observations, semi-formal planning period or after-school meetings, and informal conversation (conducted in person, via email, or in other ways). In the following sections, I describe each of these four avenues of data collection in more detail.

Interviews. A total of thirteen formal interviews were completed over the course of the study. The three teachers were interviewed three times each, at the beginning, middle, and end of the study; interviews lasted from slightly under twenty to slightly over forty-five minutes. The focus principal and district leader were interviewed twice each, at the beginning and end of the study, with three of these interviews lasting 30-40 minutes and the second principal interview lasting nearly two hours.

Teacher interviews. Initial teacher interviews took place before observations had begun, and, as mentioned, concerned the following themes: a) the ways in which teachers understood and conceptualized social justice; b) how they saw social justice issues as arising (or not) for

their own students in their own classrooms; c) their description of their local context and of the salient contextual factors they saw as affecting the school and their students; and d) their views about the school and district administration and the way in which the approach of the focus principal and the district leader (who was identified to them) might differ from their own (see Appendix A for this initial teacher interview protocol). The next two interviews repeated the first three of these four themes in consistent ways in order to document change over time. The final section of the second interview was replaced with one concerning teachers' views of the progress we had made thus far and directions for our work during the remainder of the study (see Appendix B for the mid-semester teacher interview protocol). The final section of the third interview focused on an overall appraisal of what was and was not accomplished during the study (see Appendix C for the final teacher interview protocol). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Principal and district leader interviews. Principal and district leader interviews were also audio recorded and transcribed. The initial interview for each took place early in the study as teacher observations were beginning. These interviews were nearly identical, with the only exception being a section that referred to social justice issues in the school in the principal's interview and to social justice issues in the district in the assistant superintendent's interview. Each of these interviews contained several themes that were closely related to the themes in the initial teacher interviews: the principal/assistant superintendent's views on social justice, the ways in which each saw social justice issues as arising in the school/district, the way in which each understood his/her local context and salient contextual factors, and her/his views about the ways in which teachers and district leaders (principal interview) or teachers and principals (district leader interview) might approach issues differently (see Appendices D and F).

The second principal and district leader interviews (see Appendices E and G) were again very similar to one another, but quite different from the initial interview given to each, as I was not working directly with either of them and thus was not interested in documenting change over time. These interviews took place after observations had ended and all teacher data collection had been completed, and focused on the list of concerns and issues teachers had identified in their previous interviews (see data analysis section, below, for more on how teacher interviews informed the drafting of the second principal and district leader interviews). They consisted of two sections: The first asked specific questions identified from teacher interviews and other data sources (e.g., “Do you personally experience issues with bureaucracy within the district? If so, which ones?”). The second presented a list of twenty-five issues synthesized from collected data and asked the principal/district leader to identify whether (and, if so, how) each issue was important at the classroom, school, or district level as well as whether they saw those issues as being addressed at some or all of those levels.

Observations and field notes. Observation schedules were determined based on teacher desires and availability. As with almost all aspects of this study, my primary concern in setting up observations was determining what teachers would consider useful while avoiding anything that felt overwhelming or inconvenient. I initially suggested two or three days of observations per week; Mike agreed to three, while Erin and Gordon chose two (as a note that will be discussed in more depth in the portraits, Gordon had a difficult schedule in which he moved between schools and was often out due to health issues, making two days of observation the most that was possible in his case). While it was more common for me to observe only one class per day, a ‘day’ of observations did occasionally involve observations of more than one of a teacher’s classes.

In all, I observed a total of 91 full classes among the three teachers, of which 40 were observations of Mike, 27 were observations of Erin, and 24 were observations of Gordon. I did not interact with either the teacher or the students during these observations except in rare cases (for example, Mike asked for my opinion on a current topic of class discussion on a couple of occasions, while Erin asked me to share an analysis of student work with the class – see portraits). Instead, I spent this time taking field notes, which had several areas of focus. First, I took general notes regarding class activities and interactions and the teacher’s practice throughout the observation process. Second, as I worked with each teacher to identify important social justice themes I took focused notes specific to that theme, often in additional detail. Finally, I took extremely detailed notes of any activities that we had planned together as responses to teachers’ social justice concerns. I reviewed these notes following each school visit, and they were added to over time to form a fairly complete record of major occurrences in each teacher’s classroom during times that I was present.

Formal meetings. As initially conceived in the design of this study, the schedule of my more formal meetings with each teacher was not set at the beginning of the study, but was instead determined based on teacher availability and interest with a goal of having at least one meeting of at least 15-20 minutes every couple of weeks once the study was underway (given the daily schedule in the Carteret Public Schools, the longest these meetings lasted was about 45 minutes, and most were 30-40 minutes). This was ultimately feasible with two of the teachers; between the fourth week of September and the third week of December, I met with Erin ten times and with Mike six times. Due to his difficult schedule, however, Gordon was only able to meet three times during the course of the semester (although the two of us did have additional

conversations via email). Meetings generally occurred during teachers' planning periods, although one with Gordon took place after school.

These meetings were focused on particular social justice and classroom issues identified by the teachers and/or by me. Meeting discussions generally consisted of a series of questions regarding how teachers saw the issues they identified and in what ways, given their priorities, the issues might be addressed. We then thought through the issues together, discussing solutions or brainstorming approaches as appropriate. While I did not usually take detailed notes during these meetings in order to enable full engagement with our conversations, I did write one or more pages of notes immediately after the end of each meeting before leaving the school.

The ultimate goal of these meetings was to develop some sort of action plan for upcoming classes and/or for our partnership. For example, in one meeting Gordon and I planned a listening activity he ultimately facilitated for one of his classes, in another Mike and I attempted to solve a problem he identified (inequitable participation) by planning a student debate with specific rules that would result in equal speaking time for all students, and in a third a series of questions from Erin prompted me to send her several written resources that approached issues of social justice in different ways. I frequently asked teachers for their feedback on the outcomes of these meetings, and future meetings were changed in structure or approach given feedback on earlier ones. These meetings served as an opportunity for us to take stock of what had been happening in the classroom and in our thinking since our last in-depth discussion as well as to maintain or adjust the trajectory of the study.

Informal conversation. While informal conversation is both fairly common and somewhat difficult to quantify, I include it here because it served as a major data source as well as a major mechanism for change due to the structure of this study and its focus on careful use of

teachers' time. I spoke informally before or after class to each teacher during (almost) every observation. These conversations ranged in length (anywhere from thirty seconds or less to multiple minutes), topic, and importance; while some informal chats were quick checks on progress or experience, others held a more meaningful place in the study. For example, several of my informal conversations with Erin concerned her plans for a social justice activity she was conducting that day, at times even involving quick wordsmithing of questions or checks for consistency of approach before the activity began. All informal conversations were recorded in my daily field notes.

Perhaps most importantly, these informal conversations served as a key way to gather background and context data for portraits and to gain a fuller sense of teachers' ideas and approaches, particularly at times when longer meetings were not feasible. The off-the-cuff nature of discussions enabled me to quickly receive important answers to meaningful questions without requiring teachers to think at length or to feel as if they were under a microscope. In some cases, they also helped me to learn more about how the teachers were currently thinking about an idea or approach without needing to wait for an in-depth conversation. Recorded data from our many informal conversations was treated in the same way as field notes in this study.

Data Analysis

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, data analysis began before the completion of data collection and continued once it had ended. In this section, I will describe my primary modes of data analysis. I will open with an in-depth discussion of the portraiture methodology, which is at the heart of my approach, and will then discuss additional analytical tools I employed.

Portraiture

Before beginning discussion of data analysis, it is perhaps appropriate to say more about my use of *portraiture*, a method of qualitative research that incorporates narrative device into analysis and is intended to “navigate borders that typically separate disciplines, purposes, and audiences in the social sciences—bridging aesthetics and empiricism, appealing to intellect and emotion, seeking to inform and inspire, and joining the endeavors of documentation, interpretation, and intervention” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, xv-xvi). In the following sections, I will elaborate on portraiture’s relationship to other qualitative research methods and its significance in my own study.

Portraiture as methodology. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) note that portraiture “is deeply empirical, grounded in systematically collected data, skeptical questioning (of self and actors), and rigorous examination of biases--always open to disconfirming evidence. From this vantage point, we see the portraitist's stance as vigilantly counterintuitive, working against the grain of formerly held presuppositions, always alert and responsive to surprise” (p. 85). This skepticism keeps the researcher searching for any evidence that might change the meaning of events in the story being told. By drawing on ethnographic methods in this way, the portraitist works to produce “a full picture of an event or person that tells as much about the subject as it does about the researcher, or portraitist” and focuses on “the multiple contexts and interactions that surround participants” (Chapman, 2007, p. 157). Lynn (2006) notes: “It is the work of the portraitist to capture insider perspectives and carefully integrate them into the descriptive narrative in a way that enlivens and enriches the discussion” (p. 2502).

Dixson, Chapman, & Hill (2005) suggest that “portraiture is best described as a blending of qualitative methodologies—life history, naturalist inquiry, and most prominently, that of

ethnographic methods” (p. 17). In *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), portraiture’s creator, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, positions portraiture “as counterpoint to the dominant chorus of social scientists whose methods and goals have been greatly influenced by the positivist paradigm, whose focus has largely centered on the identification and documentation of social problems, and whose audiences have been mostly limited to the academy” (p. xvi). She explains that in contrast portraiture “is framed by the phenomenological lens; it seeks to illuminate the complex dimensions of *goodness* and is designed to capture the attention of a broad and eclectic audience” (p. xvi, emphasis in original). Additionally, she describes a link between portraiture and the constant comparative method, on which I also draw in this study: “Glaser and Straus[s]’s ‘constant comparative method’ is very much like the dialectical work of the portraitist. Like the Impressionistic Records we suggest as the portraitist’s daily tool of synthesis, reflection, and analysis, Glaser and Straus[s] underscore the value of writing as a way to focus the analysis” (p. 189).

Portraiture and context. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) address portraiture’s relationship to ethnography by discussing its approach to context, a quality that is very salient in my own study:

Whether she is coming to the setting with a well-developed, discrete hypothesis, or with a theoretical framework that she is testing and refining, or with a number of relatively informal hunches, the realities of the context force the reconsideration of earlier assumptions. There is a constant process of calibration between the researcher’s conceptual framework, her developing hypotheses, and the collection of grounded data. Working in context, the researcher, then, has to be alert to surprises and inconsistencies and improvise conceptual and methodological responses that match the reality she is

observing. The researcher's stance becomes a dance of vigilance and improvisation. Ethnographers—who describe this adaptive, improvisational behavior of the researcher working in context—often claim its relationship to validity in qualitative inquiry...Participant observers working in context are forced to confront the distance (and dissonance) between their theories and categories on the one hand, and the actors' realities and perspectives on the other. (pp. 43-44)

Portraiture, then, takes a view of context as very active in the work of both the researcher and the researched, assuming that the researcher's thinking will be challenged and changed by the context in which the research takes place. As for what portraitists mean (and what I mean) by the word "context", already discussed to some extent in my introduction, they elaborate:

Like all researchers working within the phenomenological framework, portraitists find *context* crucial to their documentation of human experience and organizational culture. By context, I mean the setting—physical, geographic, temporal, historical, cultural, aesthetic—within which the action takes place. Context becomes the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere; it is used to place people and action in time and space and as a resource for interpreting the experience of the actors in the setting. We have no idea how to decipher or decode an action, a gesture, a conversation, or an exclamation unless we see it embedded in context. Portraitists, then, view human experience as being framed and shaped by the setting. (p. 41, emphasis in original)

As noted earlier, then, context in this study is seen as a complex set of factors, not all of them nameable or knowable, that affect people and actions in unique and meaningful ways. Only by working to understand context can we understand meaning; without doing so we risk interpreting others' experiences through our own lenses in highly inauthentic ways.

Portraiture and “goodness”. As noted above, the portraitist seeks out “goodness” in her/his subjects. Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) elaborate on this idea, further supporting my choice to privilege the knowledge and expertise of the teachers I will be working with:

Not only do portraits seek to capture the origins and expression of goodness, they are also concerned with documenting how the *subjects* or actors in the setting define goodness. The portraitist does not impose her definition of "good" on the inquiry, or assume that there is a singular definition shared by all (this is not the case of the expert researcher defining the criteria of success or effectiveness and using that as the standard of judgment). Rather the portraitist believes that there are myriad ways in which goodness can be expressed and tries to identify and document the actors' perspectives. (p. 9, emphasis in original)

Regarding the meaning of the word “goodness”, they clarify:

By *goodness*...we do not mean an idealized portrayal of human experience or organizational culture, nor do we suggest that the portraitist focus only on good things, look only on the bright side, or give a positive spin to every experience. Rather we mean an approach to inquiry that resists the more typical social science preoccupation with documenting pathology and suggesting remedies... Rather than focusing on the identification of weakness, we begin by asking What is happening here, what is working, and why? But in focusing on what works, on underscoring what is healthy and strong, we inevitably see the dark shadows of compromise, inhibition, and imperfection that distort the success and weaken the achievements. (pp. 141-142, emphasis in original)

This lens served as a useful model for the approach I used in building relationships with the teachers and helped to shape the tone of the study. In fact, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis

suggest that this work can *only* be done when a relationship is formed between the researcher and the researched:

All the processes of portraiture require that we build productive and benign relationships. It is through relationships...that access is sought and given, connections made, contracts of reciprocity and responsibility (both formal and informal) developed, trust built, intimacy negotiated, data collected, and knowledge constructed. (p. 135, emphasis in original)

As will be seen in more detail in upcoming chapters, learning in my own study took place very much in this way. I will argue below (and teachers' own words support the claim) that my relationship with these teachers, and the work that we put into the construction of a partnership, was an enormous influence on the progress that was made. Teachers repeatedly commented on aspects of our partnership that engendered trust and collaboration when describing the benefits of their participation in this study, and all three named my presence as a partner as a positive influence on their work to improve their practice.

Portraiture and this study. In a later work, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) distinguishes between "listening *to* a story and listening *for* a story" (p. 10, emphasis in original):

The latter is a much more active, engaged position in which the narrator searches for the story, seeks it out, and is central in its creation. This does not mean that he or she directs the drama or constructs the scenes. It does mean that the narrator participates in identifying and selecting the story and helps to shape the story's coherence and aesthetic. (pp. 10-11)

My own position as a partner working to support and respectfully understand these teachers as I tell their stories (and mine) made portraiture an extremely valuable approach to my study. As I

investigated the teachers' thinking and carefully considered my own contributions of resources and work as a co-thinker, the use of this method enabled me to "(re)present the research participant through the subjective, empathetic, and critical lens of the researcher" (Dixson, Chapman & Hill, 2005, p. 17). The analysis that led to the creation of the portraits is described in the next section; the portraits themselves constitute the next three chapters of this dissertation. These portraits are truly intended to represent the *story* of the work of three teachers (with me) to improve their practice, the story of teachers thinking through social justice work and struggling with its challenges. While there are certainly a number of methodologies that are appropriate to studying social justice work, it is this aspect of story, this empirical and aesthetic telling of the teachers' experiences and of my experience as a partner, that makes portraiture such an important part of this study. Its focus on context, on relationship, and on the treatment of participants as knowledgeable individuals, with the power to define and explain their world in a way that no outsider could, sets it apart from many of the methods commonly used in the social sciences and lends power and honesty to my study, and to my story.

“Mini-portraits” and teacher reflections. The first organized data analysis for this study took place about a month before data collection ended. In order to incorporate teachers' own reflections on our work together into my writing, as well as to member-check my portraits at multiple times as they were being developed to ensure that I understood teachers' stories in a way they felt was fair and accurate, I arranged for an exchange of writing with teachers around our experiences in the study slightly before the Thanksgiving break. I asked teachers to provide “a brief narrative description of our work together in the study so far.”¹⁷ In the meantime, I

¹⁷ Erin asked for further clarification around this question, and received the following list of prompts: 1) What has it been like to be a part of this study? What about your thinking or practice is different or changing? 2) Have you seen improvements or changes relating to issues you care about? Do you think our work in this study is having any impact on students or other tangible impact beyond your own thinking on these issues? 3) What am I like? What is

shared partial portraits of around half the length of the full portraits included in this dissertation (and, given that they were created during the course of the study, lacking any conclusions or later data present in the full portraits). I asked teachers not to read through my portrait until they had written their own analysis to avoid undue influence.

To create the mini-portraits I provided to teachers, I first looked through all field notes that had been taken from teacher observations to build the “storyline” of our progress up to that point. I then searched through other data relating to our work together, including interviews, personal communication, and notes, for instances that challenged that storyline and/or augmented it with examples or extensions. Having done this, I spent substantial time determining the order in which to present information, the information most important to present, and the voice in which I wished to tell each story. To actually create the portraits, I first wrote at length and without much concern for exact outline in order to ensure that the portrait was an authentic representation of my *own* sense of events. Once this was done, I returned to the draft to smooth out the story and to consider my examples and phrasing to ensure that they supported the narrative.

Two teachers, Gordon and Erin, provided me with a narrative, while the third, Mike, responded verbally to my mini-portrait (which I took down in my notes) but did not create a written narrative of our work together. Of the two write-ups I received, Gordon’s was about one double-spaced page, while Erin’s was more than four double-spaced pages. I examined these reflections carefully to determine themes regarding what teachers focused on most and the ways

working with me like? The other two teachers did not receive these prompts in exactly this format, although this information was communicated to them in verbal and/or written form when I requested their write-ups. I also provided Erin with a chapter from Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) as an example of what portraiture looked like, but I am not aware of her having read it. Mike and Gordon did not ask for further clarification, and simply presented appraisals (one written, one verbal) of their sense of our work together so far. I see this difference, based on teacher request, as in line with the differentiated approach taken throughout all aspects of this study.

in which they represented the study, their participation in it, and our partnership together. I used information from these write-ups both in developing final portraits and for cross-case analysis (both described below). Further, I compared teachers' write-ups to the themes I had outlined in the mini-portraits; this was done in order to ensure that the teachers and I were understanding the study in related ways prior to major data analysis.

Teachers' responses to my initial portraits were universally positive, and none of the three teachers had any suggestions for changes or concerns about misrepresentation. Erin's (emailed) response was as follows: "I have read your initial draft. You write beautifully! Spot on, you captured our conversations and student characteristics. Really, I do not have any corrections or edits to it." Gordon told me (verbally) that he had shared the mini-portrait with his wife, who had commented on the accuracy of my depiction of certain idiosyncrasies of his manner of speaking and teaching; he noted that he had been unaware of these idiosyncrasies prior to discussing the mini-portrait with her. Mike also told me (verbally) that he felt everything in the portrait was fair and accurate.

Full portraits. Given the positive teacher response to the mini-portraits, these initial drafts were used as partial frameworks for the creation of full portraits. In order to produce the full-length portraits presented in the following three chapters, I repeated the same process that I had used initially: I looked through all of the field notes I had taken during teacher observations, along with other methods of communication (now including the teachers' write-ups), in order to determine a storyline. I then reread each mini-portrait in detail to determine whether it still followed what I saw as the narrative of our work. This was generally the case, although in some places changes were made given what at the time of initial writing would have been future developments in the study.

Once I had examined the mini-portraits for evidence of earlier writing that supported or challenged my current thinking and updated whenever possible, I again drew on teacher interview data (this time from all three interviews) and other written records to extend or challenge my story, working to fill in information that was missed by the mini-portraits or that took place later in the study in a way that organically fit with the portraits that already existed while extending their narrative and bringing them to an ultimate conclusion. Following this writing (which almost doubled the length of each portrait), I began to examine the portraits as I would a short story, looking for themes to highlight and adjusting the examples and sections into a coherent narrative. I then share the portraits with others for initial feedback, and, after making small adjustments based on their comments, sent them to the teachers for further feedback.

Cross-case analysis. The purpose of each portrait was to be a complete, self-contained story of the experience of my work with each teacher rather than to draw on outside information I collected in other classrooms or elsewhere in the district. However, there were many interesting and often purposeful connections (e.g., all were history teachers, all had at least one AP class) and differences (e.g., years of teaching experience ranged from 3 to 21, teachers ranged from very liberal to fairly conservative, teachers' conceptions of social justice and the way in which they saw social justice as entering the curriculum differed widely) among teachers as well. For that reason, as a second focus of this study I bring the method of cross-case analysis to bear on the differing experiences and actions that occurred during my work with the three teachers.

These cases represent a completely separate analysis from the portraits. They draw from many pages of field notes that were not relevant to the portraits, large sections of teacher interviews not included in the portraits, teachers' write-ups and my own reflections about our partnership and the experience of working together, and a range of other documents and data

points. In order to effectively contrast my experience with those of each of the three teachers, I analyzed my data for answers to the following questions: 1) How do the three teachers' conceptions of social justice compare to one another? How do they see social justice as relating to the work of teaching? 2) Which issues are most important to these teachers? In what ways do those issues agree, differ, or conflict? 3) What are the similarities and differences in the ways in which teachers constructed activities and engaged in actions to further their social justice goals? 4) In what ways did the partnerships I formed with each teacher relate or differ? How did I, and they, experience the work of our partnership similarly or differently? The ultimate goal of this investigation was to begin to develop theory about the ways in which such partnerships can support and enhance teachers' social justice practice.

In order to answer these questions, I engaged in a grounded theory analysis and, following that, in focused coding, of field notes, interviews, and additional writing and communication (particularly, in the case of question 4, of teachers' write-ups of their experiences working with me in the study). I located sections that related to one of my four questions, identified themes among the data for each teacher, and finally compared and contrasted relevant themes for each question. I then searched the data a second time for disconfirming evidence and other nuance that may have been missed in the initial coding now that the themes had been further developed. Additional analytic details are described in Chapter 7.

Cross-level analysis. Because my only data collection involving the principal and assistant superintendent was from interviews, the analysis comparing all participants focused on interview data. It should first be noted that analysis of at least some interview data occurred in a number of ways during this study. What I consider to be the main such analysis I describe below. However, as noted above, I also analyzed the first two sets of teacher interviews for issues

identified as salient by teachers; this analysis was used to inform the second and final interview given to the principal and district leader, which were focused on their ideas about these issues. To identify them, I examined teachers' interviews for mentions of issues, which I categorized in a spreadsheet by question. I then compared issues mentioned both across interviews for a single teacher and across teachers in order to create a categorized list of high-, mid-, and low-priority issues. This list was then used in the drafting of the principal and district leaders' final interviews. Additionally, interview analysis informed both the portraits I produced and the cross-case teacher discussion described above.

In order to answer my final research question (what issues school and district leadership see as salient and how they support or challenge teachers' own approaches), I engaged in a full grounded theory analysis of the set of thirteen interviews (three per teacher, two for the focus principal, and two for the district leader) conducted over the course of the study. For this analysis, I focused on the following questions: 1) What are the similarities and differences in the ways in which the three teachers, the focus principal, and the district leader define and describe social justice?¹⁸ 2) What are the similarities and differences in the ways in which the three teachers, the focus principal, and the district leader understand and explain their local context? 3) What issues do the three teachers, the focus principal, and the district leader identify as salient both to their personal work and generally in Carteret Public Schools? What are the similarities and differences in the ways they discuss these issues? 4) What do the teachers, principal, and district leader say about one another and about the differences they perceive between their

¹⁸ There are two important points to make about this question. First, the three teachers are being treated as a group here because in the cross-case analysis just described I contrast teachers' views on social justice as individuals; the ideas of the principal and district leader simply augment this framework. Second, the focus principal was the principal at Brandon High School, where Mike and Erin taught but where Gordon did not. In the case, then, that Gordon differs in a way that may relate to his school context, this is noted in the analysis.

thinking and the thinking of those at the other two levels? What differences do they believe exist in the way in which each approaches problems and considers information?¹⁹

This analysis took place in several stages. As noted above, the initial interviews given to the principal and district leader were extremely similar to the initial interviews given to the three teachers, with moderate adjustments to questions where appropriate to fit the position of the person being interviewed (see Appendices, A, D, and F to compare these interviews). The teachers were then interviewed again in the middle of the semester, using an interview protocol that, with the exception of the final question, which focused on teachers' experiences in the study up to that point, was nearly identical to the initial interview (see Appendices A and B). While the final teacher interview was again extremely similar to the first and second (see Appendix C), meaning that all three teacher interviews and the initial principal and district leader interview were all highly alike, the final principal and district leader interviews were quite different. This is because, as also noted above, I was not working with the principal or district leader and thus not interested in measuring change over time. Rather, the final principal and district leader interviews focused on a list of twenty-five issues mentioned by teachers derived from the partial interview analysis described above (given in Table 3.1) as well as fifteen and fourteen additional questions, respectively, that were intended to further clarify their views on other issues teachers had identified as important (e.g., "Where can teachers go to find resources to support their teaching, social justice or otherwise?").

Once final interviews had been completed with all participants, they were analyzed as follows: First, all teacher responses in all three interviews were open coded by question,²⁰ with

¹⁹ This question is not intended to be speculative; this information is directly asked for in the interviews (see Appendices A-G).

²⁰ Note that while the first two teacher interviews had already been analyzed for issues, this analysis focused holistically on issues discussed within the interviews and not on responses to particular questions (i.e., there was no

Table 3.1: Issues Identified from Initial Coding of Teacher Interviews (alphabetical order)

Ability/Disability	Dress Code	Gay Rights	Parental Involvement	Religion
Alternate Perspectives	Educational inequality/inequity (incl. funding)	Gender	Police	Reproductive Rights
Basic Needs	Environment	Immigration	Politics	Responsibility
Community	Equality	Marijuana	Poverty/Income inequality	Rights
Community Participation	Fairness	Opportunity	Race	Standardized Testing

codes placed into a table and color/style-coded to identify themes that were mentioned by multiple teachers and those that were mentioned by the same teacher in multiple interviews. Second, in order to compare the ways in which teachers discussed the issues listed in Table 3.1 to the ways in which the principal and district leader discussed them, I placed all teacher, principal, and district leader comments about these issues into a spreadsheet. Comments were then compared across participants and analyzed for similarities and differences. Additionally, a frequency table was created (see Chapter 7) to quickly demonstrate which issues were mentioned by each teacher in each interview²¹.

Once the data were organized in this way, teacher responses and principal and district leader responses were searched for themes and disparities in the ways in which issues were taken up within the thematic categories of social justice, local context, and salient issues, in order to answer questions 1, 2, and 3 above, respectively. Responses to the final questions in the initial

distinction made between a mention of class issues in response to the first question and one in response to the last question in the initial analysis, but this was treated as salient for the analysis being presently discussed). Previously coded issues were not changed, but were then organized by question, and questions were re-examined in search of further themes.

²¹ The issues in this table are the same as the issues above, with the minor change that ‘community’ and ‘community participation’, which were frequently referred to at the same time, were collapsed into a single row, as were ‘gender’ and ‘reproductive rights’ due to the fact that the latter was only mentioned one time by a single teacher.

interviews, relating to the ways in which the informants at each level believed that those at the other levels took up issues, were also compared both to one another and to the other interview results in order to answer question 4.

Chapter 4: Portrait I (Erin Liang)

I Should Have Known

Nine weeks into our partnership, I stop by Erin Liang's room during her planning period for a brief meeting about the trajectory of her work with her AP Government students.

Yesterday, Erin asked those students to identify ways in which they were a role model for others by naming positive characteristics about themselves, to describe a local issue they cared about, and then to come up with 3-5 manageable steps they could take in their own lives to have an impact on the issue they had named. This question was itself a follow-up to last week's question: identify a local person whom you consider to be a role model and what about that person makes you feel that way, and then identify issues that are important to you.

This work is all part of a quest to support students in engaging with Erin's conception of social justice: identify an issue of concern, advocate around that issue, and then participate in the political process in some way to create solutions. We have both been pleased with the results of our work together so far, and I ask Erin, now that she has had some success in moving students from thinking generally about important issues to a focus on local issues they can actually address and learning from those in the community who have been working to address those issues, if she has any thoughts on where she might take this discussion next week to really push students to want to take action instead of just talking about it. Erin looks at me like I just asked her what the black strands sprouting out of the top of her head were. Of course, she tells me. Of course she knows where she wants to take this discussion next to encourage real advocacy.

Donald Trump was elected president two days ago, and her racially, religiously, sexually, and politically heterogeneous AP class is legitimately terrified.

Getting Started

I take a minute to look around me on my first day in Erin's class. The space is wide and shallow. The walls are covered in posters – the ubiquitous school-themed Garfield set, “Washington, D.C.”, “Discover NYC”, and a number of maps. This is my first day in Brandon High School other than while conducting pre-interviews, and I am hearkening back to my own days as a teacher after navigating through the packed hallways to find Erin's room before the end of the five minute class changing period. I am glad I did – as soon as the bell rings, an announcement comes over the PA: “This is a hall sweep; please lock your doors.” “This is a hall sweep; please lock your doors,” mocks a black male student wearing a football uniform, in a practiced, nasally voice. Hall sweeps, I later discover, occur after almost every ringing bell.

Erin gives me a minute to introduce myself, and I tell students that I am from the University of Michigan, that I am a doctoral candidate working on a dissertation study focusing on the work of teachers, and that Ms. Liang will be participating in that study. As I speak, several students loudly shush one another. I conclude by offering to answer any questions they may have, now or later. The student in the football uniform raises his hand immediately and asks me what my ACT score was. I tell him it was a 35, then immediately wish the number had been lower when I see the looks on a number of students' faces (I am later told by more than one teacher that, despite the fact that they believe this to be the best general education high school in the 20,000+ student Carteret Public School District, test scores are always a struggle here). A minute later I realize that what I really wish is that I hadn't still immediately known the answer twelve years after the last time my ACT score was relevant.

Erin has decided to put an explicit focus on “social (in)justice” for my first day in the classroom, asking students to define the term and talk in groups about their responses. The class appears highly engaged. Following a few peals of quiet laughter, I hear a student say, in a silly voice, “Let’s get on topic, guys.” After some discussion, students go up to the white board and write down words and phrases relating to their responses: minorities, LGBT, secret aliens, unisex RRs, slavery, actions of ISIS, #BlackLivesMatter, Freedom of Religion, Minority Rights, Effects of war on citizens, Anti-semitism, women’s rights, slavery/prejudice, women underpaid, racism, immigrants, inequality, slavery, segregation, racism, gay rights, women’s freedom. Erin reacts with some surprise to the breadth of their list, and I can see why. With the exception of ‘secret aliens’, which a student indicates upon further questioning by Erin means that the government is hiding aliens that look just like us (I’m almost positive this student is joking, but I later discover that I can rarely tell for sure), I am profoundly impressed by the breadth of student responses in the short time allowed for this activity. This is the first time she has addressed social (in)justice explicitly with this class, and it seems like this is something students have been more thoughtful about than we might have expected.

Erin’s Students

I observe two of Erin’s classes: her AP Government class, mentioned in both of the above vignettes, and, much less frequently, her Honors World Studies class. Our focus is on her AP class, and specifically on two major issues (issues Erin has told me she hopes to eventually expand to addressing in other classes after our semester of experimentation in this one): 1) How can we encourage students to take action in their community? and 2) How can we draw out the voices of quieter students? We see these issues as interrelated – several students in the class did, in fact, participate in their community in tangible ways from the outset, and these tended to be

the students who participate consistently in class as well. Actually, all students in Erin's AP class participate in the community in tangible ways, because one of her requirements is that each member of the class complete ten hours of community action (focused for the better part of the semester on the then-ongoing presidential campaign). Erin, however, is not satisfied with the ways in which students treat these hours – she sees their completion of this requirement as the ticking of a box rather than real engagement with advocacy work, and this interpretation is supported by multiple instances of students who advertise particular opportunities for hours by stressing how easy they are to get, or how little work must be done while there. I quickly agree with Erin's contention that students see these hours as just another school assignment rather than a meaningful opportunity for participation.

This issue serves as the genesis for our work together around a question-of-the-week format for asking students to think more deeply about the things they really care about (and not simply about the things they think they have been told they are to care about by a teacher, since these AP students appear perfectly capable of giving teachers exactly what they want in order to successfully complete requirements). While meeting with me at the end of September, Erin praises a student, Maggie, who stood up for a conservative viewpoint in her overwhelmingly (at least as far as has been apparent among participating students) liberal class, seeing this student as refreshingly unafraid to say what she thinks and thus to encourage further conversation. She immediately tells me another story, however, about a student who identified herself as an atheist during a class discussion and was bullied afterward, and who is now clearly concerned about speaking again. Thus, while discussion is surprisingly common among Erin's students (in fact, Erin often has more trouble getting them to *stop* discussing issues than she does getting them to start), her concern is that this discussion has been happening among a small group of confident

students willing to state their opinions and fight for them if necessary rather than from the entire class. Less than three weeks into the study, I can already name most of the students in this group, but they constitute only about a third of the room. Many of the remaining ten or twelve students have not spoken in my hearing by the time of that September meeting, and I can certainly see why Erin tells me she wants to help students understand that it's okay to disagree and to put their opinions forward.

Planning the Change

During my first observation of her class, as already noted, Erin asked students to define social (in)justice. In the second class I observe, she asks them to draw a connection between social (in)justice, the abuses of King George III, and the development of the Bill of Rights. For the third, Erin asks students to connect issues of minority rights to the language of the Constitution in order to determine if the constitution effectively protects these rights. In the fourth, she presents her conception of social justice to students on a slide: 1) Addressing concern. 2) Advocacy. 3) Political process: creating solutions, laws. She then asks them to think about what advocacy around important issues might look like, citing the recent protests and violence in Charlotte, North Carolina following two unrelated shootings of black men by police within a single week. In our late September meeting, our first full-length conference since my observations began, Erin verifies that since starting the study she has chosen to make my visits 'social justice days', suggesting that synchronizing my visits with a social justice-specific activity is a good way for her to make sure she keeps issues of social justice as a point of focus for the class. I find this intriguing; prior to the study I had considered a number of ways in which I might expect teachers to begin to introduce social justice (through particular topics from the curriculum or through adjustments in classroom interaction patterns, for example), but it had not

occurred to me that a teacher might just decide to make the days I visit the time for an explicit focus on social justice with students. It strikes me as odd that this is not a contingency I had anticipated, particularly given findings of previous research as well as my own experience that suggest that a more subtle focus on social justice in a classroom may not have a strong impact on student perceptions. Not only does Erin's approach ensure that students will know that they are talking about social justice, but it also means that data-rich social justice discussions and my classroom observations consistently coincide, something about which I certainly will not complain.

I ask Erin about her choice to use the phrase "social (in)justice" instead of "social justice", language I don't recall seeing in the literature and had never considered. She tells me that she believes her students will find it easier to consider ideas of social justice through a frame of injustice they see around them than to consider the concept itself. I remark to myself that we haven't even gotten to the part of this meeting where we share ideas for ways to accomplish Erin's social justice goals and I'm already behind in theory-building. I suppose that's why two heads are better than one, especially when the second head is atop a body that spends upwards of thirty-five hours per week in a classroom with students.

It is at this meeting that we set the foundation for the major issues we will focus on and begin to think about ways in which we can bring multiple student viewpoints, and those from more than just the six or seven students who participate frequently, into a conversation around relevant issues. This approach fits with the way in which Erin described her social justice priorities in our pre-interview. In response to my asking what she saw as the most pressing issues in schools today, she suggested that these issues were largely equivalent to the issues her students most cared about – legalization of marijuana, gay rights, unisex bathrooms – and that a

world in which social justice has been ideally implemented would be one in which people “are more educated,” “don’t think of themselves as much,” and “learn to live with other people well.” It thus has been clear that a major thrust of Erin’s perception of social justice work in schools involves supporting students in learning, particularly through listening to one another, sharing opinions, and appreciating dissent. In fact, this idea shows through in aspects of her classroom practice as well; she will frequently add in an opinion of her own during student discussions, not to serve as a correct answer, but simply to add to the debate. Amazingly, she has managed to foster an environment where students (again, initially belonging to a relatively small group of participants in discussions) appear to appreciate this and are willing to continue to debate and discuss without acquiescing to her personal beliefs (although it is clear to me that they still see her as a knowledgeable and trustworthy teacher, a strong support for the argument that one can cede the power of absolute knowledge without losing student respect). Erin’s approach even extends to basic classroom tasks: while passing back a test, for example, she tells students to “push back if you don’t know why you got something wrong or think your answer is right.” Several students do, indeed, make arguments that their multiple-choice answers should be correct, and Erin gives them legitimate consideration and talks through her own thinking on the questions²².

Having identified Erin’s priorities for our work together, and thus an area of focus for my observations, we consider resources that might be useful. I pass along four that relate to parts of our discussion: a chapter from Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* relating to the ways in which teachers can change their role from depositor of knowledge to co-learner (and that of their

²² These multiple choice questions are “choose the best answer” questions, in which more than one, and sometimes all, answers can be at least partially right, and thus this choice produces much interesting discussion about subtleties of the options that might otherwise have been left unremarked by both correct and incorrect students.

students from knowledge receptacles to co-teachers), another from H. Richard Milner's *Start Where You Are But Don't Stay There* that responds to Erin's request for material that frames various approaches to thinking about teaching and learning in challenging and justice-focused ways, two sections from Meira Levinson's *No Citizen Left Behind* that concerns the facilitation of discussions that connect current injustices with historical events, and a 2003 paper by Eric Gutstein called *Teaching and Learning Mathematics for Social Justice in an Urban, Latino School* which, despite focusing on a different subject, contains a long discussion of an approach to social justice that is very similar to Erin's, in which students identify important social justice issues in their lives, [mathematically] address them in some way, and then act on that learning through community participation.

In a follow-up meeting a week later, we discuss Erin's reaction to the readings and decide to focus on the sections from *No Citizen Left Behind*. Erin comments that she is interested in the idea of getting students engaged in the way Levinson describes, but that she isn't sure how to move beyond surface engagement to get students to actually care about community participation. She tells me she isn't sure if students are uninterested in the issues she has brought up as options, whether students feel too busy to put much of their time into the work, whether much of the class is just lazy and would be uninspired by any issues, or whether some other concern is at work. I add a fourth possible framing: that students have been taught (largely through what many educational stakeholders refer to as the *hidden curriculum*) that school activities have no actual bearing on their lives, and thus that it has legitimately not occurred to many of these students that something they are being asked to do for a high school class might be meaningful beyond the constructed and unrealistic walls of the classroom.

In order to investigate these possibilities, and to gather more data about student responses to the ten-hour requirement and whether students perceive their work to meet it as useful, we begin to talk about facilitating future discussions that ask questions that try to get to the root of students' interests. We realize that, although Erin has identified a number of really interesting opportunities for students relating to a variety of issues, students have not actually been directly asked about what issues they would most like to focus on. However, we decide that taking a few minutes to ask this question is also not a sufficient activity, as we have concerns that if we only give students a few minutes to think before expecting a response, they may give fairly surface level answers without the opportunity to really develop their thoughts. Erin expresses an interest in reading other parts of *No Citizen Left Behind* that relate to the ideas we have discussed, and I tell her that I will think through additional sections that do so and get them to her in the next few days. We plan to meet again in about a week.

At our meeting the next week, Erin is intrigued by a concept from the new reading: that of the difference between heroes and role models. Levinson argues that while we often present students with idealized heroes when addressing major issues (e.g., a whitewashed version of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who has all of the qualities he had in his best moments but none of the ones that might make him seem a bit too human), what is really needed is a focus on local role models – community members whom students know and can identify with. After all, most students simply do not have the ability to lead a march on Washington D.C., but they can easily help a local shopkeeper set up a donations box to support a local youth sports team. By focusing on real people with whom students can talk and interact, and whose actions, perhaps performed in the very community in which students currently live, are on a scale that can be achieved, Erin suggests, students can learn about community action at a manageable level. While some of these

students may, in fact, grow up to lead a march on Washington, they shouldn't expect to start there.

It is this concept that leads us to our focus on local issues and local mentors, along with qualities students identify in themselves that might position them to become mentors and community activists as well. This seems to fit with another issue Erin has experienced: on a couple of occasions she has asked Democratic and Republican party operatives to come speak to her students, but suggests that students seemed relatively uninspired by these experiences. She now reconsiders the reason for this: perhaps it is not that students are uninterested in activism and political participation, but that they see participation with large-scale national parties in a system where many don't see their own [future] vote as counting for much as a waste of time. Perhaps, we decide, changing the focus from major national issues to local issues (although there are certain to be a number of intersections) will help students to feel like their actions might actually *do* something. Before the end of the semester, I can already see Erin modeling this approach by asking the teacher candidates who sometimes observe her class (she has at least four of them) to speak to their own experience as citizens (two have some military experience in different branches, for example). Students do, in fact, seem to me to be more interested in hearing from these teacher candidates, and appear fairly engaged during most times that they are speaking about their experiences.

During one additional planning meeting, we work to more specifically hammer out the language of the question along with a beginning trajectory for the ways in which we want to support students in beginning to think. We decide to begin by asking about role models and issues generally and then to narrow in a follow-up question to local concerns. Once we get a sense of student responses, we can analyze them in order to determine where to go next. We

decide on the question-of-the-week format to try to prevent students (and Erin) from feeling overwhelmed by this work, particularly in a curriculum-heavy AP class, and three days later Erin asks students the first question. In all, the planning for this work has taken about a month, but we feel very pleased with the thoughtful, comprehensive, and well-defined plan we end up with.

Erin Herself

During a conversation with her Honors World Studies class about the arrival of immigrants in the United States, Erin asks her students if they know how their ancestors arrived here. Many seem to know a surprising amount. One male student informs her that one ancestor came over on a slave ship and the other on the Mayflower, and Erin begins excitedly asking him follow-up questions. She becomes even more interested when a second student notes that her father is Panamanian and her grandmother is Indo-Trinidadian and came to the United States in search of increased rights. After asking all of her students this question, Erin describes her own background: both sides of her family come from China, although she was born in Carteret and considers herself a “hometown girl”, one who initially envisioned leaving for somewhere else but ended up staying to teach. When students follow up with questions about where she might have gone, she tells them that her parents have moved to California, where she’d love to be, but that they have now decided to move back. The class then changes focus to a discussion of migration patterns in and out of cities in the United States.

In her interview, I ask Erin what social justice issues she considers most difficult to address. She responds, “I always find race very difficult to address and very difficult to teach.” Later in the interview, she returns to issues of race and her positioning of her own heritage:

I try to create rapport and have a good relationship with my students, and to base it on behavior instead of color. To be fair. And I'll say, um, I'm the minority in the classroom (laughs). I'm the only female Asian woman! I'm not white! But you can't say that.

During our final planning meeting before the first question-of-the-week, Erin again suggests that despite her own status as a member of one of the smallest minority groups at Brandon (and in Carteret, which is only about 1% Asian) and her 21 years of teaching in a school with about even populations of white and black students, she does not feel that she knows how to talk about race, nor does she feel able to fully identify with or understand Carteret's black community.

Erin's actions even early in the study, however, suggest that race is something she is working to think more carefully about; while the quote above, for example, makes reference to the sort of colorblind mindset that justice-focused research suggests to be problematic, Erin departs from this mindset in the practice of our work together by acknowledging race as an important issue and by admitting that it is one with which she struggles. The question-of-the-week format and focus on role models support this changing approach – asking every student to respond (in writing if not out loud) to the questions about role models and important issues, collecting and reviewing these responses, and reporting back to students about patterns among their answers, can draw both students' and her own attention to important issues of race that may be very present for some but invisible to others.

This interest stays with Erin throughout the study. In our final interview, I ask her if there are any issues she would have liked to have more opportunity to talk about, and she names race. This does not shock me; while race is the issue I see myself as focusing most on in my own social justice work, and certainly one we had discussed, it is also an issue that in my own experience takes an enormous amount of thought to wrap one's head around. I see this as

particularly due to the major disconnect between the underlying assumptions so many people in the US develop about race (for example, that it is desirable to “not see color” or that cities have high concentrations of people of color because “people like to live with others like them”) and what is actually historically and sociologically true (in this case, that acting as if the color of someone’s skin has no impact on their life or experiences is in itself an oppressive racial microaggression and that racist practices such as redlining in the real-estate industry combined with US policies that supported the mistreatment of racial minorities in a wide range of ways effectively forced people of color, particularly those who were black, into the dirtier, more densely populated centers of cities with less access to needs like food and health care).

When Erin tells me that race is something she would like to have spoken more about, I offer to have a conversation about it as soon as we conclude the interview, and she quickly accepts. We then spend more than an hour talking about the function of race in US society. Erin is most assuredly not the sort of teacher whose years of experience have given her a sense that she “knows it all”. Rather, I routinely find her to be intellectually curious, excited to ask questions and think through their answers, and, if anything, fairly overcritical of what she sees as her own teaching shortcomings. I remark to myself that Erin is not the sort of mid-career teacher whose picture gets so often painted in our popular culture, sitting at her desk and repeating the same old lessons while enjoying the fact that tenure gives her the ability to stagnate²³. Rather, she routinely seeks opportunities for further learning. This is particularly clear in her acceptance of my offer to have this conversation given that it was after the conclusion of my observations and thus could only be for her own edification. As we talk, I find myself thinking that it really

²³ I don’t know that I’ve ever met that teacher, and am starting to suspect that s/he must take off on a unicorn race with the yeti any time I enter a school.

says something about her, and likely about the attitudes of many of the wonderful teachers working in the United States, that she is willing to take an hour of her second day of holiday break (we're actually meeting in a mall, so the conversation is actively keeping her from the day of shopping she has planned with her sister) to talk about an issue she considers important for her teaching practice.

Race is only one of many subjects for which Erin seems to be constantly interested in increasing her knowledge and considering multiple perspectives. During my third observation, Erin tells her students that she likes to keep a politically open mind and vote for issues, not parties. She routinely addresses both sides of issues with students to stir debate or to encourage students to think more deeply. For example, when addressing the fact that Puerto Rico's status as a territory means that there is no income tax, she asks students, "Wouldn't it be nice to keep your whole paycheck? But what if you want local services? That's got to come from somewhere." I also observe multiple instances in which she reframes issues to challenge student perceptions of a problem. As one example, during a student disagreement about gun control following a question from Erin regarding whether it is necessary to bear arms in today's society, a student responds to a previous student's claim that Americans want guns to defend themselves by suggesting that Americans are obsessed with guns and won't believe that gun control works. Erin counters by suggesting that Americans aren't obsessed with guns, but with *rights*, and asks students to think about this debate not only in terms of the meaning of guns, but in terms of the ways in which Americans respond when an already present right of any kind is under threat of being taken away.

This approach appears to have a variety of impacts on students. On one hand, it appears to support a classroom environment in which students (at least, the students I saw participating)

do not feel obligated simply to acquiesce to anything Erin says and are comfortable arguing for their own beliefs regardless of whether she takes part in the conversation. Even as someone who has spent substantial time and focus considering the ways in which people think about important social issues, it is not always clear to me whether Erin is stating a legitimate opinion or simply challenging students to consider alternate viewpoints, so I imagine that students are likely also often unsure. On the other hand and relatedly, however, Erin expresses to me during a meeting that, prior to the election, a number of students had begged her not to vote for Donald Trump, a man she abhors. She suggests that her habit of challenging students' [mostly left-leaning] arguments in class, along with a tendency to share information about the beliefs of her two Republican sisters, has led students to greatly misunderstand her politics, and expresses some concern about this. Nonetheless, regardless of student perceptions or misperceptions of her personal politics, Erin's moves take place in a classroom in which discussion and dissent are not silenced. It is the work of expanding that discussion even further that drives our study.

Putting the Practice into Practice

Once we have determined that Erin will begin to draw out student thoughts in a way that she hopes will support her social justice practice, we choose a day for the first Question of the Week. Erin, however, skips the activity on that day due to low student attendance, so I suggest having it the following week. When I get in, Erin is clearly nervous – she stops by my desk in the back of the room to double-check on our plan and to ask me to repeat back my impressions of what was said because, she tells me, she is concerned that she forgot something. She is holding her handwritten notes from our previous meeting and glances down at them several times.

After a number of beginning-of-class procedures, including discussion of recent opportunities for campaign hours and an encouragement to form study groups well in advance of

the AP test, Erin presents to her students the question we had discussed: Is there a person or persons that you admire? If so, why? Erin encourages students to name reasons they think are legitimate for admiring someone based on their words or actions rather than personal *talents* like athleticism or acting ability. Students are asked to write this information down and to turn it in afterward, and are also given the chance to report on what they wrote to the class. The students who respond, as they did on the first day when Erin asked for a list of issues relating to social (in)justice, show themselves to be very thoughtful about these issues when given the opportunity to discuss them. For example, one student, Isaac, quickly names LeBron James as his hero, and I anticipate that his explanation will be focused on LeBron's ability on the basketball court. Isaac, however, presents a whole host of reasons not involving basketball playing: he vocally supports the Black Lives Matter movement, he stood up to Donald Sterling, the former owner of the LA Clippers, and was seen as instrumental in encouraging Sterling's 2014 firing after Sterling made a series of racist comments, he donated substantially to support those affected by Hurricane Katrina, etc. Erin asks if anything that LeBron James does has inspired Isaac to make a change, and his answer might as well have been written by one of the two of us as a justification for this activity: "Oh, for sure, but I don't know how to go about it."

A major goal, if not *the* goal, of the sequence of activities we are planning is to ensure that students like Isaac end their time in Erin's class feeling like they *do* know how to go about following the examples of those they consider to be role models. In spite of a few thoughtful answers in the vein of Isaac's response, however, many students remain quiet. The activity ends relatively quickly, as do many over the course of this semester, with a discussion of Donald Trump, this time in relation to his responses to the women who had recently begun to allege that he sexually assaulted them at various times in the past. Erin also takes part in this discussion and

does not force students to return to the role models they wrote about; after all, this is only our first step toward meeting her social justice goal.

Meeting during Erin's planning period a couple of hours later, we agree that things went well; Erin tells me that the activity "felt really good", although she does indicate that she was disappointed in the relatively restricted student participation. When I ask for her thoughts on following up, we return to the question of local vs. national issues. Erin tells me that she suspects (and, in some cases, has been explicitly told) that many students don't feel as if they know enough, or are too concerned about getting into disagreements with classmates, to participate in class conversations about major issues. Since the students who do participate tend to participate confidently, charismatically, and relatively forcefully, I can definitely appreciate that this might be a concern that affects a number of students in this class. In order to work toward a gradual increase in participation, it is at this meeting that we decide on weekly questions (prior to that in our discussions we had simply referred to it as an initial activity that would assumedly have some follow-up after we saw how it went), and we decide that the next question should narrow what students are asked to do to focus on members of students' own communities, people who might be more appropriately called role models than heroes. Specifically, Erin will ask students to name one role model whom they personally know (and to explain why that person is a role model) and one local or school issue that is important to them. Our theory is that we can draw on the responses to this question in order to support us in thinking about things students might be able to do with their campaign hours that they may see as helping them to be more like their role model and/or more able to address their issue. Erin eventually decides to postpone this until Tuesday of the following week so she can give students time on Friday to work on a project she has assigned.

When I get in on Tuesday, Erin calls me over to her desk. She has misplaced her notes about the question of the week and wants to double-check what was decided with me. Although she suggests that she has forgotten important aspects of the question, it turns out that she remembers everything that was said in the same way that I do. I check my own notes just to make sure. Fifteen minutes of test review later, Erin announces, “We’ve talked about activism nationally...Let’s bring it down to a local level.” She then shows a slide she has prepared that says the following:

Local Social Justice Activity

- Identify 1 role model you personally know
 - What characteristics do you admire of that person?
 - What do they do to try to improve society?
- Identify a school or community issue you care about
 - What avenues can you participate in to improve?

The first thought I have is that, in contrast to the previous question, which had been spoken aloud to students in effectively the same words used when we planned it at our meeting, Erin had clearly done a fair amount of outside thinking about how she wanted to present this one. The questions were given visually on a slide, and were much more clearly stated than they had been during our planning session, clearly a result of consideration about wording and straightforwardness on Erin’s part. Erin’s sub-questions added additional subqualities to consider that were perhaps implicit during our conversation but were certainly not lined up so neatly.

Students immediately ask if they can name someone famous, and I am glad we have decided to keep the focus local, because it seems that this is something students haven’t really thought about and don’t have ready answers for. Erin tells them that if they truly can’t think of anyone local they can name a famous person, but encourages them if at all possible to follow the outline of the activity and select someone they actually know. She leads off by modeling a

response of her own: she sees the nuns who worked at the Catholic school she attended as a child as role models because they “give up their personal life to help society”. She contrasts this with those who only say, “What’s in it for me?” She continues by telling students that the school issue she cares about is how to support all of her students, particularly those from difficult circumstances. She asks students, “You ever have one of those teachers you just can’t talk to, that you’re afraid to talk to?” A student immediately says, “You’re a great teacher, Ms. Liang.” Erin responds, “I’m not looking for compliments, but I try.”

Erin then turns to what students have written and says that she would appreciate responses from some students from whom she hears frequently as well as from some who participate more rarely. I am struck again by her increased level of explicitness about what she wants from students, both with the way in which she has framed the questions on the slide and by telling students specifically of a desire for some responses to come from those who do not often speak in class. Explicitness is a topic that had come up in our past discussions, and Erin has clearly had it on her mind when thinking through this activity. The choice seems effective – while participation is still limited, a couple of students who volunteer are, in fact, students who have rarely or never spoken during my past observations, and they have solid contributions. A few other students report that they do not feel ready to share, and one asks if he can talk tomorrow instead. Erin tells the student that this is fine and mentions to the class that she has always had difficulties speaking in public but that “the way I overcome my shyness is to just do it, to just talk.” She collects the papers of students who spoke and asks the others to hold on to their responses and think about presenting tomorrow.

In our post-activity meeting, we again agree that things went well. While Erin still feels somewhat disappointed by the students who were not willing to talk, I note that it is pretty

amazing that some of the students who hadn't been willing in the past gave it a chance because of her request. I suggest thinking through some additional strategies to get quieter students to talk, and we brainstorm a few ideas including small group discussions where students are asked to report out²⁴ and debating opinions on an inconsequential issue (such as favorite kind of candy) for which students might be less likely to feel apprehensive of their level of knowledge or expertise. Ultimately, we decide to wait to see if students who had asked for more time actually present the next day. Only one does, so Erin decides that a small group discussion is the right choice to make for the next activity. Next week's question will address concrete steps students can take to have some kind of impact relating to the issues they identified today.

We plan to ask students this question on November 10th, but the activity is somewhat sidetracked by conversations about the election two days earlier – class begins with a student walking in the door and announcing “America is stupid” and continues in that vein (one student calls Donald Trump a rapist, for example, and another concludes “They could have pulled a name out of a hat.”); students are anxious to talk about what has happened. Erin leads them into a conversation about voting patterns and ends this long and somewhat impromptu segment of class with a discussion of the electoral college. A few minutes before the end of class, however, she is able to bring up her slide for our question:

Local - - Social Justice

1. Last week, you ID local role model and characteristics you admired, e.g. characteristics, issues they care about.
2. How are YOU a role model for others?
 - a. ID characteristics of yourself
 - b. What is an issue you care about?

²⁴ In a previous activity, Erin had split students up into houses of Congress and asked them to propose and debate bills, and student participation had been pretty high with that setup. We used this as evidence that beginning with smaller group discussions and then moving from there to a whole-class conversation might be effective with this group of students.

- c. Write down 3-5 real steps you can take in your real life to be more like the kind of person you'd consider a mentor and/or to impact an issue you care about.
 - Make them manageable steps, not things that are too large to actually accomplish.

The goal here is to name things you can really do!

Even more than with the previous question of the week, I notice that Erin has really spent some time distilling a pretty long conversation about social justice down into an easily manageable series of specific and clear steps for students to follow (in this case, in fact, she had asked me to email her a write-up of my notes on our conversation to make sure she captured everything that might be important with the slide). She splits students up into small groups for the discussion. In order to ensure that there is enough remaining time to watch CNN Student News's analysis of the election before the bell rings, she asks them to share within their small groups but tells them that they will wait until tomorrow to share with the class at large (ultimately students end up using their sharing during the small group discussions today to argue the next day against a whole-class discussion of the question, but I do hear some pretty good discussions happening in the small groups).

It is at our meeting the next day that Erin makes the observation that opens this portrait – Donald Trump's election, whatever else it may be, can be an excellent motivation for her students to think more about getting involved in their communities. We decide that she will ask her next question with this motivating factor in mind by trying to tie the issues students named more explicitly to the election. I offer to do some analysis of student responses since their most recent answers were shared only in small groups, and I head home with a stack of all of their written work on social justice questions. A few days later, Erin shows students the following slide:

Social advocacy, in this class, has been defined as identifying areas of concern and participating in avenues for change.

In light of election results, what (on both sides of the spectrum) concerns should those be in the next four years?

-(Identify concerns, avenues – SELF, local, state)

She clarifies after students ask a couple of questions: “The question is: yes, Donald Trump won, but what do we do next? What’s the next step for the United States?” She models a response to

the questions on the slide with an example of her own: a personal concern for her is the

Department of Education and the rumor at the time that Ben Carson would be appointed to run it

despite the fact that he was not an educator but a neurosurgeon (one student yells out “...and

he’s a *dumb* neurosurgeon.”). Erin discusses her worries about the possible changes in US

education that might result from this appointment before opening the floor for student responses.

Students seem more willing to participate this time, and they name a range of issues – for

example, minority rights, women’s rights, immigration, the safety of *Roe v. Wade*, and US

treatment of Muslims are all discussed.

Finishing Touches

In a meeting about a week before Thanksgiving, we begin to discuss the end of the study.

Given our limited remaining time, I suggest that we take advantage of the upcoming break by

assigning a more in-depth question of the week. Erin suggests something a little bit different –

while she has begun to get students thinking about issues they care about, she is worried,

particularly in the current political climate, that her students have not developed the ability to

listen to reasoned arguments that disagree with their own opinions. Given the very public

conversation during and after the election that concerned issues with news, particularly the sort

of news one sees on social media sites, Erin tells me that she wants to make sure her students are

seeking out alternate ideas before reaching conclusions. More than this, though, she has

expressed a related concern to me throughout the semester: she worries that one of the reasons many of her students do not participate as much as she would like is that they do not see a difference between ‘the sharing of alternate viewpoints’ and *arguing*. Erin is worried that a number of students in her classes view a debate/discussion and an argument as equivalent, and that one of the reasons they don’t speak up if their opinions differ from the opinions of their classmates is that they see something inherently negative and aggressive in disagreeing with what others have said.

Her assignment idea, then, is for students to return to an issue they named previously, but this time for them to find both an article arguing for their own view on that issue and one that disagrees with that view. Students will then report back on whether this activity changed their opinions at all. We don’t spend any time planning out the wording for this assignment; it no longer feels as if we need to do that together. Two days later I email Erin a loosely coded and categorized analysis of themes in student responses to past questions of the week, and on the following day she asks me to talk to the class about this analysis while she projects the results (this is the only time during the study that I spoke directly to Erin’s students other than during my introduction on the first day). We observe to students that there are a number of interconnections between the issues they wrote about, and Erin encourages them to keep in mind, when asked to share in the future, that it is likely that their concerns relate in some way to concerns of others in class. She then introduces the new assignment, which she tells students they will receive more explicit details about coming up but should begin to think about now.

Due to the testing schedule, Erin does not have a chance to pass along official details of the assignment until after students return from the break, although a number of students indicated that they understood it well enough to work on it anyway. When I come in on the Wednesday

after Thanksgiving, students have completed the assignment and are ready to present. Erin brings up the slide students were shown during my absence:

Social Justice Issue

1. You have already identified a social justice issue you care about and advocacy opportunity.
2. Find a legitimate source of OPPOSING view; share out tomorrow.
3. Does this change, alter your viewpoint or advocacy?

Erin shares first, focusing on the same issue she modeled previously: the US Department of Education. Now that Betsy DeVos has been announced as Donald Trump's prospective Secretary of Education, she asks rhetorically, what impact will her focus on vouchers and her status as a billionaire businesswoman with no education degree have on public schools? Erin tells her students that when she engaged in this activity she first asked herself, "Is my concern valid? What is the opposing view?" She then discusses the perspective on school vouchers described in a *New York Times* article that quotes Donald Trump as calling vouchers "the great civil rights issue of our time". She asks, "Why do you guys have to go to a zip code school? Shouldn't those federal dollars follow you?" After a brief class discussion (one that also features the two teacher candidates observing Erin today), Erin informs students that, while her view on vouchers has not reversed, she had not considered some aspects of their use, and had not thought of home schooling and virtual schools, which were also discussed in the article, when considering the options available to students and families who wish to avoid public schooling. She concludes that she has thus expanded her sense of the educational opportunities available and how these might be seen by people. Ultimately, though, she tells the class that she still personally sees them as hurting at-risk students and damaging school culture.

Several students then share their own issues and investigations. While a couple of students have selected issues that are fairly difficult to disagree with in a reasonable way (for

example, one student selected the negative impact of littering on the environment), other students have chosen issues that are currently contentious, such as same-sex marriage, peer pressure/bullying, and the Dakota Access pipeline. Further, all presenting students seem to have taken this assignment seriously and done their research (even the girl who selected littering, in fact, had clearly spent substantial time locating a website that made an argument *in favor* of littering and, while she ultimately concluded that this argument was ridiculous, did a pretty admirable job of reporting on it in a relatively objective way and of considering its major points).

A Social Justice Surprise

When I enter Erin's room for my final observation, I am not expecting anything related to social justice to take place. Erin has asked if I would end my observations a few days earlier than initially proposed to accommodate review for the upcoming exams, and it is my general assumption that today's focus will be on synthesis of content (particularly since in our final planning period meeting Erin answered my question about future directions for her work with students by suggesting that Donald Trump and the changing political conditions should provide plenty of fodder for continuing conversation and we did not discuss any additional work with students in the last few days of the semester). What I see instead, however (perhaps more easily because I have donned my end-of-study glasses to examine change over time) is a justice-focused teacher whose practice looks very different from what I observed when I first arrived in September.

Before class, Erin calls a student up to her desk for a quiet conversation. In a past meeting, Erin had noted to me that this currently biologically female student has recently begun to identify as a male and that she had been informed that the student now wished to be referred to by a male name. In that meeting, Erin expressed some confusion about the student's reasoning

and suggested that she was unsure how to proceed. The teacher I see now, however, is confident and supportive. She first asks the student how he would like the name change to be enacted: “Is it for me? Is it for the class?” The student suggests nervously that he “doesn’t want to make a big announcement” and that perhaps the adjustment can be made quietly. Erin suggests an opportunity at the beginning of the coming semester for the student to let his classmates know about his decision, and he walks back to his desk smiling.

What follows this conversation after Erin begins class, further, is not a review, but a social justice lesson that I had no idea would be happening. It is focused on political and civil participation and ranges coherently from a discussion of the number of students who have signed a petition or shared an opinion via social media to voter turnout and voter suppression to the experience of Muslims in America. It feels much more complete than the smaller activities that we had planned in the past and lasts for the entirety of class. Further, a number of students make legitimately substantive contributions and put forward a number of interpretations of the societal phenomena they see around them. When Erin brings up a slide that says “Who participates?”, for example, one student responds “people who are angry” and a second adds “the wealthy and well-educated” before a third suggests that, rather, those who don’t vote “just show how much privilege they have.” A Muslim student expresses concern for his safety in the current climate, and Erin responds that she, too, is concerned for his safety, sharing experiences from her own Chinese heritage in a brief ensuing discussion of cultural practices that feels very relevant.

The class ends with a lengthy and racially thoughtful discussion of voter restrictions. Erin begins by noting to students that in Europe all citizens are automatically registered to vote and asking why the US does not follow the same procedure (she also provides a list of reasons that United States citizens can lose the franchise). When a student suggests that losing the right to

vote because one has been to prison is reasonable because prisoners “choose to bring that on themselves”, several students disagree strongly, with one (white) student suggesting that prisons are unfairly full of “black men who went to jail for selling a gram bag”. Erin shows a slide comparing state-by-state differences in the impact of felonies on voting rights and notes to students that states with the strictest restrictions also tend to have high numbers of black residents, suggesting that this is one of many efforts to disenfranchise people of color (an observation in response to which one student yells out, “Speak the truth, Ms. Liang!”). She concludes by noting to students that there is a state law that one needs to re-register to vote after moving even just within the state, to which a student responds, “Man – they really don’t want people to vote.” Erin sarcastically replies, “We want the *right* people to vote.” As the bell rings, a (white) student, catching the hint, asks, “The right people, or the white people?”

Looking to the Future

Following this lesson, I reflect on what I saw. This was not a minor attempt at adding in a question about social justice to a traditionally structured government class. Rather, it was a wide-ranging, engaging, and, given the success of the conversation and the variety of contributions, very well-facilitated discussion that ranged from issues of politics to issues of race to issues of human rights and back again²⁵. It was the kind of discussion I would have been proud to have in my own work with undergraduate teacher candidates, and most importantly it was one that Erin

²⁵ It is likely worth a reminder that in our final interview two weeks later Erin told me that she was still “on the fence” about how to deal with issues of race in the classroom and was interested in staying to talk about it for an hour after the interview ended. This may seem surprising given what was pretty clearly a successful treatment of aspects of this issue as they relate to voting rights (which was fairly present in the discussion and did not only arise in the couple of specific examples I narrate here). However, I would actually consider this fact to be highly encouraging: A teacher who was less thoughtful about the issue of race in the United States might have concluded following a successful discussion about racial issues in voting that race was now an issue that s/he “got”; Erin’s indication that she still finds race to be a challenging issue suggests that she is thinking about it more broadly than in terms of whether the issue can arise comfortably in class once or twice and will thus continue to think about how to improve her treatment of it rather than being happy to remain at a slightly improved level.

had not needed to plan in detail with me in advance. She had simply designed it and executed it. I hadn't been needed, and that felt great.

In her final interview, Erin gave me a sense of the sort of change she had noticed in her own thinking that had supported her in creating this broadly relevant lesson and that will hopefully support her in continuing this work in the future:

See, I felt in general that social justice was a very difficult thing, like it was too big, too complex, for me to address in the classroom. And in reality, that's not the case. You need to show the kids the process and provide them with the platform and opportunity to discuss and problem solve. So I don't think any [social justice issues are] off the table. It is any area. You just need to provide the time and resources, and strategies and inquiry questions, and evidence-based material for them to reflect on.

Beyond that, however, she drew parallels between her own work to define social justice over the semester and the social justice approach she is now taking with students. She tells me:

In the beginning I'm like, 'I don't know...let's look this up in the dictionary. What does it mean?' And it grew, it blossomed into this wonderful entity, this framework for the kids to embrace. So hopefully they will take these strategies, incorporate them into their personal lives, and do things with them after my, you know, modeling.

Perhaps most importantly, however, Erin did not stop at a vague desire for her social justice work to somehow influence her students. Rather, she described a sense of what had been done so far along with a real vision of future outcomes her work should support. When I asked her whether we had been successful in addressing issues that were important to her during the study, she said this:

The kids have taken action steps they can take in the classroom or within their community - who they could write, how they can participate. How can they volunteer? You know, the question is what can *you* do? I mean, you may feel powerless or helpless, but you can do something about this. You can write, you can participate in some type of march, you can get the word out, you can vote. So yeah, absolutely. You can-empowering kids that they can make a difference, because like we talked about, lot of kids feel that they don't matter because they're not old enough to vote, or 'who's gonna care about me, I'm a high school kid?' You can make a difference.

These comments are consistent with the way in which Erin discussed social justice with her students in class (through assignments that asked them to directly identify ways in which they could get involved in addressing an issue they had identified as important, for example), and I had no trouble believing her when she answered my question about whether she felt able to move forward with social justice work on her own with a confident 'yes'. I also have no trouble believing that this work will continue to be thoughtful, important, and highly beneficial to students' own sense of justice in the world (and, perhaps more importantly, in their own communities) and the ways in which they can work for the future they want to see.

Chapter 5: Portrait II (Mike Graham)

A Force in the Classroom

Mike Graham is *loud*. This is my immediate reaction upon beginning my first observation in Mike's AP US History class. A former lawyer, the Mike I see striding around the classroom and discussing occurrences of the 18th century with the sort of animation one might normally associate with only the most meaningful of personal events is very different than the thoughtful and soft-spoken man I interviewed four days earlier. In that interview, Mike discussed leaving his twelve-year law career for a teaching career now in its third year, and while his experience as a lawyer was evident during our talk in the ways in which he carefully described and analyzed issues within both a social and legal framework, it is only now, sitting at a table in the back of the room and wondering if the other teachers in this section of the hallway are thinking his class has gotten in trouble rather than realizing that they are having a pleasant exchange about Shay's Rebellion, that I can imagine what Mike must have looked like in the courtroom.

This is not to suggest that his AP students are silenced by his teaching style. In fact, the back-and-forth that I often observe between Mike and the other members of the class reaches a level that I don't know I have ever seen so consistently in a classroom before. This is not a lecture, but a conversation based around a set of information-heavy Power Point slides. Mike's history is a narrative, open to critique and question, and several students take him up on that to an incredible extent, talking about obscure historical figures as if they are gossiping about

friends: in the second class I observe, Mike notes that Thomas Jefferson's children with his slave Sally Hemmings were also slaves. A student responds, "He didn't care about 'em?" Mike replies, "You have to put yourself in these people's place." The student rejoins, "I don't think I want to..." Later on, when talking about the Civil War, students treat the history even more like a shared narrative, eagerly adding in comments and questions: "Not like McClellan would have been any help anyway." "He got his butt kicked?" "Did civilians come out to watch again?" A student mocks a Union general's disbelief of the veracity of intercepted confederate orders, by laughingly suggesting that "even though we had to kill a Southern messenger to do this, I think it's false."

Mike's History

It is not at all surprising to me that students in Mike's AP History class (or, as will be discussed below, the white males, at least) treat what might be seen by other groups of students as a series of bland historical facts as the most gripping story ever told; Mike is every revisionist historian's dream in his presentation of the events of the past. Far from the whitewashed tales of cherry trees and Honest Abes, Mike describes real humans, and a real country, when he teaches, and he seems particularly willing to share his beliefs about any and every topic. During my first observation, Mike calls Aaron Burr a "selfish little snot of a jerk", informs students that the delegates to the constitutional convention feared the people and then asks, "What were the delegates like? Rich.", describes many of the people he has met while visiting family in rural North Carolina as "real racist rednecks" before adding "racism is alive and well, ladies and gentlemen," and refers to Donald Trump as "an abomination". In his American Studies class, he describes the rarely-critiqued Woodrow Wilson as "a racist son of a gun". He continues,

“Woodrow Wilson was intelligent beyond belief. That just goes to show you that just because you’re really, really smart doesn’t mean you’re not a frickin’ idiot. Because he was a racist.”

Mike’s blunt depictions of racism in American history (and today) are brutal and striking. He explains the views of slave owners as “Your dog is your property, your donkey is property, black people are property.” Of our seventh president’s tenure as a general, he notes that “Jackson doesn’t just defeat the Indians; he butchers them. He tears into them with a viciousness you wouldn’t believe.” He describes the Trail of Tears in horrific detail focused on the experience of freezing to death or dying of starvation, and adds “sometimes the Indians were forced off their land when they had just sat down to supper, and the new owners who wanted to take their land would come in and eat their supper.” He comments with regard to the Mexican War that “I don’t really know the history of Mexico except when it intersects with that of the United States, and every time it intersects with the history of the United States, the Mexicans get screwed.” Later he refers to the war as “nothing more than a Southern expansionist war.” He describes the mentality of many who endorse racist policies as “things may be bad, but at least I’m not a black person.” When Mike suggests that racism was responsible for poor treatment of Irish people in the 19th century, a student asks, “aren’t Irish people white too?” Mike responds, “Yes, but you’re trying to look for racism in skin color alone. Well, I shouldn’t say racism. I should say prejudice. Look at women. Look at Muslims.” The student then adds, “Look at Mexicans.”

In Mike’s American Studies class, he summarizes the views of 20th century factory owners who forced blacks to work all the most unpleasant jobs: “A black person can’t get any blacker. Who cares if they ruin their clothes? They’re just black people.” He summarizes the logic behind teaching black students about religion but limiting focus on academics: “The white racist guys were like, ‘well, you gotta have somebody to control ‘em. Might as well be the

pastor, somebody who's smarter than the average black person." Further, he works to draw on students' own sense of racial inequities to broaden their sense of justice. In one instance, he notes that a comedian as modern as Jerry Lewis could dress up as a Chinese person and make jokes using the word 'Chinaman'. He asks students what would happen if one did that with a black person. A student says, "racist." Mike responds that if it's a Chinese person, we just laugh, and then connects mistreatment of Asians to Japanese internment during World War II. In a second, he becomes angry when a student (who may herself be Latina) makes a crack about Mexicans. He notes that he has "very little patience" for people who call Mexicans lazy when they actually work very hard. He continues, "Do you want to believe that all black people are criminals? Well then don't say Mexicans are lazy." In a different class, while addressing the slow and fraught movement of women into higher education, he talks about the power men have historically been given over women, and notes that even today men can force their wives into sex in Carteret's state because its current legal language around rape refers only to unwanted sexual actions by someone other than a husband. He follows this with a connection between the desire of whites to keep black people uneducated and oppressed to that of men to keep women "dumb, pregnant, barefoot, and in the kitchen." In a later class, he notes: "Yesterday we talked about the 14th and 15th amendments giving black people the right to vote, giving the black people rights. Women were like, 'Hey, what about us? We're 51% of the population!'"

This critical approach to history, particularly in concert with the fact that during the course of my observations I witness Mike informing his students that trickle-down economics does not work because "the rich keep most of their money" rather than using it to stimulate the economy, that Tea Party members are misguided because "they take macroeconomics and try to reduce it down to microeconomics", that the Affordable Care Act is a good idea (although one he

suggests US ultimately can't afford), and that "the embargo act [of 1807, which he has just criticized relentlessly]...makes George W. Bush look like a great statesman", as well as mentioning to me in a meeting that people who have a problem with the Black Lives Matter movement don't realize that it really means 'Black Lives Matter *too*', would have led me to the definite impression that Mike is fairly left-leaning. However, in our initial interview he described himself as a "strong Republican", noting that at the end of each year he offers his American Studies students bonus points if they can identify his political affiliation and that students are almost always wrong.

Not only, then, does Mike work to bluntly critique prejudice in his courses, but he also serves as an informative example for those (including, based on my observations and on a report from Erin, some of the students in Brandon) who might malign the entire Republican party as racist, jingoist, or generally thoughtless about issues like race. Explaining the reasons behind his own focus on them, Mike frames himself as a religious man whose interest in social justice stems from a religious interpretation of human interaction. When I ask him in an interview what an ideal world might look like, in which all social justice issues had been appropriately addressed, Mike suggests that *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry has envisioned the closest possible response, but that such a world is unachievable. He continues:

Part of that comes from religious views; I think man is carnal and we will never reach that goal for that very reason, because we are carnal, and we are sinful in nature, and inequality, in my opinion, is a sin. It's hatred of another person, or oppressing another person, because of whatever issue you might have. Whether it be your race, your gender, what-have-you.

In American Studies, in response to a question about why black people were the ones chosen for enslavement in the then-colonies, rather than, for example, people native to the Americas or Asians, Mike (who has the kind of American History knowledge that enables him to answer the vast majority of questions like this one, seemingly no matter how obscure their subject matter) notes that the impetus was likely a lost Spanish slave ship that wound up in Jamestown. He explains that the Spanish baptized all of their slaves, and adds, “Don’t even get me started on the dichotomy of saving someone’s soul while enslaving them.” However, he makes it very clear that students do not need to share this interpretation; this is not the only time that, despite the value of his religion in his own life, he takes steps to avoid using religion as a reason for anything. During one class he mentions a Christian belief as influential in views on oppression of minorities, but then quickly adds “for those of you who are atheists, I’m just talking about the myth...if you believe Christianity is a myth, then it’s the myth of Christianity.”

Perhaps the most readily apparent influence on Mike’s teaching approach, however, stems from his earlier career as a lawyer. This is an aspect of his life that requires no deep analysis to unearth; he mentions it frequently, both to me during interviews and meetings and to his students during class, to explain a wide variety of comments, beliefs, approaches, etc., and to provide background on social phenomena in the United States. In his pre-interview, he described a situation in which he asked students in his government class to raise their hand if they believed everyone was equal in the eyes of the law during a discussion of the equal protection clause of the constitution and not a single hand went up. Mike went on to explain to students that “money decides whether you get off from a crime or not”, and then to add that the next major influence is race:

If everything is equal, then, yes, a black person is going to have greater chances of going to jail than a white person. And that's just a simple fact of the criminal justice system. Anybody who has ever practiced law knows that. A black person is much more likely to get the death penalty than a white person. The drugs that black people tend to use more frequently are punished heavier than the drugs that a white person uses, cocaine versus crack being the prime example.

Slightly later in the interview, Mike makes a direct link between his experience as a lawyer and his focus as a teacher of history:

For a third-year teacher, I'm in a unique position because I've been exposed to so many things already in my legal career that I have a different perspective of this, and how I teach has been influenced by my view of racial equality and everything through the years and through my legal practice. So when I look at race – when I look at history, for that matter – I'm looking at it through a legal lens to begin with. So when I teach history, it's automatically built into my behavior, my discussion, everything I do as it pertains to racial relations, everything, is always being reflected through that prism of my past experiences, my past knowledge. So there is a large bent to our discussions in class towards racial issues and equality and how people were treated differently.

Two Classes, Three Worlds

Over the course of our work together, Mike identifies a broad range of important social justice issues – race, class, community, family, city, district – that affect schools and students. However, when we discuss his own classes, he is quick to identify the single major issue of inter- and intra-class equity as the most salient in a variety of ways. I observe two of Mike's classes:

AP US History and American Studies, a “regular” (non-AP, non-Honors) track class. In American Studies, all desks are full and additional students sit on both sides of me at a table in the back that also holds old computer towers and monitors and the occasional spare textbook. The class, consisting mostly of nonwhite students, is bustling and energetic, with students frequently out of their seats, commenting, asking questions, and making jokes. They speak loudly and excitedly, sometimes about the history being discussed and sometimes about other topics. In our mid-study interview, Mike laments that the energy in this class does not lead to positive academic outcomes:

I don't know if the dynamics of the class are different so kids aren't as enthused about studying, but it's weird because sixth period tends to be the most engaged of all the classes. They're actively engaged in class, they're actively engaged in discussion, they're participating in class, but they're getting the worst grades.

Further, Mike is not afraid to describe the impact he sees race having in this class, and in creating differences between it and his largely white AP class. This is an issue he tells me throughout the study is one with which he struggles, but in what to me seems like an unusual way. Mike is very ready to address and investigate racial inequalities, but reports concerns that the mere act of noting that black students in his classes have lower grades than white students will cause him to be labeled a racist. Research suggests that thoughts like this can be fairly common among white people who find themselves terrified of saying the wrong thing or offending someone when it comes to race, and in his final interview Mike demonstrates that despite our work together during the semester, race is something he does not feel comfortable addressing with students, even when he sees legitimate issues (in this case that black students represent a disproportionate number of those failing his classes:

And I go down the list and look into the kids who are failing, and they're African American, a substantial portion. Which makes me wonder what's going on that African Americans are failing more than white kids, even in this school, which is a pretty good racial mix. Now I'm not saying that all white kids are passing, but I'm saying there is enough of a trend here amongst black students that are failing that makes you wonder what's happening here. And I'm scared that looking even into this subject is just too prone to be called a racist right off the top...Because the question in and of itself will be deemed by people to be racist. So how do we overcome that problem where even asking the relevant questions can label you a racist? And I don't have a solution to this problem.²⁶

In stark contrast to American Studies, Mike's AP US History class contains only ten students, and one of them leaves for another school after my first week of observations. Of the remaining group, six are white and six are male. While I noted earlier that the class feels like a conversation, that conversation is quiet and orderly, with one student speaking at a time and no one's voice rising above a low conversational level (except for Mike's, which is usually above that level when he is teaching). When this class is "sidetracked", it is sidetracked by in-depth questions about the lesson material that require substantial discussion rather than in an exclusively off-topic way. Most importantly, however, the contributions to this class come almost exclusively from white males.

²⁶ It is important to note here that in this case Mike is probably right not to bring these issues up publicly; although he has the racial awareness necessary to observe current racial problems and to critique past injustice, many of his assessments of the problem focus on perceived cultural gaps or community problems (see below) rather than on oppressive conditions for people of color. We had conversations over the course of the study that alluded to these different beliefs about the underlying causes of issues Mike identifies, but this is not a topic his schedule permitted us to discuss in depth and thus is one that he is still working to conceptualize and fit into his worldview following our work during this study.

When I ask Mike about issues he would like to focus on during our work together, he suggests that he sees the differences between his AP class and his American Studies class as enormous but due largely to outside family and community issues that, at least as a third year teacher, he sees as unsolvable (although we do continue to talk about these issues over the course of the study). Instead, he hopes to focus on his AP class, and quickly names an issue that is apparent to me from my first day: female students and students of color effectively *never* participate in his AP class. Note that “effectively never” does not mean that the four white males speak two or three times as often as the other students; it means that on many days literally *every* comment, question, observation, and follow-up, of which there are many, comes from a white male, while the other five students combine to make zero total verbal contributions. The difference is incredibly striking, and very troubling to Mike, who notes that he feels particularly good about three students’ chances to do well on the AP test, and that there is a fourth student he sees as having moderate chances for success, but that these are *all* white males. That leaves *all* students who are not white males on the list of those about whose chances he is less sanguine.

Building the Partnership

By the time of our second interview, it is clear that so far Mike does not feel that he has benefited in any substantial way from the study. He suggests that one major reason for this may be his schedule this year: he spent the first five weeks of the semester moving, and hosted a national hand bell festival with attendees from most states east of the Mississippi less than two weeks later. He further suggests that he may be less receptive to feedback than other teachers: “Rightly or wrongly, I’m fairly arrogant and believe I can do no wrong and the sun shines out my tail end, type of thing, so from that regards I don’t really see much benefit to me either way on this.” Despite his thoughtful attempt to come up with reasons for our relative lack of progress

that do not place me in a critical light, however, it is certainly the case that there has been less movement on the issues Mike cares about than there might have been, which gives me plenty of opportunity to consider the benefits as well as the drawbacks of my approach to the study.

Although we are ultimately able to implement a social justice-focused activity that addresses Mike's concern about inequitable participation in his AP class and inspires him to engage in future activities along the same lines, another limiting factor in what we are able to accomplish over the semester might be the breadth of Mike's concerns. Unlike the other two teachers I work with during this study, Mike has a set of fairly disparate issues that he identifies as relevant: in addition to the participation problem in his AP class, he is concerned about student completion of homework and lack of studying for tests in his American Studies class (which, again, he sees at least in large part as a family support issue, as well as a class issue, that cannot be effectively solved from the classroom), he worries strongly about structural and policy issues at the district and state level that take his time away from his students and his teaching (in particular, he is currently going through a series of required activities and writings to upgrade his initial teaching license to a full license that seem to take up an inordinate amount of his time), and he is particularly worried about an attempt to introduce useful technology into the classroom by piloting wireless keyboards students can use to take notes directly onto their phones.

Static Practice

At the end of our work together, Mike attributes what he sees as a lack of noticeable change in his practice in part to this range of issues and his struggles, as a third-year teacher, to see them as anything but disparate problems that should be addressed one at a time:

If I did not constantly look at how to improve how I teach, I'd be a pretty poor teacher. Unfortunately, what I tend to do is I get something set and then I work on something else and leave the previous one in place while I work on something else, and then I go back and make changes. Problem is I've never gotten to that point where I can do that. I'm always 'what's the next thing?', and I'm always getting new things dumped on me, and I never had the opportunity to go back and work the previous stuff up like I want to. It's always throw everything into the next project... So we'll see what happens. It will be interesting next year whether I will get a chance to really dive back in and totally change what I'm doing. Eventually I'll get to that point because they'll run out of classes at Brandon they can throw at me, and at that point in time then I can really go back and start, okay, how can I modify this? How can I change this around totally?

There is another theme, however, that connects to this: the theme of overwork. Mike repeatedly describes the many responsibilities placed on him by the school that he sees as problematic. In his second interview, for example, he expresses concern that, particularly as a newer teacher, the work he is required to do as a teacher takes an untenable amount of time away from his ability to focus on his students and on his practice:

They're clogging us with all sorts of nonsense. And it's not just this local board. It's the [State] legislature and the [State] Department of Education. They want us to be super teachers, but they overload us with a bunch of nonsense, paperwork, busy work that truly does not indicate whether we're a good teacher or not. It's just who can do the paperwork the best and who can put on a show when it's required to put on a show, and it sucks time that we need to be looking at all the other issues, I mean, how to address individual students' needs. We're too busy just trying to keep our head above water fulfilling the

mandates of the state to pay attention to what's going on with these individual students. We're stretched to the limit, and God forbid you actually have other things, where you're trying to help other students outside of the school. For me, I find it very difficult to try and balance what I do here with what I do elsewhere for youth, and what I do for my own children.

In his third interview, he indicates that he continues to feel that way:

And we're literally- it's just too much. I mean, I'm trying to establish relationships with a kid, and that takes some time, so I use that time to work with the kids one on one or talk about things other than class topics. So some may view that as a waste of classroom time. I view it as a vital necessity to establish a rapport with a student, which I think helps with the learning process. And they keep talking about how that's an important thing and all that, but god, you can't tell it from their policies right now. It stinks of the lamp²⁷. Wide-eyed fantasies of these people who think you can fit all this stuff in in a school day, plus all the standardized testing they're pulled out of class for, plus all these other things we've got to do, and pep rallies, and this and that and the other thing. There's just no time. No time. Not like when we were kids.

While I did see some changes in Mike's approach and practice, then, he reported throughout our work together that he felt that far more could have been accomplished were he saddled with fewer non-teaching responsibilities, particularly given his status as an early career teacher.

²⁷ This is a favorite phrase of Mike's; he uses it to suggest that an idea seems overly academic and had not been vetted in practice.

Sudden Mindset Change

Our earliest attempt to address an issue comes following an informal conversation in which Mike expresses his worry that his students are not completing homework and that this relates to a lack of support. Following this conversation, I share Annette Lareau's article *Social Class Differences and Family-School Relationships*, which reframes what many present as an indictment of low-SES families as a mismatch between school expectations and families' cultural capital, and we meet later to discuss it. When we meet during his planning period a little over a week later, Mike initially disagrees with the article (and also raises concerns about its focus on class but not race, which he sees as very salient to his context), but he indicates that he read it quickly, and our conversation leads me to believe that he may have skipped over a key section of the conclusion, which turns out to be the case. Regardless of this reframing, though, Mike indicates at the time that he finds the article interesting but not particularly useful to his practice, even if it is somewhat impactful to his thinking.

By the time of our final interview, however, Mike has changed the way in which he sees this resource. When I ask him (more than two months after the meeting at which we discussed the piece) to identify actions that I took or that we took together during the study that were the most useful for him, he names this paper, suggesting that, while he does not see a direct impact on his practice, it has changed his thinking in a way that he sees as perhaps leading to future changes:

I think I would have to point to those studies that you presented to me, I think it was on the issue of parental involvement. How that's going to affect what I do, I don't know, but at least intellectually it was interesting, and you never know when one of those intellectually interesting things might affect you or affect something you do since we're

all moved, not by the big things so much sometimes; it's by the accumulation of the little things that make the big drastic changes in what we do.

A follow-up conversation after this article discussion in which I connect parents' differing senses of school to students' differing knowledge and experiences also leads Mike to make an attempt to incorporate student interests into his American Studies class: during a discussion of US intervention around the world that Mike connects to Kipling's "The White Man's Burden", he asks students whether they believe the US should be the world's police force and a discussion ensues. Particularly in American Studies, this is uncharacteristic, as students typically spend class time copying down Mike's notes, listening to him elaborate or show video clips to illustrate them, and occasionally asking questions. While I think that students make a valiant first attempt at sharing their opinions about this (students seem to agree almost universally that the US should not use its resources to support or protect other countries, even when pushed by Mike as to whether this is still true for a Holocaust-level event), Mike seems displeased with the result. On my way out he calls me over and says, "I tried to do what you said. It isn't going to work." I respond, "It's a start!" As this is my penultimate observation of this class, I do not have the opportunity to see whether or not Mike continues to work on incorporating student voices and discussion into class; he does not mention it during our final interview.

The Lincoln-Johnson Debate

When we meet in the second half of October to discuss possible issues to address, Mike notes that, as a third-year teacher, he's "just trying to keep my head above water" – that he'd love to start experimenting with his practice but probably won't feel comfortable enough to do that for another year or two. I tell him that if he's willing, I'm happy to support him in

attempting a small experiment this semester while I'm in his classroom, and to do all I can through observation and discussion to keep that from being overwhelming. He agrees and we discuss possibilities, with Mike indicating that he would prefer to try out his change in his AP class, his smallest class by far as well as one in which behavior management is not even remotely an issue.

Given the concerns Mike has expressed (concerns that my observations suggest are very appropriate) about the conversational power relationships in his AP class, I suggest planning a 10-15 minute discussion about an issue covered in the AP curriculum, a tactic that would have been fairly similar to the just-described attempt in Mike's American Studies class. Given the likelihood that this discussion would still be dominated by the same minority of students, however, we ultimately decide to frame this activity as an organized debate to ensure relatively equal student speaking time; I note that students do express opinions about course material, but that due to the need to cover immense amounts of content these opinions do not have time to evolve into full discussions or debates. However, since critical thinking skills and the ability to solidly support arguments are necessary to write successful essays on the AP US History test, this can be viewed as being as relevant to success on that exam as content knowledge. Mike likes the idea and suggests that the debate be in pairs, so that everyone gets one equal chance to participate, and that students not be allowed to select a side but rather be assigned to one to ensure that they are able to make arguments to support either side of an issue.

The only remaining question is the topic, something Mike isn't sure about. I offer to look over his upcoming slides and pass along some suggestions, and later that day I head home to do just that. In an effort to more explicitly link this debate to issues of social justice (and hopefully to issues that students feel passionate about), I link each suggested historical issue to a modern

issue: a debate about the impact of Lincoln's death on attempts at reconstruction of the South might be connected to the ways in which the US is working to end more modern conflicts, the institution of racist Jim Crow practices in the South following the end of reconstruction can be pretty clearly linked to persistent racial inequalities in the United States today, and the election of post-war black congressmen in the South despite there being no black congressmen elected in the North until 1929 can be linked to questions about affirmative action and whether people would continue to tend to engage in racist practices without it. A week and a half later, Mike unveils his debate assignment, in which pairs of students will debate for two minutes on the following question: was Lincoln's death a blow to the former Confederate states, or would the same things have happened regardless of who was president?

Mike presents the following slide:

Debate

- Class divides into two teams
- Question – Was Lincoln's death a blow to the former Confederate states or would the same things have happened regardless of who was president?
- Will have Nov. 7th to organize
- Debate = November 11
 - Two people from each group debate each other for 2 minutes
 - Next two group members debate and so on.
- Graded upon strength of argument + preparation

Since scheduling issues and the looming Thanksgiving break give Mike some concerns about completing all necessary notes in time, the debate is ultimately delayed until close to Thanksgiving. On the Monday prior, Mike announces that the debate will be the next day and that students will have the final 25 minutes of class to prepare for it. He splits students up into two groups, of four and five students, respectively, based on their location in the room (although he rejects one student's request that the smaller team get me). Mike then allows the smaller team

to decide whether they will be arguing the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ side; in response to a complaint from a student in the larger group, which is forced to argue ‘no’ despite what appears to be a general consensus in both groups that the ‘yes’ argument is more straightforward, Mike suggests that the ability to argue both sides of an issue is a key ability in AP US History and in life, asking “If you don’t know what you stand for and why you stand for it, how do you know it’s what you stand for?”

One student, a white female who has spoken only a couple of times since I began my observations, responds particularly quickly to this assignment; she chats and jokes with Mike and takes a leadership position in helping her group to prepare. Mike walks around the room encouraging students and giving them tips on debate prep: “How do you prove it? What information do you need to find to prove this?” “I don’t give two farts in the wind what you believe. What you believe does not matter. What can you prove?” “This is the problem with a debate; if you can’t argue the counter, then you don’t even know what you believe.” There is a stark difference between the two groups as far as attention given to this preparation; the group being “led” by the white female spends the full time discussing and planning, while the other group interacts only occasionally, with one black female appearing to quietly look for information in her book while the others seem somewhat off-task. As students leave, Mike clarifies the debate structure: for each pair of debaters, one student will have two minutes to state his case, after which the second will get 2:30 for rebuttal. The first student will end with thirty additional seconds to counter. Mike informs students that they will have a few minutes to finish getting organized at the beginning of tomorrow’s class.

In an extremely atypical occurrence, two of the class’s nine students are absent the following day, and both are on the same team, leaving that group with only two students. Mike

initially tells students that he will fill in on the smaller team, but students offer as a counter-suggestion the option for Mike to simply be the permanent debater on the ‘no’ side while all seven students take turns arguing ‘yes’ with him. Mike agrees, but reluctantly, and tells students “I do not like this. The reason I don’t like this is it’s not fair to all of you and the reasons we did this are so you can sharpen your debating skills.” An additional adjustment is made when the first student seems to struggle with the amount of time he is given, at which point Mike agrees to drop the times to 1:00, 1:30, and :30 rather than 2:00, 2:30, and :30.

Many students seem to struggle with their arguments, although several make valiant attempts to challenge Mike despite the fact that as a former lawyer and skilled debater he is effectively unbeatable. Additionally, a discussion about Jackson, Lincoln, and the ‘imperial’ presidency follows the debate, and both black students take part (there is a third black student in Mike’s class, but he is absent today). I have not heard more than one student of color speak during a single class period since my observations began, so this is very striking. The excellent participation on the part of one of the two white female students has also already been noted, meaning that this debate drew substantive contributions from three of the five students who were not white males (with one of the remaining two absent that day), an exciting result!

In our meeting immediately following the debate, Mike tells me that he “wasn’t thrilled” with the results, but that things could certainly have gone worse, ultimately settling on “content” to describe his feelings. He appears very excited, however, about future debate possibilities, suggesting that while students were simply unfamiliar with how the debate would work, which made it difficult for the ultimate result to be anything but “garbage”, they would know for next time, and next time would be soon. Mike is already thinking about holding another debate on bimetallism as soon as the next week or two, he tells me. He also suggests that this experience

has helped him to realize that he has been too focused on content due to his worry that students are “woefully underprepared” for the AP History test and that he now sees argumentation skills as a key skill for students to acquire and hopes to include many debates in the curriculum next year. Later in the month he tells me that he now intends to start off the following year with a debate.

In a subsequent meeting, Mike and I are again talking about incorporating student interests and ideas into his American Studies class. Given his positive sense of the many opportunities provided by the debate setup, I suggest that this could again be used to respond to this issue. In this case, however, rather than a content issue the debate might focus on, for example, why students do or do not see learning history as relevant or important. Mike tells me that he is unsure if this class can handle a debate, but that he will think about it. A few days later, I send him an email suggesting possible structures for such a debate, such as having students select a side of the room based on their opinions of the accuracy of a series of statements such as “my history class touches on things that relate to issues I care about” and “learning history is relevant to my life outside of school in some way” and then debating in teams given their opinions on the veracity of those statements, asking students to fill in missing words in sentences and then to argue for why their choice is appropriate (such as “the most relevant thing I have learned so far this semester is _____” or “periods of history that help me better understand the events of today include _____”), or perhaps to split students up into small groups and asking them to have a two-on-two debate rather than to risk what Mike worried would be distractions stemming from a whole-group activity.

As this conversation did not begin until the beginning of December following the debate in Mike’s AP class, and as exams started only a week after my follow-up email, Mike did not

ultimately feel that he had enough time to work such a debate in during the study. However, he did indicate to me that he had become more interested in the idea and hoped to make an attempt at an American Studies debate in the following semester. I tell him to keep me posted, and assure him that the end of the study does not represent the end of our partnership if he is looking for someone with whom he can talk through ideas. He tells me that he will give it serious thought.

Tech Support

Mike's final issue of concern is on a much smaller scale than the other two, but is nonetheless one that is important to him and about which we talk substantially. Note-taking requirements in Mike's class had always been for students to hand write all of the notes he presents on his slides and then to turn these in for credit (I describe a former student's reminiscences about this process below). Prior to this year, however, Mike had come to the conclusion that what he saw as students' penchant for acquiring expensive and multifunctional phones could provide a simpler and faster way for these notes to be taken. He thus convinced the principal to buy a class set of wireless keyboards that students could connect to their phones for the purpose of notetaking. In fact, I am quite confused by this upon entering Mike's room for my first observation, when every student in the class appears to be playing with a phone and occasionally typing frantically on keyboards attached to nothing.

In our second interview, Mike sets up his thinking around the keyboards and their position as a social justice issue due to inequitable access to resources among his students:

Well one thing I've tried to experiment with this year, and I'm finding I have had very limited success with this, is to incorporate those keyboards. A lot of students in a lot of other schools are using tablets, and using Bluetooth keyboards to type their notes with

and things like that, which helps prepare them for college, which- I don't know if your experience has been similar to mine, but every time I walk into a college classroom right now everybody's on some type of laptop. It's a universal. These students don't have access to that technology, or very few do. They've sunk all their money into their phones. So I was thinking "hey, let's use these keyboards and try and incorporate keyboards into the classroom as a way to try and reach parity with some of the other school districts that have the higher technology capabilities". I have not been impressed with my results so far.

Mike reports that his concerns revolve around the fact that the introduction of the keyboards has not caused grades to go up in his American Studies classes. He notes that grades went down during his second year, but that this was due to him switching to "cluster kids" a group of students deemed by the school to be in particular need of support in a subject and who are thus put into "clusters" of the same course that that have the same effect as block scheduling. This year, however, grades are similarly low despite the fact that Mike is no longer teaching the "cluster kids", and he worries that the switch to the wireless keyboards may somehow have caused students to be less invested in or attentive to their note taking.

Mike tells me by the middle of the semester that he already has a plan for testing this hypothesis. He will simply take the keyboards away for the upcoming unit and require students to take handwritten notes again, and will then compare the average test grades for his classes to the average test grades in the previous unit. I suggest an alternate approach that relates this concern to our discussions of incorporating student interests and student voices, as well one that would enable additional data analysis to provide evidence about the keyboards: simply asking students, perhaps with a co-designed survey, to report back on their experience with the

keyboards, their benefits and drawbacks, and whether students find them to be ultimately useful. Mike likes this idea and eventually decides to do both, first taking the keyboards away for an upcoming unit and then giving students a post-unit survey that asks for their opinions of the keyboards. However, the current unit is long and does not end almost until the end of the semester. Thus, Mike is only beginning to take the keyboards away when my study ends. I tell him, as with the American Studies discussion, that he is more than welcome, in fact encouraged, to contact me when he plans to create the survey, and that I will be happy to help to co-develop that as well as to analyze the data for him particularly given his busy schedule. As with the American Studies discussion, Mike tells me that he hopes to do that.

Building Relationships

Particularly given my framing of Mike as a former lawyer who lectures forcefully and with gusto about historical events he is unafraid to share his opinions on, one might develop an image of a classroom tyrant too focused on content to care for his students. This, however, is an extremely inaccurate picture, due to one major aspect of Mike's interactions with his classes: he is incredibly honest about himself as both a teacher and person, and shares his life with his students in a way that appears to have built real relationships and respect among them. In our initial interview, he sets up his views toward his classes:

I enjoy working with my students. I enjoy talking to them, spending time with them. In the end, I think that's where we have to end up to solve these problems, is we have to find a way to make more relationships. We have to connect more, be it on a community level, be it on a private level...it's, the only way to solve these problems is through communication, dialogue, and personal relationships more than anything else.

Mike continues to talk in this way throughout the study (a second example is mentioned above, when he suggests that being overloaded with non-instructional work prevents him from forming the relationships he wants with his students before noting that “I view it as a vital necessity to establish a rapport with a student, which I think helps with the learning process”), and his actions in the classroom bear out this philosophy. As soon as my observations begin, I notice that students seem to treat Mike as more than just a teacher – several of his AP students (whose class takes place immediately after lunch) eat lunch in his room, where they sometimes sit quietly, sometimes chat, and sometimes watch videos or investigate questions together. Further, students stop by after class to chat briefly, and one student in particular does this at such length that Mike routinely reminds him that he needs to get to class. Following one class, a student Mike had as a sophomore who is now a senior stops by to say hello. He says, “I remember I used to sit right there...” and asks Mike if he still uses Power Point notes with video links, which he indicates that he does. “Do you still make kids rewrite all those notes?” No, Mike tells him, now they have Bluetooth keyboards connected to their phones and everything is typed. The student marvels at this and says, “I miss being in your class.” Mike asks, with evident hope, “Am I going to get to see you again next semester?” No, the student tells him. All of his social studies credits are completed. Mike responds that, regardless, he’ll be there to see him graduate, dressed in his full law regalia. The student smiles and heads out of the room.

On a separate occasion, a student is chatting with Mike about family trouble before the bell rings. Mike says, “Give your mom a break; she’s better than you think.” He then shares part of his own family history – when he was a freshman, his dad was caught cheating on his mom and things were never the same. The student nods and smiles. It seems that something about Mike makes him easy for students to talk to, and I think his claim in my interview is right – he

really does enjoy talking to his students and spending time with them, and it shows. He really laughs at their jokes, and they really laugh at his. He really wants to answer their questions, not because he loves history, but because he wants them to love it. At the same time, he doesn't mind mocking and teasing them mercilessly (nor they him – his baldness has been a topic of conversation in class almost as often as Abraham Lincoln). Mike asks a student, “You have a girlfriend? Do you have her chained up in the basement?” which somehow results in genuine laughter from the student rather than the expected horrified outburst, and it occurs to me that there must be a real relationship there. At another time he tells a student with a broken arm who has just attempted to wow him with a story, “Do you really want to impress me? Clap.”

In this way, Mike's classroom presents a particularly interesting picture. While there is a range of research that focuses in differing senses on the ways in which increased levels of discussion and participation among students in class can lead to improved relationships, Mike is working to do this in the reverse order. Forming strong relationships with students, it seems, is something that has done since his teaching career began and something that he takes as a necessary first step before teaching can take place. Instead, his goal is to work in opportunities for students to have the sorts of helpful and personal interactions in class that they already have with him. In fact, even the students in Mike's AP US History class whom I almost never hear speak have chatted with Mike about their personal lives within my hearing on multiple occasions (in fact, I feel fairly confident in making the claim that I heard those five students in combination make *more* comments to Mike in the few minutes before or after class than they made in class during this study). This, then, presented Mike with a somewhat different problem than may be common for teachers: how can one leverage personal relationships with students in such a way as to enable and encourage them to share their ideas and opinions equitably in class?

Assessing Progress

As my work with Mike was ending, I again asked myself, as I had on several past occasions, whether I had been an effective partner for him during this study. Mike differed from the other two teachers with whom I worked in several notable ways. First, he saw many of the social justice issues he identified in our interviews as unsolvable, or at the very least as too expansive to address in any real way. In our final interview, he answered a question about issues we did not address that he would have liked to address:

I really can't think of anything. I mean, when you're dealing with an issue like what we're talking about, social justice in education and all that kind of stuff, the question is never what did we address; the question is always what did we not address. We're taking huge gallon jugs out of the ocean but that still leaves a huge ocean behind. And we can never address all the issues that are involved. I mean, you just pick one topic, just one topic, and the amount of information will fill the Pacific. You pick another topic, that'll fill the Atlantic. You- you know, off we go. There are plenty of oceans out there.

This comment was made in spite of the fact that he had just given a less-than-enthusiastic response to my question about whether he felt he had benefited from our work together in the study:

Some. As I alluded to previously, it did make me more aware in my lesson planning of social justice issues. Whenever you're put under the microscope, the objects being observed is going to change, as it will...I think more than anything it made me more conscious of it in my teaching but it has not radically changed what I do. There's no one element I can look to in my teaching and go, "I have totally changed this because of this

study.” All I can say is “Yeah, it’s just it has made me more conscious of the issue, which has subtly changed some things, but not to a huge extent.”

As in our second interview, he went on to suggest that another reason for this may simply be that he is not the sort of person who changes easily:

For good or for ill, I am who I am and I generally don’t change who I am, or at least I try not to change who I am because I’m under observation or anything like that. Oftentimes what happens is I will forget I’m being observed in the middle of the lesson, and I just am who I am and I teach how I teach and that’s all there is to it. Whether that’s a good thing or a bad thing, at least when you observe me you know you’re getting exactly what’s going on. You’re not getting a spiffed up version of it.

In the end, then, it seems that Mike ultimately saw a combination of factors, including some elements of rigidity in his practice (which, based on earlier suggestions, may have been related to his status as a new teacher still learning about teaching more generally) along with his view of social justice issues as massive, almost endless, and thus extremely difficult to impact, as making our work together more difficult. At the same time, I wonder if the fact that Mike’s ideas about education were somewhat more different from my own than were the ideas of the other two teachers with whom I worked kept my suggestions and contributions during our discussions relatively limited, and in a sense somewhat tame, as a way to avoid an inadvertent disagreement or the possibility of causing frustration. Ultimately, I find myself coming down on the side of the outside factors that took so much of Mike’s time as the biggest challenge to our partnership; between the fact that he moved into a new house partway through the semester, the national handbell festival he organized and put on in November, and the additional work he was required to do to achieve permanent licensure as a new teacher, among other demands, he simply did not

have enough time to think much about my study (and told me so explicitly on multiple occasions), which in my opinion prevented our plans from coming to complete fruition by December.

Nonetheless, Mike did make changes and design activities that focused on the social justice ideas he identified as important over the course of the study. This is particularly impressive in one's third year of teaching, at which point many large sample studies would not even include a teacher's responses due to the assumption that her/his ideas have not yet fully developed. Even as a relative novice, and even during an incredibly busy three months, Mike was still able to institute a couple of changes in his classes, and perhaps more importantly, to build a foundation that can be used to design and implement a larger and more substantive number of further activities in future semesters. Ultimately, I found myself reflecting after our final interview, that was the question: was our work together a small taste of what is to come in Mike's practice as he continues to innovate with a focus on social justice, or was it a discrete experience that will remain an anomaly without follow-through? I do not know the answer to that question, although I see Mike's focus on relationship building and obvious care for his students as a key aspect of his teaching style that may lead him to continue in this work with a goal of supporting all of his students in achieving success and enjoying the subject he loves.

Chapter 6: Portrait III (Gordon Keller)

Keeping Track

Gordon Keller's AP Government class has a staggering 49 students, but the most I have ever seen in his classroom at one time is 12. No, Gordon doesn't teach in a school beset by truancy issues so drastic he is unable to convince even a quarter of his AP students to show up on a given day; in fact, he often has nearly perfect attendance. The students are there all right, their faces tiny and far away on screens attached to the walls. Gordon's AP Government class is a distance learning class, attended not only by students at his home base of Stoppard High School, but also by students at three other city high schools in classrooms monitored by paraprofessionals. At the beginning of each class, he checks in – "Miller, how you doing? Burns, how are you? Wilde, how are my bulldogs? Beautiful!" Each of these rooms, like Gordon's own, has connected microphones that students can use to project their voices over the network – he is constantly reminding his students at Stoppard, who far more frequently have the benefit of in-person interaction with their teacher, to get "on mic" to ask questions or make comments; otherwise, the other students won't be able to hear them.

The system sounds like a technological wonder, but by the time of my first observation the only thing we're wondering is when it will be fully functional. Despite the fact that it is already the second half of September, my initial visit to Gordon's class is also the first day that things are set up enough for students to sign up for Google Classroom, the platform they will use for assignments and grades, after the entire system has been continuously down for the first two

and a half weeks of school. About fifteen minutes into the forty-seven minute period, Gordon asks students to use their Carteret Public Schools email accounts to set this up, but it turns out that students at Miller and Wilde have never used the system before and need to be walked through it, only for Gordon to discover that they don't have the proper access codes, which they were supposed to get back in August. It looks like there will be no Google Classroom setup today either. In the midst of the technical difficulties, Gordon begins a class discussion with his students at Stoppard – what are the ways the executive branch can check legislative power?

Gordon's combination of quick thinking and resigned frustration make it clear that this is not his first rodeo as far as technical difficulties go. In our initial interview, he explains that in the purpose of Carteret's distance learning program is to bring "high quality instruction" to "our most disadvantaged high schools": those in which high levels of teacher turnover prevent consistent AP instruction from taking place. The system, however, is not kept up to date by the district, is overseen by underpaid technicians whom Gordon sees as perhaps less qualified than those who can make more money elsewhere, and suffers from a bureaucratic slowness that, for example, results in a more than two month wait for district authorization to download a free and Google-authorized plugin for online testing necessary to Gordon's class assessment structure. He goes on to tell me in our first interview that, after (up to that point) twenty-two days of the system not working, "I'm MacGyvering ways to teach these kids."

The system leaves Gordon not only a MacGyver, but a Phileas Fogg as well – before the video setup finally gets up and running toward the end of September, Gordon spends many of his days driving from Stoppard to the other three schools his AP students attend, the farthest of which is 25-30 minutes away, to teach rotating cohorts of students. He does this while still teaching a full schedule at Stoppard ranging from World War II History to Economics during the

other periods of the day. Such a schedule would exhaust anyone, but Gordon Keller is not just anyone. At 41 years old, he has been diagnosed with Stage IV cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy and taking an experimental drug without which he tells me he would no longer be alive. A blood clot left untreated while Gordon was kept waiting in a doctor's office has made his favorite hobby, running, impossible, and means that even quick walking now causes him to become winded. Yet in all of our conversations Gordon's health is a side note; his concern is fixed squarely on his students' learning. At one point he tells his class at Stoppard that the faulty system that prevents class from running smoothly makes him angrier than his cancer does, and it is clear that, at least in that moment, he means it.

Gordon the Genuine

When Gordon's Economics class ends with extra time remaining, he and his students play a game called 'ask me anything', the simple premise of which is that students ask him any questions they have, and he answers them honestly. The first time he announces a round in my hearing, I am in utter disbelief; as someone who spent several years teaching high schoolers himself, this is something I feel that I would never, ever, *ever* have suggested, ever, under any circumstances, to a group of students. Yet Gordon's students ask entirely reasonable questions – *What war would you least have wanted to have fought in? What do you think education will be like in 50 years? Did we have any reason to go into Vietnam?* It is clear that they have played this game before. Just as clear is that these students (and hints from both the class and from Gordon suggest that these are students who may not be fully appreciated by other teachers or positioned as the strongest behaviorally or academically in other classes) see Gordon as someone whose opinions and ideas they value and respect, and that they do not wish to take this interaction as an opening for anything but legitimate engagement. I hear Gordon refuse to answer

only one question in the several rounds of this game I witness, and it is when a student asks him who his least favorite colleague is and Gordon informs the class that he will not speak ill of other teachers. He adds, however, that he finds his current group of social studies co-teachers to be the best set of colleagues he has ever had. From my desk in the back, I believe him.

Given the sentiment that I experience in Gordon's classes and the closeness I see in the dynamics between teacher and students, whether in a packed economics class upstairs or a long-distance conversation spread out over the city of Carteret in the large and modern distance learning classroom (Gordon moves between rooms during the day and has no classroom of his own), it is not surprising to me that Gordon repeatedly tells me that one of the most pressing social justice issues in society is a lack of community. When I ask him how he sees Stoppard as influencing his students, he talks about making Christmas baskets, the school's century-long traditional Memorial Day program, and their three-word motto – loyalty, tradition, service. He boasts that Stoppard's principal is a graduate of the school, as six of its ten principals have been in its 103-year history. He tells me proudly of the community efforts of Carteret's superintendent, who has made pride in the district a signature focus. I see no contradiction in Gordon's talk about community; the way in which he positions the school as a part of the community of the district and city, and his classroom within the community of the school, and the way he treats his classes as members of a smaller but similarly important shared community, demonstrate a consistent belief that social justice work is all about building community. Gordon originally transferred to Stoppard because of its strong sense of community, he tells me. In our initial forty-five minute interview, he mentions community twenty-one different times.

Gordon's Community

Of the three teachers I worked with during this study, the one whose focus can be most easily summarized by a single word is Gordon, and that word is unquestionably 'community'. This certainly should not be understood to mean that Gordon only cared about a single *issue*, which is absolutely not the case; during our discussions, Gordon's talk about education covers an enormous range of topics and clearly reflects years of thoughtful consideration of his work as an educator. His focus on community, however, is what connects all of these many and various issues and ideas into a consistent view of the world of schooling that is reflected in the questions he asks, the concerns he has, and the choices he makes in order to respond to them.

Gordon tells me repeatedly that there is something special about the community of Carteret's East side, where Stoppard is located. Other than Stoppard's hundred-year traditions and the fact that two thirds of its principals have also been Stoppard graduates, he suggests that his students feel a closeness with one another and a collective mistrust of outsiders. In our second interview, he calls it "a crust," telling me that while he sees that sort of sentiment as something present in many high-poverty environments, "here on the East side where it's a really insular community, I think you find that mistrust of outsiders is even more intense here." In his final interview, he says something very similar, this time describing his students as "Russian nesting dolls":

There's a lot inside these kids. I guess you could use an onion as the same metaphor, but there's just so many layers of complexity to every one of these kids, no matter what their race or gender orientation. I mean, they're really complex individuals, and I think the status of this community contributes to that greatly. Just the, I don't know, the nature of the East side. There's something very different about this part of town, and I don't feel

like I'm saying that- I spent longer on the other side of town than I did here, and I never saw the things I see here, where there's a chip on the shoulder. There's a huge, like, community-wide- anybody whose family has lived over here for more than 20 years. There's a big chip on the shoulder over here, and that makes these kids just different in a lot of ways.

Gordon is quick to point out, though, that he is not describing his students this way as a critique. Instead, he suggests that these students are part of a community tradition that has itself remained consistent for a hundred years:

I'm realizing that those guys in the 40s and 30s, especially the East side boys vs. the West side boys, when I get these kids a guy that grew up in their neighborhood- the neighborhoods in this town have not changed. The West side is still wealthier, the East side is still poorer, the East side has always been immigrants, the West side has always been well-established...the station in life of an East sider 20, 40, 60, 80 years ago, is almost exactly the same station in life an East sider has today.

Maybe more importantly for his students today, Gordon makes it clear that the crust he describes is simply that – a crust – and does not represent the true qualities present in his classroom:

I guess what I would say today is that the most important thing to know about these kids is that – and this sounds so lame – but these are really good kids, and how I mean that is that these are kids with good hearts, and these are by and large not lazy kids. These are not thugs and goons. These are good kids.

Despite Gordon's continual and detailed discussions of the sense of community across Carteret's East side and in Stoppard in particular, I find myself questioning at times during the

study whether Gordon, who has told me that he himself grew up in a small town with a close-knit community and that he moved from Miller, his previous school, to Stoppard in large part because he appreciated its community feel, might be overemphasizing the relevance of community to *others* in the area because of the importance of this idea to *him*. I fully appreciate the power of hundred-year traditions, historically consistent economic and social status, and local leadership by local people, but I can't help wondering if others in Stoppard and East Carteret would explain their identities in similar ways, or if this is just Gordon's way of analyzing particular social phenomena.

Ultimately, I discover that this is just one more example of the ways in which teachers' deep knowledge of their own contexts leads to insights that a researcher entering as an outsider, despite training in the pursuit of critical understanding of relationships, can simply never hope to uncover without asking and trusting. In a final interview with Robin Hatcher, the principal of Brandon High School, after the study has ended, I ask Robin about her sense of Brandon's own school community. She begins to tell me that she felt a sense of community as an elementary school principal but does not see it at the high school level before stopping to correct herself. She does not have this sense at *Brandon*, but *Stoppard*, where Gordon teaches, is well-known for this:

I think there's less once you get to a high school- although, you hear about Stoppard High School on the East Side being a very stable community, and their traditions at Stoppard High School still carries on today, hundred year traditions. So I see that, and I am in awe that their alumni groups and things like that still hold these time-honored traditions year in and year out. So there's a pocket, I think, that has an extreme strong sense of community.

Worth noting is that Brandon has its own AP Government program (taught, in fact, by Erin Liang), and that Brandon students are not part of Gordon's distance learning class. Stoppard's community, as it turns out, is just extremely well-known.

Making the Change

Given Gordon's focus, it is perhaps not surprising that the areas of social justice focus he suggests for our work together relate to aspects of his framing of the concept of community. In our first meeting, he suggests two issues of concern: first, that he wants students to understand that major policy and cultural changes in the United States, such as the civil rights movement, ultimately stem from public action rather than from movements by elites, and second that he has concerns, particularly in the hostile climate of the then-ongoing presidential election, that his students are losing the ability to listen respectfully to the opinions of those who disagree with them (he tells me that he believes that 95% of his students see supporters of Donald Trump as "the devil"). He sees these issues as interrelated in that respectfully discussing differences is necessary to build a cooperative community, and cooperative community action, rather than lightning bolts from on high, are responsible for social progress and development in the United States, but tells me that he is unsure of how to get students to appreciate either of these important concepts.

To address the issue of supporting students in seeing themselves as agents of social change, I pass along a section of Meira Levinson's *No Citizen Left Behind* (one also given to Erin Liang) dealing with supporting students in seeing change as the result of small actions by community leaders and role models rather than by national heroes. In our second interview, Gordon tells me that this reading has had an enormous impact on him:

I don't want to give it a TV infomercial testimonial like 'that changed my life', but it changed the way that I look at my practice. That's the number one, out of anything, everything, that we've done, that was the thing that really kind of hit me over the head, and that was incredibly useful to me.

Gordon draws on this reading at two levels. First, he begins to consider ways in which he can discuss the work of community members and other local actors, something he already does for his World War II class, in his AP Government and Economics classes. Second, he tells me that he has latched onto the idea, taken from the reading, of modeling democratic practices at all levels, and that he has begun to reconsider the ways in which he can support students in participating in democratic processes by making his classroom more democratic.

He begins with a small change – discussing and modeling excellent test behavior immediately prior to passing a test out to his Economics class, which he sees as a method of keeping students informed of expectations in a way that enables them to participate fully in class rather than simply expecting that students will understand what those expectations are. He announces that since it is impossible for all students to finish at exactly the same minute and second, some will be done before others. He then tells students that he will model what he does not want to see students who are finished doing. He squeezes himself into a desk at the front and begins twisting around while craning his neck and loudly calling out, "Who's still working? Is anyone still working?" He begs students not to be "the periscope" of the class and assures them that he will announce when all tests have been completed. This works extremely well; Gordon and I agree that the students' test behavior was impeccable. In a follow-up meeting later that day, Gordon tells me that in the past he had simply assumed that students knew what proper test behavior was and then censured students who did not follow his idea of what that behavior

looked like, but that after the Levinson reading he determined that this put students whose sense of appropriate test taking matched his at an advantage while failing to teach other students anything but the fact that there were arbitrary and unspoken rules in his class.

In order to address Gordon's second issue, producing students who are willing and able to listen to opinions they disagree with rather than immediately shutting down, I suggest that another sort of modeling work can place the method of addressing this concern very much in line with that of the previous one. Specifically, I recommend giving students practice reporting back on opinions that they disagree with, but with a gradual increase in the importance of the issues, from relatively painless dissent about things like favorite brands or foods to somewhat more meaningful conversations about, for example, favorite sports teams, followed by a gradual transition into issues Gordon suggests are important to students but on which there is class disagreement, such as gay rights. In each case, students would be tasked with reporting back on the opinions of someone who disagrees with them on that issue in a straightforward and non-judgmental way, and this would be immediately followed each time by an explicit discussion of how it felt to listen to opinions with which one did not agree.

If these practice sessions are effective, I suggest, the ultimate goal would then be for students to complete an assignment in which they interview someone outside of class who disagrees with them on major political issues and again work to report back on those beliefs without judgment. We decide to make Gordon's AP Government class the focus of this series of assignments; Gordon is particularly intrigued as to how the distance learning environment will affect dynamics, and we plan to pay close attention to this, beginning with the discussions of the most trivial issues, to ensure that students feel comfortable even if Gordon is not physically present.

Local Links

Despite Gordon's desire to increase the local relevance of his teaching, making material relevant to students is already something he does exceptionally well. In my observations of both his AP Government and Economics class, it seems to me that every concept and idea Gordon addresses is elegantly connected to students' experiences and contextualized within their world. In his Government class, public referenda are linked to a relatively recent attempted recall of Carteret's mayor. Grants-in-aid are "grandma giving you a hundred bucks at Christmas" while categorical grants are "grandma giving you a TJ Maxx gift card" and block grants "are more like an Amazon gift card, although I don't want to stretch the metaphor too far". The fifth amendment is linked to a discussion of appropriate moves for students to take if they believe they are under suspicion of a crime, the sixth amendment is related to the breaking up of underage parties by police, and the eleventh is connected to the recent override by Congress of then-president Obama's (ultimately overridden) veto of the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act enabling families of private citizens killed on September 11th, 2001 to sue the government of Saudi Arabia. A discussion of gerrymandering becomes an online investigation into the students' own oddly-shaped congressional district and the implications of the people and places the district contains and does not contain. At the start of his unit on civil liberties, Gordon asks students to analyze the legal issues at play in the second verse of Jay-Z's *99 Problems* (despite telling students that "I'd be lying if I said that was my favorite song, because I'm not a rap guy. I'm a rhythm vacuum."), which outlines a discussion with a police officer about a vehicle search. In all cases, I observe students immediately identifying with Gordon's links and quickly entering a conversation that relates both to their own experiences and to the concept at hand.

In Gordon's Economics class, meanwhile, each unit is capped with a movie to be analyzed through a particular lens: students discuss the impact of capital in the 1971 *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, types of business partnerships and the advantages and disadvantages of each in David Fincher's *The Social Network*, the difference between cost and value in the baseball biopic *Moneyball*, poverty and capitalism in the Will Smith film *The Pursuit of Happyness*, and the salience of the banking industry in the recent recession film *The Big Short*. Fringe benefits manifest in a discussion of Gordon's father's job working in a gas station. The primary process in presidential elections is likened to the AFC and NFC determining champions to compete in the Super Bowl. In both classes, Gordon is the rare teacher who does not receive student questions about why material is important to know; this information is woven into his teaching in a way that presents very clear arguments for why this is the case.

Gordon's work to make his teaching relevant for students, however, goes beyond surface analogies and popular media. In the same way that he shares stories and information about himself with students without artifice, he also shares his excitement about politics, government, and the functioning of society. When students nail a complicated answer, he will bite his lip and pump his fist in the air, or yell "yesss!!" He constantly shares in-my-own-words wisdom relating to his subject: "Federal charges ain't something you want hanging around your neck, because you're going to big boy jail"; the second amendment "doesn't mean what its supporters think it means and also doesn't mean what its detractors think it means"; "the United States is not a country ruled by men and women; it is a country ruled by law."; we have a responsibility "to soften the hard parts of capitalism."

Gordon also routinely rejects a common expectation among many, that students are responsible for not knowing particular information, often by assigning himself responsibility for

students' ability to respond to question he asks while teaching. After two schools (in his AP class) are unable to respond to a question about Jacksonian Democrats, he makes it clear that students are not to blame for this: "Okay, guys. I've got to reteach and you've got to relearn, and that's not a problem." Following a complete silence after a different question, he says, "Holy cats. Now I know I ask questions wrong because I know you guys know the answer." He also places emphasis on thinking rather than simply regurgitating information; when a girl is unable to define malapportionment, he walks her through the process of reasoning it out: "Let's be intelligent people who can BS their way out of this. What does *mal-* mean...?"

This approach extends beyond Gordon's own practice and student interactions to the challenging of assumptions and stereotypes about groups of people in US society as well. In one class, Gordon tells students that technically "the economy is based on how we feel" because public outlook can so strongly impact the stock market, but that "how we feel" is still usually based on real things rather than on entirely arbitrary ones. A girl yells out, "Not if you're a female!" Gordon begins to make a joke – that's something she can say, but if he said so it would get him in trouble. Suddenly, though, he stops himself, becomes serious, and disagrees. He's sure, he tells her, that she has met enough guys to know that what she said isn't true and that men have arbitrary emotions just as often as women. The student decides she agrees, and the conversation switches from a throwaway joke with a tinge of sexism to a thoughtful exchange about gender. In another instance, students are discussing a chapter in the book when a student of color raises a concern about the way in which the book has addressed voting patterns by race. Gordon immediately agrees with her, telling students that claiming that black people don't vote as frequently as white people is "a bold-faced lie" when education is taken into account. He then challenges students to think about how educational differences manifest in US society, asking

“Does our system do a fair or equitable job of educating black people?” After a pause, he adds, “If this is taking you more than a second, you haven’t been paying attention for the last sixteen years of your lives.” He notes that “a lot of not nice people” like to bring out such unexamined statistics to make negative claims about black Americans’ civic participation, which, he concludes, is “not fair.”

In a discussion with his Economics class, Gordon takes issue when he asks students how to become “a winner” in capitalism and one responds that you should “make smart choices.” He asks students whether it is possible to be a winner in capitalism *without* making smart choices, and another student responds “be related to people.” Gordon concurs emphatically, telling students that he calls being born with wealthy relatives “winning the genetic lottery.” In a different discussion, Gordon suggests that the election of Barack Obama made the United States seem (and feel) less racist than it actually is, and that it is economic problems that occurred on Republicans’ watch rather than a more accepting populace that resulted in the election of our first black president. He asks, “Do we all agree that there’s institutional racism in America?”, discusses the immense challenges facing the country when Obama defeated John McCain, and cites the 2008 post-election headline from satirical magazine *The Onion*: “Black Man Given Nation’s Worst Job.”

A Framework for Social Justice

In our first interview, Gordon tells me that his religion deeply influences his sense of social justice:

So any definition I come at is going to be somewhat descendent of the fact that I am Catholic. I’m a fairly progressive Catholic, and, kind of, the Catholic teaching on social

justice is where I come from. So I just want to kind of frame it from- that though I'm not bringing my religious views into the classroom at all, the way I think about social justice is definitely informed by that. And it's not like I'm trying to proselytize, by any stretch of the imagination, but that's kind of where I'm coming from.

Beyond this, he repeatedly cites aspects of his life as influences on his beliefs. As a second career teacher and former journalist, Gordon frames his switch to education after five years as meaning that he “came in late enough to not have a lot of illusions about a great retirement, but I understood that what I wanted was to do something to contribute, to do something that made a lasting effect of life.” As the son of a staunchly conservative father who he suggests would immediately react negatively to the purpose of my study by lamenting “social justice warriors”, he has long taken what he calls an “indirect” approach to issues of social justice to avoid causing any of his students to “shut down”. He tells me that the current election season, however, has highlighted some larger issues related to his discourse in the classroom: “There’s a lot of stuff that is election related that’s actually bigger picture, like when do you call out evil as evil in the classroom? When do you do that, and how do you do it, and is it appropriate to do it?”

Gordon shares more than just his views on social studies with his students; he also shares pieces of his life philosophy. After watching *The Social Network*, he comments on the special effects that enabled actor Armie Hammer to play twins: “Science can put one person’s face on another person’s body, but it can’t give me hair?” He shares with students what he perceives as the benefits of choosing less prestigious universities over, for example, the Ivy League, suggesting that the former enables students to be the “big fish”, while in the latter instance they’re a small fish in a place where the big fish might be a future president. In his AP class, after struggling to recall something he knows well, he tells students “Getting old is not terrible,

you guys. Getting old is awesome. Getting old is a gift, because it means you're not dead. But getting old is weird."

Getting old is something Gordon tells me has been very much on his mind given his cancer diagnosis. From our interview:

Anybody going into teaching, I feel, should be going in with this idea that at some level you have a commitment to make the world better, and if that's not part of why you're going in, I don't see how you would get much out of this. Maybe it's possible to get a lot out of this without that mindset, but I don't understand it. So I guess why teach, why do we do this in the first place, I think it comes back to this idea of leaving the world better than you found it. Maybe a commitment to the progress of mankind. Again, I should add that I'm in a really weird place in life... these are not the answers I would have given five years ago before I got diagnosed, but the way that I look at education now, through the frame that I have, is very much about leaving legacy – understanding that our generation will be gone and that there are massive problems we face as a human race, and hopefully I contribute something to improving it even fractionally.

Arguing Against Arguing

It is fairly early on in our planning when Gordon expresses an interest in creating some sort of activity that would give his students some experience listening generously to the ideas and opinions of someone they disagree with without feeling the need to evaluate or to push their own beliefs. Despite his complicated schedule and the demands placed on his time by things like district travel needs, medical visits, and trips out of town to places like Arlington National Cemetery for programs with which he is involved, Gordon tells me that he is excited about the

opportunity to try out an interesting activity and wants to make sure it happens. In a meeting in October, after I suggest that our relatively slow progress seems pretty reasonable given all of the other requirements of his schedule, Gordon tells me that he is nonetheless focused on making sure something actually happens before the study ends, that “I don’t want this to be something we keep putting off and putting off and then it’s January.” In order to make sure that this actually does happen before the end of the fall semester, Gordon ultimately ends up doing a fair amount of thinking through this activity on his own.

While some researchers have described situations in which teachers who intend to plan an activity that supports issues of social justice have, without appropriate guidance, ultimately produced something that misled students or misrepresented their intended topics in a way that actually worked *against* the points they were trying to make, I feel no such concern in Gordon’s case. In many ways, his sense of social justice was already pretty sophisticated when I entered his classroom. His master’s thesis focused on Critical Race Theory, and his talk about race when the issue arises (or when he brings it up) in his classroom is thoughtful and sensitive enough that I sometimes find myself thinking that recordings of it would have been very enlightening for students in my own multicultural education class for undergraduate teacher candidates (Gordon also tells me in his first interview that race is one of the issues he is most comfortable discussing, making him the only teacher who has ever told me that in my entire life). Further, Gordon’s sensitivity to issues of gender and class, as well as student identity and associated ideas of relevant teaching and privileging of students’ knowledge and experiences, make him someone I am confident will plan an excellent activity whether or not any particular aspect is outlined in conversation with me or by himself.

We clarify our previous ideas and set the general parameters for what will take place at a meeting in early November: students will engage in something I initially call a “disagreement session”, in which they will initially listen to the opinions of a classmate who disagrees with them about a trivial issue, like their favorite candy bar, and then discuss increasingly more meaningful issues until ultimately listening to someone’s contrary views on a topic of major political or emotional concern. While it does not seem difficult to identify trivial issues, nor to isolate major ones, we spend some time thinking through what might make sense as a mid-level topic, one that may produce something of an emotional reaction in students, but not the sort likely to result in real conflict. My initial suggestion of focusing on issues of crime or death in the community that relate to students, inspired by a piece by J. Alleyne Johnson on critical pedagogy in which she addresses related topics, is quickly rejected by Gordon. He tells me that an incident earlier in the school year, in which three girls wore “R.I.P.” shirts featuring the image of a girl at a different school who had died in a fire started by her boyfriend, a student at Stoppard, had ignited enormous issues among the student body, resulting in a ban on all R.I.P. shirts and student concerns that were still ongoing. I reflect yet again on how important teachers’ knowledge of their own school and classroom context is. We agree to spend more time thinking about possible issues and to continue to run ideas by one another. I notice that Gordon has taken more than a page of notes during our discussion.

We are unable to meet in person again before the activity, which Gordon schedules for the beginning of the second week of December, the only feasible time given his teaching and exam requirements, particularly in his content-heavy AP Government class. Further, he reserves two full class days to ensure that he will not have to cut off student discussion. Having never come to a firm decision regarding the set of topics students will discuss, I am relatively unsure of

what specifics to expect outside of the guidelines we developed. Gordon, however, has clearly been thinking deeply about this activity, and the day before it will take place he forwards me a pre-survey he asked students to complete online. It contains the following questions (and I observe that Gordon did ultimately decide to address the contentious topic of R.I.P. shirts, but in a very careful way):

1. Describe your favorite meal. Explain why it's your favorite.
2. [Relatively nearby popular sports team] or [Similarly nearby rival sports team]? Why?
3. Do you like the current CPS dress code? Why or why not?
4. In our dress code as currently enforced (inc. pants, shirt, no shirts promoting violence, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, gangs), some schools have banned "R.I.P." shirts, making the case that some of these shirts may inflame gang tensions in the school. What is your opinion on this?
5. Regarding the ban of "R.I.P." shirts, how would you balance the need of the school to provide a safe, orderly environment, and the need of students to appropriately express emotions?
6. What do you think America's role in the world today should be? Should we have free trade with the rest of the world? Should we defend basic human rights around the world? Should America step in to defend small nations threatened by larger ones?
7. Do you believe homosexual people should be granted marriage rights? Why, or why not?
8. If you were to pick just three basic human rights, what would they be? Why these three over any others you can think of?

Students have already responded to this pre-survey, and Gordon has taken substantial time to draw on their responses in order to produce the second document he has forwarded me, in which students whose responses have been received are paired with students in the same school who disagreed with them for any given topic. He has also pre-selected several pairs of students, based on "strength of opinion", he tells me in the email, whom he will call on to share out for a given topic the following day. The three topics listed in this document are "FOOD", "RIP SHIRTS", and "AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD". This second document also includes a brief plan for the first day:

DAY ONE

Noah and I model a perspective sharing exercise on [two sports teams, different from the two in the survey]

STEP ONE: Each of us, in one easy sentence, explains our position. We check with the other to make sure our position is clear.

STEP TWO: Each of us, uninterrupted, explains WHY we hold that position. The other repeats back what you heard them say.

STEP THREE: Each of us gets to ask two clarifying questions to understand the ‘why behind the why.’ One important clarifying question could be “What are you afraid of if things don’t happen the way you’d like?”

STEP FOUR: Each of us explains to the larger group why the other believes what they believe.

The next day, Gordon immediately launches the activity once the bell has rung, first complimenting students on their survey responses. He tells them, “Yesterday you guys got a bunch of random questions, and some of your answers were so thoughtful...some of you who are pretty quiet in class have a very loud voice when you’re talking to me.” He tells the students that this activity will be about “the way we talk to each other”, and introduces the first thing that will happen – as planned, Gordon has asked Noah, a student in his Stoppard class who is also his aide for a different class, to come up to the front of the room with him and model the steps of his protocol. Gordon tells students he and Noah are modeling “how we talk”, and sets up the topic: while the two of them agree on many things, one major point of departure has arisen in discussions that they have had over the course of the year. Gordon is an enormous fan of one professional football team, while Noah is a huge supporter of another.

Gordon walks students through the protocol as he and Noah enact it. For step one, they each state their position to one another, with the other repeating it back to ensure that he has understood what was said (“I’ve been a Team A fan my whole life.” “So you’ve been a fan of Team A for your entire life?”). In step two, each of them explains their position uninterrupted

(Gordon adds in particular that students should avoid interjections like “that’s stupid” during this time) before the other again repeats what he heard in order to verify correct comprehension. Noah notes that he supports Team B because they were particularly successful when he was growing up and that he was drawn to the excitement of seeing them win, which Gordon then repeats back in a slightly different way. Gordon then tells Noah a story of attending an extremely exciting Team A game with his family, also die hard Team A fans, as a child that led him to associate this team with family bonding.

In the third step, Gordon and Noah continue to converse with each other to discover what Gordon calls “the why behind the why”, asking follow-up questions in order to better understand each other’s positions. Gordon asks Noah why he chose Team B over other successful teams of the era, to which Noah responds that one side of his family is made up of enormous fans of Team B and they used to watch the games together when he was growing up. Gordon announces that this adds to his understanding of Noah’s position, as well as giving him some sense of agreement despite their ultimate disagreement because he now knows that for both of them “there’s a family connection” to the team each prefers. Gordon adds that a specific question students should ask one another that might not be relevant for something like sports teams but is very relevant for political and social issues is “What are you afraid of if things don’t happen the way you’d like?” Finally, Gordon outlines the final step: announcing to the class what the other person just told you. He asks, “Did either of us stop being a Team A fan or a Team B fan? No. We just learned a little more about where the other person is coming from.”

Students seem intrigued and ready to get started. Gordon announces that the first topic will be favorite food and announces student pairings, which are shown on a prepared slide. He then switches the slide back to the protocol. The class fills with discussion, and the students near

me, at least, appear to be taking this activity completely seriously. I hear one student practicing reporting back to his partner, not appearing to find it silly as he says, “Your first favorite food is spaghetti, because...” After another couple of minutes, I hear several students sharing restaurant experiences and asking one another to elaborate. When Gordon calls time, many students still appear to be talking about this topic.

Gordon checks his plan and announces that “I’m going to pick some groups of people to share out”, beginning by naming two students at a school other than Stoppard, who share over the mic that their favorites are chicken, rice, and beans, and chicken, macaroni and cheese, and cornbread, respectively, one because it was the first dish she learned to cook at age 13 and the other because it was a family tradition made by her grandmother. Gordon verifies that he understands what each has said about the other before moving on to several other pairs of students, with one student noting that her partner, a recent immigrant, very recently found out that pizza was her favorite food after arriving in America and trying it for the first time.

Gordon moves on to the second question: should the dress code ban R.I.P. shirts? Students begin to discuss, and it is clear that some have strong opinions on this topic. Gordon stops by one group in which a student has just asked, “Why are your rights to wear the shirt more important than my rights?” to remind them that “we’re not debating”, but students generally follow the protocol well and no real disagreements appear to arise at Stoppard or elsewhere. After a couple of minutes, I hear the students whose conversation was leaning toward debate doing a careful job of ensuring that they understand one another. One student who did not complete the survey and thus does not have a pre-arranged partner comes on mic to ask Gordon if he is still able to participate in the discussion. Gordon tells him, “It’s more important for you to be a part of what we’re doing right now than to have turned something in correctly.”

Students share out, and in this case Gordon has clearly selected groups of students with varying levels of disagreement, noting that one group with different but somewhat related opinions has “significant opportunity for agreement” among their viewpoints, while a second has much less due to strongly opposing answers. He calls an end to the activity for the day, and I am shocked to see that the entire class period has already passed. Gordon summarizes for students by noting that in the following class they will be discussing national issues on which there is strong disagreement in America and asking students if they believe after their experience thus far that even in cases of such strong disagreement, as with the second group’s responses to the RIP shirt question, students believe that continued discussion can yield some agreement. Most students say yes, but one says “no” over the mic. Gordon seems excited about this student’s disagreement and compliments his willingness not to go along with everyone else.

Gordon has just taken a call when I stop by his desk after the students leave to briefly chat about his sense of day 1. I realize after a minute that it must be with one of the paraprofessionals at the other schools – I hear him say, “So that discussion went a bit differently” and “we can lead with that tomorrow”. He hangs up the phone and tells me that a girl at Wilde High School had murdered her brother on the previous day, and that this not surprisingly had a major impact on student discussions of the second topic. He is planning to ask those students to speak more about their feelings on this tomorrow before the third part of the activity. Other than his initial lack of knowledge about this event, he tells me that he feels that things went “pretty smoothly” and that he is pleased to have avoided “potholes”, and I agree emphatically. I suggest keeping the meeting short and talking in more detail tomorrow – Gordon had what he says is one of the worst IV sets of his life the night before, which is what he was sitting through while planning out his student groups. He seems sick, and his right arm looks *terrible*. His reprieve,

however, is short-lived; by the time I make it to the door, he has already begun a conversation with a freshman who came in to ask about taking his Government class in the following semester.

Gordon does begin the next day's activity by opening this event up for discussion, telling his class that "the students of Wilde had a way different perspective on this...it's okay if you guys don't want to go there." One student announces that he had asked "What's the big deal with R.I.P. shirts?" and that the responses to this had transitioned into a discussion of the previous day's murder. Gordon tells students, "I don't need a show of hands unless you're comfortable, but how many of you know someone who has been shot?" In the classroom at Stoppard, only one hand stays down. Gordon adds that he certainly did not know anyone who had been shot by the time that he was 18, and tells students that one reason for major ideological disconnects between many of the people they know and many other people in the United States is that often members of the latter group "haven't experienced that violence" and have perhaps "just see in on TV".

Gordon tells students that before continuing the activity he wants to address one more issue that came up the previous day when students suggested that R.I.P. shirts and other items of clothing should only be banned if they are "gang-related". He asks, "Who's the arbiter of that?" In other words, he continues, if students are going through mourning, is someone in the front office who didn't grow up in their neighborhood going to tell them if their shirt is gang-related, particularly in an area where gangs may have influence over aspects of culture that many aren't even aware of? He caps this point with a story: when he was little, he had an uncle, Rick, who he and his cousins always suspected might be in the mafia because of his penchant for slicked hair and gold chains and a number of aspects of his personality. At Uncle Rick's funeral some years later, little Gordon's suspicions were seemingly confirmed when a number of other men who

also looked like they could be in the mafia arrived. Gordon and his cousins began to discuss this event loudly until a second uncle, Bob, came to yell at them. Uncle Bob told them sharply that Rick was not in the mafia, but that he had grown up in a place and time where one couldn't help being influenced by people that were. Gordon concludes, "All of you know someone in a gang. I know someone in a gang." When an Australian exchange student disagrees with this, Gordon adds, "Emily says she doesn't, but you just don't know that you do." A classmate gently adds, "You do."

Gordon transitions students, who have remained respectful and thoughtful during this discussion, into the final discussion: What do you think America's role in the world today should be? Should we have free trade with the rest of the world? Should we defend basic human rights around the world? Should America step in to defend small nations threatened by larger ones? Students begin to talk, and I hear one pair who has discovered that they share very, very similar opinions dutifully combing through them to find an issue on which they seriously disagree. They finally discover that the final question, about whether America should protect smaller nations from larger ones, is one such issue. On the other side of the room, I hear Gordon explaining the concept of free trade to several student groups.

When students discuss, there is a strong internal bent to their ideas. One girl suggests that America needs to focus on its own policies and making life better for its own people rather than being a "superhero for the world", while a boy suggests that America should be more isolationist, helping the world only when it is in its own interest. Two students at another school agree that America shouldn't intervene. Disagreements still generally lean in this direction – one group features a disagreement between one student who believes that America should defend

smaller nations so that they will support us later and the other suggesting that we should focus exclusively on ourselves.

Gordon seems surprised, and summarizes what he heard from students, asking if most of them are against free trade and for focusing on our own problems instead of the problems of others. Students at all four schools generally confirm that this is how they feel. Gordon tells them that this wasn't where he expected the activity to go, but that he has an interesting observation: "You guys just perfectly described Donald Trump's position and said you agree with it." Students appear fairly taken aback. It appears that their starkly different views on race had obfuscated this point of agreement with the then president-elect. There is some tittering and murmuring as students consider some of the implications of this information.

Class is ending, and Gordon passes out a final assignment to be completed over winter break:

Winter Break Homework

Over the two-week holiday break, find 15-20 minutes to talk to someone with whom you disagree on a major issue that has political implications. Examples of such major issues would be abortion, same-sex marriage, the recent election, climate change, America's role in the world, global free trade agreements, Syria, Iran... and the list goes on.

Using the same four-step process we used in class, find out the 'why behind the why' about that person's views on this major issue.

REMEMBER: Make it clear to your friend or family member that you are NOT, repeat NOT, trying to debate with each other, or change their mind. The ONLY thing you are trying to do is respectfully understand their perspective, and help them understand your perspective.

Please make your notes about these issues on this form, which will be due at the beginning of class, 3 January 2017.

STEP ONE: Each of us, in one easy sentence, explains our position. We check with the other to make sure our position is clear.

STEP TWO: Each of us, uninterrupted, explains WHY we hold that position. The other repeats back what you heard them say.

STEP THREE: Each of us gets to ask two clarifying questions to understand the ‘why behind the why’. One important clarifying question could be “What are you afraid of if things don’t happen the way you’d like?”

1. Clarifying question you asked: _____

2. Friend’s answer: _____

1. Clarifying question you asked: _____

2. Friend’s answer: _____

STEP FOUR: Explain in 50-100 words why the other believes what they believe.

Gordon stresses that this should not be a debate: “This is probably going to be somewhat uncomfortable, and there’s a lot of opportunity for this train to go off the rails... You don’t want to ruin your holiday with a debate. This is not a debate. This is not a debate. You are going to thank the person warmly, and give them a hug. Because we’re all in this together.”

Looking Back, Looking Forward

In our meeting following the activity, Gordon again tells me that he was surprised by how smoothly things went and asks for my own sense. I again emphatically agree, praising his excellent pre-discussion modeling as well as his well-constructed post-discussion assignment. In fact, I can hardly believe that this is not something he and the students had done before. We end by discussing the implications of students’ isolationist views for a sense of community that extends beyond one’s local area, suggesting that such a broad sense of community would also include a concern for the welfare of others that was not particularly present in students’ assessments of the global role of the United States. Gordon tells me that he would like to begin the next year with this activity to get students thinking about disagreement and difference of opinion as early as possible, and that he plans to try it with other classes as well.

In his final interview, Gordon identifies this perspective sharing activity, along with the reading and our associated discussions that focused on the difference between heroes and local role models, both as most influential for him and as practices and ideas that he plans to continue to use and develop with future students. When I ask him later what advice he would give to a teacher interested in improving her or his own social justice practice, he again cites the perspective sharing activity, telling me that its versatility makes it ideal for a range of discussions in a range of subjects, and that it will lead students to what he sees as perhaps the most important skill one can possess – the ability to reflect on his or her thinking and the thinking of others:

I'd probably briefly tell them about the perspective sharing thing, which I think could just be amazing because you could apply it to any subject area. Whatever social justice issue you were going to try and- in an economics class I could easily modify that to deal with wage inequality among the genders, income inequality in general. In a science class you could do that about global warming or land use, or anything. In a health class you could use it about responsible sexual behavior. I don't know. I'm just picking stuff out of a hat, but I can think of more ways to use it than more ways to not use it. I feel like you could really get the kids to be reflective. I think that's what so much of this comes down to. I think a lot of this social justice stuff comes down to both students and teachers being reflective about what they do and how they do it, and what values that reflects, and kind of trying to find common ground on what we believe is right and what we believe is wrong.

I couldn't agree more, Gordon.

Chapter 7: Teacher Cross-Case Analysis

In the previous three chapters, I presented portraits of the three teachers who participated in this study. These portraits are necessarily individualized, due to their focus on the partnership between each teacher and me and the ways in which we worked together over time, and narrow, as they are restricted to a discussion of my experience in each teacher's classroom with attention given to school and district context only when teachers themselves chose to focus on those issues. In this chapter, I broaden the lens through which I analyze these teachers' practice. First, I will treat each teacher as a case in order to engage in a cross-case analysis of my work with each, with a particular focus on differences in teachers' ideas of and approaches to this work. Second, I will consider the implications of the ways in which each teacher and I enacted our partnership over the course of the semester, and teachers' views on the experience of being part of the study. Finally, I will incorporate ideas from focus principal²⁸ Robin Hatcher and assistant superintendent²⁹ Jack Rand in order to frame the teachers' classroom ideas and experiences within the functioning of their school and district, with particular attention given to the ways in

²⁸ It is important to recall here that Robin Hatcher worked at Brandon High School, as did two of the teachers, Erin and Mike. Gordon, however, taught at Stoppard High School, which was located about 15 minutes away across a river and had a demographically different student population as well as a number of other differences with Brandon (for a more in-depth discussion of Stoppard's unique ethos, see my portrait of Gordon in Chapter 6). This provides a useful contrast that highlights important aspects of two very different schools in Carteret, but also means that the context of the focus principal, Robin, is very different from Gordon's context. For that reason, Gordon's view on school- or student-specific aspects of his work is occasionally somewhat minimized to avoid distracting from the overall comparison being made (this is true both here and in Appendices H and I, which focus on practitioners' assessment of their context and their views on the full range of identified social justice issues, respectively).

²⁹ As noted previously, Jack Rand's actual title is not 'assistant superintendent'; however, his job duties are functionally equivalent to those of an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. I have made this change with his permission in order to further preserve district anonymity.

which participants at each level talked about the work of those at the other two levels. The conclusion to this chapter will focus on supporting social justice work with teachers as well as implications for improved communication and shared knowledge across different educational levels within a district.

Social Justice and Teachers' Practice

In this section, I discuss the ways in which teachers conceptualized the idea of social justice as well as the social justice issues that we worked to address over the course of the semester. I further outline and contrast the specific practice changes teachers enacted in order to address the social justice issues they identified and consider the major influences on these practice changes.

Differences in social justice conceptualizations. Before addressing the relationship among the social justice issues teachers chose to address, it is important to contrast the ways in which they framed ideas of social justice. One major difference lay in the extent to which their social justice approaches focused on *equity*, the idea that people or groups should be treated differently based on their needs, and/or *equality*, the idea that all people or groups should receive equal treatment.³⁰ Mike's approach, for example, was strongly equality focused. He repeatedly referred to equality of treatment as the meaning of social justice in our discussions and in interviews, and was confident in the consistency of this view. In his second interview, for example, which took place two months after his first, he not only concisely defined social justice in this way but also indicated (accurately) that this was certainly how he had already been

³⁰ Note that strict equality is not a focus of any of the educational social justice literature cited above. While some of this literature does suggest that ultimately reaching equality is an eventual goal, ideas of equity are far more commonly addressed. However, work outside of education (for example, in economics), does sometimes take equality as a point of focus (Altman, 2017).

defining it: “It’s going to be the exact same definition I had prior. You know, equality, everybody being treated equal as much as possible.” In his third interview, he continued this line: “Social justice is, in a nutshell, equality for all people. Finding a way to make sure that all are treated equal.” This approach was borne out in his work with students as well – his concerns regarding participation focused on its unequal nature, and his debate was designed to give students equal time and opportunity to participate (in fact, to require them to do so equally).

Erin’s approach, however, was more equity focused. She frequently framed her work around social justice (or against social injustice) as pointed toward supporting the rights of particular groups of people who had been in some way unfairly treated, and described her work with students in this way as well: “They find that they’ve been wronged in some ways or they feel that there is an error in society or something that can be improved upon, so they participate or they contact avenues to change or improve upon those areas.” The topics Erin chose to focus on during her social justice-focused lessons also often touched on these ideas; for example, her final lesson on voting pattern and voting rights raised questions about equitable participation and equitable policies and rules around voting. Additionally, Erin’s talk about her own students focused on ways in which to equitably support them both within the classroom and in the world outside of it, from her differential requirements for student participation based on students’ perceived comfort speaking in class and with the activities required to complete their volunteer hours requirements to her frequent consideration of the particular issues faced by a Muslim student and the ways in which she could contribute to his school experience.

Gordon’s approach existed somewhat between Erin’s and Mike’s, and he introduced an additional idea into his talk about social justice: that of *fairness*, which he defined as “a shared vision of right and wrong for all citizens”. Gordon’s fairness included elements of both equity

and equality; he suggested that in his conception of effective social justice implementation, “people get a decent wage for an honest day’s work, people treat each other with kindness and respect,” but also that regardless of one’s station “your basic human needs would be covered.” He said nearly the same thing in a different interview, with one additional wrinkle, defining social justice as “issues of basic fairness, issues of access to basic rights and basic human needs...and participation based on an idea that all people are equal.” This approach certainly hints at equity, at least as far as ensuring that all people have their basic needs met (Gordon’s ideas about basic needs are discussed in more detail in Appendix I). What is striking, however, is that Gordon has something of a new take on equality: the *idea* that people are equal rather than equality in *practice*. In his framing, the idea of equality is a guide, a goal that can be reached by implementing fair practices rather than an immediate mandate.

Further, Gordon suggested that the question of exactly *what* is fair was one that needed to be determined collaboratively, thus creating avenues for an equity approach to impact the way in which we reach “agreement on basic fundamental principles.” In this way, he linked ideas of equal treatment to equitable implementation:

Equal protection should be a fairly simple thing. That people could agree on equal protection as a social justice value. Where it would differ would be exactly how that works, or exactly what it looks like. Freedom: freedom of speech, freedom of religion. That we would agree on those things, we just differ on the degree or the method or whatever.

The connection between equitable design and equal implementation also showed itself in Gordon’s work with his students. His focus on democratizing his practice by demonstrating positive test procedures, for example, showed that he was cognizant of students’ differential

understandings of school behaviors (and his talk about the impact of class and geography on Stoppard’s population explicitly drew links between these qualities and larger societal structures) and was working to give them appropriate opportunity to understand his desired testing environment in order to then provide equal opportunity for success to all students.

Social Justice Issues. While teachers’ social justice approaches led them to identify a broad list of social justice issues over the course of the semester, it was not possible to address all of these issues, or even to discuss each in appropriate depth (for more on this, see the end of this section). Table 7.1 shows the full list of issues teachers named across my interviews with

Issue	Erin			Mike			Gordon		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Fairness	X						X	X	X
Equality	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Basic Needs		X					X		
Race	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Standardized Testing	X	X		X	X	X			
Opportunity	X		X	X		X			
Gay Rights	X		X				X		X
Poverty/Income Inequality	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parental Involvement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Rights	X	X	X				X	X	
Educational Inequity/Inequality					X	X	X	X	
Community/Community Participation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Immigration		X							X
Gender/Reproductive Rights	X	X		X	X		X		X
The Police (and community relations)				X					
Responsibility	X								X
Politics	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Alternative Perspectives		X		X	X	X		X	X
Ability/Disability	X				X	X	X	X	
Religion		X		X			X		X
The Environment (and environmental justice)	X		X						X
Marijuana (and student rights)	X	X							
Dress Code (and student rights)	X								

them. My analysis identified twenty-three³¹ categories of issues mentioned by teachers during the semester, almost all of which were mentioned repeatedly. Ten were mentioned in interviews by all three teachers: equality, race, poverty/income inequality, parental involvement, community, gender, politics, alternative perspectives, ability/disability, and religion. Further, four of the issues, equality, race, poverty/income inequality, and community, were mentioned by every teacher in every single interview (these four issues have already been topics of substantial focus in the portraits). While a full discussion of all of the issues teachers identified is beyond the scope of this chapter, Appendix I, as already noted, includes a complete analysis of the differing ways in which the three teachers, Robin, and Jack discussed each issue.

In order to foment real change, the teachers and I worked together to identify the issues that were most relevant to them (and that they saw as most relevant to their students) at the present time and to identify ways in which they might address these issues through their practice. Because of this, my own role reflects Sun, Wilhelm, Larson, & Frank's (2014) description of "close colleagues"; teachers and I discussed their concerns and ideas, sharing thoughts about materials, activities, and other aspects of their work. In this section, I extend the stories told in the three portraits that precede this chapter by analyzing and contrasting the issues each teacher chose to focus on and the ways in which the teachers framed these issues as we worked to address them.

³¹ As a minor note, there are twenty-five issues listed in the interviews in appendices F and G, but only twenty-three discussed below. This is because I have combined 'community' and 'community engagement', which were frequently discussed by participants in a way that made them difficult to tease apart, as well as 'gender' and 'reproductive rights', for the reason that reproductive rights were mentioned in only one interview by one teacher (and rarely if ever discussed during our work together) and neither Robin nor Jack had much to say about their salience in the district. In neither case do I mean to suggest that the two issues combined are equivalent.

Issues: Erin. While ultimately naming more issues of social justice than any other teacher in our interviews and discussions (21 of the 23 issues identified in the teachers' interviews, see Table 7.1), Erin was also the only teacher whose specific social justice focus was on a single (albeit multi-use) issue, which I call *community participation*. While this broad focus certainly touched on a range of social justice topics (in fact, by its nature, it can essentially be applied to any topic of interest), it was clear that supporting her students in participating in their communities and exercising their rights as citizens was Erin's goal for the semester. In fact, she even created her own theory of action around this desired participation: a three-step process in which one first identifies an issue, then looks for paths to advocate for that issue, and finally works to influence what Erin calls "the political process" (for example, by creating laws or developing solutions that can be adopted by governing bodies)³².

During the course of the semester (and as described in far more detail in her portrait), Erin pushed her students to think in ways that would enable them to engage in this participatory process. She asked them to begin by identifying any issues that were important to them and to name a person they considered to be a role model. She then narrowed the activity, asking students to address both of those questions within their local context. After this, she required students to engage with an argument that opposed their own views and to report back on its impact on their thinking (see 'Issues: Gordon', below, for a related action taken by Gordon in his AP Government class), and students were finally asked to suggest specific ways in which they could address their issue of concern. In effect, the social justice activities Erin engaged in with her students served as training sessions for how to understand and engage with her social justice

³² This approach is strikingly similar to many subject-specific adaptations of Freire's problem-posing education. For example, it echoes work like Gutstein (2003), cited above, despite the fact that this work is in mathematics.

community participation protocol. Further, this structure enabled students to insert their own priorities into Erin's process – students used these investigations to address issues of gender, race, civil rights, the environment, domestic/international relations, and many others.

Issues: Mike. Of the three teachers, Mike focused on the broadest range of issues to address in his practice. While the debate he ultimately put into place was intended to increase equitable class participation, over the course of the semester we also discussed classroom concerns related to race, gender, income inequality/class, educational inequity, and sticky issues of culture that were never fully explored. Further, as noted, Mike saw these issues as interwoven and often as so far out of his control as to leave him unable to address them at all. During his second interview, for example, he told me that social justice issues relevant to his students included race, equal education, neighborhood and community issues, poverty, high crime rates, and parents' and students' work schedules. When I asked him if he felt that we had taken steps thus far in the study to address any of those issues, he responded, "I don't know how to address those issues. It's so systemic to the situation, a single classroom I don't think has the ability to address those issues."

For this reason, much of our work was as focused on thinking through issues and understanding their perceived impact on Mike's students and on his classroom (in many ways we may have been more focused on this than on instituting particular practice changes). In this way we worked, as Athanases & de Oliveira (2008) and Picower (2011) have discussed, to apply important ideas of justice within what Mike saw as a very limiting educational context. As addressed in his portrait, Mike also suggested that his status as a third-year teacher meant that he was still working to get a handle on important concepts and did not yet feel ready to begin to tweak aspects of his practice on his own. While we discussed three practice changes relating to

Mike's issues – instituting a series of student debates around issues in AP US History, engaging his American Studies class in conversations about the ways in which their own interests and experiences could inform and challenge the content of their course, and analyzing the effectiveness of the wireless keyboards Mike had begun using in order to change his policy around them accordingly³³ – only one of those changes (instituting debates) was implemented during the course of the study.

It is important to note here that although these debates were intended to address the issue of 'participation' as identified by Mike, a word I also use to describe Erin's main focus, these two types of participation are highly distinct. While Erin was focused on community participation, in Mike's case the focus was on *class* participation, particularly on increasing the participation of non-white and non-male students in day-to-day class activities and discussions. While these two types of participation have relatively little in common other than a shared word, they do serve as an interesting example of an issue raised explicitly or implicitly by a number of social justice scholars: whether high-quality learning and academic success can serve as an end for education (Moje's, 2007, *socially just pedagogy*), or whether all education for social justice should focus on supporting student agency in the world beyond the classroom (Moje's *social justice pedagogy*).

Issues: Gordon. In our final interview, Gordon was very clear about what he took away regarding the two issues he focused on during the study (listening to others' perspectives and bringing local role models into the curriculum):

³³ Note that although wireless keyboard usage may not automatically sound like an issue of social justice, Mike's interest here is highly aligned with Hennessy, Mercer & Warwick's (2011) consideration of promoting equity and active student participation through adaptive teacher professional development around the use of interactive white boards.

I'm definitely going to take that perspective sharing activity and move it to the beginning of the year in my government classes. I think it's really important for kids to identify what they believe and be able to articulate it, and then understand somebody else's perspective and explain it back to them without it becoming a debate. Just this simple understanding of other people's points of view. That's definitely something I'm going to work into everything I do. The other thing I mentioned, I think in this interview, is working the 'everyday heroes' stuff into the government class. I really want to take time to think about that.

In the perspective sharing activity to which Gordon is referring, described in detail in his portrait, he asked students to listen to an opinion that disagreed with one of their own and then to represent the reasoning of their informant without judgment or argument of any type. This focus of Gordon's on alternate perspectives was present from the beginning of our work and was gradually developed over time into this activity.

The second issue Gordon names, which he calls "everyday heroes" in the quote above, is unique in that it is the only issue of focus for any teacher that originated from a resource I provided (in each other case, resources were provided in response to a teacher's mention of a particular issue rather than serving as the source of their interest in an issue). In this instance, the resource (Levinson, 2012) was initially suggested in response to a mostly unrelated comment of Gordon's regarding the difficulty he was having in communicating to his AP Government students that national changes in law and policy ultimately began with a group of local activists rather than being birthed fully formed in Washington. Gordon read Levinson's suggestion that we focus on local role models rather than idealized national heroes such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a call to more democratic teaching practice in which the teacher her/himself could

serve as a role model for beneficial behaviors and positive action³⁴. Gordon, then, understood this concept in two ways: one suggesting that teachers privilege heroes of the local community for their own actions and struggles rather than constantly looking to the famous and far away heroes in most textbooks, and a second calling teachers to themselves actively model positive community and relational behaviors in order to serve as models of these behaviors for their students. Thus, this issue in a sense represents two related issues that manifest in different ways.

It is worth noting that the idea of focusing on the local rather than the broadly national or global was not entirely new to Gordon. By the end of the study, he had connected his interest in this concept with a project he already had in place for his World War II class (which I did not observe) called Fallen Hero, in which students each investigated the life history of one local veteran who was killed in action during the second world war. In our final interview, he spoke of the ways in which thinking about this concept had given him insight into this other aspect of his practice:

More and more and more and more I'm seeing that that's something I understood with Fallen Hero that I didn't know I understood. I was doing it for a number of the reasons of the kids being able to connect, and I definitely understood that I was trying to create this relationship between them and the past, and I was trying to make it a personal relationship. I definitely wanted it where they were understanding that it was the common guys of World War II that we were studying instead of the generals. What I don't think I

³⁴ This is something of an abbreviated summary of Levinson's argument. More accurately, she suggests that rather than constructing a "civic religion" (p. 147) around the emulation of men (and, much less frequently, women) such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, who are presented as almost godlike in many history texts, students can be better served with a focus on people they know, who inspire them, like family members and local activists. Levinson suggests that while our heroes suggest impossible standards for achievement, role models do not come with this issue because "it is their very ordinariness that inspires us to act differently and emulate their achievements, not any overarching greatness of character, stature, or even impact" (p. 154).

truly realized then – and maybe didn't even realize as much until this Wednesday, when I was doing this interview that I was just talking about – I'm realizing that those guys in the 40s and 30s, especially the East side boys vs. the West side boys, when I get these kids a guy that grew up in their neighborhood- the neighborhoods in this town have not changed...Because the station in life of an East sider 20, 40, 60, 80 years ago is almost exactly the same station in life an East sider has today. And that really struck me that just, again, how much that project is doing that I didn't understand and how I need to find a way to weave that into the other classes that I teach.

Social justice implementation issues. While I worked to make myself available to teachers whenever feasible, a number of aspects of each teacher's individual situation affected the amount of time and development we were able to put into planning practice changes around the issues of focus they identified. There is no question either in my own perceptions as recorded in field notes and reflections or in my analysis of teachers' own talk about their sense of our accomplishments that there is a clear order to the level at which strategies to address teachers' issues of interest were able to be developed during the semester. In this subsection, I discuss our reflections on the constraints in our work together that led to these different levels of development. Note that I make no claims here about the *quality* of the activities/practices/approaches in question; I simply observe that some went through more iterations than others because they were able to be co-appraised, reconsidered, and adjusted more frequently (a process that echoes the design-based approaches of scholars like Argyropoulos & Nikolarazi, 2009).

Erin's issue of participation went through the most development by far, beginning as a fairly open question that was briefly responded to by students and moving through four stages,

with further review and discussion each time, before ending up at a level of complexity that shared few similarities with its initial format. Development of Gordon's interests came next: the focus around democratic modeling in his classroom was based on a discussion of a resource and was discussed again in a follow-up conversation, and his perspective sharing activity was discussed in two meetings and an email conversation before being implemented as a two-day event immediately before his final exam review began. Mike's issues were developed the least, with a single student debate based on two relatively short discussions (albeit a debate that addressed a number of different social justice concerns) as the only legitimate practice change that either of us identified. While it is true that there is an inverse relationship between the amount of development and the number of issues identified by teachers – Erin, who had only one issue, had by far the most development of that issue during our partnership, while Gordon, who had two issues (or three, if one counts his focus on democratizing the curriculum with “everyday heroes” and his desire for more democratic modeling in his own practice as separate), had the second-most, and Mike, who had many issues, had the least – teachers' feedback, as well as my own observations, suggest that this is not a sufficient explanation for these differences.

Rather, there are three major themes that teachers pointed to in describing what was or was not accomplished. The first, which has already been discussed to some extent, is teachers' feelings of efficacy in addressing the issues they discuss. As noted above, Mike described the issues he chose to focus on as effectively unsolvable. Conversely, Gordon and Erin both described their activities as being directly connected to student results within their local context. Further, both suggested that their work with students in class was focused on the specific skill(s) that students would actually engage with outside of school. Gordon noted, “I think it's really important for kids to identify what they believe and be able to articulate it, and then understand

somebody else's perspective and explain it back to them without it becoming a debate," which was exactly the structure of his activity. Further, when I asked him what advice he would have for another teacher interested in improving her/his social justice practice (as already discussed in his portrait), Gordon noted that the skill students worked on during this activity was a broad one that could apply to issues in any discipline, not just Social Studies:

Have your kids identify what they believe about social justice issues and find ways to interact with other people about those issues. And I'd probably briefly tell them about the perspective sharing thing, which I think could just be amazing because you could apply it to any subject area. Whatever social justice issue you were going to try and- in an economics class I could easily modify that to deal with wage inequality among the genders, income inequality in general. In a science class you could do that about global warming or land use, or anything. In a health class you could use it about responsible sexual behavior. I don't know. I'm just picking stuff out of a hat, but I can think of more ways to use it than more ways to not use it.

Erin similarly described her participation activities as applying broadly to a range of interests and thus supporting students in responding to any issue they might care about (it is interesting to note that my attempt to design a study that would allow for multiple teacher priorities and interests resulted in two of the three teachers designing activities that would allow for multiple *student* priorities and interests, although there is certainly not enough data to support any speculation as to a relationship between the two). She noted that her own sense of the meaning of this activity changed as we worked together: "It grew, it blossomed into this wonderful entity, this framework for the kids to embrace. So hopefully they will take these strategies, incorporate them into their personal lives, and do things with them after my, you

know, modeling.” Further, Erin answered my follow-up question about advice for other teachers interested in improving their social justice practice in a way that is nearly identical to Gordon’s response (although quite different from Mike’s), by returning to the process we had developed and pointing out its relevance to a variety of topics and interests. She said that she would tell another teacher to employ “basically the same model that we did here”:

So we identified what social justice is. So have the kids identify what social justice is. What does it mean to you? I had my kids do ‘what is social *injustice*?’ to help identify. What can you do in the community, at the state level, at the international level? Are there examples that you see in society? What have they done? Are there some small ways you can do within the building to help improve, to advocate? So I would model. I would, you know, show what we’ve done in class and say “well, what can you do as a teacher in the building, with your kids?” Regardless of what level, Special Ed, you know, AP. And empower them.

The second theme that describes differences in practice development across teachers is their felt ability to respond to feedback through practice. In his interviews, Mike was very explicit about the impact of his status as a third-year teacher on attempts to change his practice in specific ways. Particularly, as already quoted in his portrait, he told me that in his current learning phase, “what I tend to do is I get something set and then I work on something else and leave the previous one in place while I work on something else...Problem is I’ve never gotten to that point where I can do that.” Because of this it seems reasonable that Mike would report that the greatest impacts of the study had been on his thinking, which is still developing as he transitions from a teaching novice to a more seasoned educator, rather than on his practice, which is still largely being built brick by brick.

Erin and Gordon, both of whom had been teaching for more than ten years, appraised our work together very differently, and again in notably related ways. Specifically, both told me that the study had given them an opportunity to reflect on their practice after a number of years of teaching, and that this had enabled them to challenge what they ultimately determined to be a comfortable but perhaps stagnant approach to some aspects of their work. Gordon said this explicitly:

So much of what we do, I think especially mid-career- I think beginning teachers are a lot more reflective, maybe, and perhaps the end of the career you're more reflective about things, but at mid-career, especially with a young family and stuff, you just kind of go on autopilot, especially with classes you've taught for a while. Things just kind of go on, and you don't question the assumptions, and I guess I look at that with- like my government class, that I've been teaching since- I'm 41 right now. I've been teaching government since I was 30, and I'm a different person right now than I was when I started teaching government, through life experiences, through health experiences, through just kind of learning more about the way the world works. And I think a lot of the assumptions I've made in my government class are the assumptions of a younger man, and I think that's been one of the greatest things in this, is reflecting, particularly with that class, why I do things the way I do them.

Erin similarly suggested that the study had caused her to ask questions which, while difficult, were useful in preventing her from going into what Gordon calls "autopilot" above:

It forces me to- it challenges me, in a different light. It challenges my teaching, it challenges my preparation in a different way. Instead of mindlessly throwing together a

Power Point there is an overreaching, a greater picture to this madness, and I never thought of it in that aspect.

This raises important questions about the implications of this study for those working with teachers around important issues. Is it necessary for teachers to be well past the novice stage in order to feel comfortable reflecting on practice in this way? Might social justice work along these lines present mid-career teachers with a *raison d'être* for their practice at a time that might otherwise tempt them to remain in too-comfortable patterns of unquestioning procedure, while at the same time being just one more thing for newer teachers to add to their enormous and perhaps even overwhelming list of responsibilities and questions? It is interesting that in Mike's comment, he anticipates that in the future he will do exactly what Gordon and Erin describe doing during this study – going back to aspects of his practice and adjusting them in order to produce particular results. At the current time, however, he suggests that this is simply not possible given all of the other learning and thinking in which he is engaging as a third-year teacher. Whether this is true in general when contrasting newer teachers with those who have more experience is a question that merits further consideration.

The final theme that teachers identified as affecting the results of their work on the study is simply the problem of time. Ultimately, Erin, whose social justice project underwent the most development, had the most time to devote to meetings and discussions³⁵. She told me in her second interview that participating in the study was “extra work, but it's good work.” In her third

³⁵ By this I certainly do not mean to suggest that Erin was not extremely busy – she put an incredible amount of her time into her work as a teacher. Rather, my point is that Gordon and Mike had additional and often extreme demands outside of teaching that limited the time they could spend working on their practice.

interview, she named a number of time-consuming aspects of prior conversations as helpful to her, suggesting that she appreciated:

The questions and the counter-questioning, and the amount- like, you collected information and then we, again, reflected upon it. I thought that was really good. Giving ideas, making suggestions, brainstorming, the fact that you observed and you could cite specific examples or comments the kids made or things that I did or didn't do, and you expounded upon that. I thought that was very helpful.

Gordon's medical treatments, teaching schedule, and responsibilities as the distance learning coordinator, by way of contrast, prevented us from meeting as frequently, one of the main reasons that Gordon's perspective sharing activity took place during my final observation of the study. In fact, Gordon and I planned the perspective sharing activity during our second meeting, while Erin and I planned her initial student questions about role models and issues during our third meeting. The difference is that my second meeting with Gordon took place on November 3rd and was one of three, while my third meeting with Erin took place on October 14th and was one of nine (five of which had already been held by November 3rd). Erin and I were simply able to spend much more time analyzing and adjusting than were Gordon and I. In fact, the success of Gordon's activity is likely a testament to the substantial thinking he put in on his own time; while he did discuss plans for the activity with me via email prior to implementing it, there was nothing in the materials that inherently guaranteed the high level of student engagement Gordon actually achieved through his facilitation of the exercise.

Finally, while Erin was able (and willing) to schedule multiple meetings during her planning period, and was consistent in thinking about ideas that had come up in our discussions outside of our time together and keeping in touch with me about that thinking, and Gordon

lacked schedule availability but spent substantial time thinking through resources and designing his activity on his own, Mike's schedule was such that he had neither schedule availability during the day *nor* free time to think in-depth outside of school hours, as he spent the semester moving to a new home, organizing and running a national hand bell festival, completing fairly intensive third-year teacher requirements for extending his teaching license beyond the following year, and seeing his wife through surgery and recovery. These extracurricular demands pushed much of Mike's basic planning and thinking time into the school day; while we did meet six times during the semester, these meetings tended to be shorter and to involve initial overviews of resources and ideas that Erin and Gordon had often had time to consider beforehand. Mike simply did not feel that he had enough time to fully engage in this study, as he noted repeatedly (and as is discussed in some depth in his profile). Nonetheless, he continued to participate throughout the semester without complaint, and, as noted, did report that his thinking was changing in potentially useful ways.

While no scholarly analysis is really necessary to support the argument that some people have more available time to spend on particular activities than do others, this should not be passed over as a trivial observation. It will likely always be true that among any group of educators in a school or district some will simply not have substantial time to devote to things they might otherwise have focused on in much more depth. I argue that determining how to support not only teachers with substantial freedom of schedule, but also those who, like Mike, find themselves struggling to meet a range of personal and professional time commitments, is a necessary step in developing a process for supporting *all* teachers in improving their practice.

This challenge extends to those who design teacher development programs as well; Mike argued that the requirements of the state program he sees as intended to make him a more

reflective teacher in his first years are unfortunately (and ironically) preventing him from actually having the time to think about his practice:

I think I could look back and make changes and do the things I need to do to incorporate all those other things that you're referring to without the five-year wait. The problem is, is that they pile so much crap on me. This [third year certification] thing I am just sick to death of, and I want it gone, and I've got to do another round of it due April 15th, so I've got to start on that, like, immediately. God, I'm so pissed off about that. So I don't have time to stop and breathe and look and come back and fix it because they're piling so much stuff on me trying to teach me how to be reflective in my looking, and- I'm forgetting the code words now that they use for all this stuff, but 'look back, and use data, and do this and do that', and right now I'm just running in place just to keep up in part because in part all the crap they're throwing at me. So it makes it difficult. It makes it hard³⁶.

In other words, Mike felt unable to participate fully in our work together, which was intended to support him in reflecting on his practice, because he had too many requirements from the state as part of a program that was *also* intended to support him in reflecting on his practice but which he did not see as having that effect. I argue that this is not simply a case of a teacher's rejection of a program as ineffective, but a legitimate equity issue; it is well documented (e.g., Roza, 2006) that teacher turnover disproportionately affects the most disadvantaged students, and that these students are much more likely to be taught by teachers with less experience. Thus,

³⁶ This last observation of Mike's directly echoes Marsh, Bertrand, & Huguet's (2015) observation that more research is needed as to how teachers can be supported in drawing on data to increase equity. Clearly in this instance the ways in which Mike is being supported to do this do not seem effective to him and do not appear to have had that result.

requiring these teachers to complete programs they do not find to be useful eliminates even more time they might spend building relationships³⁷. Mike says as much when he reports on his frustrated desire to set aside time to get to know his students and to reflect on building relationships with them:

Some may view that as a waste of classroom time. I view it as a vital necessity to establish a rapport with a student, which I think helps with the learning process. And they keep talking about how that's an important thing and all that, but god, you can't tell it from their policies right now.

An implication of this issue of time is that policy hoping to support teachers in improving their practice, social justice or otherwise, should be created in a way that takes into account teachers' varying time availability. More importantly, programs put into place for early-career teachers should be continually investigated to determine if they are having the desired effects. Mike saw the requirements intended to support him in being a reflective educator as instead hampering his ability to reflect; while it is certainly impossible to ensure complete agreement among a large group of teachers as to whether a program or process is effective, further investigation is warranted to determine if Mike's opinion is a notable outlier or if it represents a sentiment held by a number of others. One might ask in what ways programs can be designed to enable teachers to feel supported in improving rather than merely being obligated to jump through a series of hoops; while it is certainly not clear exactly how one might respond to this

³⁷ Note that I am not assessing this particular program or myself claiming that it is unhelpful to teachers. Rather, I observe that Mike found this program to be unhelpful and saw it as wasting time he could otherwise have spent improving his teaching. As noted below, this suggests that continually assessing such programs and ensuring that they are having the intended results for newer teachers is a social justice imperative due to the equity issues that arise if this is not the case.

question, the answer certainly involves thoughtful design and rollout of programs targeted to specific and clearly stated objectives.

Incorporating social justice. In addition to highlighting and developing different social justice issues in their work, teachers chose to modify different aspects of their teaching in order to put this work into practice. In this section, I discuss the three approaches identified from teachers' changes in practice, and from their talk about that practice, as well as the ways in which each approach played out (or not) for each teacher. These include a *curricular* approach, in which one focuses on linking social justice practice to the curriculum itself and drawing on content being taught to address social justice issues, an *interactive* approach, in which teachers address social justice through the ways in which people talk to and understand one another, and a *relational* approach, in which teachers structure their relationships with students within the classroom in such a way as to respond to perceived issues of social justice. While distinct, I see the second and third approaches as related: both focus less on *what* students are learning and more on *how* they are learning, as well as how they are engaging with others around what they know.

It is important to note that one's social justice approach need not be uniquely determined by one's general issue of focus – for example, gender equity might be addressed with a curricular approach by explicitly discussing the oppression of women that shows up in the history students are learning, but might also be addressed through an interactive approach by working to increase the participation of female students and by carefully examining one's practice to determine if it supports equitable outcomes for girls and boys. However, at the end of this section I do discuss ways in which teachers' approaches were at least somewhat linked to their particular contexts and to the specific details of the issues they identified. While no teacher employed a single

approach exclusively, these approaches are present in their work to different extents, and in the following sections I address the ways in which the three approaches are visible in each teacher's practice.

Erin's mostly curricular approach. While both Gordon and Mike certainly incorporated what students were learning into their social justice teaching, Erin focused most heavily on the curriculum as a vessel for social justice work. In all three of her interviews, she discussed the history she was teaching to students as a way to frame her ideas about social justice. In her first interview, she said this:

You probably would be interested in my AP Government class; we're starting out with the founding fathers. So the idea of social inequality regarding a monarchy and a democracy, and right now my students just had a homework assignment about the different philosophies. The big question for American government is how can we protect liberty but still have order.

In her second interview, Erin told me that she now saw the development of the United States as a way to get some purchase on issues of social justice and social injustice:

I never thought of studying the Constitution in government as a social justice project, but it really is. I mean, we were founded on social injustice. That's the reason why we had the revolution. We were founded on basic principles of liberty and sovereignty, and that we were done wrong by Great Britain.

In her final interview, Erin also addressed this topic, noting that she saw social justice as "the idea that our country was, if you study the constitution, equal opportunity for all, equal rights for all, and there are interest groups that try to infringe upon that, so what can we do about

that?” In all three cases, she connects social justice to the material students are learning. This also played out in practice. In her portrait, for example, I describe the final lesson I observed in Erin’s classroom, in which her social justice investigation was actually a full lesson on voting patterns that was linked directly to the content of her AP Government course. Students reached important conclusions about concepts like fairness and justice through this investigation into content.

Erin did not exclusively employ the curricular approach in her teaching, however. While certainly linked to the curriculum, and particularly to the unit on electoral politics they spent much of the semester addressing, the questions Erin asked students to respond to during the series of social justice activities she implemented also took an interactive approach. In her final interview, she discussed the necessity of asking students to “identify what social justice is. What does it mean to you?” The writing she asked students to do around the issues they found important, and particularly her assignment to locate an argument that ran counter to their own thinking and to address the points it made and their impact on the student’s own beliefs, supported students in clarifying their own ideas around particular issues and in building their own abilities to interact with others around them as participants in their community.

Gordon’s interactive and relational social justice. While Gordon also made connections between what students were learning about history and government and a number of real-life issues those topics related to, these connections were not often explicitly focused on social justice. Instead, interactional and relational approaches appeared more strongly in Gordon’s social justice work (although in different proportions for his two different issues). First, Gordon’s democratic modeling of classroom practice is relational. The social justice aspect of this work was not about the economics he was teaching – in fact, it might have occurred just as

easily in a health or English class – but about the way in which he communicated that information to students. For Gordon’s second issue of listening to alternative perspectives, he instead took an interactional approach, structuring a situation in which students practiced listening and talking to one another. While again not influenced by the specific topic of study (as discussed above, Gordon makes a particular point of observing that this activity could work for a range of topics in effectively any subject and that “I can think of more ways to use it than...not use it.”), this approach was also not one that focused on Gordon’s relationship with his students, but instead on their ability to relate to one another. That is, while the modeling of democratic practices is a teacher-centered choice that affects the way in which teacher and students communicate and participate in the classroom environment, Gordon’s perspective sharing activity works not only with multiple curricula, but also in multiple contexts outside of the classroom – students can practice interacting with anyone in this way, whether a classmate, teacher, friend, or complete stranger.

Mike at the intersection. Mike’s approach in some sense lies at the intersection of these three approaches. It is certainly curricular, as he draws on the history he is teaching to make powerful observations about what he calls “the stupidity of racism” as well as to comment on issues of gender, power, politics, and many others. Further, in his final interview, when I asked him what advice he would have for a teacher who was also interested in thinking through possible improvements in social justice practice, his immediate response was, “What subject?”. However, as he repeatedly discusses, his teaching also blends this curricular social justice work with a very careful and explicit focus on his relationships with students, something he addresses in many, many comments already included here. The ways in which he took up almost all of the

ideas we discussed involved addressing in some way how teacher-student relationships can be leveraged to improve particular aspects of students' learning and thinking.

His chosen activity method, however, in which students discuss and debate in a new way in order to make claims and defend them, is clearly interactive. The day of the student debate about the death of Lincoln, then, saw Mike independently adjusting three different aspects of his social justice practice at once: The curriculum was used as the basis for students' debate about racism and the failure of Reconstruction, as well as for the follow-up discussion that saw increased participation by Mike's students of color. The activity itself was interactional and focused on students' ability to listen carefully to the arguments of others and to make reasoned attempts to address these arguments. Finally, relational changes around the way in which Mike connected his own actions to the needs and desires of his students (e.g., his adjustments to the debate format to respond to student concerns) influenced the structure and outcome of the activity.

Links between issues and approaches given teachers' perceptions of context. In many ways, the approaches teachers took were tailored to the particulars of their social justice foci and shaped by their context. While the portraits that precede this section provide some sense of this context, teachers and leaders were asked to provide substantial additional contextual information in interviews; this information is presented in far more detail in Appendix H, which provides an analytical overview of all of the contextual factors practitioners identified as salient to their classroom, school, district, and community context. While the overview in this appendix is somewhat outside of the scope of this chapter, I see it as providing substantial foundation for much of what is discussed here, and it has thus been included as supplemental material to further contextualize teachers' interests and practice choices.

As demonstrated above, the varying social justice issues that teachers saw as most contextually salient were in many ways addressed through similarly varying practice changes. Erin, for example, focused on participation around topics individually identified as important by each student, and her method of addressing that issue focused on a combination of discussing particular content that arose within the social studies curriculum and working with students on ways to represent their own views and beliefs and to take up the views and beliefs of others. Additionally, while one might argue that her activity and Gordon's perspective sharing activity are very similar in that both were designed as protocols that can be applied to many different topics in order to better understand and/or communicate about them, I suggest that two major differences align Erin's more with the curricular approach and Gordon's more with the interactive.

First, Gordon's approach is designed to work for *all* issues, while Erin's is designed to work for *an* issue. In the perspective sharing exercise, students did not need to identify a specific issue (in fact, they identified none of them – all issues were pre-selected by Gordon, albeit based on things he saw as important to students). Rather, they needed to be able to listen to the opinion of someone else about any issue, perhaps even many issues at once, and to engage in a set of practices that enable them to process and understand that person's reasoning. Erin's participatory protocol, however, begins with one issue of importance to each student; in fact, the protocol immediately fails if the student does not care about the issue in question and has no desire to address it (compare this to Gordon's perspective sharing activity, which should produce the same general results whether students find a topic to be incredibly fascinating or utterly inane). Thus, addressing specific issues is key for Erin's goals, and this aligns with her focus on specific issues

within the Social Studies curriculum. Gordon's activity instead focuses on how students take up arbitrary issues, and for this reason he does not do the same.

Additionally, Mike's multi-faceted approach reflects the multi-faceted nature of the issues he identified. He made it very clear that there are certain issues that he found important, such as racism and income inequality (even, as discussed above, going so far as to answer a question about the social justice issues that were important to his students by telling me both what he saw as most important to them and what he thought *should* be most important to them), and for that reason he focused on these issues when they arose, as they frequently did, in the content of his Social Studies classes. Beyond this, though, Mike also identified ways in which he wanted his students to be able to interact around these issues (reasoned debates in which they express arguments based on evidence), which added an interactive aspect to the work.

Additionally, Mike repeatedly said that he saw relationship building as necessary not only for social justice teaching but for teaching in general, meaning that within the curricular and interactive knowledge students are building there must also exist an aspect of relational social justice, in which Mike in his position as the teacher develops rapport with his students and uses this rapport to support their learning.

Assessing Partnerships

While I do address the impact of my presence during this study in providing support and collaboration for teachers to some extent above, in this section I focus more explicitly on my own participation and the function of the partnerships I formed with these teachers. This project was not designed with a goal of "objectively" assessing teachers' practice (portraiture, in fact, rejects entirely the possibility of such objectivity), but rather as dynamic partnership between two people (more accurately, three different dynamic partnerships, each between two people). As

part of this partnership, I worked to understand teachers' needs and interests through constructive and open conversation, to respond to those needs by sharing my observations and analysis, by providing resources, and by working to develop or co-develop specific activities, and then to adjust based on teachers' responses in order to continue to improve our collaboration. In this section, then, I analyze teachers' appraisals of our work together, first identifying aspects of our partnership that each found more or less useful and then considering the trajectory of each of the three partnerships over the course of the semester.

Presence, participation, and accountability. In their second interviews, both Erin and Gordon told me that perhaps the most useful element of our work together so far was simply the fact of my presence. Erin, as already noted, made many of my observation days into 'social justice days'; she would explicitly address social (in)justice³⁸ with students at times that I was present as a way of making sure that it was happening. She told me she appreciated "just having you in the classroom, because that holds me accountable, like, 'oh crap, he's coming; I better make sure that my lesson aligns to his expectations³⁹.'" Gordon said nearly the same thing: "Knowing that I have somebody in the classroom a couple of times a week I think makes me more accountable to be on my 'A' game...Just being in this study at all has forced me to reflect on things that especially- this has been probably the craziest of my years teaching, where this year very easily could have just happened with me throwing it on autopilot, and the very fact of

³⁸ Recall that Erin chose to frame many of her discussions with students as focusing on social *in*justice, with which she felt they could identify, rather than on social justice, which she suggested was too theoretical of a concept to really grab student interest.

³⁹ This is a particularly interesting framing, given that I ostensibly had no expectations and Erin's work on those days was at least theoretically focused on the issues that concerned her. It is my sense that "aligns to his expectations" simply means "touches on social justice" in the way she uses the phrase here.

being in the study is making me reflect on things that I probably wouldn't reflect on. It's making me inject things into my teaching that I don't think I would have injected in before⁴⁰.

I would suggest that the most striking aspect of these two comments is that both teachers use the same word to describe the way study participation and my presence made them feel, despite the fact that this word is usually used in a very different way: *accountable*. In an unrelated comment in her first interview, Erin uses the word “accountable” in a way that gives it a fairly different connotation, one that echoes Cochran-Smith’s (2015) critique of US accountability culture: “I could offer kids opportunity, but for them to actually walk through that door and take personal responsibility...I have to hold them accountable, like you have to get stuff signed off or you have to do a reflection paper.” While the meaning of the word is still ostensibly the same, in this instance Erin is referring to requirements set forth for others that they are required to meet or face consequences. In the prior instances, however, Erin and Gordon discuss being accountable *to themselves* – in other words, rather than feeling as if they are being *held accountable*, as Mike described the state and district requirements that have caused him much frustration, both teachers suggested that my presence encouraged them to *hold themselves accountable to improving their practice* in order to better support their students. I argue that this is an extremely different kind of accountability, one in which teachers are positioned as knowledgeable professionals who feel a responsibility to their students, not as workers who need to be made to accomplish particular tasks under threat, like the children Erin is referring to above who are still learning what responsibility means.

⁴⁰ Note that while Gordon is also quoted as referring to the danger of going on “autopilot” above, this quote is from a completely different interview, suggesting that this issue was very much in Gordon’s mind during the course of our partnership.

While he did not use the word accountable, Mike also echoed this sentiment in his third interview, telling me in response to a question about benefits from the study that “it did make me more aware in my lesson planning of social justice issues. Whenever you’re put under the microscope, the objects being observed is going to change, as it will⁴¹.” There is little if any mention in literature on teacher learning of the specific impact of the presence of a supportive researcher or colleague in the classroom, but it is striking that *all three teachers* reported that simply participating in this study, and having me come in to observe as part of that participation, led them to think differently about their teaching and about their accountability to their students. Erin went even further in her third interview, telling me that she was desirous of additional opportunities to be observed and to discuss her practice:

It was weird having somebody observe me twice a week, but in reality I think it was a good thing. You know, like “Oh man, Max is coming today. What are we doing today?” or “How could I improve upon what I did last time?” or “I never thought about last week, so now I have to think through last week.” But I think it was a good thing to have- you know, observe, and then have a meeting once a week as well. I think that was very- I wish my principal would do that sometimes. You know, to have a more one-on-one. My TBT, my evaluator, said, “Just pretend we met, and just fill out this form.” I’m like, “Well what’s the purpose of this if you didn’t meet with me?”

Erin’s comments did not simply call for repeated observations, however. She referred to our meetings as “a safe space” and suggested that they provided time “to process strategies and

⁴¹ The implications of this statement are made somewhat stronger given that Mike also told me “I can have the principal and the director of the school board sitting in my classroom; that’s not going to change one iota of what I do” about a month and a half earlier, suggesting that our work having impacted Mike’s thinking about his practice is notable.

ideas.” This echoes Robin’s comment, discussed in the following section, suggesting that the positive appraisals that I heard of Robin’s own work were due in part to her having given teachers opportunities to experiment in their practice and, if necessary, to fail in those experiments.

These comments paint a meaningful picture of three teachers who *want* to learn and to improve their practice (despite the fact that two of the three have already been teaching for more than ten years), of teachers who are not afraid to try and fail, nor afraid to talk through their interests and goals with others, but who are not given the support to do these things. Mike put in an intense effort to participate in this study to the best of his ability despite an unbelievably busy and trying semester, yet he paints the work he is doing for the state, ostensibly designed to meet goals similar to my own of supporting teachers in reflecting on their practice, as utterly useless and infuriating. It seems reasonable, then, to question whether there are not ways to provide opportunity for these educators to work through issues in their practice that, as they described this study, leave them feeling supported, particularly, again, if my mere presence was considered by all three to be one of the most important elements of our partnership.

What might support for teachers along these lines look like? In her write-up of her experience in the study, completed in November (see Chapter 3 on methodology), Erin outlines in far more detail the aspects of our interactions that she felt were beneficial:

He is very patient, open-minded, does not show bias, supportive, not critical or condescending. He works WITH me, in spite of the bureaucracy or barriers that are tossed in daily (e.g. schedule changes, fog days, etc). He is helpful when I am floundering to construct guiding, clarifying, or follow up/counter-questions to help define/craft my role. E.g. For our next step, let’s have students create a 3 step process about how they are

a role model and what they can do locally. He enters the class like a ghost. Sometimes I do not realize he is sitting at the back of the classroom to observe until I begin teaching!

Max has really helped me to grow as an instructor.

The qualities that Erin points to are largely things I had taken for granted about my interactions with these teachers. Asking for an opinion and listening carefully when one is volunteered, being sensitive about teachers' time and schedule requirements, making suggestions when suggestions are desired, and avoiding disruptions or inconveniences, I contend, are not difficult practices.

This raises a key question, addressed further in the discussion of implications that ends this chapter: if Erin felt that she had been helped to grow as an instructor after less than three months, what might be accomplished if ongoing programs are put into place with the long-term intention of supporting the practice, and knowledge, of all teachers?

Reflection over resources. Another major point of agreement among teachers was that the study had successfully supported them in reflecting on their practice; in their final interviews, each addressed this topic. Erin's initial response when asked about the benefits of the study was that "it made me reflect upon my teaching from a colleague". Mike told me that he appreciated the way in which a reading we discussed (Lareau, 1987) enabled him to reflect on his thinking around issues of social class, despite the fact that he did not yet see this thinking having affected his practice:

Intellectually it was interesting, and you never know when one of those intellectually interesting things might affect you or affect something you do since we're all moved not by the big things so much sometimes; it's by the accumulation of the little things that make the big drastic changes in what we do.

Gordon told me that for him, the study's "primary benefit, I think I've said before, is a structured way to reflect on practice." In his write-up of his own experience of the study, he extended this idea: "Somehow, when you stop and take time to think, you realize how little you actually *think*."

This appreciation of reflection extended to teachers' comments on the resources I provided. Teachers' second and third interviews involved a question about aspects of the study that were the most and least helpful (see Appendices B and C). Of the six occasions on which I asked one of the teachers what they found least helpful about the study, four resulted in an answer of 'nothing', and the other two, Gordon's and Erin's third interviews, both referred to reading material. Specifically, Erin told me that the reading material itself was the least useful, but that discussing and reflecting on that material made it useful:

I scanned the reading material. I thought it was helpful, but I didn't read it as much as I did- I thought the conversations were more helpful, but it was based on the reading, though. I wouldn't say they weren't useful. They were useful, but I think I utilized the conversations more than I did with the reading material.

Gordon's response concerned a packet of financial literacy social justice lessons I had shared with him following an observation he made during his second interview that he was unsure of how to cover economic inequality in his Economics class. Because this occurred late in the semester and referred to content that was not taught until after the study ended, it was the only resource I shared with a teacher but never discussed. Gordon's description of the issues with that lack of discussion notably relates to Erin's point above:

There was a big packet you gave me, on a mathematics thing. And I'm being totally honest here, I made it about three pages in and I glazed over, because it was just really, it

was hard for me. And frankly I should have worked harder, but it was hard for me to engage in it...And if we're looking at how people can replicate this later on and how they can make use of this, I think it would be either- yeah, if there's something that you know is outside of a teacher's subject area, finding a way to scaffold them to it or just doing stuff within their subject area.

Finally, although Mike did not discuss this event specifically in his interviews, the Lareau (1987) reading that he commented on (above) as useful to his thinking was one that he had initially told me he completely disagreed with. Following a discussion, though, he suggested that he understood the content of the piece differently, and that although he was still not fully in agreement, he now saw its value. The connection seems clear – Erin notes that the readings themselves may not have been as useful as other resources, but that they were made more useful by our discussion of them. Gordon pointed to the only material we did not discuss as the single aspect of the study he found not to be useful (and, incidentally, to the reading we did discuss as one of the two *most* useful aspects of the study). Mike changed his negative opinion of a reading following a discussion about it, ultimately naming it as the most useful influence on his thinking. These responses suggest that simply requiring these teachers to read through information would *not* have been a useful way to support them in their learning; even given my tailoring of recommended resources to the specific issues teachers discussed with me, all three teachers found these resources not to be useful without discussion and reflection to go along with them. The implication of this focus on reflection, particularly when coupled with teachers' comments about the benefits of my observing in their classrooms and the discussions we had following those observations, is that it was the physical presence of another human which both made them

feel accountable to work on their social justice practice and supported them in understanding ideas and identifying solutions to problems they recognized in their classrooms.

While it is quite unlikely that a district would have the resources necessary to distribute dedicated observers trained to facilitate reflective discussions to every classroom, a possible solution to this problem may also have been identified by study participants. During her interview, Robin discussed a new district policy intended to support groups of academically struggling students:

Now in Carteret Public, I don't know if Mr. Rand ever touched upon this, but we have freshman clusters, and last year we rolled out sophomore clusters, where they have the four same core subject teachers, so it's still kind of like that family atmosphere that they had in elementary, and so all of the teachers have common planning, and they meet and they talk about the same kids.

Mike had informed me in an earlier interview that cluster students “tend to be the lower functioning kids, kids who have more problems, for whatever reason, larger number of children with special needs⁴².” The implication of this program, then, is that teachers can better support students seen as needing the most additional support by sharing planning periods and discussing their students and their work. However, when I asked Erin to describe Brandon's context, she said this:

I don't feel like we're very cohesive. I mean, we'll get a mandate from my principal, but we don't really- even though we have weekly meetings, we really don't collaborate.

⁴² The terminology of this framing may be somewhat problematic, although Robin's and Mike's comments were my only source of information about this program.

There's not a smooth sense of unity. One teacher really doesn't know what other teachers are doing.

Further, when I asked Mike in his first interview how issues might be approached at the school level, he responded by describing a sense of isolation from the thinking of his colleagues and the overall sense of things at Brandon:

I deal with the teachers I meet with. But you can see I'm at the end of a hallway. You go down that hallway, I have two other Social Studies teachers, a math teacher, Home Ec or Household Sciences or whatever they call it nowadays, and then Special Ed. Lots of Special Ed. That's not a good cross-section of the school.

The teachers who participated in my study did not describe a desire to disappear into the "black box" (e.g., Black & William, 2010) of teaching. Rather, they all expressed an appreciation for discussion and reflection and a desire for further interaction around issues of practice. While a number of factors mentioned by teachers (e.g., time/scheduling problems or classroom responsibilities) work against collaboration in the school environment, there is clear agreement among them that opportunities for reflection and discussion are wanted and needed, and that this provides gains well beyond those that come from readings or other individually-accessed resources. There are already policies in this district that recognize that shared planning provides an excellent way for teachers to support students; perhaps extensions or adjustments to such policies might provide teachers with some of what they need.

Contextualizing Teachers' Work Within the School and District

While I have largely focused up to this point on the importance of teachers' own ideas and approaches during our work together, it is certainly true that this work did not take place in a

vacuum. While teachers do to some extent have the freedom to address the needs of their students in their own classrooms given their appraisals of those students' needs, those classrooms exist within a school, and that school within a district, and for that reason the ideas and approaches of principals and district leaders are also a salient part of the story of teachers' work. In this section I will briefly discuss some connections and differences between the ways in which teachers discussed particular issues and the ways in which Robin Hatcher, Brandon's principal, and Jack Rand, a Carteret assistant superintendent, reported understanding them. Following this, I will address the ways in which participants at each level discussed the work being done at other levels.

Social justice redux. At the beginning of this chapter, I discuss differences among teachers' conceptualizations of social justice, noting implications for our work together of the extent to which each teacher focused on equity and/or equality in defining the concept. This distinction is if anything even more salient as regards Robin's and Jack's definitions of social justice, as each leaned strongly to one side of the spectrum. Jack, like Mike, discussed equality when asked about the meaning of social justice, although he focused on equality of access and opportunity rather than on treatment:

A couple of words that you said⁴³ resonated with me, one being equality, one being the rights and terms of individuals to have equal access, and I think from my own standpoint in terms of the lens, as being someone who controls resources across the district, to

⁴³ While this question was asked at the beginning of the interview, I had just told Jack that 'equity', 'equality', 'fairness', and 'justice' were all words that some may see as being related to social justice, and that is what he is referring to here. For the context of this comment, see Appendix G.

ensure that there's equality in terms of resources, in terms of opportunities, as well as other things educationally to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to move forward.

Both Jack and Mike, then, were very clear that they saw social justice as a question of equality. Robin, however, framed her answer around equity more strongly than either Gordon or Erin, explicitly noting without prompting that she did *not* mean equality:

I do believe it is giving each person/group what they need to be successful. So I don't necessarily think that it is an equality thing. I think it is what kind of puts each group on an even playing field. And that would differ for each group.

As is discussed in much more detail in Appendix I, Robin repeated this focus on equity and rejection of equality in her second interview, responding even to a question from me about her thoughts on strict equality by discussing equity:

It kind of goes back to- when you say strict equality, I kind of still railroad into the fairness...you just have to look at the needs of each area...For example, we have [campus resource officers] in schools. Not everyone gets one, but not everyone needs one, sort of thing. So I think resources or manpower or laws or rules need to be based on the need of that person or that organization.

This disconnect raises a couple of major questions: even setting individual teachers aside for a moment, if Jack, as a district leader, sees equal access and equal opportunity as the way to achieve a socially just society, while Robin, as a principal, sees equity as the way to achieve a socially just society and actively rejects equality as a way to do so, can both definitions operate without causing dissonance in the design and enactment of policy? This also begs a second question: assuming that those working in schools generally desire a world in which issues of

social justice have, in fact, been addressed in a way that at least limits their impact (as opposed to actively desiring inequities), in what ways can a district discussion around how to achieve such a world be approached? Here I am not referring to discussion around particular district initiatives, but rather a discussion that focuses on the underlying mechanism for achieving social justice aims. Scholars cited in Chapter 2 differ in their conceptions of social justice mechanisms, suggesting that this question is not at all trivial. Equality of opportunity looks very different from equity when put into practice in schools; I would suggest that, given the differences among these practitioners' responses (and these differences are part of a very small sample, whereas the Carteret Public Schools employ thousands of people), explicit discussion of aims and mechanisms would be invaluable in organizing a coherent mission around social justice. I discuss this idea further in the conclusion to this chapter.

Leaders' views. The relationships among participants' views of the twenty-three issues identified as salient by teachers over the course of this study are discussed in far more depth in Appendix I. One notable result of that investigation is that on multiple occasions, Jack and Robin gave similar if not identical responses regarding policies, programs, and relationships in the district, suggesting effective communication between the district and school level (or at least between the district and Brandon). As one example, Robin and Jack gave extremely related responses to a question about differences in how issues were taken up at the school and district level. Robin said this:

Well our difference might be we're only focused- we have our blinders on about what's helping Brandon, and so our thoughts about what we should or should not be doing are kind of like this (gestures), whereas the district, they have to look a little bit more globally

Jack expanded upon this distinction, noting that the difference was useful because both views had benefits and drawbacks:

I think one, um, we kind of have more of a global view. You know, they may have more of their own individual school. Also, we are far removed from the problem, so we may not have a better understanding of what the problem is than what they do. So I think it goes both ways in terms of at the building level they may only see it through their lens, which obviously isn't necessarily good for the district, but we may be seeing it from our lens, which doesn't give us a true reflection of what the issues are. So obviously both sides, both lenses can be flawed. And I acknowledge that.

Beyond similarities in the ways in which Jack and Robin viewed the roles of school and district, they also demonstrated strikingly similar ideas about policies. For example, in response to a question about where teachers could go to find resources to support their teaching, both showed a knowledge of the same set of options. Jack told me:

We have academies here within our- reading, math, science and social st- or, reading math and science academy. There is no social studies academy, which a lot of this would probably come out of. Also we do allow teachers to take professional development beyond what is offered internally. They are permitted so many hours of professional development beyond what the district is pushing them or requiring them to go to. There are dollars within the district through federal programs such as our Title I and Title II programs. There are also Carteret Federation of Teacher funds that are set aside for professional development as well, so there's a couple different pots that can be utilized for that.

Robin listed almost the same things:

We have a math academy, we have a reading academy, and those are CFT teachers on paid special assignment. They're not in the classroom anymore. They're masters in their field, in their trade, things like that. We have curriculum experts for science and social studies. So teachers immediately have that little pocket that they could go to. The union- and there are funds set aside under a lottery system, teachers can apply to go to conferences in a specific area that they would want to go to.

Robin and Jack also both described the same example of school-district collaboration that resulted in a changed district policy. When discussing the dress code, Robin noted that Brandon had been instrumental in adjusting its requirements the previous year:

We made a decision: even though we have a dress code, we were going to let kids wear jeans. Because last year you couldn't wear jeans. You couldn't wear sweats, things like that. Yoga pants, things like that. It came to be unenforceable, and so like we were beating a dead horse. So we work with our building committee, who was our teacher aspect, and we said "you guys, we're killing ourselves." And they were like "we know, we get it." So we kind of- well, word got out, very quickly, and we had a visit from someone from the board, who says "what are y'all doing?" And we're like, "Listen. You know, we can't enforce this." And I said "well, I'll take that back." I said "I can enforce dress code if that's all you want me to do here. I'll put every administrator on corners, and we'll watch every kid that goes by." I said "...but it's all that we'll do." I said "It's not working." And so this year, I don't know if you know, this year high schools have a new dress code....So that was a good example of how we tried to do something against what we were supposed to be doing, and they did come in, and we had our hands slapped

a little bit, but it did open up the conversation. Like, “Listen – we’ve got to get through this year. We hear you though. Let’s get a committee together.” And so over the last summer they did. They talked with teachers and parents and students and board members, and, you know, they drafted and adopted a new dress code policy.

Far from seeming frustrated by this turn of events, Jack also described this change as a positive thing, although he did not mention Brandon specifically:

We just recently modified our dress code to make it less restrictive for our students. And a lot of it had to do with input from our teachers, our administrators, etc. And you’re never going to win that battle- you have some that are saying we need a really strict dress code because it brings in barriers to education, you have others saying listen, I don’t want my kids missing class because they wore a red shirt, or they wore this or that. So the district has tried to change that.

In several instances, however, these leaders also gave responses that differed notably from what teachers had said about issues salient to their classrooms or district policies that impacted them. For example, teachers frequently mentioned gender as an important issue in their classrooms, but it was one for which neither Robin nor Jack had anything to say. When asked about whether issues of gender were addressed in the district, Jack told me that they weren’t:

A lot of discussions about race, a lot of discussions around poverty, etc. As for gender, other than the fact that we have established boys and girls academies and we have a high school that’s gender based in terms of where they are, for lack of a better term, segregated, the boys are on one side, the girls are on another, so we have K-12 options for that, but I wouldn’t say there’s a lot of discussion around that.

Robin, after asking me to clarify what I meant by issues of gender, eventually told me a story about an occasion on which she had conversed with the only girl in a computer design class about her experience, but noted that “it was really just an off-the-cuff- so nothing. I don’t really have any conversations about that with people, about ‘why do we have more boys in the sciences’ or something like that, at my level.”

Further, despite the politically charged environment in which this study took place and teachers’ frequent discussion of concerns relating to the present political situation and its impact on students, Robin and Jack both suggested that they had given little thought to the place of this topic in CPS. Robin simply told me that she herself was not political before moving on to a discussion of the politics she saw in school governance:

I, again, I am not one of those that go out and lobby, and get involved in politics.

Whether that’s right or wrong, I have so much to do here that this is where I focus my energies, and I guess I also know I can’t gripe too much about it if I’m not the one out there beating to make a change.

Jack indicated that other than as a part of US history politics were not addressed in CPS:

We try to be politically neutral, and actually try to ensure that political views are not presented to students, in terms of a way that would favor one political party over the other. But politics are taught in terms of within the social studies curriculum, in terms of you talk about the branches of government, the political parties, etc., through American history. That is spoken about. But we try to ensure that political views of the current day are not cast upon our students.

This is particularly striking given that two of three teachers focused their biggest practice change on the impact of politics on students' lives, and that all three discussed concerns about how to address these very real issues in their teaching.

This brief overview is certainly not meant to suggest that there are no or very few connections between teachers' issues of focus and issues of focus at the school and district levels; as can be seen in Appendix I, there were a number of issues that were important to teachers, including major ones like race, class, testing, and the environment, that were also seen as important by Robin and/or Jack. Nonetheless, it is also true that several of the issues teachers saw as most important in their classrooms were not seen as important by these school and district leaders. Further, in many instances teachers seemed to have a different sense of policies around issues like teacher development, parent involvement, and community engagement than did Jack or Robin. As will be discussed next, part of this may be due to differences in how teachers see the work being done at the district level and what they assume about the approaches and beliefs of those who do it.

Assessing work at other levels⁴⁴. The ways in which teachers appraise the work being done at other levels within the district, as well as the impact of that work on their own practice, has already served as an underlying theme of this analysis. In this section I will take on that question more explicitly, outlining in detail the ways in which the three teachers, as well as Robin and Jack, discuss their perceptions of this work⁴⁵. Generally, teachers were split as to how they reported seeing district higher-ups, while the principal and assistant superintendent both

⁴⁴ In this section, in order to further preserve teacher anonymity, I will not refer to teachers by pseudonym or include other identifying information.

⁴⁵ Note that while Robin's and Jack's perceptions of topics discussed in this chapter have to some extent been minimized, their ideas are discussed in far more detail in Appendices H and I.

reported confidence in their teachers (as discussed in Appendix H, they also both noted having excellent teachers as a salient part of their school and district context) and in the work being done at one another's levels.

Views about the district. One teacher comment was critical both of the district's commitment to social justice work (the question that had been asked) and of within-school structures for teacher collaboration, further including a critique of other teachers who do not get more involved in their practice:

We do have a mission, but I don't know if it's for show or if there's actual follow-through. And, once again, we're so huge, it's very difficult. I know like in my building we never have department meetings; there's no collaboration. I'm involved in a lot of stuff because I got fed up that I wasn't getting any good professional development, so I do a lot with the state, I'm on committees and stuff like that, so I am but I can't say the same thing for people in my district who hide behind the union.

A second teacher, however, when asked whether the district was focused on social justice, framed it as having the substance to back up its equity goals: "Absolutely. I could nitpick about certain issues, but I really do believe that senior leadership downtown cares about equality. They care about service. They care about engagement. Yes, I do believe that."

One teacher comment indicated several perceived concerns about bureaucracy and the upper administration, but suggested that a good principal was a protective force for teachers in her/his school:

I often see this district as being more interested in doing things that look good than in things that...actually accomplish things. They will start up a program and make a big launch of a program and then do nothing with it, or they will start a program that has very

little basis that meets our need but sounds good. There's way too much of that kind of stuff going on. There's not enough emphasis- we're a true bureaucracy in the fact that we have, one hand doesn't know what the other hand's doing. Some of that you expect from a large school district, a large bureaucracy, but...I'm just amazed that we can operate. I think we have a very good principal who tries to limit the type of crap that comes down from up above, down on us [and] tries to protect us...from all of this stuff...The administration, most of them don't have a clue.

A different teacher, however, said the opposite about district leaders: "Our local context, we have a great superintendent, great assistant superintendents. There are really good people in the building admin and in the district admin."

Teachers also differed as to whether they saw district leaders as caring about the same issues that they cared about. While one teacher indicated seeing the district as having similar priorities, a second seemed frustrated by a lack of understanding of the district's priorities and decisions, responding to my inquiry as to whether the leadership at the district would give similar or different answers to the interview questions with, "I have no idea. None whatsoever. I've given up on trying to figure out what [district leadership] thinks or does."

As a principal, Robin, however, reported a positive attitude toward communication with and from the district in her initial interview:

At our principal meetings, the three policies we've talked about the most have been the ones that I have [discussed as well]. And, you know, that comes from above, so I roll it down, and, or what comes down below I roll up, so, again, I think some of the big ones are definitely across the board at every level.

When I asked about issues of bureaucracy, she said that they existed, but noted that they should be expected in large organizations and discussed a district initiative to improve communication:

We're a large organization with many facets, so there's definitely times I think there's too many layers to get to the answer or the solution. We are very big on trying to follow the chain of command, which I get, and I understand. I would also like a parent to come to me first before jumping to the Board, so I get that aspect of it, but there are times, for example, you just need an answer fairly quickly, and when you're waiting for one person who doesn't know, so they're going to follow their chain of command, which follows their chain of command, and you know the end person's going to have the- you just want to call that person...So yeah. There are definitely times when there is too much bureaucracy or levels to get things done. On the other hand, our transformational leaders- as you know, they added one. We had two last year. This year we have three. One deals just with the high school, which is great, because she's high school. So having that, even though it's an extra layer, that's kind of her job is to support us and get those answers from whoever it needs to be. So I like that additional layer because she's kind of my go-to person, and I know she will do all those steps for me.

From his district office, Jack Rand also agreed that bureaucracy was a concern at the district level as well as the state level:

Some [bureaucracy issues] are internal. You have, you know, we have an elected board, we have a superintendent, and we have a teacher's union all having a stake in the game and not all necessarily on the same page, so that can become very political and bureaucratic. Also you have the state of [State] under the new Secondary Act trying to

figure out what the federal government wants of them, them trying to enforce that upon us. So bureaucracy plays a major role in education.

Views about the principal. Both teachers at Brandon reported positive views of principal Robin Hatcher, as did Jack Rand. As may already be apparent from previously cited comments, teachers presented her as someone who worked to support them and to make their work within the school easier and more straightforward. In my second interview with Robin, I asked her why she thought this might be. She was actually quite surprised by my inquiry (asking “Is that like a joke question?”), but told me once I assured her that it was not that she believed the cause might be that she did not see herself as superior to anyone else in the school, echoing some of the same things that teachers had complimented about her:

Well, I hope it's because I really feel on the same level as anyone in this building, whether it's my site coordinator- I have no problem getting out a bucket and a mop. If I see a spill I'm going to clean it up. I'm on the same level as a teacher, so if they need something, I hope they feel they can come to me and ask for it or- because *I* don't make Brandon successful. I, hopefully, what I try to do is create an environment where people are going to find success, feel successful, because I need them to be successful as teachers, as site coordinators, as paraprofessionals, for me to be successful. You know, it cannot work any other way. Like I said earlier, we all have the same end goal, and we need everyone doing their piece. And I am not a professional in any aspect of what I do perfectly, and I hope I give that to teachers. I tell them, “You want to try? Try it. Try it. I don't care what you try, and if it doesn't work, okay, nix it, go to something else.” So I hope I give them the sense of freedom to try new things, that it's okay to break away from the mold, that I'm not out to get them. That I'm really here to support them...I

really think it takes time for a staff to get to know you, to trust you, to trust when I say “truly, try it”, they’re going to know that “oh, she really means it, and if I fail she’s not going to come after me for failing at something.” I don’t know, I guess you try to treat people the way you want to be treated. Right? I mean, you give that, and hopefully you get that back.

It is striking how closely this response (as well as teachers’ positive comments about Robin) echoes both Stillman’s (2011) view, of effective principals serving as mediators between external requirements and “equity-minded” teachers, and Kose’s (2007) framing, in which effective principals not only work with teachers around acquisition of subject matter knowledge but also support them in developing their identities as educators. Particularly given these teachers’ previously stated desires for the freedom to improve their practice without fear of external censure within Cochran-Smith’s (2015) “accountability regime”, Robin’s comments appear to be very much in line with what they appear to want from an administrator.

Views about teachers. Robin’s willingness to allow teachers to try new things, and perhaps to fail, represents a generous view of teachers that is not always present at leadership levels. Both leaders in Carteret, however, had positive things to say about their teachers: Jack Rand noted that teachers (and principals as well) are able to take their own needs into account when thinking through issues in a way that the district cannot, which in many ways makes for both a benefit and a drawback:

You know, they may have more of their own individual school. Also, we are far removed from the problem, so we may not have a better understanding of what the problem is than what they do. So I think it goes both ways in terms of at the building level they may only see it through their lens, which obviously isn’t necessarily good for the district, but we

may be seeing it from our lens, which doesn't give us a true reflection of what the issues are. So obviously both sides, both lenses can be flawed. And I acknowledge that.

He also expressed the district's confidence that "teachers have academic freedom to implement that curriculum to how they see meets the needs of their students", indicating that teachers serve as the ultimate power in communicating with students:

At the end of the day, though, teachers have the ability to instruct students. There are not people at the doors monitoring what is said, or- they have academic freedom.... Teachers also have the ability to bring various course proposals to central office, etc., to be implemented... The superintendent has the power to direct the workforce, set the course of study, but with that being said, teachers have the ability to have input in that.

Robin agreed with Jack that teachers and school leadership often had a different focus than those working at the district level:

We have our blinders on about what's helping Brandon, and so our thoughts about what we should or should not be doing are kind of like this (gestures closely around her), whereas the district, they have to look a little bit more globally.

She spoke highly of her teachers, bringing Erin up without prompting in response to a question about opportunities for teacher learning:

Erin goes- she's amazing. I mean, she's applying for a grant right now, and she's so deserving to get it, where she'll go to New Orleans for a week this summer to learn about World War II, and then next year goes to Normandy. And she goes- so she is someone who is so learned in her area, I mean that's just her passion and her desire, and she is a guru at it. She should be leading them, quite honestly.

She further discussed a focus on teacher support rather than teacher critique, noting that high and sometimes unreasonable expectations were placed on teachers, as well as echoing Lampert, Boerst, & Graziani's (2011) mention of shared planning time as a key resource principals can use to support teachers:

I took a course and we realized that as teachers, once we give you this paper certificate, you're a teacher, we just put you in a classroom, and it's like this sink or swim mentality, kind of. So I have started- this year we gave all new teachers the same lunch period, and so periodically about once a month I've been meeting with them. We had a set topic the one day, but it's really just open forum of just- I'll go, the assistant principal of curriculum will go, someone from the dean's office will go, to say "What's going on? How can we help you?" Or, like, just online grading... So things like that that we take for granted that teachers should know how to do, but if you've never done it, how do you know that you had to manually do that? So with new staff turnover, I think you have to have a plan in place to support them as well.

Implications

In this chapter, I have worked to identify some similarities and differences among teachers' and leaders' conceptions of social justice, the issues teachers chose to address, and teachers' methods of incorporating social justice work into their practice. Further, I have considered the ways in which teachers assessed their partnerships with me as well as how practitioners at each level have discussed work being done at other levels. I will end by suggesting some further implications regarding support and communication in the Carteret Public Schools; this discussion will be continued in the Conclusion chapter of this dissertation.

First, teachers saw my presence in their classroom as keeping them accountable (to themselves and to their students, rather than to external rules or regulations) to continue to reflect on and challenge their own practice, rather than allowing that practice to stagnate and lose relevance. While this is a positive assessment of the structure of the study, it also suggests that further such support is something from which these teachers could truly have benefited, particularly given the short-term, if intensive, nature of our collaboration. Teachers expressed a strong desire for collegial discussion and reflection, which they found valuable. Additionally, teachers' comments suggest that resources alone were not adequate to help them improve their practice; it was the ability to discuss these resources that they found to be key to using them well.

Ultimately, the decisions that affect these desires do not come from the teachers themselves, but must be made at a higher level and backed up with policy; districts are in a position to institute policies that give teachers the ability to collaborate with others around their practice in an environment that feels opening and nonthreatening (as Erin said, a "safe space" for investigation). In many ways, the Carteret Public Schools already seem to have useful connections between levels. Jack Rand and Robin Hatcher frequently gave very similar answers to questions about policies and programs, often, in fact, saying nearly the same thing in response to the same interview question (Appendix I provides a number of additional instances of this). For example, both named the same set of options in response to a question about resources for teachers, both discussed the district's recent partnership with a "college and career readiness" organization when asked about supporting students, and both discussed a recent Head Start contract arranged by the district as an attempt to address issues of income inequality. Further, Robin presents an excellent example of a principal who is well-liked by her teachers, and does a helpful job of outlining positive behaviors (addressed appreciatively more than once by Erin and

Mike) that support teachers in their work and in mediating between teachers and external policy requirements. These aspects of the district and of Brandon are informative as concerns effective support of others and the distribution of information between the central office and principals in schools. From the central office, Jack speaks well of teachers and principals, indicating that he trusts in their judgment (although he did note that the district is willing and able to intervene if that judgment should prove ineffective) and giving several additional examples that support this claim.

However, while it is clear that Jack and the district leadership have thought carefully about a number of the issues that the teachers in my study reported caring about, it is also apparent that not all teachers see things this way; there are clearly some disconnects between teachers and the district's leaders, highlighted by the teacher who had "no idea" how the district leadership thought about issues and has "given up on trying to figure out what [district leadership] thinks or does". It is clear that there are district programs that address many of the issues teachers care about (these are again discussed in more detail in Appendix I), yet in many instances teachers seemed largely unaware of these programs. They appear to be communicated to principals (or at least to Robin, the principal of what she and her teachers feel confident is one of the best schools in the district, if not the very best), but one might wonder why teachers are unaware. Is there an assumption on the part of the district that teachers will be uninterested in these details? Do teachers feel too overwhelmed with classroom duties to also stay informed about policies? Have frustrations caused teachers to feel that the district does not actually follow through on its stated goals? Some sort of periodic district communication or online forum might make this information more available to teachers without overloading them with further meetings or requirements.

Perhaps an even bigger disconnect relates to the ways in which these practitioners reported understanding major concepts. Robin's and Jack's conceptualizations of social justice were highly opposed, with Jack relating it to equal treatment and Robin explicitly rejecting that framing. While there is no inherent issue in two people defining a somewhat ambiguous term differently, Robin, as already discussed, went on to completely reject equality as an appropriate concept for the district, in favor of equity. Such a major disconnect in ideas about how, for example, resources are to be distributed might upset partnerships or interfere with useful co-thinking. When teachers are included in this discussion as well, it is clear that any given concept can have multiple and vastly different interpretations. While it is certainly unreasonable to expect everyone to agree, one might look to Gordon's idea of "a shared vision of right and wrong." If there is not discussion of the meaning and importance of fundamental concepts between levels of the system, how can teachers be expected to successfully implement district policy, or district policies be expected to meet the needs they are intended to meet?

Further, a significant number of issues teachers identified as important within their classrooms are not addressed at higher levels. In multiple instances during the interviews, I was told by Robin and Jack that issues I had identified from teacher interviews, and which had sometimes been addressed repeatedly and concernedly by teachers (e.g., gender) were not ones that the two leaders had particularly considered before, or were not things they felt were addressed by leadership. Some of the major issues for teachers are not issues that they feel the district is necessarily aware of or focused on, and responses at higher levels back up those beliefs. This, then, raises a question: in what ways can structures be put into place that enable teacher concerns to be effectively communicated to district leaders? In her talk about bureaucracy, Robin discussed the frequent difficulty of getting an answer to a complex question.

One might ask how the district can prevent the same fate from befalling teachers' knowledge of their own students and relevant issues for those students. This is particularly important if one assumes that the district would take such information seriously, given the trust and respect that Jack reported placing in teachers, if it could be systematically acquired.

There is no obvious answer to this question, or to the questions raised by the other disconnects that are apparent from practitioners' interviews. Nonetheless, I would argue that possible responses are extremely important to consider. Combined, the expertise of my participants addresses almost every major issue that was raised, but any single actor alone reported missing out on key pieces of this. How might this expertise be shared through community conversation? How might questions and answers better find one another within the context of the district? Perhaps the key implication of this chapter (and certainly, as regards teachers, from previous chapters as well) is that everyone with whom I worked was clearly a competent individual who was able to speak thoughtfully about many issues. Enabling that speech to find the ears of others in the district in a way that can inform collective action seems to be one of the great challenges facing Carteret.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In the first seven chapters of this dissertation, I have detailed a study and resultant analysis that was designed to address a topic that is impossibly broad: teaching for social justice, writ large. While investigations that more narrowly consider certain aspects of this work through particular lenses are certainly valuable and important, I argue that my study, too, is valuable and important, because through it I have worked to acknowledge the complexities of defining and enacting social justice in US schools today and the struggles and confusions that accompany such attempts. Social justice work in schools is rarely organized or focused; rather, it is messy, confusing, and constantly changing to reflect new knowledge, new challenges, and different contexts. Further, while a substantial body of educational literature often carefully categorizes and outlines specific social justice approaches and ideas, it is clearly quixotic to expect those who work in schools and classrooms to be familiar with this literature to any real degree. While I find this work to be very important, its importance is a distant second to that of the needs of the students who occupy teachers' and leaders' minds (and classrooms) and who inspire their practice.

Instead, I see it as the responsibility of researchers to think deeply and carefully about how to respectfully share, in manageable and useful ways, the work that they do with those who might appreciate and benefit from it. Especially in an applied field like education, we academics have a mandate to make our knowledge *useful* that extends far beyond identifying trends and supporting conclusions in our own quiet corner of the university. Further, I see our work as

benefiting from (in fact, I should say *requiring*) the input of practitioners and others in the field – that our work often “stinks of the lamp” is not a trivial concern, and this idea underlines the need for substantial thought around how to take what we do and put it “out there”, where it may perhaps be of genuine service.

This question serves as the basis for many of the decisions that I have made throughout the design, enactment, and presentation of this study. Rather than particular conceptualizations or approaches, this dissertation is about the *process* of working to teach for social justice. It asks what this process looks like for three teachers who wish to improve their practice, following them first through the act of conceptualizing and defining social justice with respect to their own classroom context, then into a consideration of ways in which they might respond, through their practice, to the issues they identify, and finally through the work of designing and implementing changes that address these issues. Further, it contextualizes this work within teachers’ (and their principal’s, and a district leader’s) understanding of their own roles, of the context of their school and district, and of the relationship between their classroom practice and the policies that support or constrain it. My own position as a dynamic partner was also carefully structured so as to put me into a position to share resources teachers saw as valuable without interrupting their important work with ideas or approaches they did not find to be useful.

Similarly, the purpose of this dissertation is not to sit on a shelf (or in an electronic file system) as a forgotten artifact of my personal search for a degree, but to serve as a guide for others who are interested in pursuing social justice work at the classroom, school, or district level, or as a researcher or other educational stakeholder in partnership with those in schools. By drawing on the methodology of portraiture, as well as on the methods of cross-cases analysis and grounded theory, I have attempted to make apparent the challenges and achievements of the

teachers who participated in this study as they worked to improve their social justice practice. It is my contention that the ideas contained here can inform the work of other teachers who may wish to improve their own social justice practice but find themselves unaware of how to do so by supporting them, through real examples, in reflecting on their teaching, questioning their assumptions, developing their own beliefs and approaches, and following through on these ideas to improve their work with students. Further, it is my hope that the self-reflection and introspection contained here will provide useful observations on creating structures and partnerships that enable teachers to think through the issues they see in their classrooms and then on working with them to address these issues. In this conclusion, I will lay out what I see as the important implications of my study for these various stakeholders as well as the further questions it raises.

I will begin by addressing connections between my work and the social justice literature, discussing the ways in which this study supports, challenges, and extends prior work. Following this, I will summarize some notable conclusions from previous chapters as well as a series of limitations of this study. I will conclude by considering implications for future research, and finally with a list of questions and suggestions that arise from the analysis presented here.

Social Justice Literature and This Study

In Chapter 2, I review a range of literature that focuses on three specific aspects of the study of social justice in the field of education: how it has been conceptualized, ways in which it has been studied, and theory around supporting teachers in learning for social justice. In this section, I will address each in turn in the context of my own study in order to frame the discussion that follows within this body of work.

Conceptualizing social justice. I begin the section on conceptualizing social justice by drawing on the example of culturally relevant pedagogy to support the suggestion that there is, in fact, no way to fully and clearly categorize the range of social justice conceptions that are present in the literature. This suggestion is borne out in my own analysis, in which I demonstrate the difficulty of categorizing even the views of only these five respondents, even when considering only one major axis like equity/equality. Further, the literature I have focused on is within the field of education; that conversation may be a robust one, but this choice, too, is limiting. Elsewhere (Altman, 2017) I argue that due to social justice in education is inherently different than social justice in a field like economics or law. While teachers are certainly actors within the field of education, they are also actors in the world at large, and as such experience not only education, but also economics, history, technology, politics, etc., in their daily lives. Thus, there is no reason to assume that the way in which a teacher understands social justice is strictly (or even generally) tied to the ways in which educational scholars understand it.

Beyond the somewhat facile observation that social justice is hard to define, however, the ways in which the teachers in this study spoke about social justice do underline the importance of the distinctions I address in that section. I have already noted that the range of ways in which Erin, Mike, and Gordon frame the desired outcomes of their own social justice work highlight Moje's (2007) distinction between socially just pedagogy, in which teachers like Mike work to better support all students in achieving academic success through the social studies curriculum, and social justice pedagogy, in which teachers like Erin work to build student skills that will enable them to address injustices in society beyond the walls of the school.

Additionally, the sub-distinctions made for each of these broad approaches are also borne out in teachers' talk. The distinction between social justice as group equity and social justice as

universal good show up in the ways in which teachers talk about their social justice goals. Mike, for example, addressed these different framings at different times as demanded by his assessment of his classroom context; as one practice goal, he identified specific groups within his AP US History class who he felt were experiencing inequitable learning opportunities (specifically female students and students of color) and structured his debate to effectively address these inequities by bringing those students into the conversation in a way that I had not witnessed before. At the same time, however, the ultimate goal of the debate (as opposed to its structure) was to support *all* students in his classroom in improving their reasoning and debate skills in a way that would enable them to succeed not only on the AP exam but also in their future social studies work. Mike's example suggests that these distinctions are not as rigid as they appear, echoing, for example, Nieto's (2009) focus on both the social and academic advantages of bilingual education for linguistic minority students in particular *and* its positive impact on the cognitive processes of all students.

The critical educational ideas espoused by Paulo Freire (e.g., 2000) and those who followed in the steps of his liberatory education are also to some extent present in the work of these teachers, for example in the ways in which Gordon's perspective sharing activity engaged his students in the sort of sociopolitical consideration that he had feared was missing as they worked to learn amendments and understand relationships among government branches. By pushing students not only to listen to one another but also to interrogate and clarify their own views on important issues (as well, of course, as some less important introductory issues), Gordon can be seen as having given them additional power, as Freire and others (including myself) put it, to *read and write the world* with social studies.

Studying social justice. In my review of the ways in which scholars have studied social justice, I note that many of the studies that identify positive social justice methods and approaches focus on teachers with a long track record of effective social justice work who often come highly recommended from a variety of sources. At the same time, many studies that focus on teachers who are *learning* to teach for social justice place a much stronger emphasis on their mistakes and confusions, or on the ways in which their views are problematic⁴⁶. On the contrary, a major assumption that guided this study is that *all* (or, at the very least, the vast, vast majority of) teachers have knowledge and understanding of their own students that is valuable and that can strongly contribute to our social justice knowledge.

I suggest that this claim is strongly supported by the outcomes of this study. It is clear from the teachers' successes, not to mention from their own words in discussions and interviews, that although the three had different approaches and ideas, and were not asked to possess any prerequisite specialized knowledge, each teacher was able in her or his own way to bring his/her familiarity with and understanding of students and context to bear on our work together in important ways. The variation in what these issues were and in how teachers addressed them suggests that the structure of our partnership, and the way in which our conversations were facilitated, really did enable teachers to follow their own expertise rather than being forced into thinking about particular issues in particular ways. For this reason, I suggest even more strongly that taking this approach in working with teachers can provide powerful learning about social

⁴⁶ While I certainly do not claim that *all* studies that focus on effective social justice practice involve expert teachers, it is worth noting that many of the studies cited in Chapter 2 that focus on positive aspects of the practice of non-expert teachers (e.g., Athanases & de Oliveira, 2008; Picower, 2011) involve teachers with whom the researchers were previously familiar (for example, as students in a teacher education program) and to whose positive credentials they can already speak as opposed to teachers that were selected in an (at least mostly) arbitrary way.

justice, and can support other teachers in attempting to improve their own practice, in ways that reading about the work of teachers framed as experts cannot.

Learning social justice. As already noted (e.g., Bartell, 2013), while there is much work that focuses on teaching for social justice, there is far less that addresses how teachers *learn* social justice. I see the results of my own study as supporting and extending the existing work on this topic in several ways. First, teachers' assessments of our work together strongly support Lampert, Boerst, & Graziani's (2011) contention that resources are far more impactful when used together than individual resources would be alone. All three teachers, and particularly Erin and Gordon, spoke about the ways in which the use of multiple resources supported their practice, and about the ways in which they were better able to draw on some resources because of the support of others⁴⁷.

Beyond this, teachers' responses suggested that not all resources were equally impactful. All three implied or directly stated that readings were less useful than other resources (although, again in support of Lampert, Boerst, and Graziani, that they became much more useful when combined with other aspects of our work together), and all three also focused on reflection as particularly influential to their practice. However, they also noted that the way in which they were supported in engaging in that reflection was an important aspect of its effectiveness. For example, Mike complained about the district program that he explicitly identified as intended to make him more reflective in the same interview in which he noted that our work together had

⁴⁷ Recall that when referring to my own study, I have used the word 'resources' only to refer to material teachers might consult, such as readings or lesson plans. Lampert, Boerst, & Graziani, however, also include interpersonal interactions (for example, they name shared planning time as a resource, which comes with a clear implication that teachers will interact with one another during that time). For that reason, my observation in the previous chapter that 'resources' alone were the least effective tool for the teachers in my study and were made more effective with discussion means the same thing as my comment here, drawing on Lampert, Boerst, and Graziani, that resources were more effective when combined with other (e.g., interpersonal) resources.

supported him in being reflective. Erin told me in her written appraisal that aspects of my method of interaction with her (being patient and supportive, focusing on her interests) provided a safe space for experimentation and questioning and were a main part of her positive experience reflecting over the course of the study.

Additionally, the broad range of ways in which I was able to work effectively with teachers during this study is in line with Knapp's (2003) observation that professional learning can arise in situations far more varied than traditional professional development. Our partnership possessed aspects of what I call formal adaptive learning as well as informal learning, having been structured around a combination of meetings focusing on particular (although teacher-designated) topics and additional interactions that took place spontaneously during our work together. However, teacher appraisals also suggested that this work met all but one of Sun, Wilhelm, Larsen, & Franke's (2014) criteria for effective professional development. They noted its active and interactive aspects, its clear focus on their practice, its responsiveness to their own personal and external learning, its connections to their content area, and its continuous nature as all useful to them. The sole criterion it did not meet was that of collective teacher participation, but teachers did repeatedly frame me as a colleague and for that reason seem at least not to have felt as if they were working alone.

My experience during this study leads me to echo Bartell (2013) in calling for additional work concerning teacher learning around social justice. I see the process outlined in this dissertation as a fairly original approach to working with teachers around practice development, but the limited nature of literature concerning social justice learning means that it is not necessarily clear which aspects of it are transferrable, which are specific to this study and the particular teachers in this time and place, and what sorts of skills and knowledge are necessary

on the part of an interlocutor to facilitate useful partnerships in this way. Further conversation on this topic would also enable additional analysis regarding how my approach might add to or challenge other approaches. It is also important to recall that teachers noted to me repeatedly during this study that one of the things they most appreciated was simply the opportunity to talk through their practice, and to raise questions about that practice, with someone who was interested in listening and supporting them. Continuing to build theory around how this support can function with respect to social justice is extremely important; supporting teachers in using their knowledge to develop their social justice practice is something that can – and, I argue, should – be done both within a school district and outside of it. However, it is not clear who else might do that work or how.

Takeaways from This Study

Having contextualized my work within prior literature, in this section I summarize a series of important conclusions and observations given the results of my study. Many of these points have been addressed to some extent earlier in the text; they and others are presented here as an overview of what I see as major implications of my findings.

- *These teachers each had different ways of seeing the relationship between social justice and the work of teaching, as well as different ways of implementing social justice in the curriculum.*

Even among my small selection of participants, social justice (or social injustice) was not something that was consistently addressed, or even discussed, in the same way. Erin located social justice issues largely in the curriculum, while Gordon found them in the ways in which teachers interacted with students and students interacted with one another. Mike found them in all three of those places. The differences in the ways in which

teachers framed the relationship between social justice and the work that they do suggests that those who wish to support teachers may benefit from thinking carefully not only about what teachers say social justice is but also about where social justice “lives” in the work of teaching. I designed the present study with adaptability as perhaps its most salient characteristic, but even approaching such adaptability is difficult if not impossible for programs intended to reach large numbers of teachers. For this reason, understanding how different teachers see this work is key to ensuring that they receive supports that are appropriate for their approach.

- *These teachers do have important knowledge of their students and classrooms that can inform their work around social justice.*

This has already been addressed, but bears repeating. The three teachers I worked with were not required to have any particular qualifications other than an interest in improving their social justice practice, and, were this assumption incorrect, it would have been entirely possible that I would have found that the three really did not have much to add to the conversation. As expected, however, I instead found that all three, in different ways and through different approaches, had complex and powerful understandings of their students, of the salient contextual factors that affected their work, and of the ways in which ideas of social justice were relevant to their classrooms.

- *The teachers all indicated a desire for constructive observation, and for discussion and reflection.*

The teachers in this study did not desire to disappear into the “black box” of teaching. Rather, they described feelings of isolation, questions for which they were unable to find answers, and needs for support and resources that remained unmet. Most notably, they

contradicted the common claim that teaching takes place in a black box because teachers want it to be that way, that they close their doors to keep out prying eyes and do not welcome others into their classrooms. Instead, all three teachers indicated that my presence in their rooms encouraged them to continue to hold themselves accountable to their students and to work to improve their social justice practice in a way that they found beneficial. Erin reported frustration with an evaluator who asked her to simply sign a form pretending they had met. Mike lamented the distance he felt from the rest of the school. Gordon discussed multiple concerns regarding the technology in his distance learning class that were not fully or speedily addressed by administration at any level. These are not teachers who want to keep their work a secret and avoid administrative oversight. They are teachers who appreciate and benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their practice and the issues that impact it and wish for additional opportunities to do so in a safe and open manner.

- *The teachers suggested that the simple provision of resources was not enough, and that discussion had a major impact on their work.*

All three teachers indicated to me during the course of the study that my simply providing them with resources was not a particularly effective way to help them to improve their social justice practice. Rather, it was the discussion of these resources that enabled them to contextualize the ideas the resources contained and to apply those ideas to their own practice. Gordon reported that the farther from his specific content area and teaching knowledge a resource was, the less relevant it felt to him without substantial scaffolding and discussion, while Erin noted that she felt that readings were the least useful aspect of the study, but that our *discussion* of those readings was one of the most

useful. Mike identified one reading in particular as most valuable to him, and it was the reading we spent the most time discussing as well as one that, prior to that discussion, he had suggested to me that he did not appreciate. In all three cases, teachers framed their own context as unique and requiring more than the one-size-fits-all approach that might be obtained by applying resources indiscriminately.

- *Portraiture's focus on telling a story and on "goodness" provided a unique window into understanding and improving teaching practice that supported this investigation of social justice.*

As discussed in Chapter 3, portraiture had multiple functions within this dissertation. Through its search for goodness in participants, acknowledgment of the influence of the researcher on a study, and radically collaborative approach to analysis, one is able to *show* the work of a teacher in a way that can surface key aspects of practice and give a real sense of context and process. It is my hope, although certainly as yet unrealized, that the portraits in this dissertation will support others in their own quests to improve their social justice practice. However, portraiture was useful for far more than data reporting. Initial portraits constructed partway through the study were shared with each teacher, and their responses to these portraits enabled the two of us to clarify and focus our work together as well as to ensure that we were perceiving events in similar ways. Further, two of the three teachers reported that these portraits enabled them to get a different perspective on their own practice, and even to see that practice in ways that they had not before. As a methodology that focuses on both art and science (e.g., Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), portraiture gives a window into social justice work that is valuable and warrants further study as a process.

- *While there was evidence of instances of clear communication and areas of agreement between the teacher level, the school level, and the district level, there were also disconnects.*

All three teachers and both leaders spoke thoughtfully and at many times quite eloquently about the issues facing their students, and in many cases what they said was highly connected (and frequently based on actual inter-level communication). There were many similarities in the ways in which each described their school and district context (discussed in detail in Appendix H), and points of departure, when they existed, were not necessarily insurmountable. For example, despite outlining the issue in different ways, all participants agreed that the changing class and racial makeup of the district and of its schools were affecting both the way in which Carteret's public schools operated in reality and the way in which the schools were perceived by the Carteret public. Nonetheless, some difficulties in communication between the classroom level and the school and district level mean that teachers were not familiar with many district initiatives relating to issues they identified as salient, and that many of their own concerns about the support and development opportunities they received had not fully reached the district level. Further, the ways in which participants took up key concepts in this study, such as equity and equality, varied sharply, and some issues that were identified as extremely salient by teachers, such as gender, politics, and religion, were not seen in the same way at leadership levels. Perhaps the key observation here is that there is desire for better communication at all levels, and that this appears to be possible within the current district context.

Limitations

As with any study, particular choices I have made, idiosyncrasies of my own approach and the approaches of my participants, and various external factors all served in several ways to limit the conclusions that I have been able to draw. First, while the small number of participants enabled deep qualitative investigation, their comments and approaches cannot be taken as representative of views even within the Carteret Public Schools, let alone elsewhere. Further, while I argue that Erin, Mike, and Gordon are in many ways typical teachers who were not expected to have any specific characteristics or social justice experience, the fact that they all agreed to participate in this study while other teachers did not likely indicates something about their views on the work of teaching. Regardless, the differences among the orientations of the three do not suggest that any sort of pattern could or should be expected among other teachers in the district, or that additional teachers, particularly teachers in different schools or of different subjects, would have had anything in common with these three. The same is true for the principal and district leader, who are taken as representatives of, but not proxies for, their respective positions.

Second, while portraiture is a methodology that does take into account the researcher's impact on the study and avoids any claims of objectivity, it is still true that there is no way to fully measure or analyze the impact of my own ideas and beliefs, as well as of my own priorities, on this study. While initial interviews do give some sense of the ways in which teachers thought about social justice prior to the beginning of this study, the goal of this study was change. Exactly how much of that change was due to teachers' intentions and how much was influenced by my own ideas is certainly unclear, and I thus make no claims about the direct applicability of the procedures described in this dissertation to the work of other teachers who are thinking

through these issues in different contexts alone or with different people. Nonetheless, I also suggest that anyone who might do this work would bring to it particular views and beliefs; it is for that reason that I have focused on the process of working with teachers rather than making any sort of attempt to minimize my presence in the story.

Finally, while I call repeatedly in this dissertation for increased communication that can provide further social justice discussion and reflection opportunities to teachers, the simple fact is that I spent a *very* large amount of time observing these teachers, discussing my observations and their ideas and concerns, and thinking about the work of this study and about our partnership. Even ignoring time spent on my own identifying possible resources, emailing teachers to check in, writing mini-portraits, etc., between observations, meetings, and interviews I was physically present in Gordon's room(s) for more than 22 hours, in Erin's for more than 28, and in Mike's for more than 38, for an average of about 30 hours per teacher over the course of the semester. Enacting this work in a similar way in a high school of even 50 teachers would require 1500 personnel hours, which is clearly not feasible on a large scale. For that reason, anyone wishing to draw on my strategies with a larger set of teachers will also certainly need to consider the sort of time commitment that is possible given their own context, which may profoundly limit what can be done. Exactly what level of support is necessary to enable teachers to produce the sort of positive results I discuss here is not something I attempt to hypothesize or examine in this dissertation; additional research into this question is clearly needed. Further, my work with these teachers was necessarily done individually due to their different schedules (and, in Gordon's case, location). School and district leaders, however, have the ability to implement the sort of collaborative structures that research cited here (e.g., Little, 2007; Sun, Wilhelm, Larsen, & Franke, 2014) has shown to be highly effective in supporting teacher learning.

Investigation into the ways in which teacher collaboration through professional learning communities or other avenues such as mentorships or partnerships may support, extend, or change the impact of the approach described here is certainly warranted.

Implications for Future Research

In the writing of this dissertation, I have striven to avoid making general statements about my study or its conclusions. If I may be permitted a single one now, it is this: in this study, I offered teachers a listening ear and a supportive partnership, and they rose to the challenge I presented to them and took tangible steps, drawing on their own knowledge and abilities, to improve their social justice practice. I see this as a fantastic outcome – all three teachers reported at least some advantages gained from their participation in this study, with some of those reported advantages being described as quite valuable to their practice. At the very least, then, this messy, broadly conceived and fairly unusual study of vaguely defined concepts and continuing conversations, which enabled me to respond adaptively to teachers as a dynamic resource in order to best serve their goals within their own contexts, is one that was successful in supporting these three teachers in improving their practice around social justice in ways that were consistent with their own ideas and desires.

The actual process by which this took place is one that raises a number of questions that warrant further investigation by researchers. First, it would be interesting to investigate groups of teachers of other subjects, as well as heterogeneous subject groups, in order to examine whether, for example, teachers of physical education or teachers of math seem to focus on social justice issues differently than these teachers did. Second, my study took place in a diverse urban district with more than 20,000 students (and one that I was told repeatedly leans notably to the political left); the ways in which the outcomes might have been different in districts that are suburban or

rural, or more demographically homogeneous, or much smaller, or more conservative, are not at all clear. In the same way that Lewis (2001) applied a race-focused lens to the uncommon context of a (mostly) all-white school, future studies might engage in work like this in contexts that are less studied, or simply different, in order to determine whether the conclusions that might be drawn from that data are different in minor or major ways.

Third, I note above that I was fortunate to have a large number of resources to devote to my work with these three teachers over the semester during which this study took place, including substantial time availability, social justice expertise, and practice facilitating discussions that draw on others' perspectives about difficult issues, among others. This raises questions about whether the study might have produced similar results, or positive results of any kind, if teachers had been partnered with someone who had different skill sets, availability, etc. For a more straightforward quality like time availability, further study might examine whether increasing or decreasing time spent over a semester results in substantial differences in teachers' feelings about the work and/or in the practical changes they are able to implement. For more complex qualities like one's ability to facilitate discussions, teachers might work with different facilitators around related issues in a study intended to determine whether particular qualities seem to be more impactful than others among those supporting teachers in doing this work, and whether teachers attribute success to the same qualities consistently or to different ones given the skill set of the facilitator.

Further, as one of the major goals of the present study was to demonstrate that this sort of work with teachers can produce results (as well as to consider what "results" might look like), an investigation into what parameters must define this work would contribute to an understanding of the ways in which teachers can most effectively be supported in working for social justice. If

averaging fifteen hours per teacher per semester would have been enough time for me to have acquired results, for example, I might have worked with six teachers rather than three with roughly the same time commitment. If this amount of time was not sufficient, however, I might not have supported any teachers with such a study. If an open mind and a basic ability to facilitate discussions are sufficient for this work, I might have organized a small team to reach much larger numbers of teachers. If not, those teachers might instead have been left frustrated with the idea of social justice work and resistant to future practice development. Beyond this, there is certainly no reason to expect any consistency among teachers – it is quite possible that one group might meet with considerable success under different conditions while another would not, and that this would depend on factors unique to each member of the group.

Fourth, as noted above, studies like the one conducted by Sun, Wilhelm, Larsen, & Franke (2014) support the contention that collaborative learning is more impactful for teachers than individual learning. A future study might incorporate focus groups or other structures such as a professional learning community to enable teachers to partner not only with a researcher, but also with one another, in identifying and addressing issues of social justice. This could also help to build theory around supporting teacher collaboration within a school or district in a way that this study cannot, since schools have the ability to implement collaborative development structures that might require far less time to accomplish social justice goals than is needed when working with teachers individually. Such a study might also investigate the comparative utility for teachers of learning from and working with one another versus learning from and working with a researcher or researchers.

Fifth, studies that use portraiture, let alone that use portraiture in a context related to social justice, are few and far between. For this reason, many of the ways in which the unique

aspects of portraiture can contribute to an understanding of social justice are not well-explored and should be further investigated. The teachers in this study did tell me that they appreciated the mini-portraits I shared with them and that these supported our work together, and aspects of portraiture such as a focus on goodness and an acknowledgement of the impact of the researcher on a study were key to the way in which I and each of the teachers understood the purposes and goals of our partnership. However, I am certainly not able to theorize or make any claims about how this study might have turned out differently with a different methodology. Further consideration of the benefits and possible drawbacks of portraiture for social justice work would be very helpful in better understanding its function in this study.

A closely related question is whether my choice to frame the study around these three central teacher portraits is, in fact, an effective way to support others in taking up social justice work. Currently, it is simply my unproven contention that the narratives contained in this dissertation can be valuable to the learning of other teachers interested in improving their own social justice practice, in the same way that one might learn a lesson applicable to one's own life from a novel or film made in an entirely different place and time. My lengthy and substantive search into the portraiture literature led to a number of studies that considered the methodology in different ways, but to no studies that considered the impact of completed portraits as a resource for others. Thus, investigation into the utility of portraiture-based resources is necessary to determine how comparatively useful the format I employ here might be.

Finally, I address a variety of ways in which these three teachers, a principal, and a district leader conceptualize and describe a number of concepts, including social justice itself, related ideas like equity, equality, and fairness, and underlying salient contextual issues. However, I am not able to do much theorizing here about the relationship among all of these

concepts and teachers' social justice beliefs and actions. Elsewhere (Altman & Rankin, 2017), I suggest that teachers' views on context may be far more complex than is typically considered in research, and the range of issues that are outlined in this dissertation certainly suggest that this may be true of social justice as well. For this reason, then, perhaps the most important area of focus for further research given my findings is on the ways in which different educators conceptualize social justice and relate it to their personal context, and the ways in which both of these things affect their practice. While much can be learned from more streamlined studies that investigate teachers' thoughts about a more limited set of social justice ideas or categories of issues, the data I have collected make it fairly clear that deep analysis of the ways in which teachers (and others!) conceptualize important ideas of social justice and context is also extremely valuable in the search for understanding around the ways in which they can be best supported in improving their practice.

Practical Recommendations for Researchers and Educators

I will conclude with a series of recommendations, beginning with several for researchers that are implied by the prior discussion and ending with suggestions for educational leaders and other stakeholders who wish to support teachers in doing social justice work. While these suggestions certainly draw on my data, they also go beyond that data into a more speculative realm that has been informed by my own experience as a researcher, a teacher, and a teacher educator.

Addressing researchers, I first argue that our own understanding of social justice must be broadened and allowed to remain open, even messy at times, to ensure that we are making the best possible attempt to understand teachers' views and not simply to place one of a set of predetermined category tags on them that might cause us to miss major distinctions or qualities.

Additionally, I call here and elsewhere (Altman, 2017) for an expanded social justice conversation that incorporates the sorts of approaches that are present not only in education, but also in research in other fields. Only by having such a broad conversation can we remain open to the many ways in which teachers and others might understand social justice, and to the dynamic and shifting social justice ideas that appear in different disciplines. Further, we can learn in different and often useful ways when researchers who focus on social justice remain methodologically open, continuing to examine how different methodologies enable us to understand the work of teaching for social justice in different ways.

Perhaps even more importantly, teachers' comments in this study raise questions about the ways in which ideas gained from practice-focused research are disseminated, and to which audiences. Despite its vast ability to support improved practice, and thus improved opportunity and experiences for students across the country and beyond, teachers in this study frequently suggested that educational research they encountered was not particularly useful for them, and in some cases rejected it entirely. This raises an important question: whose responsibility is it to address this disconnect?

I argue not only that it is appropriate for researchers to take on this responsibility, but that it is our *obligation* as trained communicators to ensure that our results are shared with the appropriate audience and in ways that are reasonable for that audience. In this study, I structured my participation so as to make myself a resource for teachers, providing support as they translated educational theory for the real-time events of their classroom, but such an intensive approach is certainly not the only way researchers can work to better reach educators. We can work to make our writing more clearly understandable to those who are not researchers, and test that work by asking for feedback from others. We can, as many do, publish in periodicals

teachers are more likely to read in addition to research journals, or even create helpful blogs or forums. Beyond this, those of us who work with teachers can simply ask them how we might better share what we know and then listen carefully to their ideas. Regardless of the way in which we choose to improve our work, we should remain wary of research intended to impact education that cannot be easily accessed and understood by educators.

Looking beyond the world of research to the functioning of school districts, I suggest that the meaning of concepts like social justice, equity, equality, and fairness should be discussed to a much greater extent by teachers and leaders. There were many issues identified by teachers in this study that were talked about in similar ways by the school and district leader I interviewed, regardless of whether either reported having discussed those issues across levels. However, social justice, the focus of this dissertation, was not among them, nor were related concepts like equality, equity, and fairness. The ways in which these concepts were defined varied enormously both among teachers and across levels, with understandings of a concept like fairness ranging all the way from a sole focus on equality of access and/or treatment for all students to a complete rejection of equality in favor of strict equity which addresses differences in perceived needs in policy and practice. As I argued in the previous chapter, effective communication around such issues is simply not possible if stakeholders do not understand and acknowledge that they may have different meanings for the same word or phrase that result in differing ideas about enactment of social justice work. What is reassuring, however, is that, as noted, all participants expressed similar desires as far as supporting students in their district, school, and classroom; this is not a question of whether social justice is appreciated, but of whether the meaning of ‘social justice’ can be a topic of focus in a way that enables the work done at different levels of the district to support educators in accomplishing their own goals.

I call for school and district leaders to investigate the quality of their communication with teachers, and to explicitly ask teachers for feedback on this communication and on what teachers see as important in their classrooms. Further, I recommend a careful appraisal of teacher supports, including professional development, training, classroom observation, mentoring, and available resources, to determine whether teachers find these supports useful and whether they appear to be having the intended effect. To this end, I suggest that leaders take specific steps to open channels of communication through which teachers' voices can be better heard, and through which teachers can hear their administrators' own reasoning, in order to gain a stronger sense of the intent behind policy.

Such a development does not need to be difficult or complicated. As one example, a district might create a simple online forum where teachers can leave comments and ask questions, with the option to make their contributions anonymous if desired. This forum might also contain rationales for newly implemented district policies that teachers are able to access and ask questions about; providing this information would enable administrators like Jack, who during our interviews clearly demonstrated a desire to use policy to support teachers, to share the basis for particular structures or requirements with educators who are affected by them. Engaging in ongoing conversation among teachers and those who work at other levels of the system around these rationales as well as around teachers' own questions and concerns could go a long way toward surfacing and clearing up misunderstandings and disagreements in a way that gives agency to all participants.

The ability to support teachers, however, is not one that is solely reserved to educational leaders. External community organizations possess a number of resources that can also be used in service of this goal. Robin and Jack both noted that local businesses and other organizations in

Carteret sometimes provided their employees or members with opportunities to contribute to the Carteret Public Schools, and this was met with appreciation at leadership levels. While it is of course necessary for organizations to ensure that they are working *with* school leaders rather than trying to enact an unapproved agenda, their resources can support those in local schools in meeting the needs of their students and thus, ultimately, in supporting the city. Jack in particular noted several times that Carteret’s schools and the Carteret community were inextricably linked, concluding:

“What happens is when we’re not supporting and moving the city forward in terms of the students that we are graduating to be a part of it, or the city’s not working with us to help prepare them, our city suffers.”

Finally, those at the governmental level, whether local, state, or national, can design and support programs intended to meet needs that schools cannot meet on their own. I note in this dissertation that schools often lack the resources (financial and otherwise) and manpower necessary to enact intensive social justice supports for teachers. Governmental organizations may possess such resources, and may be able to use them with the guidance of educational leaders to support this goal. Further, such programs may help to counter funding discrepancies that often result in fewer resources and less opportunity for many students, and particularly for members of historically marginalized groups.

It is worth noting that there are no recommendations for *teachers* included here, and it is not unreasonable to wonder about this choice in the context of a dissertation that is focused squarely on teacher learning. The answer is that I see the portraits themselves as recommendations for teachers. I could not possibly presume here to tell America’s teachers what they need to know about social justice, what justice issues are important in their classrooms, or

how they should go about improving their practice in order to better support their students, because those answers are wildly different for different teachers. What I can do, and what I hope that I have done here, is present detailed narratives portraying other teachers who have worked to answer those questions for themselves. The three teachers showcased in this dissertation have generously shared not only their time and energy with me (and thus with all readers of this work), but also their struggles and challenges, successes and failures, questions, and, frequently, answers, and, perhaps most importantly, the process by which they each approached the monumental task of improving practice with a social justice focus. I hope that the stories I have told about these teachers' work will be instructive for others who wish to take on this process but may find doing so overwhelming without guidance. Further, I hope that the recommendations above, if enacted, will create spaces in which teachers feel more able to do this work, and more supported in their attempts.

As a related note, the recommendations in this chapter have focused on supporting teachers' learning, not on actually *teaching* teachers. These recommendations are structural in nature, suggesting steps that can be taken in order to better enable teachers to go about improving their practice. As I have said repeatedly in this dissertation, this is because the data from this study strongly suggests that these teachers did not *need* to be taught. They expressed a need for further constructive conversation around their work as teachers, for useful resources and the opportunity to work to contextualize those resources, and for the opportunity to challenge and improve their practice in a supportive environment, but each drew on her/his own knowledge of students and classroom context in order to self-improve. Each teacher identified unique issues and unique paths to address those issues. Had I tried to *teach* them during this study, I have no

doubt that the results would have been less authentic to their needs and far less instructive for me.

Perhaps the most appropriate sentiment on which to end this conclusion is this: One need not engage in deep analysis to determine that the educational conversation taking place in US society at the present moment is a largely critical and negative one. Teachers are treated within the culture of accountability as if they must be forced to do their jobs, as if they chose the low-pay and often low-status profession of teaching for reasons other than a real desire to support student learning. School and district leaders are blamed for societal issues that find their way into schools as if their goal were not to work for the education of all. Schools and cities often point fingers at one another, each placing blame on the other in times of economic disadvantage and educational struggles. Researchers, too, often treat educators as empty boxes to be filled with knowledge and theory, and educators blame them right back for a lack of understanding of what really happens in schools. Many, many people criticize marginalized students, or, even more frequently, their hard-working and long-suffering families, as if there were huge numbers of parents who really don't want their children to get an education (as opposed, I would suggest, to huge numbers of parents with whom schools have been unsuccessful in partnering in meaningful ways due to conflict between schools' expectations and parents' past experiences and knowledge around schooling).

I believe in, and I believe the results of this study support, the idea that, although perhaps in different ways, all of these people and groups want the same thing – an educational system that is more successful in supporting all students in achieving their goals, educational and otherwise, and in contributing to their communities and their world along the way. The teachers in this study repeatedly remarked with appreciation upon the fact that I listened to and respected

what they had to say; the fact that they saw this as worth noting and not simply a matter of course was deeply troubling to me. Robin and Jack, too, both noted an appreciation for an opportunity, if brief, to discuss what they do and to think about that work in more depth. Each participant in this study showed her/himself to be a thoughtful, committed educator who wished first and foremost to support Carteret's students.

I ask, then, what might be accomplished if all of the abovementioned stakeholders gave one another the benefit of the doubt instead of assuming an adversarial position: What might be different if teachers were made to feel trusted and respected as deserving professionals and holders of the awesome power to help students learn? How might things change if schools and communities consistently made one another feel supported and appreciated rather than looking for ways to find fault with one another? What would our education system look like if it was automatically assumed that parents and families cared about their students' educations (because of course they do) and focus shifted to questioning how they could best be supported in becoming educational partners, in whatever way might be most possible for them? In short, what if educational conversations between different people and groups were approached with open arms instead of pointed fingers?

Ultimately, I believe that social justice work can only truly be effective in the kind of environment I have just described, one in which each educational stakeholder is treated as competent and caring by others and, as in portraiture, relationships and partnerships are begun with the question "what is *good* here?" rather than by searching immediately for what is wrong. It is my hope that the analysis and methodology presented here, while instructive as to the choices made by these teachers as they worked to improve their practice, also support the contention that we in the education system are better together than apart, and that by improving

communication, working together, and treating one another respectfully as professionals, real change is possible. The successes of these teachers within the limited context of this study have been notable; how much more success could we find if this generous approach were found everywhere in education?

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Appendix A: Initial Teacher Interview Protocol

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study! Is it okay if I record this interview?

I'd like to start by telling you what I'm interested in and what I'll be doing to study it. The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which you as a teacher think through issues of social justice. You may not use the phrase 'social justice', but when I use it I don't mean anything specialized – you or others may refer to some of the same ideas as 'equity' or 'equality' or just 'justice' or 'fairness', but all I mean when I say 'social justice' is an increase in the amount of justice, or fairness, or equity, in society, however you define that. I'm very interested in the ways in which you see these ideas as relevant to your own work with this particular group of students and the ways in which you think through specific questions of teaching that you see as related to these ideas.

Before I talk about what I'll be asking you next and why, do you have any questions?

[Teacher is given time to ask any questions]

Great! So in order to get this work started, I'd like to ask you a few questions about the issues that you see in your own classroom. During this study, I hope to partner with you in thinking through these issues. Nothing you say to me will be told to anyone else without your permission, and you'll be completely anonymous in anything published about this study, so whether you have answers or just questions I hope you'll share them with me. I have no expectations, of course, that you'll share anything you don't feel comfortable discussing, and you're under no obligation to answer any questions, now or later, that you wish for any reason not to answer.

1. I'd like to start by understanding your views on social justice in general:
 - a. I've given you a very vague definition for social justice. If you had to make an attempt, how would you define it?
 - b. What do you think are the most pressing social justice issues in society today?
 - c. What do you think are the most pressing social justice issues in schools today?
 - d. What do you see as the purpose or purposes of teaching? Your answer may have nothing to do with social justice, and that's fine. [If necessary, prompt with 'why did you choose to become a teacher?']

- e. I want you to imagine for a minute that all of the steps you think are most important for increasing social justice have been taken successfully and things are now perfect. What is different about the world?
2. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about the ways in which you see social justice issues in your own classroom. The issues you identify will be the basis for what I observe during your classes, although we'll be discussing them continuously, so if you think of something later or want to change or nuance a particular thought, that can happen any time. I'm just trying to get an idea of how you think about the relationship between social justice issues like the ones you've just discussed and your own classroom.
 - a. What social justice issues do you think are most relevant to your own students and your own classroom? [If necessary, prompt teacher by noting that these issues can either be external issues that are visible in the classroom or class-based concerns that relate to social justice issues]
 - b. Other than the issues you just named, are there other such issues you see as being relevant to your students and your own classroom? Are there issues you see as being particularly not relevant?
 - c. Have you taken any steps to address any of the issues you just named with your current or past students? These steps might have been taken through planning, through your choices about teaching practice, through discussions with students, or in any other way.
 - d. What issues do you feel most able to address or otherwise impact? What issues do you feel least able to address or otherwise impact?
 - e. If any, what current difficulties are arising in your practice around issues of social justice? For example, an issue that you see as relating to social justice might have proven particularly difficult to address, or it might be negatively impacting learning for a particular student or group of students.
 - f. As a follow-up to the last question, if I am interested in studying the ways in which you think through issues of social justice, what do you think would be most illuminating to focus on, either in your practice or in the classroom?
3. Now I'd like to talk to you specifically about your local context. When I say 'local context', I mean any factors or issues that relate to the school, neighborhood, or city that you think are important. If you think there are state influences that impact your local context, you can speak about those as well.

- a. How do you see your local context? What contextual factors are most salient in this district, this community, this school, and in your own classroom?

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences the way this school operates? [If necessary, prompt again with ‘do you think anything about the city, the neighborhood, or anything else makes this school different from schools that might be in other neighborhoods or other cities?’ and ‘can you talk a little more about why you see X as important?’])

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences the way this district operates?)

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences your own classroom or your own teaching practice?)

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences your students and their families? [If necessary, prompt with ‘do you think anything about the city, the neighborhood, or anything else makes your students and their families different from students one might find in other neighborhoods or other cities?’ and ‘can you talk a little more about why you see X as important?’])

(PROMPT: What about the school do you think influences your students and their families? [If necessary, prompt again with ‘do you think anything about the school makes the students here different from students one might find in other neighborhoods in other cities?’])

(PROMPT): How do your students themselves and their families influence the school and your own classroom?

- b. If I were trying to describe [School Name] to someone who hadn’t ever been here, what do you think would be the most important things for me to say to give that person an accurate picture of the school?
- c. If I were trying to describe your students to someone who had never met them, what do you think would be the most important things for me to say to give that person an accurate picture?
4. My other interest in this study lies in thinking about how the ways in which you see the issues you identify might relate to the ways in which your principal [and district administrator] see these issues. As a reminder, nothing you say will be shared with these people beyond a general description of the issue you identify, so if, for example, you talk at length about your thinking concerning the relationship between median family income in this school and student work completion in your classroom, the only thing I’ll ask the

principal will be for his thoughts on the influence of median family income on this school, with a possible prompt about whether this might influence work completion. In other words, none of your personal concerns or thinking will be reported to anyone else without your express permission.

In this final section, I'd like to ask you about how you see the relationship between your own ideas about social justice and what you perceive as the ways in which these ideas might be taken up, or not, by the school and district. I'll be asking you for your beliefs about how these issues *might* be approached at those levels, so it's okay to tell me what you think even if you're not totally sure. However, it's also totally acceptable for you to simply tell me that you don't know the answer to something and we can just move on.

- a. Do you think that this school's leadership places a focus on issues of social justice in any way? If so, what issues do you think they focus on?
- b. Do you think that this district's leadership places a focus on issues of social justice in any way? If so, what issues do you think they focus on?
- c. Earlier, you named [list of issues not discussed in a. or b.] as additional important social justice issues. How do you think these issues are viewed and/or addressed at the school level?
- d. How do you think these issues are viewed and/or addressed at the district level?
- e. If I asked your principal to describe important contextual factors that influence the school, do you think [her/his] answer would differ from yours? How so?
- f. If I asked someone in the district office to describe important contextual factors that influence the district, do you think [his/her] answer would differ from yours? How so?

Appendix B: Mid-Semester Teacher Interview Protocol

I'd like to ask you a few questions, some of which will be the same as in the previous interview and some of which will be different. As a reminder, nothing you say to me will be told to anyone else without your permission, and I have no expectations that you'll share anything you don't feel comfortable discussing.

1. I'd like to start with a few questions about your views on social justice:
 - a. How would you define social justice?
 - b. What social justice issues do you think are most relevant to your own students and your own classroom? [If necessary, prompt teacher by noting that these issues can either be external issues that are visible in the classroom or class-based concerns that relate to social justice issues]
 - c. Other than the issues you just named, are there other such issues you see as being relevant to your students and your own classroom? Are there issues you see as being particularly not relevant?
 - d. Would you say that we have taken any steps to address any of the issues you just named?
 - e. What issues do you feel most able to address or otherwise impact? What issues do you feel least able to address or otherwise impact?
 - f. What issue do you consider the most important for us to address before the end of the semester?
2. Now I'd like to talk to you again about your local context. When I say 'local context', I mean any factors or issues that relate to the school, neighborhood, or city that you think are important. If you think there are state influences that impact your local context, you can speak about those as well.
 - a. How do you see your local context? What contextual factors are most salient in this district, this community, this school, and in your own classroom?

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences the way this school operates? [If necessary, prompt again with ‘do you think anything about the city, the neighborhood, or anything else makes this school different from schools that might be in other neighborhoods or other cities?’ and ‘can you talk a little more about why you see X as important?’])

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences the way this district operates?)

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences your own classroom or your own teaching practice?)

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences your students and their families? [If necessary, prompt with ‘do you think anything about the city, the neighborhood, or anything else makes your students and their families different from students one might find in other neighborhoods or other cities?’ and ‘can you talk a little more about why you see X as important?’])

(PROMPT: What about the school do you think influences your students and their families? [If necessary, prompt again with ‘do you think anything about the school makes the students here different from students one might find in other neighborhoods in other cities?’])

(PROMPT): How do your students themselves and their families influence the school and your own classroom?

- b. If I were trying to describe [School Name] to someone who hadn’t ever been here, what do you think would be the most important things for me to say to give that person an accurate picture of the school?
 - c. If I were trying to describe your students to someone who had never met them, what do you think would be the most important things for me to say to give that person an accurate picture?
3. Lastly, I’d like to ask you a few questions about your experience in this study so far. Part of my goal for my dissertation is to analyze whether the structure of the study and the choices I’m making in it are useful, so please answer honestly even if the answers are critical. I give you my word I won’t be offended.
- a. Do you feel that you have gotten any benefit from participating in this study so far? If so, what?

- b. Do you feel that you have been inconvenienced or caused any problems by the study? If so, how?
- c. Has the study generally gone as you imagined when you signed up? If not, what about it differs from that?
- d. What are the things that I've done so far that have been the most useful for you? Least useful?
- e. What would you most like to have happen in this study over the next six weeks? (PROMPT): How can this study be as useful as possible for you in its second half?

Appendix C: Final Teacher Interview Protocol

I'd like to ask you a few questions, some of which will be the same as in the previous interview and some of which will be different. As a reminder, nothing you say to me will be told to anyone else without your permission, and I have no expectations that you'll share anything you don't feel comfortable discussing.

1. I'd like to start with a few questions about your views on social justice:
 - a. How would you define social justice?
 - b. What social justice issues do you think are most relevant to your own students and your own classroom? [If necessary, prompt teacher by noting that these issues can either be external issues that are visible in the classroom or class-based concerns that relate to social justice issues]
 - c. Other than the issues you just named, are there other such issues you see as being relevant to your students and your own classroom? Are there issues you see as being particularly not relevant?
 - d. Would you say that we have taken any steps to address any of the issues you just named?
 - e. What issues do you now feel most able to address or otherwise impact? What issues do you feel least able to address or otherwise impact?
2. Now I'd like to talk to you again about your local context. When I say 'local context', I mean any factors or issues that relate to the school, neighborhood, or city that you think are important. If you think there are state influences that impact your local context, you can speak about those as well.
 - a. How do you see your local context? What contextual factors are most salient in this district, this community, this school, and in your own classroom?

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences the way this school operates? [If necessary, prompt again with 'do you think anything about the city, the neighborhood, or anything else makes this school different from schools that might be in other neighborhoods or other cities?' and 'can you talk a little more about why you see X as important?'])

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences the way this district operates?)

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences your own classroom or your own teaching practice?)

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences your students and their families? [If necessary, prompt with ‘do you think anything about the city, the neighborhood, or anything else makes your students and their families different from students one might find in other neighborhoods or other cities?’ and ‘can you talk a little more about why you see X as important?’])

(PROMPT: What about the school do you think influences your students and their families? [If necessary, prompt again with ‘do you think anything about the school makes the students here different from students one might find in other neighborhoods in other cities?’])

(PROMPT): How do your students themselves and their families influence the school and your own classroom?

- b. If I were trying to describe [School Name] to someone who hadn’t ever been here, what do you think would be the most important things for me to say to give that person an accurate picture of the school?
 - c. If I were trying to describe your students to someone who had never met them, what do you think would be the most important things for me to say to give that person an accurate picture?
3. Lastly, I’d like to ask you a few questions about your experience in this study. Part of my goal for my dissertation is to analyze whether the structure of the study and the choices I made in it are/were useful, so please answer honestly even if the answers are critical. I give you my word I won’t be offended.
- a. Do you feel that you received any benefit from participating in this study? If so, what?
 - b. Do you feel that you have been inconvenienced or caused any problems by the study? If so, how?
 - c. Which of the things that I/we did were the most useful to you? The least useful?
 - d. Which issues, if any, did we not address that you would have liked to address?

- e. Do you feel able to move forward with additional social justice work on your own? Do you have any plans for further practice changes or experiments, activities, discussions, etc. in support of social justice with your current or future students?

- f. If a teacher in this school came up to you and asked you how to go about improving her/his own social justice practice, what would you say to that teacher?

Appendix D: Initial Principal Interview Protocol

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study! Is it okay if I record this interview?

I'd like to start by telling you what I'm interested in and what I'll be doing to study it.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which you as a principal think through issues of social justice. You may not use the phrase 'social justice', but when I use it I don't mean anything specialized – you or others may refer to some of the same ideas as 'equity' or 'equality' or just 'justice' or 'fairness', but all I mean when I say 'social justice' is an increase in the amount of justice, or fairness, or equity, in society, however you define that. This interview will not be in any way an assessment of the school or of you. Instead, your responses will be used to think through the relationship between your perspective as the principal, the perspective of a teacher in this school, and the perspective of a district leader. I'm very interested in the ways in which you see ideas of social justice as relevant to your work and the work of the school, and which ideas in particular you think might be most important or salient.

Before I talk about what I'll be asking you next and why, do you have any questions?

[Principal is given time to ask any questions]

Great! So in order to get this work started, I'd like to ask you a few questions about the issues that you see in this school. Nothing you say to me will be told to anyone else without your permission, and you'll be completely anonymous in anything published about this study. I have no expectations that you'll share anything you don't feel comfortable discussing, and you're under no obligation to answer any questions, now or later, that you wish for any reason not to answer.

1. I'd like to start by understanding your views on social justice in general:
 - a. I've given you a very vague definition for social justice. If you had to make an attempt, how would you define it?
 - b. What do you think are the most pressing social justice issues in society today?
 - c. What do you think are the most pressing social justice issues in schools today?
 - d. What do you see as the purpose or purposes of education? Your answer may have nothing to do with social justice, and that's fine. [If necessary, prompt with 'why did you choose to become involved in education?']

- e. I want you to imagine for a minute that all of the steps you think are most important for increasing social justice have been taken successfully and things are now perfect. What is different about the world?
2. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about the ways in which you see social justice issues in this school.
- a. What social justice issues do you think are most relevant in this school and for the students who attend it? [If necessary, prompt principal by noting that these issues can either be external issues that are visible in the school or school-based concerns that relate to social justice issues]
 - b. Other than the issues you just named, are there other such issues you see as being relevant to the school and its students? Are there issues you see as being particularly not relevant?
 - c. Have you taken any steps to address any of the issues you just named?
 - d. What school social justice issues do you feel most able to address or otherwise impact? What issues do you feel least able to address or otherwise impact?
3. Now I'd like to talk to you specifically about your local context. When I say 'local context', I mean any factors or issues that relate to the school, neighborhood, or city that you think are important. If you think there are state influences that impact your local context, you can speak about those as well.
- a. How do you see your local context? What contextual factors are most salient in this district, this community, and this school?

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences the way this school operates? [If necessary, prompt again with 'do you think anything about the city, the neighborhood, or anything else makes this school different from schools that might be in other neighborhoods or other cities?' and 'can you talk a little more about why you see X as important?'])

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences the way this district operates?)

PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences your own work as a principal?)

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences students and their families? [If necessary, prompt with 'do you think anything about the city, the neighborhood, or anything else makes your students and their families different

from students one might find in other neighborhoods or other cities?’ and ‘can you talk a little more about why you see X as important?’)]

(PROMPT: What about this school do you think influences your students and their families? [If necessary, prompt again with ‘do you think anything about the school makes the students here different from students one might find in other neighborhoods in other cities?’])

(PROMPT): How do your students themselves and their families influence the school?

- b. If I were trying to describe [School Name] to someone who hadn’t ever been here, what do you think would be the most important things for me to say to give that person an accurate picture of the school?
 - c. If I were trying to describe the students here to someone who had never met them, what do you think would be the most important things for me to say to give that person an accurate picture?
4. My other interest in this study lies in thinking about how the ways in which you see the issues you identify might relate to the ways in which the teacher I’m observing and the district administration see these issues. As a reminder, nothing you say will be shared with the district beyond a general description of the issue you identify. I’d like to learn more about how you see the relationship between your own ideas about social justice and what you perceive as the ways in which these ideas might be taken up, or not, by teachers and by the district. I’ll be asking you for your beliefs about how these issues *might* be approached at those levels, so it’s okay to tell me what you think even if you’re not totally sure. However, it’s also totally acceptable for you to simply tell me that you don’t know the answer to something and we can just move on.
- a. Do you think that the teachers here place a focus on issues of social justice in any way? If so, what issues do you think they focus on?
 - b. Do you think that district leadership places a focus on issues of social justice in any way? If so, what issues do you think they focus on?
 - c. Earlier, you named [list of issues not discussed in a. or b.] as additional important social justice issues. How do you think these issues are viewed and/or addressed at the district level?
 - d. How do you think these issues are viewed and/or addressed at the classroom level?
 - e. If I asked your teachers to describe important contextual factors that influence their classrooms, do you think their answers would differ from yours? How so?

- f. If I asked someone in the district office to describe important contextual factors that influence the district, do you think [his/her] answer would differ from yours? How so?

Appendix E: Final Principal Interview Protocol

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study! Is it okay if I record this interview?

I'd like to start by describing the purpose of this second interview. During the semester, I have worked with teachers in your school and elsewhere, and have, whenever possible, interacted with other district faculty and staff, with a two-part goal. The first part is to understand the ways in which the teachers with whom I am working think about social justice, how that thinking changed as we worked together, and the ways in which they drew on resources with a goal of improving their social justice practice. During that work, the teachers identified a number of issues, factors, structures, etc. that they felt were salient to their practice, and to the school and district as well as the neighborhood and city. The second part is to analyze ways in which the teachers' conceptions of social justice and of the important issues in this district compare to your own views and to the views of a district administrator. I have already interviewed you about your views about those things and we won't be talking about them again. Instead, I'd like to focus on the various types of issues that teachers identified over the course of the study.

Before I talk about what I'll be asking you next and why, do you have any questions?

[Principal is given time to ask any questions]

1. Great! In the first part of this interview, I'd like to ask you a few questions about the functioning of this school and this district, and about the impact of its context.
 - a. Where do you see the power in this district as lying?
(PROMPT: Is this power with the superintendent? With the transformational leaders? With principals in individual schools? With the teachers?)
 - b. How are the class sizes in this school? In the district overall?
 - c. How much power does the district have over what is taught in each classroom? The school?
 - d. Is the school impacted by teacher turnover? The district?
 - e. Do you see the location of this district in a very democratic county as influencing its operation? The school?
 - f. How do you feel about parent participation in this school? This district?

- g. Do you personally experience issues with bureaucracy within the district? If so, which ones?
 - h. Do you personally experience issues with bureaucracy relating to the state? If so, which ones?
 - i. Do you think there are national or state funding issues that negatively impact the district? How about district funding issues that negatively impact the school?
 - j. Do you believe there is a feeling of community in the district? In the school? What does that mean to you?
 - k. How does the teacher's union impact the district? The school?
 - l. While I have heard much praise, I have also heard critique of almost every aspect of teaching in this district. However, I have heard only positive things about you. Why do you think that is?
 - m. What about the way in which you and the rest of the school leadership consider issues might be different from the ways in which district leadership considers issues? Teachers in the school?
 - n. Where can teachers go to find resources to support their teaching, social justice or otherwise?
(PROMPT: Where would they find these resources (and what resources would they find) in the school? In the district?)
 - o. If a teacher mentioned an interest in improving her/his social justice practice, what would you tell them?
2. So for the second part of this interview, I'd just like to very generally name a series of issues mentioned by teachers (and not necessarily teachers at this school). I'd like you to tell me whether, and if so, how, you think this issue is important at the classroom level, at the school level, and at the district level. I'll also ask you about whether you believe the issue is addressed at the classroom level, at the school level, and at the district level. If you aren't sure what I mean by any of the issues I name, please feel free to ask for further information and I'll be happy to clarify.

How are these (or aren't they) important, and are they addressed, at the classroom, school, and district level?

- a. Fairness

- b. Equality
- c. Basic needs
- d. Race
- e. Standardized testing
- f. Gay rights
- g. Opportunity
- h. Poverty/Income inequality
- i. Parental involvement
- j. Rights
- k. Educational inequality/inequity (incl. funding)
- l. Community
- m. Immigration
- n. Gender
- o. Reproductive rights
- p. Community participation
- q. The police
- r. Responsibility
- s. Politics
- t. Alternative perspectives
- u. Ability/disability
- v. Religion

w. The environment

x. Marijuana

y. Dress code

Appendix F: Initial District Leader Interview Protocol

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study! Is it okay if I record this interview?

I'd like to start by telling you what I'm interested in and what I'll be doing to study it.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which you as a district leader think through issues of social justice. You may not use the phrase 'social justice', but when I use it I don't mean anything specialized – you or others may refer to some of the same ideas as 'equity' or 'equality' or just 'justice' or 'fairness', but all I mean when I say 'social justice' is an increase in the amount of justice, or fairness, or equity, in society, however you define that. This interview will not be in any way an assessment of the districts, of its schools or teachers, or of you. Instead, your responses will be used to think through the relationship between your perspective as a district leader, the perspectives of a school principal, and the perspectives of three teachers in this district. I'm very interested in the ways in which you see ideas of social justice as relevant to your work and the work of the district, and which ideas in particular you think might be most important or salient.

Before I talk about what I'll be asking you next and why, do you have any questions?

[District leader is given time to ask any questions]

Great! So in order to get this work started, I'd like to ask you a few questions about the issues that you see in this district. Nothing you say to me will be told to anyone else without your permission, and you'll be completely anonymous in anything published about this study. I have no expectations that you'll share anything you don't feel comfortable discussing, and you're under no obligation to answer any questions, now or later, that you wish for any reason not to answer.

1. I'd like to start by understanding your views on social justice in general:
 - a. I've given you a very vague definition for social justice. If you had to make an attempt, how would you define it?
 - b. What do you think are the most pressing social justice issues in society today?
 - c. What do you think are the most pressing social justice issues in schools today?
 - d. What do you see as the purpose or purposes of education? Your answer may have nothing to do with social justice, and that's fine. [If necessary, prompt with 'why did you choose to become involved in education?']

- e. I want you to imagine for a minute that all of the steps you think are most important for increasing social justice have been taken successfully and things are now perfect. What is different about the world?
2. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about the ways in which you see social justice issues in this district.
- a. What social justice issues do you think are most relevant in this district and for the students in it? [If necessary, prompt principal by noting that these issues can either be external issues that are visible in the district or district-based concerns that relate to social justice issues]
 - b. Other than the issues you just named, are there other such issues you see as being relevant to the district and its students? Are there issues you see as being particularly not relevant?
 - c. Have you taken any steps to address any of the issues you just named?
 - d. What district social justice issues do you feel that you and the rest of the district leadership are most able to address or otherwise impact? What issues do you feel least able to address or otherwise impact?
3. Now I'd like to talk to you specifically about your local context. When I say 'local context', I mean any factors or issues that relate to the district or city that you think are important. If you think there are state influences that impact your local context, you can speak about those as well.
- p. How do you see your local context? What contextual factors are most salient in this district?

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences the way this district and its schools operate? [If necessary, prompt again with 'do you think anything makes this district different from other districts?' and 'can you talk a little more about why you see X as important?'])

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences your own work as a district leader?)

(PROMPT: In general, what about your local context do you think influences students and their families? [If necessary, prompt with 'do you think anything about the city or district makes your students and their families different from students one might find in other cities or districts?' and 'can you talk a little more about why you see X as important?'])

(PROMPT): How do your students themselves and their families influence the district?

- q. If I were trying to describe [District Name] to someone who hadn't ever been here, what do you think would be the most important things for me to say to give that person an accurate picture of the district?
 - r. If I were trying to describe the students here to someone who had never met them, what do you think would be the most important things for me to say to give that person an accurate picture?
4. My other interest in this study lies in thinking about how the ways in which you see the issues you identify might relate to the ways in which the teachers I'm observing and a principal see these issues. I'd like to learn more about how you see the relationship between your own ideas about social justice and what you perceive as the ways in which these ideas might be taken up, or not, by teachers and principals. I'll be asking you for your beliefs about how these issues *might* be approached at those levels, so it's okay to tell me what you think even if you're not totally sure. However, it's also totally acceptable for you to simply tell me that you don't know the answer to something and we can just move on.
- a. Do you think that the teachers here place a focus on issues of social justice in any way? If so, what issues do you think they focus on?
 - b. Do you think that principals place a focus on issues of social justice in any way? If so, what issues do you think they focus on?
 - c. Earlier, you named [list of issues not discussed in a. or b.] as additional important social justice issues. How do you think these issues are viewed and/or addressed at the school level?
 - d. How do you think these issues are viewed and/or addressed at the classroom level?
 - e. If I asked your teachers to describe important contextual factors that influence their classrooms, do you think their answers would differ from yours? How so?
 - f. If I asked a principal to describe important contextual factors that influence [his/her] school, do you think [his/her] answer would differ from yours? How so?

Appendix G: District Leader Final Interview Protocol

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study! Is it okay if I record this interview?

I'd like to start by describing the purpose of this second interview. During the semester, I have worked with teachers in the district with a two-part goal. The first part is to understand the ways in which the teachers with whom I am working think about social justice, how that thinking changed as we worked together, and the ways in which they drew on resources with a goal of improving their social justice practice. During that work, the teachers identified a number of issues, factors, structures, etc. that they felt were salient to their practice, and to the school and district as well as the neighborhood and city. The second part is to analyze ways in which the teachers' conceptions of social justice and of the important issues in this district compare to the views of their principal and to your own views. I have already interviewed you about your views about those things and we won't be talking about them again. Instead, I'd like to focus on the various types of issues that teachers identified over the course of the study.

Before I talk about what I'll be asking you next and why, do you have any questions?

[District leader is given time to ask any questions]

1. Great! In the first part of this interview, I'd like to ask you a few questions about the functioning of the district, and about the impact of its context.
 - a. Where do you see the power in this district as lying?
(PROMPT: Is this power with the superintendent? With the transformational leaders? With principals in individual schools? With the teachers?)
 - b. What are class sizes like in the district?
 - c. How much power does the district have over what is taught in classrooms?
 - d. Is the district impacted by teacher turnover?
 - e. Do you see the location of this district in a very democratic county as influencing its operation?
 - f. How do you feel about parent participation in this district?
 - g. Do you feel that there are issues with bureaucracy in this district? If so, in what ways?

- h. Do you personally experience issues with bureaucracy relating to the state? If so, which ones?
 - i. Do you think there are national or state funding issues that negatively impact the district? Do you think the district equitably funds schools?
 - j. Do you believe there is a feeling of community in the district? What does that mean to you?
 - k. How does the teacher's union impact the district?
 - l. What about the way in which you and the rest of the district leadership think about issues might be different from the ways in which principals and/or teachers think about these issues?
 - m. Where can teachers go to find resources to support their teaching, social justice or otherwise?
(PROMPT: Where would they find these resources (and what resources would they find) in the district?)
 - n. If a teacher mentioned an interest in improving her/his social justice practice to you, what would you tell them?
2. So for the second part of this interview, I'll just name a series of issues mentioned by teachers and others over the course of the study. I'd like you to tell me whether, and if so, how, you think this issue is important at the classroom level, at the school level, and at the district level. I'll also ask you about whether you believe the issue is addressed at the classroom level, at the school level, and at the district level. If you aren't sure what I mean by any of the issues I name, please feel free to ask for further information and I'll be happy to clarify.

How are these (or aren't they) important, and are they addressed, at the classroom, school, and district level?

- a. Fairness
- b. Equality
- c. Basic needs
- d. Race
- e. Standardized testing

- f. Gay rights
- g. Opportunity
- h. Poverty/Income inequality
- i. Parental involvement
- j. Rights
- k. Educational inequality/inequity (incl. funding)
- l. Community
- m. Immigration
- n. Gender
- o. Reproductive rights
- p. Community participation
- q. The police
- r. Responsibility
- s. Politics
- t. Alternative perspectives
- u. Ability/disability
- v. Religion
- w. The environment
- x. Marijuana
- y. Dress code

Appendix H: Practitioner Views on Context

As discussed by researchers like Sharkey (2004) and Hennessy, Mercer, & Warwick (2011), social justice work does not occur in a vacuum, and my work with these teachers was no exception. In fact, it was the way in which teachers saw their *local context* – their students, their school, the district, and the community, among other things – that informed and guided them in identifying issues. Teachers continually referenced their local context as they outlined not simply social justice issues that they thought of as important, but those that they saw as most important for *their* students and *their* practice at the present time. In this appendix, I will first outline the contextual factors that teachers, as well as the two educational leaders, identified at the classroom (when relevant), school and/or district, and community levels. Following this, I will briefly summarize and contrast these views⁴⁸. The information contained here served to inform the analysis presented in Chapter 7.

Defining Local Context

Table A.1 summarizes the contextual factors identified by the teachers and leaders in response to questions 3a-c in their respective initial interviews. As participants said a number of related things in response to different questions (for example, Robin made effectively the same comment in response to my initial question about local context that Mike made when I asked what Brandon was like), I do not distinguish between the questions, as all three were intended to

⁴⁸ Recall that scholars can conceptualize context very differently from one another, with some (e.g., Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, & Kron (2003) limiting it to a single issue and others (e.g., Flores, 2001) working to keep possibilities for relevant contextual factors quite broad. Practitioners' comments here support the latter interpretation.

produce a general picture of context. Rather, I have broken comments up thematically by the entity to which they refer: the city/community, the district/school⁴⁹, and students. Additionally, responses given by a single teacher in multiple interviews are bolded, and the number that follows each response indicates the number of interviews out of three in which they addressed this concept. Responses given by multiple respondents have been italicized⁵⁰. Responses that actively contradict have been underlined⁵¹.

In the following sections, I first give a brief summary of each practitioner's description of her/his context⁵² based on the information shown in Table A.1 and then contrast these descriptions. I conclude the section with a discussion of the implications of the differences and similarities in the ways in which participants talk about their context. In other work on context (Altman & Rankin, 2017) I suggest that teachers' and others' views of context include not only a huge range of factors but also a wide variety of suggestions regarding the source of particular issues or factors and the people or groups that are impacted by them. I do not attempt to investigate the latter aspects of participants' descriptions of context in this appendix. However, it is nonetheless true that these practitioners do name many, many contextual factors (Erin alone

⁴⁹ I have chosen to combine the district and the school in this table for two reasons. First, many teachers made comments that were not clearly about one or the other (for example, Erin noted that there were problems with homelessness, but never indicated whether she was referring to homelessness in the district or in Brandon). When a teacher did specifically refer to the district, this has been noted parenthetically. Second, assistant superintendent Jack Rand's comments are all district-specific since he does not work at a school, which, had these categories not been combined, would have resulted in a difficult-to-read table with substantial blank space.

⁵⁰ In some cases, responses that are similar but arguably not exactly the same have been italicized to make it easier to read the table. For example, Mike and Gordon both noted class-related issues in schools, while Erin specifically mentioned middle-class flight, which, while more specific, still clearly belongs in the same category of comment.

⁵¹ Note: since Gordon is at a different school than Erin, Mike, and Robin, his school-specific responses have not been italicized or underlined when they match or oppose school-specific responses of the other three since the two schools have different contexts. However, comments that match other teachers' observations and may also point to district qualities (true for two: 'experiencing class issues' and 'suffering from issues of bureaucracy') have been italicized.

⁵² While some of the ways in which teachers represent their context here are scattered throughout their portraits, the goal of this section is to collect these contextual representations into concise paragraphs as well as to highlight additional issues mentioned by teachers that may not be explicitly discussed elsewhere.

Table A.1: Summary of Comments on Context					
	Erin	Mike	Gordon	Robin	Jack
This city...		...is in the rust belt ...has a shrinking population ...is very Democratic	...is in the rust belt	...is experiencing suburban flight	...is unappreciative of what it has ...”shoots itself in the foot” ...has a defeatist attitude ...has built a bridge to support its schools
This school (district)...	<p>...experiences class issues (2) ...is experiencing changing demographics ...has great teachers (3) ...features a number of out-of-district students ...has a great reputation in the district ...has a wide range of curricular options ...is urban ...is experiencing middle-class flight (2) ...is impacted by teacher turnover (2) ...is a good/great school (2) ...has a number of resources ...has good school spirit ...is impacted by redistricting ...suffers from high class sizes ...is impacted by homelessness ...serves a number of students who live alone ...serves a number of transient students and families ...lacks consistency ...is decreasing in quality ...provides excellent student experiences within individual classrooms ...has great athletics ...experiences attendance issues ...presents a façade to the public ...is caring ...is affected by its geography ...is disorganized ...is not a collaborative environment ...is chaotic ...has great programs</p>	<p>...experiences class issues (2) ...is racially diverse (2) ...has great teachers ...is the best in CPS (2) ...suffers from issues of bureaucracy ...is located in the inner-city (3) ...has a racial balance (2) ...is experiencing “white flight” (2) ...lacks resources ...is open ...has better students than elsewhere in the district ...has higher parent participation than elsewhere in the district, but much lower parent participation than surrounding suburbs ...suffers from administrative issues (district) ...is negatively impacted by the State Department of Education ...has overloaded teachers ...focuses on public relations over substance (district) ...has a great principal ...is not a “ghetto school” ...devalues education ...is mid-sized</p>	<p>...experiences class issues (2) ...suffers from issues of bureaucracy ...has a mix of urban and suburban students ...supports the values of loyalty, tradition, and service (3) ...suffers from funding issues (district) ...has a strong sense of community (district) ...is focused on the future ...has good school spirit ...is a “throwback” to schools of yesterday ...provides a good general education curriculum ...has a push toward vocational education ...lacks appropriate investment in technology (district) ...loses students to voucher programs</p>	<p>...is experiencing changing demographics ...is very diverse ...features a number of out-of-district students ...is the best in CPS ...is comprehensive ...is engaging in community outreach ...has negative stories told more often than positive ones ...lacks school spirit ...is very political (at the high school level) ...serves a number of students from other parts of the district ...is impacted by public perceptions ...meets the needs of all students ...supports a wide range of students ...is well-rounded ...breeds success</p>	<p>...is very diverse ...has passionate, generous teachers ...is engaging in community outreach ...has negative stories told more often than positive ones ...has a sense of district pride ...has built a bridge to support the city ...engages with local senior citizens ...has a committed staff</p>
These students...	<p>...are good kids (2) ...are open-minded/accepting ...feel a sense of entitlement (2) ...have gaps ...are eager (2) ...are poorly behaved (2) ...are 30-40% free and reduced lunch (2) and have a 60-70% graduation rate ...do not see many “success stories” ...have room for growth ...have received a number of accolades</p>	<p>...are good kids (2) ...feel a sense of entitlement ...are unprepared ...are respectful (2) ...are lazy (2) ...are fun-loving ...are of subpar quality ...are African American ...are energetic ...are talkative ...are not brilliant</p>	<p>...are good kids ...are mistrustful of outsiders (2) ...are higher achievers ...are not lazy ...are not thugs ...are high-poverty ...are able ...have many layers, like nesting dolls</p>	<p>...are open-minded/accepting ...are exactly like kids at any high school ...are of every type</p>	<p>...are open-minded/accepting ...need support ...are compassionate ...feel a sense of teamwork and unity through adversity</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...sometimes have "horrible home lives" ...are often raised by single parents ...are loud ...are ready to learn ...are argumentative ...want to make a difference ...want to be heard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...are profane ...have potential ...do not study ...are self-absorbed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...have a chip on their shoulder 		
Issues mentioned multiple times by a single practitioner are in bold		<i>Issues mentioned by multiple practitioners are in italics</i>		<u>Responses that contradict are underlined</u>	

names almost fifty, and some of those already represent collapsed categories of factors that are highly similar but perhaps not exactly equivalent) that touch on a variety of subjects and themes; I attempt to overview these in such a way that they form a coherent picture, but this is again only possible in a limited sense within the scope of this appendix.

Local Context: Erin⁵³. Erin describes a school that features caring and capable teachers and eager learners, but that nonetheless suffers from issues of organization and structure. Her Brandon is changing, serving an increasingly large number of students from other parts of the city and outside of the district. While it is a well-reputed school that has a wide range of curricular options and athletic and other programs, gives students a high-quality experience within each classroom, and encourages school spirit, Erin nonetheless sees the quality of education at Brandon as declining as the school struggles to support many different students, some of whom are homeless or transient and many of whom are impacted by poverty. This results in a chaotic, disorganized environment that lacks collaboration or consistency.

Erin frames Brandon's students as eager to learn but poorly behaved. They are "good kids", who are open-minded and accepting of their classmates, who want to be heard and to make a difference, who represent some of the best in the district, and who in many cases have received awards and accolades. Nonetheless, like the school itself, Erin's students are loud and accompanied by the sort of chaos that follows poor behavior, risk factors, sometimes difficult home lives, and a tendency to be argumentative. These students have much room to grow in

⁵³ Note that in these five short sections I am representing practitioners' own talk about their context rather than my analysis of that talk. This means that in some cases language that might be considered somewhat problematic by scholars interested in social justice has been presented unaddressed. The goal for this section thus is not for me to assess the views of my participants; rather, it is to describe those stated views in a way that enables me to better address the ways in which they relate and differ.

Brandon's positive academic environment, but do not see many "success stories" among other Carteret students and often act entitled.

Local context: Mike. Mike's Brandon is unquestionably the best general education school in Carteret, a highly Democratic rust belt city with a shrinking population, but in spite of this the school finds itself at the mercy of a number of outside factors. While Carteret has great teachers, a great principal (Robin), and the best students and highest parent participation in the district, Mike also sees it as having much lower parent participation than suburban districts and being negatively impacted by "white flight", district and state administrative issues and major bureaucratic problems, and a lack of resources (this is in contrast to Erin, who, as noted, sees Brandon as providing a wide range of resources). This leads to teachers who are overloaded with trivial bureaucratic concerns and a school that devalues education due to a lack of true support from the district, which Mike suggests values public relations and a positive appearance over substantive policies that can improve the issues Brandon faces.

Mike, like Erin, sees his students as "good kids". He finds them respectful, but academically underprepared. Further, while he frames his students as energetic and fun-loving, he also sees them as overly talkative, self-absorbed, and, echoing Erin, entitled. He sees this entitlement as connecting to a laziness among students who feel as if they should simply be able to receive the grades they want without putting in the work. Further, he finds them to be "profane in word and deed", often focusing their energy on negative behaviors rather than on positive ones.

Local context: Gordon. Gordon describes his school, Stoppard, very differently than Erin, Mike, and Robin describe Brandon. While he also sees class issues as a concern, and, like Mike, struggles with issues of district bureaucracy as well as with a lack of investment in

technology (see Gordon's portrait for more on his struggle with district technology in his distance learning AP Government class) and general underfunding, Gordon's Stoppard is not an environment torn between its advantages and its flaws. Rather, he portrays it as a positive place, one that has excellent school spirit and a unique history of loyalty, tradition, and service stretching back more than a hundred years. A positive district community combined with a positive school community result in a place that in many ways feels like a high school from the middle of the 20th century (in which "if anybody wanted to rob our whole town on a Friday night during football season they could have looted every house over a 3 hour period and nobody would have caught them") but is also forward-thinking and focused on the future of a city that is just beginning to accept its place in the rust belt and move toward a new identity.

Similarly, Gordon's students, despite their high poverty, are not defined by their disadvantages. While he sees them as mistrustful of outsiders and with "a chip on their shoulder" that he finds common among denizens of the East side of Carteret (and, he tells me, has been common and consistent for many years in a part of the city that has changed very little in demographics other than race), this is merely "a crust". Once one moves beyond this crust, one finds additional layers (Gordon sees these as similar to the layers of matryoshka dolls): able, higher-achieving students who are not lazy, are not "thugs", and want to succeed and do well.

Local context: Robin. Robin was in her third year as principal of Brandon High School at the time of this study, and she told me that she faced substantial adjustment when moving from her previous position as the principal (and, before that, the assistant principal), of Creekside Elementary, due to the sudden appearance of politics at the high school level:

I've been an elementary principal – for about twelve years or so around the corner. These are completely different beasts, and I would have to say when I was at the elementary,

beyond maybe having a business partner, there were not those contacts. You were just kind of in your school doing your own business getting through the day. A huge jump when I came to the high school arena – I find it to be more political in nature in a variety of ways.

This issue of politics extends beyond the inner workings of the district to public perceptions of the school. Robin describes Brandon as a school with quickly changing demographics, one that used to serve a mostly white, middle-class group of students whose advantages made it the premier school in the district. She still sees it as the best in CPS, and as a high-quality comprehensive high school with a diverse student body representing “every type of student...period.” Nonetheless, while Brandon is a well-rounded school with a high-quality comprehensive curriculum that meets the needs of its wide range of students, the community, which Robin suggests still expects the Brandon of ten or fifteen years ago, is much more ready to latch on to negative stories, even when they are inaccurate or represent only one perspective on a situation. Further, unlike Erin, Robin sees a lack of school spirit at Brandon, perhaps due to the wide geographic area covered by its students, or perhaps due to their many after-school responsibilities. She tells me:

I think probably if I talk to someone from ten years ago versus today, they would say there’s just a lack of community spirit or things like that, but the other thing we’ve realized, like a lot of my high school students, as soon as the day ends they’re going to jobs, or they have athletics, usually one or the other. So life takes over once the school day ends for many of these students.

Local context: Jack. As Jack Rand works in the district leadership, his comments did not address any school in particular and rather served as an overview of his sense of district context.

He sees students in the district, much as Robin and Erin see students in Brandon, as open-minded and accepting, and, despite the fact that they need substantial support from the district, as compassionate people who use the adversity they feel as an impetus toward unity and a sense of teamwork. He sees this quality as representative of the city of Carteret as a whole as well, noting that while Carteret is a city that often “shoots itself in the foot” through its internally defeatist attitude, it is also a city ready to band together if anyone *outside* of the community challenges or critiques it:

Yeah, we talk to each other about how bad we have it, but don't let somebody talk bad about us, because we're united in that, you know? And I think that they would see that in terms of within our kids, that they're very accepting of each other, but also very united in terms of going through the issues that they're going through.

As Jack describes it, the priority of the district is to connect with the city, whose population is beginning to realize that it needs to support its schools in order to improve its own situation:

Between the city and the school system there's a bridge, and it goes both ways. I think the city is looking for us to develop leaders for tomorrow and develop a strong work base that could help propel the city forward. The school district cannot do it alone if we don't have the city's support in terms of industry, in terms of our groups providing back into the schools. And not just financial. Everybody wants financial, but in terms of opportunities for kids, in terms of embracing those who don't have the opportunities that they may have across town, that bridge goes both ways, and what happens is when we're not supporting and moving the city forward in terms of the students that we are graduating to be a part of it, or the city's not working with us to help prepare them, our

city suffers, and it allows for, you know, in terms of not having the quality workforce, for industry to come in, for us not having a quality school system to prepare that workforce, etc. So I think we're really related in terms of- our success is their success, our failure is their failure, and vice versa.

The district engages in this work through community outreach. While many community members do not have children in CPS, he does not see this as a reason not to connect. In fact, he describes a "senior prom" for Carteret's senior citizens as one example of the district reaching out to a demographic that is unusual, but that has the time and willingness to support the schools if they themselves feel supported. Jack, like Robin, tells me that in the community "our negative always gets told" and that the district's focus is on spreading information about the more positive aspects of the school system; he sees this community engagement, and the committed staff and passionate teachers who carry it out, as key to continuing to change this relationship.

Comparison. Interesting patterns arise in a comparative analysis of the contextual factors discussed by each study participant. I will first address the ways in which practitioners talk about students and their families, and then the ways in which they describe their school/district context. Of note in talk about students is that all five practitioners interviewed described students in their school (or district) as "good kids" and/or open-minded/accepting individuals, suggesting some level of consistency in the positive ways in which these teachers, and this principal and district leader, see their respective populations. This is particularly relevant given that Robin had comparatively little else to say about students, with both of her other observations about them being quite general, but still spoke at length about the level of open-mindedness and acceptance she sees among Brandon's students. Jack also made this comment at the district level, making this view one that extends across levels.

Further, Erin and Mike, who both teach at Brandon, describe their students in strikingly similar ways (and it is worth noting that since both teach Social Studies they are likely to have little if any student overlap). Both represent students as ultimately good, but frame them as having behavior issues and misplaced energy that challenges the classroom environment. Robin, however, does not describe students in this way, raising interesting questions about the ways in which students may be viewed by other teachers in classrooms when compared to other non-teaching school personnel. Also interesting are the parallels between Gordon's and Jack's description, as both frame students (and, in Jack's case, residents of Carteret as well) as ultimately united in adversity (as Jack calls it). As Gordon is officially a teacher at Stoppard but serves students from four of the six district high schools through the distance learning program and Jack's view is from the district office (and considering that Erin and Mike say nothing whatsoever along these lines), it is interesting to consider whether this may be a district-wide trend that is bucked at Brandon or whether other factors are at play. Further questions raised by practitioners' talk about students are discussed at the end of this chapter.

As already noted in the individual overviews above, the parallels between the ways in which Erin and Mike describe their school and how they describe their students are striking. Both describe students who are good at heart, but with a misplaced, chaotic energy that may confuse their priorities, and both additionally describe a school that is good at its core, but with a misplaced, chaotic energy that may confuse its priorities. Additionally, Mike's talk about students highlights the negative influence of outside factors to a greater extent than Erin's, and Mike's talk about Brandon also highlights the negative influence of outside factors to a greater extent than Erin's. In this case, Robin, from her principal's seat, tells a different story, but one that certainly aligns with what Mike and Erin are saying – rather than focusing on the particular

students that sit in Brandon's classrooms, she speaks about changing demographics and a school struggling to adjust to serve very different groups of students while still maintaining its reputation as the premier school in CPS. In such circumstances, and particularly given both Robin's and Jack's sense that negative stories about CPS are frequent and common while the positive often goes unreported, the façade described by Erin, and the privileging of PR described by Mike, might also be seen as a desire to present the community with a more positive view of the Carteret Public Schools in order to support the public outreach and bridge building both Robin and Jack describe. These different framings could certainly describe views of the same choices and compromises but at different levels, although if this is the case they certainly suggest that these teachers understand the goals of the school and district very differently than do the two participants in leadership positions.

Appendix I: Views of All Issues Across Levels.

In this appendix, I list each of the twenty-three issues identified from my work with teachers over the course of the study. I synthesize teachers' talk about these issues as well as the ways in which principal Robin Hatcher and assistant superintendent Jack Rand responded to them. These issues are in no specific order, although those toward the beginning of the list were generally noted by teachers to be of particularly high importance. The amount teachers spoke about each issue in interviews varied widely, ranging from one like dress code, which Erin mentioned once, briefly, in a single interview, to one like race, which was mentioned in every interview by every teacher, and which Mike, for example, mentioned fourteen times and spoke over 1500 words about in a single interview.

Fairness and Equality

The relationship between the teachers', principal's, and district leader's comments on fairness and equality (and their relationship to the elusive 'equity') have already been discussed to a fair extent in Chapter 7. Nonetheless, the distinctions they make deserve a second brief mention because they highlight such an important disconnect between two related but ultimately very different concepts. This disconnect is ideally set up by Robin, who said the following when asked to define fairness:

Fairness doesn't mean fair and equal across the board. I believe fairness means what that person needs to be successful. So fairness, I think, varies...I don't think fairness means equal across the board, but it does mean we should be fair that each teacher or student or department is getting its fair share, what it needs to be successful.

Jack, on the other hand, said the exact opposite, responding that “when I think of fairness I’m thinking of equality...fairness in terms of access to curriculum, discipline, consequences, etc.”

This is almost exactly the same as what each of the two told me when I asked them to define social justice, as described in Chapter 7 (Robin: “So I don’t necessarily think that it is an equality thing. I think it is what kind of puts each group on an even playing field. And that would differ for each group.”; Jack: “to ensure that there’s equality of terms of resources, in terms of opportunities, as well as other things educationally to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to move forward.”). What is particularly striking is that Robin and Jack’s comments on social justice and their comments on fairness and equality were a) said in response to completely different questions and b) told to me 3-4 months apart. Well before this occurred, Gordon suggested such a disconnect in his very first interview:

I think in society at large there’s a huge issue with different understandings of fairness. I don’t think you’re going to find anybody who says they’re against fairness, but I think people’s definitions of fairness differ dramatically, and differ from the way they did 40-50 years ago.

This dramatic difference in participants’ definition of fairness extended for Robin even to the concept of equality, one I had anticipated would be understood similarly by everyone. When I asked immediately after our discussion of fairness for her to discuss her views on “strict equality”, she effectively rejected the concept completely as it pertains to education and returned to equity instead:

It kind of goes back to- when you say strict equality, I kind of still railroad into the fairness, but I think there does need to be a sense of ‘all schools need some minimum’.

There needs to be this base of starting platform. Equally everyone minimally gets

something, whether it's financial, whether it's people, whether it's the mandates, but then I do think you just have to look at the needs of each area...For example, we have [campus resource officers] in schools. Not everyone gets one, but not everyone needs one, sort of thing. So I think resources or manpower or laws or rules need to be based on the need of that person or that organization.

Basic Needs

When he addressed what social justice meant to him, Gordon concluded, "So I guess when I think social justice, I'm thinking issues of basic fairness, issues of access to basic rights and basic human needs." Erin also mentioned the concept, suggesting that some students' basic needs had to be addressed at the school level: "I think a lot of kids come to school because they feel that they can get a meal here, there are people who care, there are activities." Robin agreed, bringing up this idea without my asking in response to a question about income inequality:

You know you have to meet those basic needs, because if that kid's sitting in your room and didn't get a good night's sleep, and came to school cold, and didn't eat breakfast, and now you're making him sit for six hours, I mean, that kid's never going to learn. He's hungry. He's worried that mom's not going to be able to pay the gas bill. You know. So I think at schools our nature is, unfortunately before even teaching, is filling all those other needs.

Earlier in the interview, Robin had connected the meeting of basic needs to equity issues, contrasting two different district schools with very different populations:

Well 500 kids at Longview Elementary is different from 500 kids at Douglass Elementary. There could be a case made that Douglass doesn't need an assistant. You know, you've got parents that support the kids, they come to school on grade level,

you've got a strong PTO, whereas maybe at Longview you've got a transient community. You've got 99% on free and reduced lunch... They may not be coming ready for school. They may not be coming clothed appropriately for school. They may not be coming fed appropriately for school. So there are different needs at those schools, so I think when we used to have contracts that were strictly based on numbers, that's not fair to me.

Jack, however, suggested that discussing students' basic needs was not common enough in the district: "You'll have that in your health courses to some extent; the problem is that that tends to be an issue throughout education. And I think that's an adult conversation. I don't know if it's necessarily at the student level, and it probably should be more."

Race

Race was mentioned forty-four times by teachers in fewer than six total hours of interviews, making it the most mentioned issue by far (income inequality and community came in as the next most mentioned, at twenty-nine and twenty-eight mentions, respectively).

Interestingly, however, many of these mentions were used to explain that it was not the most important factor. Mike told me that while the Black Lives Matter movement was the most important issue for his students, it shouldn't be: "Well of course the Black Lives Matter thing, that's a huge issue for these students right now, but truly I think the issues that should matter the most to them right now is the fact that students of their age, students in the inner-city areas, are not given the same equal education as in other areas."⁵⁴ Robin agreed – when I asked her about the impact of SES, she told me, "I think it's the number one factor, more than race, is socioeconomic status. Because so much is tied to your socioeconomic status."⁵⁵ Later, when I

⁵⁴ Despite the distinction Mike is making here, some might argue that the work of addressing issues of inequitable education in inner cities is highly aligned with the goals of the Black Lives Matter movement.

⁵⁵ Further comments that minimize the importance of race in relation to other issues such as class and gender are sprinkled throughout this appendix.

asked her to talk more about her thoughts on race, she responded for a minute before repeating the comparison:

But like I said, I still think to me socioeconomic status plays a bigger factor than what race does in a school. Because whatever your races are, if you're coming from a stable two-family income family coming ready for school, no matter what your race you have a leg up versus someone that does not.

Gordon, however, told me that while he had initially thought the same thing, his thinking had changed during the study:

Well I go back and forth on this, because I think the first time we talked, I think I talked about not seeing race as being particularly relevant, that it's more of a class issue. If that's what I said the first time I think maybe my thinking has changed on that, and I can't identify exactly why, but I do think race is a very important issue.

This interesting disconnect between the frequency with which participants discussed race and their tendency to minimize its importance raises important questions about the treatment of race in schools. First, while teachers did not say so specifically, their comments (as with Mike's, above) often heavily implied that when they said "race" they were referring to black students as compared to white students (these two groups are split about evenly to make up around 90% of CPS's student population), suggesting concerns about whether the experiences of the several thousand CPS students not included in either of those groups are considered at all. Second, Gordon's changing views about the salience of race, as well as Erin's renewed desire by the end of the study to understand more about the issue (as discussed in her portrait), indicate that at least two of the three teachers appeared to see race as more important as they began to take time to step back to consider their own students and practice in a different way (as noted already, Mike

had a strong focus on race even before the study, although he also minimized its impact at times during our interviews). If it is true that more focused consideration of contextual issues can lead to an increased sense of the importance of race, it is concerning that this sense did not appear to be particularly present among participants prior to the study.

Also interesting is the split in teacher levels of comfort with the subject of race. When I asked Gordon in his first interview what issues he felt most comfortable addressing in the classroom, he responded, “I think the easiest one is race”. Erin and Mike, however, said the opposite: Erin told me that race was the issue she felt the *least* comfortable addressing in the classroom, and that “I always find race very difficult to address and very difficult to teach.” Mike noted:

I am terrified of addressing racial or gender issues. I am never so much on my guard as when I’m having a discussion on race or gender, and every word that comes out of my mouth, I think twice before I say it.

These different reactions to the issue of race suggest that differing comfort levels may impact the ways in which teachers address race in their practice, raising further concerns about the experiences of students of all races as they move through CPS. Despite these disconnects, Jack told me that “Race is something we discuss quite frequently with adults.”

Income Inequality and Educational Inequity

The practitioners I spoke with were united in identifying income inequality and other class issues as major concerns. As already noted, Mike told me that he believed that the future would see a shift from racial hatred to class hatred, and that, “that has been a constant problem in history, with the rich being more powerful than the poor. I think we’re heading back to that type

of view⁵⁶.” Erin, in describing Brandon’s changing demographics, told me that the class differences between the city’s public schools and private or suburban schools was increasing: “So we have middle-class flight. I don’t like to say racial. I don’t think it’s racial. I think it’s middle-class. People are physically moving, or sending their kids to private schools or whatever.” In her second interview, she repeated this: “I told you we have middle class flight. We have a lot of out-of-district students, so we’re growing in attendance issues, poverty issues.”

Gordon also commented on the issue, linking it to the way in which Carteret’s schools function: “I think poverty and income inequality is a huge issue – in the funding, in the students we have in front of us, in the way the curriculum is approached.” He also, however, noted differences within the school system:

So the class you’ll be observing, the AP Gov class, is a distance learning class where I have students from, at this point, four different high schools...They are very different parts of town, very different socioeconomically, very different culturally, and when I look at that class, I don’t know if they see it reflected in themselves, but I see macro-level poverty stuff happening between the different groups of kids. So I’d say poverty is one of the number one things that would impact the classroom.

This seems to be felt at the district level as well – Jack told me that there is “a lot of talk about poverty and what to do around poverty”. Robin connected the issue to disparities at both the state and district level, suggesting that state leaders “need to remain cognizant that we are an urban district and with that comes different inequalities than another district” but also that when comparing Brandon to other schools within CPS that cater to a lower-SES population:

⁵⁶ While it is certainly true that class divisions have existed, often to an incredible and insurmountable extent, throughout history, it is again interesting given the prior section that in the context of the discussion Mike’s comment implied that racial issues have *not* historically existed in the same way.

They're not going to offer the same things we do. So two students who went through high school under the same district, I've got to think there's inequalities there, that one student did not have maybe the opportunities available to them as the other one did. For no fault of their own, but they happen to live in a district whose school did not offer what a different school district offered⁵⁷. So I guess inequalities in that aspect have to exist just by that fact alone.

Parents and Parent Involvement

Other researchers (e.g., Lareau, 1987) have discussed the impact of class on parent-teacher interactions, and different views of parents were very apparent at the different levels. Erin contrasted her own school experience unfavorably with her view of the families of her students: "I went to a private school, and so the amount of parental involvement, the values, are very different. Obviously this is now the digital, YouTube, selfie, and I sometimes hear that the parents, you see the parents, you understand the kid, like, 'oh, this is the reason why'." Mike took an even more critical view of parents:

To really get at the root of social issues you really have to get the parents involved on a real, meaningful level, and they don't want to do that because on one hand it's going to be uncomfortable, because we have to put the parents to task... We need parents who push their kids and demand excellence from their kids like you see out in the suburban areas, and I don't know how to solve that problem... Why are you letting your child stay up until one, two o'clock in the morning, why are they not studying? Why are they not bringing in this document? Why are they behaving in this manner?

⁵⁷ In this comment, Robin is using 'district' and 'school district' to refer to the geographic boundaries that zone students to a particular district school, not to an entire district like CPS.

In his second interview, he again reported frustrations, both with parents and with the district's efforts to get them involved.

How do you tell a parent that they suck? I mean, not to put too fine a point on it, but that's really what it comes down to. The school board isn't willing to do that. The school board isn't willing to tell the parents, "listen, we're doing our part and you need to step up and do yours"

Jack, from his position in the district, told a very different story, suggesting that the fault was the district's:

It's just something that we really struggle with, getting our parents engaged as meaningful partners. And then identifying, what the hell is a meaningful partner? You know, is it making sure homework's done every night? Is it volunteering at the school, etc? But really identifying and capturing that and having more parents engage in their students' success is a challenge for us, and something that we are trying to explore and get additional help from outside of us, because it's something we don't do very well.

When I asked him how the district thought about parental involvement, he described an attempt to re-envision its meaning in a modern context:

We think of parent involvement, in the old days, of coming to meetings, of coming in and volunteering in our schools. Parent involvement is in essence working with teachers in terms of to set a path, monitor that path, and to ensure the students are successful.

Working together in that. That doesn't necessarily mean that they need to come to the classroom, but it does mean that we have a hand in this that when there are issues there's communications that are happening both ways and we're both working together to solve the issues that we have. That in my mind is parent engagement. Anything beyond that is

gravy, but if I can get to that elementary level where we are all committed to working together for the benefit of the students we serve and have the same goals in mind I think that would be a good place to start for us.

Beyond this, Jack was able to describe specific district initiatives focused on expanding parent outreach:

We are partnering with outside agencies to develop what's called Parent University to provide opportunities for parents to get more engaged as well as to provide informational sessions that parents deem important to give them information that they want and not just what we think is needed. And there's been outreach through other community agencies to try to open our doors. Like, for example, we have a partnership with Scott Metropolitan Housing Authority where we go into several housing establishments providing free lunch, giving out free books, etc., to try to break down some of the walls of trust to improve communication.

Robin's comments about parent involvement further complicated the picture of how parents and parent participation are viewed at different levels in the district. She reported effectively no parental involvement at Brandon despite Jack's description of programs intended to procure this involvement, suggesting that class issues were at least partially responsible (in fact, her comments echo one of Lareau's main arguments fairly closely). However, despite the insistence of the two Brandon teachers quoted above, Robin also indicated that she was under the impression that teachers did not actually *want* parents in the school:

Parent participation is nonexistent, for all practical purposes. But also, over time- you know, we're an urban district. We don't have a lot of stay-at-home parents. A lot of our parents are both families might be working multiple jobs, so they don't have the time to

give, and I also think in urban settings it's sometimes difficult because some of our clientele weren't successful themselves in school, so they still do not feel comfortable coming into where there's educated teachers and trying to volunteer their time. So I really have no parent volunteers, nor do I have teachers saying, "Hey, can you put out a word? I need some help". So it's almost, at this state, at least here, equally nonexistent, and I don't think either side is bothered by that.

This issue, then, seems to be one for which there is a disconnect between levels in the way in which parent involvement is thought about, in understandings of who is responsible for (or desirous of) increasing parental involvement, and in the attitudes expressed toward parents.

Community Involvement

There was much more unity, however, in the ways in which the involvement of the Carteret community was discussed, with general consensus that the district was working to build a bridge with the community. Jack said this literally:

Between the city and the school system there's a bridge, and it goes both ways. I think the city is looking for us to develop leaders for tomorrow and develop a strong work base that could help propel the city forward. The school district cannot do it alone if we don't have the city's support in terms of industry, in terms of our groups providing back into the schools. And not just financial, everybody wants financial, but in terms of opportunities for kids, in terms of embracing those who don't have the opportunities that they may have across town, that bridge goes both ways, and what happens is, is when we're not supporting and moving the city forward in terms of the students that we are graduating to be a part of it, or the city's not working with us to help prepare them, our city suffers.

He also noted the importance of connecting with community members due to the fact that “the majority of families here in the city do not have children in Carteret Public Schools, so we’ve got to expand that...being able to connect all aspects of the city and all populations of the city to our schools is important, and that’s something we’re really trying to build.”

Robin suggested that the district’s community engagement work was successful, and credited Carteret’s superintendent for his consistent focus on engaging the community:

Dr. Garnett, I’m telling you there’s not a church in this city that he has not spoken at, or rotary group that he has not spoken at, and that’s not even an exaggeration. So that is definitely one of his things, and once some of those businesses get on hold and they tell their employees- or, like, the company I had that gave their employees time – choose an hour during the day, once a week, you can go volunteer at a school. So right now I see more success at the community business partner aspect.

Gordon spoke similarly:

I love what Dr. Garnett is doing with the [recognizable district slogan] thing. I think it’s- a lot of people find it hackneyed and find it shopworn and, “oh, it’s just words”, but I think those words are really important. I think building a community atmosphere around the district is huge, and then I think it’s incumbent on us as buildings to do that for our neighborhoods. The way the community has bought into Garnett’s message is huge, I think. The city government has bought into it; the people have bought into it.

Mike, however, suggested that Dr. Garnett’s focus on community relations meant that it was actually his assistant superintendents, including Jack Rand, who ran the district:

Garnett, the chairman, the superintendent of the school board: good guy, good ideas, but the longer I’m hear the more I realize he’s a figurehead. The real power lies with Rand

and Muller and other leaders like that, and I don't know what it is but I think they have a vested interest in keeping it the way things are.

Rights, Gender, and Sexuality

Erin and Jack discussed protecting the rights of citizens when discussing equality, and Gordon linked this issue to fairness. In her second interview, Erin told me that she had begun to think of citizens' rights, along with liberty and choice, as a major social justice issue (at least for the US) since beginning this study:

I think when we compare the United States with other countries, liberty, choice, my rights, are so important, and if not we need to do something to correct that. Other countries, not so much. The government's going to do whatever, my vote really doesn't matter, but for the United States I feel that we're all about that, and that's what this election is all about: we've been done wrong and we need to correct that⁵⁸. It never would have occurred to me until I started working with you that we can think about government in those terms.

Gordon spoke more specifically about categories of rights, some of which he worried that students were not as accepting of as others:

I do a really long civil rights and civil liberties unit, and that's another one where I try really delicately not to shut kids down. Especially when we get to gay rights issues, when we get to women's rights, when we get to affirmative action, I try really hard to make sure all voices are heard, and not to steer them in necessarily the way I believe about these things, but to really highlight those to make them think a little more deeply about fairness.

⁵⁸ This interview took place on October 24th, fifteen days before the 2017 presidential election.

Women's rights in particular, along with other gender issues, were mentioned frequently by teachers. Feminism appeared in Erin's definition of social justice, while Mike, for whom gender equity issues in class participation were a major concern (see his portrait), told me that gender issues should be more important to students than they were: "Normally I'd say, yeah, gender issues should play a large part, but they're not any more, at least not in the eyes of the kids. Gender issues are taking a backseat to racial issues right now."

Robin and Jack, however, both reported that gender was not an area of focus at their level. When I asked Robin about it, as noted in Chapter 7 she responded that "laws that help to support gender equalities have [been] put into place" but informed me that "I don't really have any conversations about that with people, about 'why do we have more boys in the sciences' or something like that, at my level." (although she did mention having a discussion with a transgender student regarding which bathroom and locker room he preferred to use at a different point in the interview). When I asked Jack if gender was addressed, he said, "Probably not to the extent that it should."

Jack also said that he did not believe that there was as much discussion of sexuality and gay rights as there should be, telling me that such issues were addressed, "probably once again in your health classes. It is an issue within our schools, and I think that's something that we could definitely spend more time on." Robin suggested that Brandon was an accepting place in which sexuality was not a major concern:

We have quite a few openly gay or lesbian students here, girls walking down holding hands, and what I like about it is that it's very accepted here... Very open gay and lesbian community here, and again at schools we deal with all those social issues, and it is- if

you're wanting to help the student, I mean, how can you not accept if that's how you are?

If you come and tell me, "okay, well great, let's move on then, forward."

Erin, however, said that gay rights was one of the most pressing social justice issues of today, and listed it as the second most important issue among her students (after the legalization of marijuana, which may be more debatable as an issue of social justice). Gordon described discussion of sexuality as "increasingly important but less difficult than it was when I started teaching", noting, however, that there was difficulty in the increased subtlety of the issues since an earlier time when "'Yo, that's gay' was said about anything that was unsatisfactory to [students]":

You don't have kids talking about that anymore, because we're at a more sophisticated level. They've realized that the overt- more or less, most kids realize that the overt discrimination is not okay, and I guess my question is now how do I deal with the more discreet discrimination that goes on, which is maybe in some ways even worse than just the overt use of language. That's something I'd like to explore more in the future.

Politics and Religion

These two issues, often carefully avoided in schools, were clearly very salient to teachers. Erin frequently discussed her fears about the United States political environment, worrying in her second interview about "The whole complex issue of Donald Trump and how he's brought out all these, like, hushed things that we usually don't talk about in politics and all of a sudden they're out in the open." In her final interview, she bemoaned "the fact that we are electing a fascist demagogue", noting:

The tenets of democracy, of inclusiveness, of civil rights, is appearing to be threatened, and what do we do about that? So, you know, the idea that our country was, if you study

the constitution, equal opportunity for all, equal rights for all, and there are interest groups that try to infringe upon that, so what can we do about that? How can we change it?

Gordon also shared (prior to the election) that his own political beliefs, which he felt largely matched the beliefs of his students, were something he was struggling with during a particularly divisive election year:

I have very strong feelings about this election and the choice we face with Donald Trump, and one of the largest challenges I'm going to have this year is going to be how do you teach social justice issues while not coming right out and saying "this guy is against everything I think we believe in as Americans"? And I have no idea. I've been fudging it as I go along and it's getting the kids frustrated, because they'll say "Trump's a racist" and then I'll feel like I have to say "Well, I mean, let's stop. You don't know him. You don't know what's in his heart. Give me specific examples of when he said something that you find racially-". And I've never had to deal with it like that before. I'm kind of groping in the dark to find ways to build the kind of citizens I think we need and not explicitly say "this guy's against civil liberties in thirteen different ways".

Mike indicated that he had chosen to address the political situation in his classroom. While normally, he said, "I deliberately hide what political party I am," this year had made him reconsider both that choice and, in fact, the answer to the question. In his first interview he told me that "I'm a strong Republican, or at least I was until Trump came along" and on one occasion called Trump "an abomination" in class.

Jack reinforced the district's policy on keeping present-day politics out of the classroom when I asked him whether such issues were addressed in the district:

We try to be politically neutral, and actually try to ensure that political views are not presented to students in a way that would favor one political party over the other. But politics are taught within the social studies curriculum, in terms of you talk about the branches of government, the political parties, etc., through American history. That is spoken about. But we try to ensure that political views of the current day are not cast upon our students.

Robin, however, noted that she felt a legitimate need to give students the opportunity to voice their concerns, if not to address politics herself, in the current environment:

I took a group of kids to vote. It was their first time voting; they were our seniors. We got a bus, we went downtown, we did early voting, we came back and ate, and I talked to them. And it was a very multiracial group that I had, and I said “I’m not trying to get political, but do you guys want to talk about the voting or what has happened and things like that.” And they have a lot of fears. The group I was with, and there was about twelve kids of every ethnic background, was fearful of the new presidency.

The issue of religion paralleled politics in many ways. It was a similarly important factor in two of the three teachers’ views, with Gordon telling me that with regard to social justice, “Any definition I come at is going to be somewhat descendent of the fact that I am Catholic. I’m a fairly progressive Catholic, and, kind of, the Catholic teaching on social justice is where I come from.” Additionally, Mike told me that “we are sinful in nature, and inequality, in my opinion, is a sin” after noting that his own religious views informed his thinking about social justice. Also as in the case of politics, participants suggested that current religious issues (in this case, the widespread fear and misrepresentation of Muslims) seeped into the classroom – Erin mentioned concerns for a Muslim student in her class during her interview and spoke to the student about

his own fears regarding his safety and treatment in this country following the election, and Robin discussed the same student in her interview. When I asked her whether religion was addressed, she noted that, while her son was getting some exposure to religions in a different (suburban) district:

I don't believe so, beyond what is in the current adopted social studies curriculum book. I will give you an example in Richland schools, because my son is learning about Christianity, Islam, in his section in Social Studies right now. So that's his exposure to different cultures and to things like that. So I don't believe so. I mean, we're definitely getting a larger Muslim population in Carteret. You know, we are getting a population, but nothing, no.

Jack said something similar, telling me: "You know, religion we try to stay away from. That's a hot topic within our schools. I think other than what is taught in our social studies curriculum, etc., I don't believe there's a lot of conversation." When I addressed the experience of Muslims specifically and asked if there was any work to inform students about Islam, he continued:

Well I think that's happening around, you know, your Social Studies curriculum. Some aspects. I don't believe there's- or, I can tell you there's not a mass movement to speak directly about that or to present that material to kids, but there is a movement to develop empathy and to develop an understanding of other cultures, etc., which that fits into, but not particularly if you talk about Islam, etc.

Standardized Testing

Standardized testing is another issue on which there was consistent agreement (although Gordon did not address the topic in any of his interviews). Erin told me that standardized testing

was one of the most relevant social justice issues for her students, and Mike went far beyond that in his strident critique of the burden such tests place on students:

One thing I think is troubling, and this is coming up recently to be a problem, is these standardized tests and blocking people from graduating. I have one young lady who is an A student in my classes and she's an A student in English classes, but she has undiagnosed problems when it comes to mathematics and science, and she's not going to be able to graduate because she cannot pass the [State Graduation Test]...I think that is a very cruel and- from a social justice standpoint I think it's indefensible what we are doing with the standardized testing. The longer I teach, the more I realize that the standardized testing is the opposite of social justice, and while I say we need to improve education that does not mean that we destroy the lives of these young people because they might have problems with mathematical learning or other areas. Not everyone is going to be an engineer or a scientist or something that requires heavy math use, and basically we've told this girl that you must perform at these standards in math to be a worthwhile member of society. I think that's wrong.

Robin extended this critique to include the negative effects of standardized tests on teachers as well:

I think it's horrible what it does to teachers. I'm going to say teachers first, because when we talked about teachers having flexibility in teaching, I think standardized testing has taken whatever freedom they thought they had, because, oh my God, we have this end of course exam now at high school that these kids- and it puts so much stress on teachers, which trickles down and puts stress on the kids. Because we know what it does to students, the standardized testing and things like that.

Jack was somewhat less critical, but still told me that problems of standardized testing were commonly addressed in the district:

Oh, I think that's talked about all the time. Teachers, parents, students, etc. That gets communicated out to students, why we do this. I think there's a belief from all that there's too much, and too much reliance upon it.

In this case the agreement may be moot given that the tests are required at the state level, but there certainly appears to be no love for standardized testing at any level in Carteret.

Alternative Perspectives

As noted in their portraits, Gordon and Erin both made understanding alternative perspectives a focus of their work with students around social justice, with Gordon implementing a perspective sharing listening activity and Erin requiring students to locate an article counter to their own beliefs on an issue and to discuss its arguments. From a different angle, Mike discussed concerns that students did not have the ability to consider perspectives that differ from those with which they are already familiar:

Social Studies teaches critical thinking – how to look at the world and know when a lot of bullshit's being laid down, excuse my French...and especially during this time period of the campaigns, when all these lies are being plastered all over the TV ads about this candidate vs. that candidate, the ability to think critically and look at what's going on in your world and say "that's not true because of this" is so very, very important.

Although this was a major issue for teachers, however, their claims that students had effectively no exposure to alternate perspectives was supported by the fact that neither Robin nor Jack suggested that this topic was considered at leadership levels. Robin simply told me:

I don't think there's any mandate. I don't think that is discussed. I think the alternate would only come from a teacher's personal view if they're teaching something and they're injecting their own personal view in something.

Jack instead discussed aspects of district policy that he felt built up abilities that would help students when dealing with alternative perspectives:

I'm going to kind of turn it on you a bit. I think there is a focus on creative thought, an openness to opposing views and an openness to express one's views in a safe, nurturing environment. I think there's also a movement to create active listeners, and also the ability to be a part of your community and to have empathy and understanding for different points of views.

Student issues: Marijuana, police, and dress code

Three of the issues on the list stand out because of their indicated relevance to students specifically rather than to teachers. While only Erin discussed marijuana, she discussed it repeatedly as one of the most important issues, perhaps even the most important issue, to her students. Classroom evidence supported this claim – in the activity, mentioned in her portrait, in which Erin split students up into houses of Congress and asked them to propose and debate bills, two different students in the group nearest to me independently wrote and presented bills relating to the legalization of marijuana. Robin and Jack, however, both indicated that the issue was not discussed within the district, although Jack noted that “I would imagine there are some very strong debates in our schools in some of those classrooms around legalization.”

There was certainly discussion in the district of the role of the police, however. This issue was also mentioned by only one teacher, Mike, who noted “racial relations, especially vis-à-vis police officers” as a major concern for his students and later noted that “with the latest

emergence of all the police shootings race really has, in the past six years, seven years, race has really become the hot-button issue for most students”. Robin and Jack focused largely on the role of police in the schools in their responses, which were fairly different. Robin indicated that she felt that police were unfairly maligned by students and their families:

The problem is that every parent- I don't know that there's a parent that would say we don't want police in the school. I think parents like having a police officer in schools, but they want police officers to act like teachers, not police officers.

She then told a story about a time that the school's officer had broken up a fight in which a student had been bloodied (by another student) and had then been accused in rumors of bloodying the student himself, culminating in parent complaints:

The phone calls that I got the next day that were left on my voice message from parents, or on social media? And you're like, "oh my goodness." First of all, he had nothing to do with the situation, but he is now bearing the brunt because of what everyone hears and assumes and makes judgements on information that is faulty. You know, I was like, I couldn't believe the hatred being pointed at him. All he did was remove one of the fighters out of the room. You know, he didn't bloody the kid up or anything. So that's where it goes wrong real quick, you know, because society's just jumping on that police brutality thing.

Jack suggested that the response to school police officers was generally positive while also giving more legitimacy to concerns about their presence:

They are a force in our schools, and I think they are from most people seen as a positive. You have community who would like to see the police out of our schools altogether, and I think actually, and I was just stating this week, I think our police and education are both

down a similar path, to where I think you're going to see less people going into those public service roles based on how society and the community sees them. But I think the police for the most of our students and most of our adults are seen as a proactive and helpful resource and not one that is there as an enforcement agency.

Finally, issues of dress code, summarized to some extent in Chapter 7, provided some food for thought. Erin suggested that the dress code had until recently been the most pressing social justice issue for students, while Gordon, as discussed, also described it as a major issue and included it as a major part of his perspective sharing activity. Beyond this, Robin and Jack discussed the issue from an administrative perspective at length, presenting both sides of an example of school-district cooperation that produced real change. Perhaps even more interestingly, however, Robin ultimately presented the dress code not simply as a hard-to-enforce system, but as a legitimate social justice issue due to the population served by the school:

Someone also shared with me this statistic: we have a very transient, homeless population, and sometimes homeless just means that you're living with another family temporarily, not necessarily on the streets, but someone brought to my attention that in homeless shelters jeans are preferred, because you can wear jeans multiple days in a row and they don't look- whereas you wear a pair of khakis, in an hour they look horrible.

Well our dress code says no jeans. We're in a large urban district and we say no jeans. So you start getting a different aspect and realizing this is kind of really ridiculous. And I don't know what its goal is any longer at the high school level.

The story of the changes made to the CPS dress code serves as an excellent example of what can happen when building and district leaders work reasonably together to address an educational concern; implications of this example are discussed in Chapter 7.