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Los Angeles

Exploring Social Justice Conceptions and  
Self-Reported Practices with Teacher Candidates

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Education

by

Tatevik Mamikonyan

2017



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Exploring Social Justice Conceptions and  
Self-Reported Practices with Teacher Candidates

by

Tatevik Mamikonyan

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Douglas M. Kellner, Chair

This two year longitudinal study focused on the evolving conceptions and self-reported practices regarding social justice of twelve diverse teacher candidates who were enrolled at the University of California, Los Angeles's (UCLA's) teacher education program (TEP). The distinctive attribute of this study was to reveal how the social justice conceptions and practices of the twelve candidates changed between the time they entered and completed an urban-centered, social justice oriented teacher education program.

Using qualitative methods, this study conducted four interviews with each participant, one in the beginning and end of each academic year, over the two year program period. The theoretical backdrop for the analysis conducted during this study, included the works of critical pedagogue Paulo Freire and scholarship grounded in the critical tradition urging educators to be

engaged in self reflection and be well informed about the structural inequalities due to social, historical, political and cultural contexts.

The results of the study indicate that all participants increased their understanding and commitment towards social justice education, and made an effort to integrate social justice into their pedagogical practice. Those who were initially committed to social justice ideals, maintained and further expanded their understandings and practices of social justice.

Alternatively, those who were initially unaware and uncommitted to social justice issues gained an increased understanding of the concepts—mostly rooted in the instructional application of social justice—but had not integrated their concepts into teaching. This study did not evaluate UCLA’s teacher education programs’ impact, but rather explored the evolving notions of social justice among candidates as they completed their course of study.

The dissertation of Tatevik Mamikonyan is approved.

Tyrone Howard

Marcus Hunter

Carlos Torres

Douglas M. Kellner, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

## Dedication

I wish to thank my amazing advisor, Dr. Doug Kellner. I was inspired by your scholarship and applied to UCLA to work with you on issues related to critical media. However my interests shifted during my coursework and you never once deterred me from pursuing a research project because it wasn't strictly related to CML. I always felt that you had great confidence in me and thus allowed me the freedom to bring this project to completion on my own terms. You are truly a gift to our department. I also express deep gratitude to the rest of my dissertation committee, Professor Carlos Torres and Professor Tyrone Howard, the courses and articles you have authored have had substantial influence on my research. Professor Marcus Hunter, thank you for joining my committee towards the end, I appreciate your openness and willingness to contribute to my work. Lastly, Professor Kathryn Anderson Levitt ( Dr. A. ) although you were not a certifying member, your guidance along every step of the way has been exceptional. Your generous time contribution to my methodology has been very valuable. It has truly been a privilege and honor to have all of you serve on my committee.

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I am deeply thankful to my participants. Thank you for your honest reflections and meaningful insights. I am truly inspired by each and one of your stories. You are incredible

teachers who are teaching against the grain every single day. You have taught me that social justice advocacy is dynamic and unique. I am sincerely grateful for your faith and confidence in me to accurately represent your beliefs and practices of social justice. I look forward to extending this longitudinal study with you for many more years.

I now wish to acknowledge my family. First, to my parents, who have given me confidence and support throughout my entire life, to both of you, a heartfelt thank you. I would not be where I am if it was not for your sacrifices, unwavering support of my academic goals and your profound conviction that I have a lot of potential. Dad, you always set much higher expectations for me than anyone else and that has molded my tenacity and self-confidence. Mom, I am truly blessed to have gotten your extraordinary support during these five years, especially the times you insisted on caring for my girls, so I can write or get a good night's sleep. You have put my needs above yours, deferred your priorities to help me meet mine. Words just cannot express my gratitude for you. I also wish to thank my brother for his unconditional love, which he communicates in understated ways. You love and accept me for who I am, apart from my academic achievements and success in life.

To my gracious grandmother, who boasts about me everywhere and anywhere, thank you! To my deceased grandfather in Armenia, a history teacher, a genius, who was in love with learning, I am so happy I made you proud. To my entire extended family, who have given me encouragement and support, thank you. Many thanks to my mother in law for countless hours of babysitting, you always extended a helping hand.

Lastly, I wholeheartedly thank my husband, my best friend, my teammate, my love. Your support has been beyond belief, thank you for your constant encouragement during these last five



very difficult years. It was only you who could cheer me on during times when I felt overwhelmed, exhausted and disoriented. You are the rock I stand on. I share this triumph with you.

To my daughters, you are the love of our life. I dedicate this work to you both. You are exceptionally bright, assertive, thoughtful, rebellious and kind beings. I am truly honored to be your mother. I feel self-fulfilled to have followed a career that I love, a career that can potentially make a positive difference in the world. I hope my critical ideology and my scholarly achievement as an Armenian woman and a mother, not an easy balance to strike, will inspire your future aspirations in life.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
COMMITTEE .....	iv
DEDICATION .....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	xiii
VITA/BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	xv
I. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Introduction to the Study .....	4
B. Problem Statement.....	5
C. Research Questions.....	11
D. Significance of the Study.....	11
1. Personal Significance.....	13
E. Scope of the Study .....	14
II. CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	15
A. The Phrase Social Justice in Teacher Education.....	16
B. Neoliberal Education .....	18
C. Social Justice Oriented Teacher Education.....	19
D. UCLA’ Teacher Education Program .....	21
E. Teacher Candidates practice and Conceptions of Social Justice .....	26
F. Social Justice in Practice .....	27
G. Social justice Conceptions .....	29
H. Pedagogical Strategies to Teaching Social Justice .....	30
I. Challenges .....	31
J. Maintaining Social Justice Beliefs and Practices .....	33
III. Chapter 3: THEORETICAL ORIENTATION.....	35
A. Social justice Theory .....	36
1. Social Justice in Teacher Education .....	37
2. Activist Pedagogy .....	38
3. Activism Beyond the Classroom .....	40
4. Activist Scholarship.....	41
5. Critical Self-Reflection .....	42
IV. Chapter 4: METHODS .....	45

A.	Longitudinal Design.....	45
B.	Interviews.....	47
1.	Recruitment .....	47
2.	Interview Process .....	50
3.	Interview 1 .....	51
4.	Interview 2 .....	51
5.	Interview 3 .....	52
6.	Interview 4 .....	53
A.	Survey .....	53
B.	Data Analysis .....	55
1.	Research Questions .....	55
2.	Group Thematic Analysis.....	56
3.	Case Study Analysis.....	58
4.	Survey Analysis .....	59
5.	Researcher Reflexivity.....	59
V.	CHAPTER 5: THREE CASE ANALYSIS .....	63
A.	Sully.....	63
1.	Candidate Profile .....	63
2.	First Interview .....	64
3.	Second Interview .....	65
4.	Third Interview.....	67
5.	Fourth Interview .....	68
B.	Truth Revealed.....	70
1.	Candidate Profile .....	70
2.	First Interview .....	73
3.	Second Interview .....	75
4.	Third Interview.....	76
5.	Fourth Interview .....	78
C.	Luna .....	81
1.	Candidate Profile .....	82
2.	First Interview .....	82
3.	Second Interview .....	83
4.	Third Interview.....	85
5.	Fourth Interview .....	87
D.	Overarching Conclusions.....	90
1.	Strong Entering Beliefs, Strong Commitment .....	90
2.	Social Justice Commitment Stems from Personal History.....	93
3.	Personal Attribution to Social Justice Education .....	94
VI.	CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE.....	96
A.	Social Justice Definitions .....	97
1.	Interview 1 .....	97

a.	Recognizing Inequalities .....	97
b.	Pedagogical Equity .....	98
2.	Interview 2.....	99
a.	Recognize Inequalities and Promote Academic Success .....	100
b.	Pedagogical Equity .....	101
c.	Agency .....	102
d.	Personal Commitment to Social Justice .....	102
B.	Self- Reported Evolution of Social Justice After the First Year.....	104
1.	Less Theoretical .....	105
2.	Change Starts with Students.....	106
3.	Reflective Practice .....	106
3.	Interview 4.....	108
a.	Voice .....	108
b.	Recognize Inequalities and Promote Academic Success .....	110
c.	Pedagogical equity .....	110
4.	Self- Reported Evolution of Social Justice After the Second Year .....	112
1.	Less Theoretical .....	112
2.	Defiance.....	113
3.	Social Justice is a Process: Where Do We Fit in?.....	114
E.	Overarching Conclusions.....	116
1.	Social Justice as a Practice to Empower Students .....	117
2.	Social Justice Growth Measured by Pedagogical Strategies.....	118
3.	Lack of Critical Self-Reflection .....	119
F.	Social Justice In Practice .....	120
1.	Interview 1 .....	121
a.	Critical and Relevant Curriculum .....	121
b.	Community Building .....	121
2.	Interview 2 .....	122
a.	Critical and Relevant Curriculum .....	122
b.	Community Building .....	122
3.	Interview 3 .....	123
a.	Critical and Relevant Curriculum .....	123
b.	Community Building .....	125
4.	Interview 4 .....	125
a.	Critical and Relevant Curriculum .....	125
b.	Community Building .....	128
G.	Overarching Conclusions.....	130
1.	Critical and Relevant Curriculum .....	130
2.	Institutional Transformation.....	131
H.	Cross-Theme Analysis: Social Justice Definitions and Practices.....	132
1.	Teaching Philosophies and Social Justice Definitions and Practices.....	133
VII.	CHAPTER 7: PRE AND POST SURVEY ASSESSMENT .....	138
A.	Survey Data Analysis .....	139
1.	Easy to Endorse Set .....	140

2.	Difficult to Endorse Set .....	142
3.	Distribution Among Easy to Endorse and Difficult to Endorse Averages .....	145
4.	Direction of Change in Easy to Endorse and Difficult to Endorse Sets .....	145
5.	Easy to Endorse Pre and Post Tests .....	146
B.	Thematic Group Analysis .....	148
1.	Institutional Inequalities .....	149
2.	Deficit Ideology .....	156
3.	Critical and Relevant Curriculum .....	158
4.	Critical Self-Reflection .....	160
C.	Overarching Conclusions.....	161
1.	Institutional Inequalities .....	161
2.	Deficit Ideology .....	163
3.	Critical and Relevant Curriculum .....	164
4.	Critical Self-Reflection .....	165
VIII.	CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION .....	167
A.	Chapter 5 Summery .....	169
B.	Chapter 6 Summery .....	171
C.	Chapter 7 Summary .....	172
D.	Implications .....	173
1.	Implications for Teacher Education .....	173
E.	Recommendations for Future Research .....	176
F.	Limitations .....	178
G.	Concluding Thoughts .....	181
	APPENDICES .....	184
A.	TEP ORIENTATION RECRUITMENT SCRIPT .....	184
B.	DESCRIPTIVE CANDIDATE PROFILES .....	185
C.	MINING THEMES.....	188
D.	FIRST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	189
E.	TEP COURSEWORK .....	191
F.	SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	197
G.	THIRD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	198
H.	FOURTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	199

REFERENCES ..... 202

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Interview Schedule .....	46
Table 2. Demographic Chart.....	58
Table 3. Primary and Secondary Reasons for Choosing UCLA.....	49
Table 4. Survey Schedule .....	54
Table 5. Individual Definitions of Social Justice in Interviews 1-4 .....	115
Table 5.1. Group Theme Definitions of Social justice in Interviews 1-4.....	116
Table 6. Social Justice in Practice in Interviews 1-4 .....	129
Table 7. Cross-Theme Analysis Interviews 1-4.....	133
Table 8. Interview 2 Cross-Themes Analysis .....	135
Table 9. Interview 1 Cross-Themes Analysis.....	135
Table 10. Interview 4 Cross-Themes Analysis.....	136
Table 11. LTSJ-B Survey .....	139
Table 12. Pre-Test Easy to Endorse Set .....	141
Table 13. Post-Test easy to Endorse Set.....	142
Table 14. Pre-Test Difficult to Endorse Set.....	143
Table 15. Post-Test Difficult to Endorse Set .....	144
Table 16. Difference in the Average Points .....	145
Table 17. Measuring Change in the Pre and Post Easy to Endorse Set.....	147
Table 18. Measuring Change in the Pre and Post Difficult to Endorse Set.....	148
Table 19. Easy to Endorse Set Pre and Post Test Results .....	150
Table 20. Items 7 and 8: Pre and Post Test Results .....	152
Table 21. Difficult to Endorse Set Pre and Post Test Results.....	153

Table 22. Items 11 and 12: Pre and Post Test Results .....	154
Table 23. Item 10: Pre and Post Test Results .....	155
Table 24. Items 5, 6 and 9: Pre and Post Test Results .....	157
Table 25. Items 2 and 4: Pre and Post Test Results .....	159
Table 26. Item 3: Pre and Post Test Results .....	160



## Tatevik Mamikonyan

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

An important role of public education is to contribute to the development of a socially just society, and to prepare an educated, informed, critical, multicultural citizenry engaged in promoting common and collective aims. Many teachers pursue a teaching profession in order to contribute to the betterment of society. This is often described by teachers as *wanting to make a difference in the world*. But contributing to society can vary in meaning and practice from upholding traditional and conservative values of teaching and course content, to progressive and radical pedagogical approaches, as well as adhering to market driven or social justice oriented ideologies. Historically, the purpose of education has vacillated between a market driven ideology—training future employees and equipping them with skills necessary for the job market—but also teaching them how to fulfill a democratic vision of education that includes a commitment to social justice goals (Bowles & Gritis, 1986).

A social justice teaching practice has a transformative potential especially for marginalized students, students who are academically and socially marginalized along racial, ethnic and class lines. Marginalized students especially in urban schools face inherent challenges of “health disparities, substandard housing, less adequate early childhood preparation, disproportionate school funding, lack of high quality after-school and summer experiences, absence of peer and community role models, and racism and classism” (Collopy, Bowman & Taylor, 2012, p. 9). The challenges of underfunded, under resourced, overcrowded schools in over-policed communities speaks to the realities of racial and class inequalities that exist in the U.S. Social justice education aims to equalize these challenges, in order to ensure that marginalized

students achieve academic success, develop critical consciousness, praxis, and by extension bring about social change themselves.

The different strands of social justice education promote education that is both personally and socially transformative. For example, multicultural education according to its foundational figure James Banks (1991) is concerned with increasing academic achievement for all students by developing positive attitudes towards difference and empowering victimized members of society to feel confident in their academic abilities. Similarly, the author of the teaching practice known as culturally relevant pedagogy, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) defined the purpose of culturally relevant pedagogy as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (pp. 17-18 ). Tyrone Howard (2012) one of the key authors of culturally responsive teaching defines it as a pedagogy embodying “a professional, political, cultural, ethical, and ideological disposition that supersedes mundane teaching acts, but is centered in fundamental beliefs about teaching, learning, students, their families, their communities, and an unyielding commitment to see student success become less rhetoric, and more of a reality” (p. 550). He adds “culturally responsive pedagogy is situated in a framework that recognizes the rich and varied cultural wealth, knowledge, and skills that diverse students bring to schools, and seeks to develop dynamic teaching practices, multicultural content, multiple means of assessment, and a philosophical view of teaching that is dedicated to nurturing student’s academic, social, emotional, cultural, psychological, and physiological well being” (Howard, 2012, p. 550).

Social justice oriented teachers have documented a positive relationship between academic performance and critical pedagogies (Fortuna, 2001; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). For example, Ernest Morrell

and Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade taught a summer research seminar to “at risk” urban teens who were engaged in different forms of critical media deconstruction; such as hip pop music, portrayals of urban youth of color, youth involvement in protests and so on. Their study concluded that “critical media pedagogy can simultaneously empower youth toward the media they confront while also imparting academic literacy skills” (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005, p. 4). These students’ own engagement with developing counter-narratives of what it’s like to be a Black and Latino “at risk” student disrupted the negative images they consume and gave them a sense of empowerment (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005). Additionally, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade explain that students’ academic literacy skills were developed through their engagement with research, in which they read “complex academic texts, designed interview protocols and surveys, transcribed interviews, and wrote a lengthy report as part of the research process”(2005, pp. 6-7). Social justice education not only affects academic performance but the overall culture of the classroom, the school, the community and society at large.

Opposition towards social justice education is widespread, global and politically rooted. The contemporary culture of standardization and high stakes testing that educational policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT) have promoted are partly due to global, economic and political changes known as neoliberal globalization. Michael Apple (1996) has argued that under neoliberalism, schooling becomes subject to market competition solely providing technical education. Education that is serving the market interests, can be argued by definition to fail to serve the public interests. Neoliberalism further shapes the purpose of education to be financially driven and competition based (Torres, 2009). In the current educational landscape social justice in terms of critiquing issues of race, gender, class, religion, sexuality and ability are not promoted, supported or sustained by the larger institution.

Neoliberal education and social justice education do not function independently of each other but in fact function oppositionally (Sonu, 2012). Social justice educators are torn between the pressures of the market primacy doctrine imposed on them and their commitment to social justice education. Michelle Herczog who served in the Los Angeles County Office of Education, articulates the problem of declining commitment to social justice well, “while it is vital to the nation's future that every student be prepared to succeed in higher education and in the workforce, it is vital to the health and future of America's democracy that schools also prepare students for a lifetime of knowledgeable, engaged, and active citizenship” (2012, p. 20).

Evidently, education can serve as a site for creative social and personal transformation and a site for “reproducing the functions required by the economic system” (Torres, 2009). Given the intricate and contradictory ways school and society are connected it is significant to turn our attention to the process of becoming a social justice educator and becoming an agent that can enable marginalized students through social and personal transformation.

### **Introduction to the Study**

There are very few teacher education programs that are deeply and primarily committed to preparing teachers for a social justice teaching practice. UCLA’s teacher education program is among the few that is fully committed towards that goal, rhetorically, conceptually and as a matter of praxis. This study focused on twelve diverse teacher candidates from UCLA’s TEP to learn how they developed and integrated the notion of social justice as they earned their degree and credentials.

To understand their evolving concept of social justice conceptually and practically, participants were interviewed four times during the two year program, one individual interview in the beginning and end of each academic year. The interview questions were designed to

understand their definitions and applications of social justice, and to map out variations and similarities in their responses. The study drew heavily from critical educational theorist Paulo Freire (1970; 1992; 1998).

### **Problem Statement**

Contemporary education is primarily marked by neoliberal reconstruction, re-aligning, the goals of education to solely serve the market demands as well as redefining its operation to resemble profit generating corporations (Ayers, 2005; Giroux, 2012; Hedges, 2009; Klein, 2007). Education that is concerned with improving the social conditions in society is rapidly diminishing. One would assume that the reforms that would be initiated under the new Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, who tacitly supports privatization of education and teacher education to improve students' academic performance in preparation for industry jobs, obscure the far more important issues of social and educational inequalities. These reforms will further pose challenges for teachers who are already committed or becoming committed to social justice teaching practices. Mounting research suggests that social justice oriented teaching practices effectively contribute to marginalized students' academic performance and personal empowerment (Fortuna, 2001; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Nonetheless, a social justice practice stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing reforms, and one would assume that even more stringent reforms to follow under the Trump administration. Thus a vision of education aimed at social justice, that has been institutionally unsupported will be further demoralized.

A study like this one, where scholarly attention and interest is vested in exploring the process of becoming a social justice educator carries more importance now. This concept is widely underexplored in traditional as well as critical teacher education literature. The teacher

education programs that embrace and promote a social justice teaching practice haven't examined this process in depth. The critical literature on teacher education has mostly focused on the struggles integrating a social justice practice in traditional classrooms (Apple, 2001; Katsarou, Picower & Stovall, 2010; Philpott & Dagenais, 2012; Sonu, 2010). More specifically, in the 22 year history of UCLA's teacher education program, dedicated to producing socially just educators, no such study has been undertaken.

In this section, I first, discuss the institutional and historical lack of commitment towards diversity and social justice in teacher education programs to illuminate the pressing need for the inclusion of these goals and second, identify the gap in related literature that hasn't addressed the process of becoming a social justice educator.

First, it is important to note that reviewing institutional attempts towards social justice education is challenging because the most prevalent way that institutions have aspired towards social justice is by attempting to acknowledge and accommodate diversity. Therefore the analysis below highlights "diversity" instead of social justice. Historically, some institutional efforts have been encouraged by AACTE (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education) "which began to promote attention to diversity in teacher education in the early 1970s" (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, & McQuillan, 2008, p. 352). The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) even included preparing teachers for diversity in its 1976 standards, however promoting diversity as a desirable professional disposition was removed from the standards in 2006 because the meaning was contested. NCATE is an organization recognized by local, state, and federal agencies "as the principal accrediting body for schools, colleges, and departments of education" (Connell, 2014, p. 9). Vavrus's (2015) study of the NCATE concluded that in 2008 "just one use of the term



*multicultural* was found in the primary text of NCATE teacher education accreditation standards” the term was defined in the glossary as “educators who can reflect *multicultural* and *global perspectives* that draw on the histories, experiences, and representations of students and families from diverse populations” (p. 3). Vavrus (2015) adds “this expectation lacked a clear rubric assessment and overlooked interlocking elements of discrimination against marginalized populations, profit accrument on the backs of such groups, the prioritizing of military expenditures, and the decline of public funds for schools and other fundamental human needs as witnessed under globalized neoliberal policies” (p. 4). After the 2010 NCATE merger with TEAC (Teacher Education Accreditation Council), which created CAEP (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation), thus becoming the sole accreditor for teacher preparation programs, CAEP’s commitment to teach diverse student populations re-emerged. Diversity gained more importance; the standards now read “diversity must be a pervasive characteristic of any quality preparation program” (Vavrus, 2015, p. 6). The long-standing struggle for embracing diversity in education continues. Although great strides have been made to acknowledge and value diversity and uproot old discriminatory practices, mono-cultural hegemony persists.

Moreover, when the language of valuing diversity and/or social justice is included in the state or national teaching standards, it often presents a washed down, uncritical view of diversity and goals for social justice. Akiba, Cockrell, Simmons, Han and Agarwal (2010) conducted content analysis of 50 states’ policies and standards on teacher certification and accreditation “to understand the type and characteristics of diversity-related requirements” (p. 446). They concluded that nearly all states as well as the District of Columbia address diversity in their requirements, however what is alarming is that almost half of the states included a statement that

expressed a deficit perspective of diversity. These diversity requirements viewed difference as a sensitive issue to accommodate rather than a resource for student learning, for example, “show sensitivity to the histories and cultures of others (New Hampshire)” or “demonstrate sensitivity to cultural, gender, intellectual and physical ability differences in classroom communication (Missouri)”(p. 455). Their study also indicated that diversity related requirements were too ambiguous which made understanding and implementing these requirements more difficult. Although diversity was vaguely addressed in state requirements “diversity courses or internship in a diverse setting” were not required by most states (Akiba et al., 2010). Newman’s (2010) study of teacher education programs at 302 universities in the U.S. concluded that “approximately 75% of programs do not require a distinct multicultural education course of 3 units or more” (p. 13). Juarez, Smith and Hayes (2008) articulate this problem very simply by stating “the paradox of the nation’s teacher preparation programs is that *everything* is about diversity and social justice in the preparation of teachers and, simultaneously, *nothing* is about diversity and social justice in the preparation of teachers” (p. 20).

Marilyn Cochran-Smith widely known for her 40 year scholarly work on social justice teacher education sharply criticizes programs that emphasize social justice but lack theoretical, philosophical and political grounding (2010). A teacher education program for social justice “is not about requiring a fieldwork experience in a diverse setting nor is it about having teacher candidates read something like Peggy McIntosh’s (1989) widely used article on ‘white privilege’” (Cochran-Smith, 2010, p. 447). She explains that although these are valuable teaching tools, a teacher education committed to social justice “is *not* merely activities, but a coherent and intellectual approach to the preparation of teachers that acknowledges the social and political contexts in which teaching, learning, schooling, and ideas about justice have been located

historically as well as acknowledging the tensions among competing goals” (Cochran-Smith, 2010, p. 447). There are only a handful of teacher education programs that embody the concept of social justice in theory and practice. Cochran-Smith’s (2003) study cited a few of these programs that are designed to “prepare teachers to work against the grain of common practice, to be agents for social change, and to teach to change the world by raising questions about the ways schooling has systematically failed to serve many students from diverse backgrounds” (p.14). In her study Cochran-Smith highlighted UCLA’s TEP for embodying a genuine and strong dedication to social justice through its commitment to the community. In sum, it is clear that social justice education is institutionally unsupported and highly contested.

The second outstanding problem, in addition to the lack of institutional validation, is the mixed results produced by similar research studies inquiring about teacher candidates’ evolving conceptions and practices of social justice. Most of these studies lack longitudinal data among candidates to better conclude their evolving conceptual and practical understanding of social justice.

Nonetheless, the literature indicates that some teacher candidates confront their preexisting biased beliefs about diversity to varying degrees and show more willingness to embrace teaching for social justice (Bartolome, 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Frederick Cave, & Perencevich, 2010; Juarez, Smith & Hayes, 2008; Philpott & Dagenais, 2012; Owen, 2010), while others’ understandings of diversity when they enter and exit a teacher education program remain unchanged (Banks, 2001; Han, 2013; McDonald, 2005; Mills, 2009; Sleeter, 1988, 1995, Weisman & Garza, 2002). Lee’s (2011) study illustrated that notions of social justice are either deepened or abandoned among teacher candidates in the same cohort. Lee (2011) conducted case studies with six predominantly white teacher candidates over a one year period. Initially when

the participants were asked to define social justice some could not articulate what it is, while others conceptualized it to be about equality and equity. Towards the end of the year some students were able to articulate a definition, some implemented their ideas into practice, while others did not attempt to articulate nor implement any aspect of social justice into their teaching practice (Lee 2011). Similarly, Mills and Ballantyne (2010) explored the development of social justice dispositions of teacher candidates in a one course seminar. They focused on three factors; openness, self-awareness/self-reflectiveness and a commitment to social justice using a measure developed by Garmon (2004). They report no change among candidates' beliefs and attribute the stasis to "one stand-alone course within a teacher preparation program" noting it is not "sufficient [to have one stand alone course on social justice] if we have expectations of changing the dispositions of our pre-service teachers" (p. 454). Many of these studies are inconclusive and offer little insight about the evolving practical and conceptual understandings of social justice.

Instead what many studies and social justice teacher education programs have focused on in this domain, are the associated struggles integrating social justice into practice (Apple, 2001; Katsarou, Philpott & Dagenais, 2012; Picower & Stovall, 2010; Sonu, 2010). Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, and Sonu (2010) conducted a case study with first year teachers who had graduated from a social justice oriented teacher education program to "explore how social justice is integrated into instruction and the day-to-day activities of teachers and students in schools" (p. 239). The study found that teachers experienced struggles in integrating their conceptions of social justice in schools that didn't prioritize social justice values. Their practice was "laden with hindrances such as instructional pacing, test preparation, and mandated curriculum, many of which work directly against a social justice agenda" (Agarwal et al., 2010, p. 239).

The vast scholarship devoted to understanding and revealing the challenges of social justice oriented teaching, amidst such tense opposition is very important. It is inspiring to learn how teachers maintain their commitment and continue to teach against the grain. However, it is equally important to learn how teacher candidates develop their commitment to social justice, especially in a program that is strongly committed to preparing social justice educators. Although a teacher education program occupies a short period of time in a teacher's career, its potential to incite conceptual and practical change is significant. I extend the line of research that explores the developing and evolving process of becoming a social justice educator.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the teacher candidates' initial conceptions of social justice before they start their course of study?
2. What are the teacher candidates' initial beliefs about putting social justice into practice before they start their course of study?
3. What are teacher candidates' conceptions of social justice after their first year in the program?
4. What are teacher candidates' practices of social justice after their first year in the program?
5. What are teacher candidates' conceptions of social justice after their second year in the program?
6. What are teacher candidates' practices of social justice after their second year in the program?

### **Significance of the Study**

What makes teacher candidates committed to the values of teaching for social justice? Especially, candidates who are enrolled in preparation programs that strongly nurture this vision? Clearly, the attributing factors are vast and varied. My curiosity about teachers' receptiveness to a social justice teaching practice is both personal and professional. In this section, I detail the

relevant literature that has explored the influencing factors of becoming a social justice educator and discuss my personal commitment that has guided my research.

Scholars interested in social justice education continually debate the factors that make some candidates more committed to social justice than others (Collay, 2010; Garrett & Segall, 2013; Levine-Rasky, 2001; Milner, 2010; Phillips & Hollingsworth, 2010). Levine-Rasky (2001) has argued that social justice teacher education programs should set out to selectively recruit teacher candidates that “personally identify with educational inequality or social injustice” to ensure they embrace social justice oriented practices. Similarly, Collay’s (2010) case study with three urban teacher candidates in a *Leaders for Equity* teacher preparation program revealed that teachers were compelled to serve the underserved students and families who face discrimination because they too came from similar impoverished communities. Personal histories of discrimination are powerful contributing factors to teachers’ commitments towards social justice, however, teacher education programs for social justice need to be aware of the false assumption about minority candidates’ preparedness and commitment to teach diverse students “simply by virtue of their own backgrounds” (Nieto, 2000, p.184).

Phillips and Hollingsworth’s (2010) study of a teacher education program emphasizing *Literacy for Equitable Society* concluded that candidates’ commitment to social justice was attributed to the program’s design which focused on reflective action research and critical self competence. Similarly, Ukpokodu (2007) has argued that candidates’ commitment to social justice depends on how well integrated social justice is in the program, calling for “program reconceptualization” which means “integrating social justice across the program and [adapting ] aggressive efforts to diversify faculty and teacher candidates” (2007, p. 13). On the contrary,

Garmon (2004) has suggested that “if students are not dispositionally ‘ready’ to receive the instruction and experiences presented to them, even the best-designed teacher preparation programs may be ineffective in developing appropriate multicultural awareness and sensitivity” (p. 212). Many teacher educators agree that teacher candidates need to critically confront their beliefs and pre-dispositions as a condition to becoming a social justice educator (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Haberman, 1996; Mills, 2009). In sum, candidates’ commitment to social justice is rooted in their personal histories, programmatic emphasis of social justice and their engagement in critical self-reflection.

### *Personal Significance*

On a personal note, this study is significant to me because it is related to my aspirations and visions of teaching for social justice. My interest and commitment to social justice education has stemmed from my struggles with cultural adaptation and academic engagement in the United States. The tension of preserving my ethnic culture and adapting to the U.S. culture as a newly arrived immigrant and as a teenager was very intense. Embodying and navigating life bi-culturally was not an option. My struggle between assimilating and acculturating continuously shifted and the difficulty of adapting dual identities was further exacerbated by the educational system. School did not foster a safe climate for ethnically diverse students like me to adapt without assimilating. Becoming educated meant destroying our cultural identity and accepting a process of cultural conditioning to conform to the social norms. I always defied the deficit approach that many of my teachers exhibited through their interactions and teaching practices with immigrant students. I resisted by not internalizing that my academic capabilities were inferior to students who were non immigrants.

Years later, the opportunity to teach in higher education and concurrently conduct research during my graduate studies led me to grapple with the dynamics of the dominant culture, the negotiations of identity, institutional inequity and social justice advocacy in more depth. This teaching and research nexus broadened my horizons and led me to pursue a teaching practice rooted in social justice. My unwavering commitment to learn how activism in education can be enacted is a lifelong goal. I have always considered teaching as a form of resistance and like the art of teaching, resistance entails creativity and courage.

### **Scope of the Study**

There are eight chapters. Chapter two reviews the literature on social justice teacher education programs, focusing on structural and pedagogical practices that enable such undertaking. Chapter three discusses the theoretical orientation underlying this study. Chapter four discusses the research methods utilized; which include a qualitative longitudinal design, interviews, and pre and post assessment surveys. Chapter five provides a descriptive analysis of three teacher candidates' evolving conceptions and practices of social justice through case studies. Chapter six, unlike the individual case studies, explores two concepts: defining social justice theoretically and social justice in practice for the group of 12 participants, in addition to engaging in cross theme analysis to explore the connections between these them. Chapter seven provides an analysis of the pre and post assessment survey and compares the finding to the interview data. Lastly, Chapter eight includes the summary of each chapter, implications, recommendations for future research as well as the limitations of this study.



## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Teachers have a unique opportunity and a pivotal role to play in addressing social injustice, by means of encouraging students to recognize and challenge systems of oppression. Scholarship grounded in the social justice tradition urges educators to promote social change and *be* the agents for change. In spite of this proclivity, it is important to note, that such advocacy does not individualize “the systemic and institutional problems that undermine effective public education” by merely focusing on teachers (Philip, 2012, p. 34). Teacher educators and social justice advocates Kenneth Zeichner (2009) and Marylyn Cochran-Smith (2004) both contend that educational inequities and achievement gaps are not just reflections of teacher quality and teacher preparation, but the consequences of historical, systemic and structural inequalities. With this in mind, it is still very important to recognize teachers’ immeasurable and momentous capacity to influence students towards social justice.

Historically, teachers’ influence has been defined within scholastic confines, and the classroom has naively been viewed as a value-free space, a neutral territory, in which all those who enter have an equal chance to participate and learn (Schmitz, Paul & Greenberg, 1992). In reality, this notion is far from the truth. Minority and economically disadvantaged students in urban school districts face disproportionate school funding, unequal educational resources, non-qualified teachers, large class sizes and mandated curriculum (Condron & Roscigno, 2003; Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 1998). Markedly, the historic achievement gap persists among ethnically and racially diverse students (*U.S. Department of Education*, 2013), *even* in middle class and affluent communities and school districts (Noguera & Akom, 2000; “Racial and Ethnic Achievement Gaps”). Reduced teacher autonomy in the classroom, high turnover rates, in addition to the absence of teachers of Color remain as major concerns in the

teaching profession (Haddix, 2017; Kholi, 2009; Lavine-Rasky, 2001; Mills, 2009; Spalding, Klecka, Lin, Odell, & Wang, 2010). Many of these issues of educational disparities are exacerbated by neoliberal educational reforms which include: high stakes testing, standardization and privatizing education (Apple, 2001; Klein, 2007; Torres, 2011).

Conversely, the ideology of social justice for teacher education stands in utter contrast to traditional schooling, by way of politicizing the classroom, defying deficit ideology, advocating for marginalized students to have the same resources, access and opportunities, purposely recruiting and selecting diverse teachers in the profession, and resolutely opposing technocratic educational reforms. Teacher education programs that fully embrace and foster social justice oriented teaching practices are strong oppositional forces against the neoliberal efforts of restructuring the institution of education.

In this chapter, I review the literature on social justice teacher education. The list below previews the sub-sections:

1. I discuss the exploited *phrase* “social justice” among teacher education programs and layout the macro-level neoliberal educational climate under which social justice ideology is contested.
2. I discuss the integral infrastructure enabling teacher education programs to actualize social justice teacher education and aptly, introduce UCLA’s TEP as an exemplary case.
3. I summarize similar studies that have explored practices and conceptions of social justice.
4. I review pedagogical strategies for teaching about social injustice as well as the associated challenges involved with such instruction in teacher education.
5. I discuss the importance of having a support network to help candidates maintain their commitment to social justice oriented teaching in their practice.

### *The phrase “social justice” in teacher education*

The label of social justice is often loosely attached to teacher education programs (Cochran-Smith, 2003, 2010, Dantley, 2008; den Heyer & Conrad, 2011; Nieto, 2000; North, 2006; Ziechner, 2009). Connie North’s (2006) in-depth meta-analysis of the term *social justice*

in educational research reveals that the term *social justice* is a catchphrase that very often does not offer “an explanation of its social, cultural, economic, and political significance” (p. 507). Similarly, Kenneth Zeichner author of *Teacher Education and the Struggle for Social Justice* has argued that teaching for social justice is so under theorized and overused in teacher education programs that it is almost meaningless (2009). den Heyer and Conrad (2011) call the term *social justice* in teacher education an “empty signifier, simply a rhetorical appeal to something ‘good’”(p. 8). Moreover, Cochran-Smith (2003) contends that the language of social justice has been adopted by both dominant discourses and counter-hegemonic discourses:

Despite their differing positions, it is often the case that the debaters use some of the same language and rhetorical strategies, and nearly all of them claim to be advocates of educational equity. This confirms the fact that the meanings associated with education, particularly with “multicultural,” “social justice,” or “equity” education are multiple and contested. (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 22)

Many, teacher education programs revere the rhetoric of social justice and multicultural competence but fail to prepare teachers towards these aspirations. Sonia Nieto argues that “although the mission statements espoused by schools and colleges of education are grandiose declarations about the purposes of education in a democratic society, they often have little to do with teachers’ day-to-day practices” (p. 183). Similarly, Michael Dantley (2008) has argued that the radical social justice work among educational leadership is fading away. The curtailing of social justice practices are due to the larger social, political and economic changes—neoliberal globalization-affecting the institution of education.

### *Neoliberal education*

It is impossible to discuss teacher education for social justice without tending to the macro economic and political contexts in which it exists. In the last thirty years, economic policies have sharply re-defined the purpose and function of education. These changes are connected to the neoliberal economic philosophy of privatization, deregulation and the cutting of social programs (Klein, 2007, p. 18). Neoliberal economic policies privatize state owned enterprise in the name of efficiency, cut social programs and services for the purposes of fiscal responsibility and un-regulate private enterprise from governmental regulation to increase economic growth (Martinez & Garcia, n.d.). Michael Apple explains that neoliberalism has redefined democracy from its political roots to mean economic democracy through concepts like “free market” and “privatization” (1996).

Similarly, the pretext to growing neoliberal education reform is that “private is better ...and is wildly perceived as superior” (Aronowitz, 2008, p.67) especially under the new Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, who pioneers the movement to privatize education. The ideology that free markets can improve schools insinuates the government’s shrinking commitment to educate its citizens. Schooling that is financially driven and competition based prepare students for the marketplace, but neglect to ensure that poor and working-class racially and ethnically diverse students have equal access and opportunity. In this model of schooling, marginalized students will be perceived as less valued commodities in the education marketplace, promoting divisions “strongly rooted in racializing and class-based structures [that] are not simply mirrored in the schools... [but] actually are produced in these institutions” (Apple, 2001, p. 192).

For instance, a school's hierarchical structure, based on prestige and reputation of their high national test scores and graduation rates, create the condition that schools are encouraged to attract and value students with predictable higher rates of passing, which is mostly white and middle class students. This system further marginalizes poor, racially and ethnically diverse students and re-establishes the academic space that is more concerned with performance than learning, more monocultural than diverse, and more detached from social issues than engaged. Lois Weiner, who coordinates the Urban Education program in New Jersey City University and writes extensively about the global transformations of education, contends that the implications of neoliberalism in teacher education receive "almost no attention by researchers" but it is a "lethal threat to U.S. teacher education" (2007, p. 274). It is critical for teacher education programs to ask how to "reconcile the drive of [neoliberal] globalization and the need to keep alive ideas of equity, justice, and caring as motivating forces in the work of schools" (Ben-Peretz, 2001, p. 50). Teacher education programs that are oriented towards social justice contemplate the ramifications of neoliberal education reforms (Apple, 2001; Sleeter, 2008; Lipman, 2011; Weiner & Compton, 2008; Zeichner, 2010). In the next section, I formulaically review some the structures and processes that constitute social justice oriented teacher education.

### *Social justice oriented teacher education*

Many scholars are mapping out the ecology of social justice teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2003, 2010; Dorman, 2012; Mills & Ballantyne, 2016; Rodriguez, Chambers, Gonzales & Scheurich 2010; Rust & Bergey, 2014; Zeichner, Grant, Gay, Gillette, Valli, & Villegas, 1998). Cochran-Smith (2003) has devised a framework posing eight key questions that underscore the values of social justice among teacher education programs.

1. *Diversity question* seeks to understand whether diversity is equated with deficiency or whether it is treated as a valuable asset in curriculum development, instruction and assessment.
2. *Social justice* question asks about the purpose of public education and its role in “maintaining or changing the economic and social structure of society” (p. 11).
3. *Knowledge question* seeks to understand “what knowledge, interpretive frameworks, beliefs, and attitudes are necessary to teach diverse populations effectively, particularly knowledge and beliefs about culture and its role in schooling?” (p.11).
4. *Teacher learning* questions how, when and where teachers learn to teach diverse populations.
5. *The practice* is a subset of the learning question that asks about practical competencies and skills needed to effectively teach diverse student populations.
6. *Outcome* “what should the consequences or outcomes of teacher preparation be, and how, by whom, and for what purposes should these outcomes be assessed?” (p.14).
7. *Recruitment/selection/retention* deals with how teachers should be recruited and selected to meet the needs of diverse populations especially in urban schooling.
8. *Coherence* encompasses the seven questions discussed and the degree to which “the answers to the first seven questions connected to and coherent with one another in particular policies or programs” (p.15).

This framework also includes external forces such as *governmental/non-governmental regulations* in terms of requirements and evaluation related to teacher preparation, as well as the *larger contexts* “the conditions of schools and the larger social, historical, economic, and political contexts in which all of the above are embedded” (p. 18).

Rodriguez et al.’s, (2010) cross case analysis of three different programs in different institutions that consider themselves committed to social justice teacher education, provide additional domains to the terrain of social justice teacher education. Their study proposed six contributing premises:

1. Hiring *faculty* who are engaged with issues of social justice in their scholarship and day to day classroom instruction.
2. *Curriculum*, in all its aspects incites critical consciousness and critical reflection.
3. *Program structure* includes community partnership, internships, practicum and summer residences, all of which are approached from a social justice lens.
4. *Student recruitment and selection* intentionally target for diversity.
5. Provide *student support* in forms of fellowships, and continued support post graduation in terms of faculty evaluating teachers’ social justice practice in their respective classrooms.
6. *External relationships* which focus on building relationships with the community outside of the university, such as community colleges or lobbying efforts at the state level.

These scholarly works expand our understanding of teacher education programs that position social justice to be an integral part of their mission. Next, I introduce UCLA's teacher education program as an example of one that is highly committed to preparing social justice inclined teachers for the urban schools of Los Angeles. UCLA's TEP is well recognized and respected for its comprehensive commitment to social justice (Cooper 2006, Conchran-Smith, 2004; Ritchie & Cone 2013). Additionally, in 2017 UCLA's Department of Education was ranked as the third best school by U.S. News and World Report (Best Education Schools, n.d.). This ranking further validates the efficacy of positioning social justice as the fundamental goal in teacher education.

### **UCLA's Teacher Education Program (TEP)**

Center X, formerly known as the Teacher Education Laboratory, grants California CLAD and BCLAD (Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development and Bilingual Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development) elementary and secondary teaching credentials and M.Ed. degrees. The center hosts three programs: Teacher Education Program (TEP), Principal Leadership Institute (PLI), and Professional Development through the California Subject Matter Projects (CSMP).

Center X was founded in 1992 in response to the "Los Angeles' Rodney King verdict uprisings" (*UCLA Teacher Education Program,* " n.d.). Jeannie Oakes, then the director of TEP also credited as one of the founders, takes us back to the beginnings "it wasn't until three years later in the Fall of 1995 that we welcomed our first cohort of teacher candidates who had signed on to our teacher education program expressly committed to social and educational justice for low-income children of color in urban Los Angeles" (1996, p. 1). She notes that the vision for creating Center X was that it may be "able to become what we want schools to be—caring,

ethical, racially harmonious, and socially just” (Oakes, 1996, p. 6). Eighteen years later, this same viewpoint was echoed by the current director of Center X, Annamarie Francois, who was the director of TEP during our interview, “we want to model the kind of pedagogies that we want our graduates to take in to their classes” (A. Francois, personal communication, January 13, 2014). In this interview Annamarie outlined the structures that are in place, for faculty as well as teacher candidates, enabling social justice to transpire.

First, she discussed the extensive collaboration that exists among faculty. Faculty have monthly meetings, plus three day retreats in the Fall and Spring quarters “where all faculty gather and it’s in those spaces that we do professional development, we do collaboration around our courses to make sure that there is cohesion amongst the courses, that all of them are focused on social justice.” Further noting, “we share pedagogies with one another so that we continue to grow, there is this open forum for any concern the faculty have and also that the students have, and also to talk about what are the contemporary concerns and issues that are effecting our candidates as they are trying to become social justice educators in their schools” (A. Francois, personal communication, January 13, 2014). She shared that their last retreat focused on *identity* facilitating, “conversations and activities around our own identities as individuals, and as social justice educators and what are the implications on our practice with our own graduate students. This is an ongoing kind of PD... so it’s constantly reflecting on our own practice”. Jody Priselac, mathematics teacher educator, similarly discussed the value of collaboration that enables teacher educators to stay focused on social justice. She said “I teach the *learning theory class* and there are four or five of us who teach that class so we meet every week to discuss the content, how we are going to teach it ... we do things together, it doesn’t mean we have the same notions of social justice...we are in this together and that’s what makes a difference in



maintaining the center's values, our mission and vision [of social justice]" (J. Priselac, personal communication, January, 13, 2014).

Second, Annamarie discussed the structures in place for teacher candidates to help them become social justice educators. First, the program and faculty model critical pedagogies for their candidates. Second, social justice is infused in the three main components of the coursework, foundations courses, methods courses and fieldwork. Third, the program's 405 series "that's kind of our signature course where we explicitly talk about social justice in terms of community." She said "we begin our teaching practice with the belief that we have to understand the communities we serve... the fundamental belief that you are serving a community and the community has assets that you can build upon and utilize in your classroom." Part of the community series is teaching candidates about identity, "we really want students to confront the biases and assumptions that they have based on racial lines, class and gender and want them to recognize that, you know, you bring that to the class." In addition to leaning about community and self, the 405 series encourages meaningful parental involvement. Lastly, Annamarie mentioned the existence of student initiated action committees "where students enact their own activism and advocacy." Annamarie's detailed account of the contributing processes and practices that make social justice transpire are seamlessly connected to the goals identified by Jeannie Oakes for cultivating transformative urban teachers. Jennine Oakes had identified four goals:

1. *Caring advocacy*, which meant having high expectations, confidence in students' abilities, and providing continuous support for high achievement, in addition to conceptualizing the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the students as a resource for "constructing rich and meaningful learning opportunities" (Oakes, 1996, p. 10).
2. *Becoming reflective inquiry-based practitioners* promoting constant reflection and questioning even the knowledge and curriculum that the program is enforcing because "it would do little good, we decided, if they simply "learned" a new set of things that we thought were important in place of the old convention" (Oakes, 1996, p. 12).

3. *Teachers as community builders* extend the teachers' role beyond the classroom walls to engage with students and their families as well as communities in "finding and solving real problems that matter to them outside of school," helping "make schoolwork less abstract and detached" (Oakes, 1996, p. 13).
4. Teachers as *generative change agents* must embody an activist role in school reform through working "collaboratively in teams to initiate change projects in their school and/or communities, and to see this work as a 'normal' part of the job of teaching" (Oakes, 1996, p. 14).

In sum, the program's embodiment of social justice is promoted through critical reflection at the faculty and student level, embracing community assets and genuine involvement, and lastly, the constant engagement in the efforts of advocacy and activism. It is also evident that Jeannie Oakes' inquiry of TEP's development and aspirations toward becoming a social justice program resonates very deeply with current faculty and leadership. Eduardo Lopez a current faculty advisor for the MEd in Urban Teaching echoed those same goals "the program seeks to provide the conditions to empower teachers in creating culturally democratic classrooms, where the lived experiences of bicultural students are not only validated but also utilized to foster critical consciousness and social transformation" (E. Lopez, personal communication January, 19, 2014). Whether teacher candidates embody these interrelated core values has not been undertaken in a research study. However, there are a few empirical studies which inform us of UCLA's teacher graduates' strong dedication to teaching in urban schools.

Karen Hunter Quartz and the TEP Research Group (2003) conducted a mixed method study about the retention rates of their urban educators. Their findings indicated that UCLA's TEP graduates stayed at their jobs longer than the teacher retention rates nationally. Out of the 326 teachers who graduated between 1997 and 2000, "70% of Center X graduates remain[ed] in the classroom, compared to 61% of teachers nationally" (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003, p.13). Qualitative interpretations helped reveal what type of preparation and ongoing support enabled Center X's urban teachers to stay at their jobs longer (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003, p. 16). Based on survey and interview data, the study yielded three themes:

1. Center X “helps students form understandings that focus on discovering the strengths of the urban communities in which they teach”(Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003, p. 16).
2. Center X graduates tend to take on variety of leadership positions to make their schools a more just and caring place.
3. Center X supports and provides variety of strategies for continued professional growth and development by encouraging participation in the Urban Educator Network (UEN), or Teaching to Change LA(TCLA), the online journal ([www.TeachingToChangeLA.org](http://www.TeachingToChangeLA.org)) as well as providing “extensive professional development through the California Subject Matter Projects (CSMP) and ongoing support to achieve certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)” (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003, p. 23).

In another study, UCLA’s candidates as student teachers, were paired with guiding teachers who weren’t proponents of social justice education in urban Los Angeles schools (Lane, Lacedied-Parachini, & Isken, 2003). These student teachers constructed their social justice practice through building community in the classroom. Moreover, the findings conclude that the student teachers “became change agents and had an impact on the practice of guiding teachers at the schools. The student teachers had such strong beliefs that they did not waver even when confronted by guiding teachers with differing conceptual orientations” (Lane, Lacedied-Parachini, & Isken, 2003, p.62)

More recently, Center X had conducted another quantitative longitudinal study of more than a thousand TEP alumni from 2000-2007 to study retention rates among urban educators (“*UCLA TEP*,” *n.d*). The findings of the study revealed that “Center X graduates are almost three times more likely than other highly-qualified teachers nationwide to stay put in the same school over time.” The report also indicates that “in fact, being in a high-priority school predicts the retention of these graduates—not the attrition as is commonly reported throughout the profession” (“*UCLA TEP*,” *n.d*).

These limited studies show that UCLA's TEP graduates' commitment to work and contribution to urban schools are exceptional. Although it has not been studied how the TEP graduates developed and incorporated a social justice oriented teaching practice, the mere retention rates signify their deep commitment to "high-priority" urban schools. Given the paucity of empirical research conducted with UCLA's TEP candidates, I rely on relevant literature that has explored social justice conceptions and practices in social justice oriented teacher education programs.

*Teacher candidates' practices and conceptions of social justice*

Most empirical studies undertaken by teacher educators investigate candidates' beliefs of social justice (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Mills & Ballantyne, 2016). Mills and Ballantyne (2016) sought to locate peer-reviewed, articles written about *social justice* and *teacher education* in the last 10 years in acclaimed databases such as ERIC, Proquest and others. Their advanced search returned a total of 297 articles, and they chose 23 studies to discuss in detail. The findings yielded four key areas that the selected studies represented: "1) understandings of social justice and attitudes to diversity, 2) changes in beliefs, 3) field experience and service learning and 4) innovations and challenges in teacher education" (p. 274). The order indicates the most prominent theme to the least prominent theme in the review of literature on social justice teacher education.

My own review of the literature confirms that most studies aim to understand teacher candidates' developing and evolving conceptions of social justice. Many research studies are exploring candidates' conceptions of social justice because they impact candidates' practices in terms of instruction, curriculum, classroom climate, relationships with colleagues, students and their families, the community, as well as their fortitude to advocate for social and educational

change. There are far fewer studies exploring candidates' practices of social justice. Candidates typically have one or less year of pre-service teaching experience or fieldwork and therefore, not a lot of research has focused on this short time period to explore practices of social justice. More studies have explored practices of social justice post graduation (Kelly, Brandes & Orłowski, 2004, Philpott & Dagenais, 2011). In the following section, I discuss the literature on studying *social justice in practice* as well as studying conceptions of social justice.

### *Social justice in practice*

Most research studies published in educational journals have relied on teacher candidates' self reported practices of social justice (Ajayi, 2017; Mills & Ballantyne, 2016; Roseboro, Parker, Smith & Imig, 2012). There is an inherent discrepancy between conceptions and practices of social justice (Grossman, Hammerness & McDonald, 2009). Despite the fact that some teacher candidates are critically aware and informed of educational disparities, many fail to operationally integrate social justice into their practice. Ajayi (2017) relying on self reported practices of social justice concluded that candidates' receptiveness of critical course content didn't prepare them to teach against the grain in rural schools, even with their training in creating curriculum honoring their students' cultural backgrounds, candidates did not "relate instruction to the complexity and specificity of the rural community"(p. 64) they were teaching in. Thus it is evident that awareness doesn't immediately translate into practice. Similarly, Roseboro et al., studied teacher candidates' self-reported practices during their student-teaching to conclude that although candidates learned to recognize discrimination they were unable to materially challenge it in their practice (2012). In the next section, I discuss the plethora of research exploring conceptions of social justice as aligned with teacher candidates.

### *Social justice conceptions*

Research examining social justice conceptions has revealed the intricacies relevant to becoming a social justice educator. It has also become evident that, by and large, most research studies analyze the impact of candidates' changing beliefs of social justice over a single course, rather than longitudinally over the entire teacher preparation program (Lemly, 2014). Mills and Ballantyne have also noted this tendency stating, "what is less prominent in the journal articles emerging from this systematic review, then, is large-scale research: research that requires the generation of data longitudinally" (2016, p. 274).

Studies have indicated increased understanding or no change at all, among candidates who had completed a social justice oriented course in their prospective programs. Yong and Jackson (2016) studied teacher candidates' conceptions of teaching mathematics for social justice in three universities. Candidates were asked to respond to the question of "what does teaching mathematics for social justice mean to you?" before and after their social justice infused mathematics methods course. Seven themes had emerged, ranging from "limited understanding where pre-service teachers did not see a connection between mathematics and social justice" (p.32) to empowering students by teaching them about social issues through mathematics. They conclude that entering social justice beliefs were more *unsure/limited* than exiting responses. Additionally, participants had gained more instructional strategies; which they defined as differentiating, connecting math to the world, to students' lives and having high expectations for their students, after finishing the course. Similarly, teacher educators Ritchie and Cone created a social justice methods course in an elementary teacher education program that placed "equity and justice at the center of the curriculum rather than in the margins" (2013, p.63). They aspired to study how the course influenced candidates' beliefs and practices of social justice, by analyzing candidates' weekly reading responses, online discussions, lesson plans and end of the

course focus group interviews. Three conclusions were drawn: first, candidates developed a sense of agency, second, they used content relevant to their students' lives, and lastly, researchers concluded that candidates needed "more time to develop confidence in disrupting normative educational practices in schools and the policies made outside the classroom that undergird them" (p. 76).

While these two studies have concluded increased understandings of social justice, other studies have reported a lack of commitment especially by White teacher candidates. Leonard and Leonard (2006) studied pre-service teachers in a multicultural education course that they had taught. They reviewed teachers' autobiographical reflection papers, online and in class discussions to learn about their dispositions towards social justice and diversity. Three themes had emerged: first, *cultural conciseness*, concluding that mostly Black students acknowledged issues of discrimination and bias, second, *intercultural sensitivity* similarly, mostly marginalized students showed more empathy; and lastly *commitment to social justice*, which didn't go beyond the recognition of inequities. Candidates' existing and evolving beliefs of social justice have a lot to do with their social identity, lived experiences and educational background (Dorman, 2012). Elizabeth Dorman explored candidates' development of critical awareness in an urban teacher preparation program (2012). Her case study with three teacher candidates indicated that the strongest influence on the teachers' appropriation of critical awareness is teachers' personal biography and history, in other words, "teachers' life experiences prior to entering the teaching profession affected how they approached teaching for social justice and equity" (Dorman, 2012, p. 24).

In addition to personal history, many teacher educators have argued that the instructional strategies for teaching about social injustice immensely contribute to cultivating social justice

beliefs among candidates. How to initiate and engage in such difficult and constructive dialogue is of utmost importance. In the next section, I explore the pedagogical strategies for teaching about social injustice as well as the challenges involved teaching predominantly privileged (middle-class, White) candidates.

### *Pedagogical strategies to teaching social justice*

There is no one best way to expose candidates to internalized or structural oppression. Many teacher educators have created and used creative teaching methods and materials to facilitate hard conversations, help diverse teacher candidates engage in critical self-reflection and aspire for a social justice teaching practice (Medina, Morrone & Anderson, 2005; Porfilio & Malott, 2011; Reed, 2009; Walsh, Shier, Sitter, & Sieppert, 2010).

I review a few of the creative approaches proposed by teacher educators. Reed (2009) proposed a metaphorical image activity to help teacher candidates flush out their perceptions of themselves and of society. This activity called upon “resources and mental processes that are significantly different from those involved in oral discussions or written papers, insights may be gained that are not available through more ‘left-brained’ tasks” (p. 54). Similarly, Walsh et al. (2010) advocating the use of digital storytelling to learn about injustice say it “blends creative writing, oral history, [and] art therapy” (p.2). Porfilio and Malott (2011) argue that alternative approaches are necessary to teach specifically White pre-service teachers about oppression, noting “hip-hop and punk pedagogues have helped many of our [White] students understand the social, political and historical dimensions of schooling, ...unpack the unearned privileges they themselves and other members of the dominant society accrue from their racial class status” (p.78). Additionally, teacher educators suggest that not just course content enhances especially



white, non urban teacher candidates' perceptions and receptiveness towards social justice but also incorporating multicultural service-learning to more fruitfully cultivate social justice beliefs among candidates (Brown, 2005; Tinkler & Tinkler 2013; Tinkler, Hannah, Tinkler, & Miller, 2015).

Irrefutably, the literature mostly reflects White teacher educators' attempts to prepare White teacher candidates in raising their awareness of social and educational injustice. The unique needs of candidates of color are often neglected in predominantly White teacher education programs that focus on raising awareness of social injustice. In the next section, I discuss these challenges in detail.

### *Challenges*

Consistent documentation shows that White pre-service teachers demonstrate resistance to social justice oriented and multicultural education courses (Cochran-Smith, 2004, Bartelome, 2004; Juarez, Smith & Hayes, 2008; Le Roux & Mdunge, 2012). Juarez, Smith and Hayes (2008) state “we respectively have not experienced a semester in teacher education without the pain and challenges associated with teaching predominantly White teacher candidates about White racism” (p. 22). Galman, Pica-Smith, and Rosenberger (2010) contend that despite the good intentions “white teacher educators, working in a program serving predominantly white pre-service teachers at a largely white university continue to teach through unexamined white racial knowledge” (p. 226). On the contrary, candidates of color who are aware of racism and social injustice through their lived experiences are underserved even in teacher education programs even when they are oriented towards social justice (Kholi, 2009). Kohli (2009) has argued that “preparing white teachers and teachers of Color to enter Communities of Color cannot look the

same” (p. 237). Yet, teaching instruction and curriculum for White-middle class teachers, who have limited or no exposure to communities of Color, is the same, as for teachers of Color.

Moreover, candidates of Color often have arduous experiences in predominantly White teacher education programs. Amos’s (2010) study poignantly exposes this truth. Yukari Takimoto Amos, Professor at the School of Education at central Washington University, interviewed four minority teacher candidates in a predominantly White classroom to investigate the “kind of interaction [that] takes place between minority and White pre-service teachers in a multicultural education class and how this interaction impacts minority pre-service teachers’ participation in class” (p. 31). The findings revealed that minority teacher candidates felt frustrated, fearful and despaired from insensitive comments expressed by White teacher educators and peers. Not only teacher candidates of Color felt unsafe engaging in critical discussions of race, but teacher educators did as well. Jean Moule a teacher educator of Color has learned that “there is a tendency for white students to diminish or disrespect a messenger of color and thereby discount the message” (2005, p. 32). Sadly, there hasn’t been a significant increase in recruiting and retaining “teachers and teacher educators who reflect more closely the demographics of school populations” (Spalding et al., 2010, p. 194). Moreover, curriculum and instructional strategies aren’t being developed to meet the needs of teacher candidates of Color who are committed to teaching for social justice (Kolhi, 2009; Johnston-Parsons, Lee & Thomas, 2007; Lynn & Smith-Madox, 2007).

Yet another challenge of cultivating social justice values among candidates of Color or White candidates, is maintaining those beliefs and practices in schools that are unsupportive and against such practices.

### *Maintaining social justice beliefs and practices*

Individual efforts toward enacting social justice in the classroom may seem hopeless and inadequate in the face of mandated curriculum, high stakes testing and lack of administrative support. A large body of research suggests that teacher organized communities are essential for maintaining commitment to a social justice practice (Affolter, 2006; Chrisman, 2010; Calderwood, 2002; Cochran-Smith et al., 2008; Nieto, 2000; Potts & Schilicing, 2011; Picower, 2007). In the following section I discuss these support systems that enable social justice teachers to maintain their commitment.

Picower (2007) explains that a support group is needed to help teachers stay committed to social justice especially as they transition into their first year of teaching. She notes that the pressures of first year teaching cause many to abandon their commitments to social justice and therefore a support group specifically devoted to helping teachers follow through their vision of social justice is vital. Chrisman (2010) notes “without reinforcement outside the program and into actual practice, it becomes increasingly easier for new teachers to compromise the carefully built languages of critique and possibilities; without these in place, the preparation of a socially just teacher-leader becomes impossible” (p.122). Similarly, a study with UCLA’s TEP graduates revealed that they conceptualize “the process of becoming a teacher activist occurs[ing] primarily in alternative sites of learning or communities of practice” such as activist organizations like *Organization for Justice in Teaching (OJT)* and *Consortium on Critical Pedagogy (CCP)* (Montano, Lopez-Torres, DeLissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman, 2002, p. 265).

Calderwood (2002) argues that those who are teachers committed to social justice can’t work in isolation. Developing a community of critical friends “not simply peers who support one another, essential as this may be, but also peers who debate, critique, and challenge one

another to go beyond their current ideas and practices” (Nieto, 2000, p. 185). Teachers have in fact formed national alliances such as the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME), Urban Network to Improve Teacher Education (UNITE), National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER), American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), American Education Research Association (AERA) and among these organizations there are committees and special interest groups that collectively collaborate and theorize on how to keep the tenets of social justice alive (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008, pp. 351-352). Inarguably, a support system is vital to developing and maintaining teachers’ commitment to social justice.

In conclusion, this chapter reviewed the literature pertaining to social justice by parsing out the diluted phrase *social justice* in teacher education, laying out the frameworks that enable teacher education programs to embolden their pursuit of social justice, reported on relevant studies that have examined candidates conceptions and practices of social justice, noting innovative critical pedagogical strategies for teaching about social injustice along with its challenges and lastly, calling attention to the significance of having a network of support to maintain the vision of social justice.

### Chapter 3: Theoretical Orientation

*How do I define social justice in education?*

I see the role of educators at all levels of schooling as advocates committed to the goal of eradicating existing disparities in school and society by means of identifying systems of power and privilege that enable social inequality. This form of commitment involves continuously challenging our own beliefs and biases that are reflected in our expectations for our students especially from marginalized backgrounds; informing how we develop curriculum and instruction and form safe classroom spaces for dialogue, especially honoring non-dominant voices. I see this critical capacity of educators and teaching practices rooted in cultural contexts, informed by historical, sociopolitical and economic conditions. I also believe that courage and love are the pillars for our engagement in the process of actualizing social justice. To have courage to seek for opportunities for change in oneself or institutionally, and to love and care compassionately for those we are empowering with our intentional practice.

My theoretical orientation is heavily influenced by the writings of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1970, 1983, 1992, 1998). Freire's concept of education is the most significant to me because it contributes to the endeavor of creating the conditions for social justice through education. For Freire, becoming educated means joining the struggle for justice. Learning is a form of deconstruction, self-understanding and connecting the self to a larger social action. Education is a powerful instrument of rupture. Education cannot be neutral, for Freire education is inherently political. In numerous interviews he expressed how he "always saw teaching adults to read and write as a political act, an act of knowledge, and therefore as a creative act" (Freire, 1983, p. 4). Freire envisioned school as a center for creativity, teaching to

question established truth claims, to think critically, learn with seriousness and work towards transformation (Freire, 1992).

The Freireian concept of problem posing education is an indispensable part of education for social justice. Problem posing education promotes the cultivation and practice of critical consciousness. Posing the world as a problem illuminates the forces of oppression and its manifestation in all spheres of social, economic, political and environmental life. Problem posing instruction involves curriculum that is culturally familiar to marginalized students motivating them to “read the word” and by extension “read the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Problem posing education is empowering for marginalized students because they become the *epistemically privileged* in the process of co-constructing knowledge surrounding their social situation and oppression. It is this empowerment and critical consciousness that fuels acts of resistance and transformation.

My beliefs and practices of social justice are strongly influenced by Freire’s educational philosophy. In the section below, I start out by introducing social justice theory and then discuss the framework I developed of social justice engagement in teacher education to help conceptualize its far-ranging parameters.

### **Social Justice Theory**

Social justice theory is an amalgamation of different disciplines. Nonetheless, social justice has one common denominator across many contested definitions and domains: it is the critical analysis of historical, political, social and economic injustice and the promotion of individual and collective action towards social transformation (Bell, 1997; Fraser, 1999; Freire, 1970; Young, 1990).

Nancy Fraser, a feminist critical theorist offers a definition of social justice which encompasses two main components; a political-economic aspect, such as fair distribution of resources among people; and a socio-cultural facet, which is recognizing systematic, historical and institutionalized subordination based on race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class (1999). Another feminist scholar, Iris Young (1990) has expanded the framework of social justice by conceptualizing oppression in terms of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. By and large, social justice is considered both a goal and a process (Bell, 1997). These theories of social justice as well as Freireian social justice education inform the development of my own framework of social justice in teacher education.

### *Social justice in teacher education*

The task of defining social justice in education is like “trying to nail jello to the wall” (Sandretto Ballard, Burke, Kane, Lang, Schon, & Whyte, 2007, p. 307). I have over-simplified this task by conceptualizing social justice in education as an ongoing practice that engages in the efforts of criticism and activism. More specifically, I have broken up the concept of *teacher education for social justice* into four components: *activist pedagogy*, *action beyond the classroom*, *activist scholarship* and *teacher reflexivity*. In the following section, I explain how I see social justice in teacher education from these spheres of influence. In reality, these dissected parts of what constitutes social justice education are not separated from each other and they are not limited to just these four arrangements. I only built the frames of this constantly evolving and growing macro schema to invite scholars to grapple with me, dispute and discover the potential of social justice teacher education. First, I discuss the social justice enactment in teacher education through the concept of *activist pedagogy*.

## *Activist pedagogy*

Activist pedagogy includes *what* we teach and *how* we teach it. *What* we teach? The literature respectively reflects the fervent call by educators to align their content of instruction that advocates for critical awareness of race (Bogges, 2010; Solorzano & Bernal, 2009), critical awareness of gender (Charles & Bradley, 2002; Streitmatter, 1994), inclusive education (Gabel, 2002; Lalvani 2013), LGBTQ visibility (Hermann-Wilmarth, 2007; Horn, Konkol, McInerney, Meiners, North, Nunez, Quinn, & Sullivan, 2012), critical literacy (Phillips & Hollingsworth, 2010) access and critical media literacy in emerging technologies (Kellner and Share, 2005; Kellner, 2002; Porfino & Mallott, 2011) as well as intersecting of all of these frameworks (Banks, 1991; Grant & Sleeter, 2003; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). The contents of instruction that challenge intersecting hegemonic beliefs, practices and structures that limit marginalized students' opportunities for academic achievement, economic success, power sharing, and basic human rights.

*How* we teach? The teaching method is an equally significant part of embracing activist pedagogy. Ira Shor (1992) explains that reinforcing unilateral authority in the classroom makes hierarchy seem as the norm. This hierarchal relationship communicates to students “to fit in an education and a society not run for them or by them but rather set up for and run by others” (1999, p. 20). Students do not effectively learn how to share ideas with one another because they come to believe that knowledge should be disseminated from teachers to students and as a result devalue student to student interactions as learning (Devillar & Faltis, 1994). A teaching method such as dialogic teaching (Darder, 1991; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1988; Shor & Freire, 1987; Shor, 1992; Torres, 2009), challenges the asymmetrical, hierarchal and authoritative power



relationship between the students and the teacher or among students with varying degrees of marginalization and privilege. Freire (1998) eloquently and simply proposes a different relationship between the students and the teacher:

Education takes place when there are two learners who occupy somewhat different spaces in an ongoing dialogue. But both participants bring knowledge to the relationship and one of the objects of pedagogic process is to explore what each knows and what they can teach one another. (p. 8)

*How we teach*, has a lot to do with genuine love and care. bell hooks beautifully articulates the power of love and care noting, “when teachers teach with love, combining care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we are often able to enter the classroom and go straight to the heart of the matter, which is knowing what to do on any given day to create the best climate for learning” (2003. p.134). The power of a caring interaction, an honest concern and the vulnerability to show love has a transformative potential for students. Ghilami and Tirri (2012) note “in the caring teaching approach, teachers’ pedagogical orientations are more moral and emotional than technical and methodological” (p. 1).

Social justice education is not limited to activist pedagogical applications practiced inside the classroom, it is often a precondition to engaging in social justice efforts outside the classroom. The notion of being active outside the classroom is an essential characteristic of teaching for social justice. Next, I discuss how *activism beyond the classroom* embodies the practice of teaching for social justice in teacher education.

### *Activism beyond the classroom*

The most controversial social justice oriented teaching approach is the one that focuses “beyond the school context [to] transform any structures that perpetuate injustice at the societal level” (Chubbuck, 2010, p. 198). In the Fall 2012 issue of the *Radical Teacher*, Nicholas Fox raised the question of whether critical classroom discussions of power, privilege and capitalism constitute activism. If it does not promote political action or social change outside the walls of the classroom in some material way, is it still considered activism? Fox proposed a teaching goal that is not only about interpreting texts critically but one that encourages students to participate in the change they want to see (2012). He noted, “if we do not teach students how to move from interpreting the world to changing it, our practice of politics is hardly a practice at all” (Fox, 2012, p. 22). Similarly, Bree Picower (2012) has argued that “focusing solely on teaching social issues in class alone cannot address the existing power structures” (p. 562) contending that racism cannot be overcome through critical reading material available in class, that alone “will not impact institutional racism” (p. 563).

Efforts to engage students in social justice advocacy in and out of the classroom are commonplace. Bruce Calhoun, a high school biology teacher, realized that promoting environmental responsibility to students was not enough, and more meaningful action and measures need to be taken to help preserve our ecosystem (1990). Working with his students they became a tax-exempt entity under the name of *Save the Rainforest Inc.* and have been rigorously campaigning for environmental conservation until now.

*Activism beyond the classroom* also embraces efforts towards social justice enacted in understated and less public way but still posing a threat to structural oppression. Activism understood through theories of *transformational resistance* (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001)

challenge the nature and scope of what constitutes activism outside the classroom. This subtle and silent form of resistance promotes change from within the structures. For example, Hidalgo and Duncan-Andrade (2009) identified *internal transformational resistance* among students of Color in the Step to College (STC) intervention program in which marginalized students linked their future aspirations of becoming a lawyer, fashion designer and architect with community building. As more and more empowered students align their careers towards serving their own marginalized communities, they will incrementally redirect their professional institutions' attention and resources to communities of need.

Evidently, school and society are profoundly linked to one another. Social justice oriented education inescapably ties pedagogy with the outside world, in explicit and implicit ways. Next, I discuss *activist scholarship*, which, similarly aims to blur the boundaries of academia and “the real world”.

#### *Activist scholarship*

*Activist scholarship* is the engagement in scholarly, philosophical or methodological inquiry pertaining to issues of social justice. Jean-Marie (2010) a teacher educator explains that engaging in ongoing research on social issues is an integral part of her activism and deep commitment to social justice education. On the contrary, Donald Collins (2005) fervently critiques this sort of scholarship activism by noting that there is a false presumption that “over time, all of our scholarship, theories, and critiques will trickle down to policy makers, K-12 educators, and the rest of society” (p. 27). In reality, this form of activism suffers from a major disconnect between knowledge attained and knowledge disseminated for the promotion of social justice. For Collins, activist scholarship involves reaching out and relating our work to the members of marginalized community, whereas in academia most social justice scholars

(especially those on a tenure track) do not publish on social justice issues for the general public (Collins, 2005). Collins illustrates this point through a hypothetical example, “if a scholar on the tenure track in, say, a history department, taught undergraduate courses only from a social justice perspective or published articles in activist magazines like *Color Lines*, *Mother Jones*, and *The Nation*, he or she would probably have an activist following but would not earn tenure” (2005, p. 27). Collins’ argument makes clear that there is no institutional support for engaging in critical scholarship for the general public. Professional advancement guidelines promote knowledge production for selective audiences. Those who are affected by social injustice don’t have access to such scholarly work and are left out of the conversation. Collins gives examples of few activist scholars who have successfully bridged the divide between activist scholarship and disenfranchised members of society. Scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, Cornel West and Howard Zinn have all served those who are marginalized through their scholarly work by means of direct engagement to promote critical awareness and empowerment (Collins, 2005).

*Activist scholarship* as a form of enacting social justice in teacher education can range from just publishing on issues of injustice in traditional academic venues, to prioritizing scholarly publications that directly reach the oppressed. In the subsequent section, I detail the last component that makes up the concept of teaching for social justice, *critical self-reflection*.

### *Critical self-reflection*

Critical self-reflection is a process and a lifelong project; “there are no easy, simple or quick fixes” (Cross, 2005, p. 273). It is not something that can be achieved by reading an article or completing a workshop (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009). Arguably “[discriminatory] preconceived ideas and judgments can never be totally eliminated, [but] through mindful attention one can refuse to reduce others’ reality to one’s limited dimension” (Barrera, Corso &

Macpherson, 2003, p. 48). This is especially true for teachers. Multicultural educator Sonia Nieto (2003) notes:

Although teachers may work hard to leave their values, beliefs and biases outside school doors, the reality is that: teachers bring their entire autobiographies with them. It is useless for them to deny this, the most they can do is acknowledge how these may either get in the way of, or enhance, their work with students. (p. 24)

Connell (2014) argues that despite the influence and popularity of Schon's *The Reflective Practitioner* publication in 1983, promoting the practice of teacher reflection "the concept has been commandeered to support the status quo. Very often, the focus of reflection is not so much on the experience of teachers in classrooms and schools, but rather on how successfully a curriculum or teaching method has been replicated" (p.7). Although teacher reflection is strongly emphasized, it's critical component is hardly recognized in traditional teacher education programs (Zeichner & Liu, 2010).

Social justice teacher educator Sharon Chubbuck articulates the definition of critical self-reflection best: the process of critical self-reflection "inherently originate in a rigorous self-examination where personal biases and emotional responses are brought into the light of self-awareness, accompanied by a humility of heart that is willing to admit their presence and to do the work needed to address them productively" (Chubbuck, 2010, p. 203). Critical self-reflection embodies the full concept of Freireian praxis: reflection-action, but instead it is an internal reflection and internal action an "unfinished process"(Freire, 1998) of resistance and rectification. As mentioned in my definition of social justice, courage is an important characteristic, especially in critical self-reflection because it gives one the inner strength to challenge and confront engrained oppressive notions. Courage to confront feelings of guilt and

discomfort is a requisite for engaging in reflexivity. Diane Goodman (2001) notes that “learning is more stimulating and meaningful when both the intellect and feelings are attended to” (p. 38). The process of critical self-reflection engages one’s intellectual and affective faculties, enriching the learning experience. Scholars, administrators, teachers and students must realize that critical self-reflection is an enactment of social justice. This unique and personal practice is a precondition to all forms of activist engagement. In fact, the spectrum of contributing to social change is bounded by one’s critical self-reflexive capacity.

In sum, I have conceptualized social justice engagement in teacher education through four frameworks: Activist pedagogy in the classroom, linking and extending critical instruction to the outside world, engaging in critical scholarly research and relaying it to people who are directly affected by corresponding forms of oppression and lastly, making a lasting commitment to the ongoing practice of critical self-reflection.

## Chapter 4: Methods

In this chapter, I outline the selected method of inquiry that explored the evolving notions and self-reported practices of social justice of teacher candidates as they entered and completed their teacher education program, in addition to discussing the theoretical orientation that informs the study. First, I review the research methods, which include a qualitative longitudinal design, interviews and pre and post assessment surveys. Second, I lay out my theoretical orientation influenced by Freireian pedagogy and suggest a theoretical framework that I developed for engaging in social justice through teacher education.

### *Longitudinal design*

My research methods are consistent with qualitative longitudinal methods of inquiry. According to Saldaña (2006) the two primary uses for using qualitative longitudinal research is to capture participants' life experiences over time and any changes in their perceptions and actions. Similarly, Koro-Ljungberg and Bussing (2013) explain that "longitudinal studies are commonly characterized by investigation of change over time, time in context, and time and texture of experiences" (p. 3). Additionally, the design of a longitudinal qualitative interview research factors in the "point at which longitudinal inquiry originates; the number and frequency of longitudinal interviews; interview protocol format and accompanying mode of analysis; subject attrition and retention; and, respondent reaction" (Hermanowitz, 2013, p. 194).

The design of this longitudinal study adheres to the factors Hermanowitz lays out. The point of origin in this study is intentionally planned. I interviewed participants in the first three weeks into the program to capture their entering notions of social justice. The number and frequency of interviews were determined based on the changes in the teacher education program. The program has two very different academic years. The first year is focused on theoretical and

social foundational coursework accompanied by student teaching; and the second year is focused on independent teaching and an inquiry project. Participants were interviewed in the beginning and at the end of their first academic year. Subsequently, they were interviewed before beginning and after completing their second academic year (see Table 1).

Table 1.

*Interview schedule*

First Academic year		Second Academic Year	
<b>Interview 1</b>	<b>Interview 2</b>	<b>Interview 3</b>	<b>Interview 4</b>
October 2014	May-June 2015	August 2015	June 2016

Conducting four carefully planned out interviews enabled me to study the evolution among participants’ notions and practices of social justice. The key goal of this qualitative longitudinal design has been studying change theoretically and practically, more specifically: “studying interpretations that people make of their situations and experiences. Because interviews occur serially with the same subjects, we render ourselves capable of advancing an ancillary goal, that of identifying and understanding the meaning of temporal change to people, while also exploring how people interpret and respond to such change” (Hermanowitz, 2013, p. 194).

More than likely, teacher candidates’ notions and self-reported practices of social justice will continue to change throughout their professional career. Agarwal et al. (2010) explain that social justice teaching practices naturally evolve during a teacher’s career, “given the plurality of teacher experiences, student identities, and classroom dynamics, it should be expected that teachers teach for social justice differently at different moments in their careers” (p. 245). This



study only seeks to understand the changes that occurred from the time teacher candidates started the teacher education program and completed it over the course of two academic years. In the next section, I outline the interviewing process in greater detail.

## **Interviews**

### *Recruitment*

I was granted approval from the *TEP's Leadership Team*, and received an IRB clearance to carry out this study. A few days before the start of the Fall quarter, the program's orientation was held. At the orientation on September 29th, 2014, I had been granted a time slot after the keynote speaker to present my study and solicit for volunteers. I introduced myself, my research study very broadly, and the compensating schedule (see Appendix A). I introduced the study as a dissertation research that aimed to study teacher candidates' experiences in the teacher education program. I purposely did not reveal the core purpose of the study, so as not to discourage teacher candidates who may have considered themselves to be less aware of social justice issues, and consequently, hesitated from signing up for the study. Additionally, I wanted to deter the prospective participants in the study from overemphasizing the role of social justice in their practice, thinking that's what I wanted to hear. This strategic, broad introduction of my study was meant to reduce *social desirability bias* among participants (Fisher 1993).

After my introduction at the orientation, a signup sheet was passed around for those interested to fill out their name and contact information such as email address and phone number. Over 100 teacher candidates signed up to participate in the study. Five days later, I e-mailed all of them a questionnaire inquiring about their demographical information and sub specializations in the program. I received responses from 25 teacher candidates. I selected 12 participants based on the demographical characteristics; such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation;

academic specializations such as subject matter and grade level; and lastly, their ability to interview immediately because the first interview was time sensitive, in hopes of capturing participants' entering beliefs without the impact of the program.

Table 2.

*Demographic chart*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Ethnicity/Race</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>SEC</b>	<b>Subject Matter</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>
Sarah	White	Bi/pansexual	Woman	23	Lower/working class	English	Secondary
Andy	Asian American	Straight	Female	27	Middle class	Social studies	Secondary
Marissa	Latina	Heterosexual	Female	21	Middle class	Biology	Secondary
William	Chinese	Straight	Male	28	Middle class	Social studies	Secondary
Truth	African American/Black	Heterosexual	Female	39	Low	Social studies	Secondary
Allan	Southeast Asian/ Vietnamese	Heterosexual	Male	23	Lower middle class	English	Secondary
Alice	White/ Jewish	Queer	Female	22	Middle class	Social studies	Secondary
Monique	Hispanic		Female	41	Low middle class	English	Secondary
Jonathan	Latino	Straight	Male	25	Middle class	English	Secondary
Luna	Mexican American	Straight	Female	26	Low Income	Multiple subject	Elementary
Robin	African American	Straight	Female	24	Working class	English	Secondary
Sulley	Asian/ Taiwanese	Heterosexual	Female	23	Low Income	Math	Secondary

*Note:* Participants assigned their identity labels. Monique was the only participant who left the question about sexual orientation blank.

I strategically selected white students and students of color, as well as male and female students in varying age groups, from both elementary and secondary divisions with different subject specializations to compare data across these categories (see descriptive profiles in Appendix B). This intentional selection couldn't aim for multiplicity in participants' level of social justice awareness; however, after their first interviews it was clear that most teacher candidates in this program were pre-disposed towards social justice education (see Table 3).

Table 3.

*Primary and secondary reason for choosing UCLA*

Primary Reason for Choosing UCLA TEP	# of pp.	Secondary Reason for Choosing UCLA TEP
Social Justice	6	
Urban schools in low income communities	1	
Step Program	1	Social Justice
Best friend, relocation, finances	1	Social Justice
2 yrs vs 3ys for an MA degree	1	Social Justice
Prestige	1	Social Justice
Highly ranked	1	

Half of the participants shared that their primary reason for selecting UCLA's teacher education program was for its social justice emphasis, and almost half expressed social justice as their secondary reason.

In the next section, I outline the interview process in detail, discussing how the data was collected and analyzed as well as providing a statement of the researcher reflexivity.

### *Interview process*

I conducted four interviews with teacher candidates in which three were conducted face to face and one interview (the third interview) was conducted over the phone. Face to face interviews took place in a reserved room, coincidentally the same classroom participants were attending for their seminars. Participants signed a letter of consent and were promised to be compensated for two interviews together at the end of each academic year. I made a deliberate choice of compensating at the second and fourth interviews as an incentive for them to finish all four interviews. The compensation for each interview was twenty five dollars, but they received \$50 dollars at the second and fourth interviews. The study was self-funded. Successfully nobody withdrew from the study.

All four interviews ranged between 1-2 hours in length. All the participants agreed to be audio recorded during the interviews. I assured all candidates that their confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained and protected by assigning numbers to their interview accounts. During data analysis and coding, I reached out to the participants with a request to have them select their own pseudonyms for the study. They all gladly shared a preferred pseudonym to be used in the study for the purposes of concealing their identity.

I developed the interview questions for all four interviews. All four interviews had repeating questions, probing teacher candidates to explain their teaching philosophy, their understanding of social justice and how they have or plan to incorporate social justice notions in their teaching practices. Upon finishing each interview, I immediately transcribed and engaged in

preliminary analysis and reflection. The preliminary analysis involved drawing out themes that represented the group experiences for each interview set, as well as individually comparing the same question responses to participant's previous interview responses (see Appendix C). Although, each interview largely asked the same questions, each had a slightly different goal. In the section below, I briefly discuss the goals of each interview.

### *Interview 1*

I conducted the first set of interviews three weeks into the program in the Fall quarter of October, 2014. The first interview was time-sensitive as I wanted to learn about participants' entering understandings of social justice before they were exposed to or influenced by the theories of social justice from the program (see first interview questions in Appendix D).

These first interviews were key to building rapport and trust with participants in order to assure their long term commitment and comfort disclosing personal reflections. I allocated some time to conversations that were unrelated to the study to connect with participants personally as graduate students juggling many priorities, assured them of my disassociation from the TEP to avoid being perceived as someone evaluating their knowledge and practice, and lastly, offered to be a resource to them for academic related needs; some had reached out to me to get more information about the Ph.D program.

### *Interview 2*

In the spring quarter of 2015, marking the end of their first year in the program, I conducted the second set of interviews with the same participants. At this time they had completed their social foundational and theoretical coursework and student teaching in a designated urban school in South Central Los Angeles. Some of the critical classes they had taken were (see Appendix E):

Ed 406 *Social Foundation and Cultural Diversity in American Education* exploring the “historical development of American society...Examination of issues of racism, ethnic and gender differences”.

ED 466 *Critical Media Literacy: Teaching Youth to Critically Read and Create Media*, which “combines theoretical foundations of cultural studies and critical pedagogy with practical classroom applications of new digital media as well as traditional print-based means of communication. Exploration of media representations of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other identity markers”.

Although these courses along with others stand out as ones that deal with critical content, participants have expressed that critical content is infused in all of their classes. The second interview questions (see Appendix F) remained almost identical to the first set with the exception of one question -*question 5: Have you noticed an evolution in your understanding of social justice?* This question inquired about participants’ own self-reflection pertaining to changes in their understandings of social justice

### *Interview 3*

In the summer of 2015, just before participants started their fall quarter field placements, the third interviews were conducted. This interview was conducted over the phone. It was difficult to arrange a face to face interview during the summer break, because many of the participants were either out of town or booked for their professional development series in their respective schools. The interview questions for the most part remained the same. The additional questions focused on the practical applications of social justice, such as:

1. Have you thought of concrete ways to integrate social justice teaching strategies into your lessons?

2. On a scale of 1-5 how heavily will your practice include strategies of social justice? 1, not at all, and 5, heavily.
3. Do you consider your teaching practice social justice oriented? (see Appendix G)

Given that teacher candidates were starting their independent field practice, I deemed it important to inquire more about the ways they had planned to incorporate the theories of social justice into their practice.

#### *Interview 4*

The fourth interviews were conducted at the end of their last academic year, in the spring quarter of 2016. Participants were wrapping up their last week of teaching and had already completed the inquiry project. This interview also marked the end of their teacher education program.

Similarly, the interview questions were consistent with the previous three interviews (see Appendix H). No new question was introduced that hadn't been asked in the last interviews. The goal at this last interview was to learn about participants' culminated understandings and practices of social justice.

In addition to conducting four interviews, I also administered a pre and post survey assessment to further identify teacher candidates evolving notions of social justice. In the next section, I discuss the details of the survey.

### **Survey**

Participants completed a pre and post assessment survey called *Learning to Teach for Social Justice* LTSJ-B (see Table 11 on pp. 142-143) developed by teacher educators from Boston College to measure social justice beliefs of teacher candidates (Enterline, Cochran-Smith, Ludlow & Mitescu, 2008).

The pre-assessment survey was completed by the second week into the program in the fall quarter of 2014. The post-assessment survey was completed at the end of the program in the spring quarter of 2016.

Table. 4

*Survey schedule*

<b>Pre-test survey completed</b>	<b>Post-test survey completed</b>
Fall 2014	Spring 2016

The LTSJ-B pre and post surveys were utilized for the purpose of tracking the changes in participants' understandings of social justice as well as for the purposes of triangulation. Triangulation strengthens the validity and reliability of a research study (Merriam, 2009) enabling a deeper understanding of phenomena under investigation, by providing additional evidence.

The developers of the LTSJ-B survey explain that measuring social justice is a complex matter, "this kind of measurement instrument presents only a partial picture of what it means to learn to teach for social justice" (Enterline et al., 2008, p. 273). This scale is intended to only study candidates' beliefs and perspectives, "it does not address classroom practice, relationships with parents and colleagues, content and pedagogical knowledge, advocacy for pupils and families, or pupil learning outcomes" (Enterline et al., 2008, p. 276).

They assure that "rigorous piloting, as well as consistent results over time and cohorts of candidates, has produced a scale that measures substantively meaningful changes in reported beliefs about teaching for social justice as candidates enter and exit a teacher education program" (Enterline et al., 2008, p. 286). Hollins and Guzman (2005) have found that most studies that



measure teacher candidates' beliefs in a social justice oriented teacher education program involve measurements that are over a short time period, such as after one course in a teacher preparation program. This pre and post assessment survey was suitable to my study because it entails a longitudinal design exploring entering and exiting notions and practices of social justice over the entire course of the teacher education program. Using this survey in addition to interviews enabled a closer examination of social justice conceptually. In the next section, I provide an overview of how the data has been analyzed

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed purposefully to respond to the research questions that guided the study (presented below). It was appropriate to start the analysis chronologically from the first interview to the fourth interview to capture the evolution of notions and practices of social justice.

#### *Research questions*

1. What are the teacher candidates' initial conceptions of social justice before they start their course of study?
2. What are the teacher candidates' initial beliefs about putting into practice their conceptualizations of social justice before they start their course of study?
3. Do teacher candidates' conceptions of social justice change after their first year in the program?
4. Do teacher candidates' practices of social justice change after their first year in the program?
5. Do teacher candidates' conceptions of social justice change after their second year in the program?
6. Do teacher candidates' practices of social justice change after their second year in the program?

It is important to note that I did not observe teacher candidates' practices, but relied on their self-reports to analyze how they had applied their understandings of social justice into practice.

### *Group thematic analysis*

My initial analysis entailed reading through each participant's interview transcription and mining for broad themes and categories for each response from each interview question. For example, at the first interview, Alice's response to the interview question, *What does social justice mean to you? How would you define it?* was characterized as such:

I think a lot about systemic inequity and structures that make systemic inequity happen and acknowledging how each of us plays a role in that, so it was really important to me to find a program that was taking a broad look than just like what are we doing in the classroom because students experiencing success is a lot more than what happens in that space. Taking a look at all the structures that are acting upon our students and how we can work with them to fight against those and how we are making classrooms safe and productive, especially students of color.

I coded this definition under the label of *recognizing structural inequality*. Then I found more participants defining social justice in terms of structural inequality. Robin's definition matched the theme:

*What does social justice mean to you? How would you define it?*

Robin: Social justice...(paused) it means recognizing that there are inequalities in the education system, in our government in politics in everything, and recognizing that you can change those you can address them and show other how to address them, make sure there is dialogue about them so that eventually they can disappear.

I changed the initial theme from *recognize structural inequality* to *recognize and challenge structural inequality* in order to label more precisely the responses under this theme. After grouping many of the similar responses together, I realized that the most inclusive theme is *recognize inequality*. Under this new and broader theme, I included *structural inequality*, *historical inequality*, *educational resource inequality* and even *recognize and challenge inequality*.

After thematizing and grouping each interview question from every interview, I created a table with the dominant themes (see Table 5). I only asked participants to define social justice in the first, second and fourth interviews. I didn't inquire about their notions of social justice in the third interview for two reasons: first, the third interview (which took place in August, at the beginning of their second year) focused primarily on their plans for putting social justice into practice. Second, their second interview had taken place two months earlier in June, (at the end of the spring quarter) at which point they had defined social justice. A two month gap, for their summer break didn't seem to be a significant time difference within which they would have altered their notions of social justice.

Creating tables allowed me to study the major themes underlying the definition of social justice, practices of social justice and participants' teaching philosophies (see Table 7). I engaged in cross analysis between these variables. For example, I realized that participants' teaching philosophies were disconnected from their conceptions of social justice. I had assumed that notions of social justice would be integrated into teaching philosophies instead of remaining as separate and co-existing conceptions. I analyze this in greater depth in Chapter 6.

Subsequently, I laid out all four interview responses to the same questions (definition of social justice, practices and teaching philosophy) for each participant and searched for patterns, similarities and differences. This form of data organization enabled me study how participants individually have evolved from their first to their last interview.

To sum up, I engaged in a constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify emerging themes. Labels were created for each question, from every interview, and the responses were grouped together. The labels were either changed or clarified for the purposes of better linking the embedded conceptions together. The goal was to find mutually exclusive and

conceptually congruent categories (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175-187) for each theme. To get a broader picture of the major themes and be able to cross analyze, tables were created to plot each theme for each participant, in each interview.

I focused on the following six questions which correspond to the study's research questions:

1. What is your teaching philosophy?
2. What does social justice mean to you? How would you define it?
3. Has your understanding of social justice changed since the beginning of your first year?
4. Has your understanding of social justice changed since the beginning of your resident year?
5. How do you plan to integrate social justice teaching strategies into your practice?
6. How have you integrated social justice teaching strategies into your lessons in concrete/practical ways?

Lastly, I wrote about the dominant themes chronologically and selected vignettes from the transcribed interviews to descriptively represent each theme.

### *Case study analysis*

The data was analyzed in two ways, as a thematic group analysis (see Chapter 6) which included all twelve participants' responses, and individual case studies (see Chapter 5) involving three participants with low, medium and high levels of entering understandings of social justice in education. The case studies were analyzed separately. The purpose was to identify the uniqueness of each case and show in greater detail and levels of clarity the changes in participants' understandings and practices of social justice. The uniqueness was determined by participants *entering* conceptions of social justice from being completely unaware of social justice, representing the majority of the participants' entering beliefs of social justice and demonstrating high levels of awareness of social justice. The case studies helped reveal the

development and evolution of notions and practices of social justice with detail and nuance, otherwise unavailable from group analysis (see Chapter 5).

### *Survey analysis*

Administering the survey served the purposes of cross verifying and triangulating the primary data from the interviews. The survey was analyzed qualitatively; (see Chapter 7), examining the two question sets separated into *easy to endorse* and *difficult to endorse* items. The findings were cross analyzed with the conclusions drawn from the case studies and the group thematic analysis.

### *Researcher reflexivity*

The researcher, the research process and the knowledge construction are inevitably interconnected. Researcher reflexivity is the recognition that meaning making is a jointly constructed and contextual process. Merriam (2009) points out that the “interviewee-responder interaction is a complex phenomenon” (p. 109), involving factors that influence how much information will be revealed in an interview: such as, insider-outsider status, the skill level of the interviewer, social identities (race, gender, socioeconomic class) personality, age, attitudes, predispositions and biases of both the interviewer and the interviewee (pp.107-109). In this reflective analysis, I focus mostly on the power dynamics between me and the participants.

Acknowledging the power dynamics between the researcher and the participants doesn't dissolve or reduce the influences but instead informs how every stage of the research process is impacted by it. In this study, participants hold slightly lower power positions in academic standing (I am pursuing my Ph.D degree and the teacher candidates are pursuing their Master's degree). Like them, I am also a graduate student, and not a faculty researcher in their program. I

am not in a position to evaluate or test their learning and practices. I am also closer in age with most of the participants.

Additionally, as an ethnic woman of Armenian descent (being both white skinned and ethnic), my identity has influenced the notions of social justice that White and students of Color have shared with me. Since our identities are fluid and evolving, it is hard to assume exactly how my identify has intersected with my data collection. Nonetheless, the power relation between participants of Color and myself was destabilized by being able to identify on certain aspects of my ethnic identity and immigrant educational background. Similarly, I related to White students in terms of age and through our mutual parental status. My intense interest in social justice connected me to both White and students of Color despite our differences.

Overall, I recognize that I have been in a position of power throughout the research process. First of all, I had institutional access to participants at their orientation, maintain full control over the direction of the study and accrue the most benefit from this research. Seidman (1991) has rightfully noted that “the interviewing relationship is fraught with issues of power-who controls the direction of the interview, who controls the results, [and] who benefits” (p. 76). Although, I stand to gain more from the participants’ interviews, this study has also been beneficial for the participants as well as for the UCLA’s TEP. First, the routine interviews allowed participants the additional space to articulate and reflect on their notions and practices of social justice. They were challenged to reflect on how their evolving notions get applied to their practice. Their reflections were more authentic and unfiltered since they were not being evaluated. By the second interview, four participants had shared how comfortable it had been to talk to me. At the last interview almost half expressed how this study had given them the chance to reflect on their learning experiences.

Truth said: It's always so nice to reflect on these with you and talk about this stuff, I always see this much more clear when I go back and talk about it, I usually don't talk about it to anybody, and its nice when you have to ask the questions and I have to reflect, it is hard to reflect and talk about it, but it is like working with one of the advisors. You clarify yourself, you reflect on it, you think about it, you go deeper and more critical about it. You are more clear. Especially, when it's repeated back to you, so thank you!

Andy noted: I actually really appreciated this whole process, ... I feel honored to get to be in this process. Who talks to resident teachers? Not really anybody, other than resident teachers and the professors. Oh thanks, you care... you care about what we are doing. It was nice to have someone to care about what we were doing.

Robin: I think that this talking to you throughout the two years has been very helpful, I was able to reflect what I am doing, even leaving you afterwards, what do I think about social justice and seeing it in the classroom and being able to talk to you again. It was helping my praxis a little bit. I feel like TEP should do something like this every year with students, all of them, like a beginning interview and an exit interview and somewhere in between just so that we are reflecting and seeing hey did I grow at all. This has been very helpful.

Sulley: I learned a lot by coming to your interviews, I always had to reflect on the questions you asked me about what did I actually do, what did I actually learn, it was really helpful thank you.

Alice: Its always so good talking to you. This heightened self awareness of participants' notions and practices is aligned with teaching for social justice. Participants benefited from the space that was created to truthfully reflect on their learning and practices of social justice.

Second, the UCLA's TEP also benefited from this study. Learning how teacher candidates' notions and practices of social justice evolve served as an assessment instrument. The program can compare its conceptual and practical learning objectives, with the participants learning outcomes/takeaways to further theorize on possible gaps and discrepancies. The TEP leadership team approved my study noting that "everyone agreed that it represents important work, aligned with the vision and mission of TEP" (K.H. Quartz, Personal Communication, 2014). Furthermore, upon completing my dissertation, I will be making a presentation at the faculty meeting with all teacher educators and advisors on relevant findings that were not addressed in this study. Findings related to candidates' overall teaching experiences (not related to social justice) and their beginning expectations and continual need for support from the program.



## Chapter 5: Three Case Studies

In this chapter, I provide a descriptive analysis of three teacher candidates: one participant who started with a high commitment to social justice, another with no commitment to social justice and lastly, one participant who was in between. With more depth and detail, I analyze the evolution of their concept of social justice and the ways in which they engage social justice as a practice.

The two teacher candidates, Truth and Sulley, who were either highly committed or not at all committed to social justice education, respectively, are an anomaly. While Sulley entered the program without any knowledge, experience or exposure to educational inequity or the concept of social justice, Truth's educational background and career had been deeply rooted in the realities of discrimination and marginalization. Although they don't represent the rest of the participants who fall somewhere between these two extremes, the examples of Truth and Sulley enable us to see how a social justice oriented teacher education program impacts candidates such as these. The third participant, Luna represents the majority.

In the next section, I introduce the three participants; recount, explore and critique their notions and practices of social justice based on four interviews, starting with Sulley who entered the program without any knowledge of what social justice is, or the affects it has on education.

### Sulley

#### *Candidate profile*

Sully identifies herself as an Asian/Taiwanese, heterosexual and low income female. Her mother who is a teacher in Taiwan influenced her decision to become a teacher. She immigrated to the U.S. 9-10 years ago and is pleased to have had the chance to get a public education and be

successful. Sulley stated: “I got to learn English, everybody uses this language now, I was happy and pleased that I can actually be here [in the U.S.] and pursue my education here, I want to give back to my community, public school gave me the chance to succeed, now I want to give back, that’s the reason I want to teach.”

Her teaching experience has been through the STEP program. She specializes in Math for secondary education. She has taught a pre-calculus course in high school and has been a private tutor for 6 years, tutoring for SAT’s and homework. She notes that she is much more effective one-on one because “you can see what they [students] have trouble with and you can target it, but for the class setting, you can’t assess where the individual students are at.” She chose this teacher education program because it’s highly ranked and she said “I think for my parents UCLA is a big name, I always wanted to go here.”

#### *First interview*

She admitted to her naiveté about social justice issues and explained the reasons as follows: “I wasn’t born here, I didn’t know what was going on with the education system, now I got a little background... my thought was my parents finally had a chance to send me here [school in the U.S.] so I gotta work hard, I didn’t even know what was going on outside in the world.” When asked to define social justice, Sully responded: “I actually had to look up the word. I wasn’t understanding what social justice is” she explained, “I wasn’t aware of this, I lived here in Arcadia, the school is well off, I didn’t know what was going on... now I realize the schools here are different, depends on the district you are in.” She grew up believing that the American dream was a reality and that everybody has the same opportunities and chances to succeed.

Our first interview was conducted when she was three weeks into the program and even within this short time frame she had acquired a new understanding of social justice "now I understand that we don't all have the same opportunities and chances." She defined social justice in terms of a pervasive lack of educational opportunities that exist in low income communities.

During her three weeks into the program she had learned of practical social justice oriented strategies to implement in the classroom. She said "when we are doing word problems, I feel like I can create some problems that are related... incorporate issues in the problem, make it more relevant, [introduce] more real world themes."

### *Conclusion*

As this study has revealed, the candidates' educational and life experiences prior to entering the program impacted how they understood teaching for social justice. At this initial interview, Sulley conceptualized social justice in terms of equal educational opportunities. Her practice of social justice centered on relevant curriculum that incorporates social issues.

### *Second interview*

At the second interview, held at the end of the first year in the program, as with every other participant, Sulley expressed excitement about moving forward. She weighed in on the heavy workload but looked forward to the opportunity of being able to apply her knowledge in the classroom, "It's a lot of work, but it's good, it gets you to try to wanna do something new when you learn it, try to apply it."

Her understanding of social justice had narrowed to one concept, providing educational resources to enable academic achievement. She said "it's a lot more clear now ...now I realize

that it's this big systematic issue that affects the children. For me, I want to make sure when they are in my class they get what they are supposed to get, in terms of knowledge and material.”

When asked how she planned to put into practice her evolving concept of social justice, she spoke of her plan to seek resources outside of LAUSD, such as donations from nonprofit organizations to buy teaching materials like computers and document camera. Her willingness to seek out alternative methods of acquiring teaching materials reflects her commitment to actualize educational resource equality. It is clear that her notion and practices of social justice are aligned at this interview.

When asked if her understanding of social justice has evolved since the first interview, correspondingly, she discussed her evolution on this subject in terms of providing teaching materials and enhancing her students knowledge of math.

### *Conclusion*

Sulley's conception of social justice narrowed rather much. Her notion and practice of social justice is chiefly equated with providing resources for academic achievement. This minimizes the notion of social justice in education giving the misleading impression that equal resources are the answer to educational inequality. It mitigates the historical and institutional neglect, deficit ideology and racism that continue to enable educational inequity.

Her understanding of social justice had evolved from the time before she came into the program as well as from her first interview. She has grown to identify educational injustice in terms of unequal opportunities (first interview) and more specifically in terms of educational resource inequalities (second interview). Again, the much narrow definition of social justice extenuates the possibilities and practices of social justice.

### *Third interview*

At the third interview, held right before the beginning of the second or resident year, the primary focus was on candidates' anticipated practices of social justice. Sulley was hired by the Arcadia School District, to teach 6<sup>th</sup> grade math. In the same school district she completed her education. Her residency school had mostly White and Asian middle class students and not the urban demographic she was trained for in her program.

Preparing for her resident year, Sulley admitted that she hadn't thought about ways to concretely incorporate social justice into her practice. She said, "honestly at this point, I haven't been thinking about that." Additionally, when asked to rate how heavily she will include strategies of social justice in her practice on a scale 1 to 5 (1 not at all and 5 heavily) she said: "I'd say 2 because there is a lot to worry about as first year teachers".

She conceptualized social justice in practice in terms of giving students choices: "I need to make sure students have autonomy, by that I mean, they get to choose—not what they wanna learn, we have a curriculum to follow—but they have choices." She broke down her pedagogical practices as follows: "some approach, I am doing now is, I give out homework assignments but they choose which one they wanna do. Students get to choose what they want instead of me always giving them stuff. Whenever we do word problems, instead of me talking a lot to hear the explanation, I am giving them the opportunity to speak up, to communicate with one another, to convince one another, to practice the mathematical stands we are trying, constructing your argument, providing evidence, backing up. This is helping my practice to be social justice."

### *Conclusion*

It is evident that the practice of social justice is not the lead concern for Sulley in her resident year. From her explanation of putting social justice into practice it can be inferred that

Sulley is relinquishing some power as a teacher, more specifically sharing her decision making power with her students by giving them some options and choices within the set curriculum. Giving students choices within the set curriculum makes her practice more student-centered as opposed to social justice oriented. The content remains traditional, uncontested and often unrelated, nonetheless, students get to make choices within these rigid boundaries. Autonomy defined in terms of allowing students to choose their homework or in class assignments reflects a limited understanding of social justice.

#### *Fourth interview*

At the fourth interview, held at the end of the second or resident year, Sulley had already completed the two year teacher education program. Recalling her resident year, she talked about the challenges of teaching as a first year teacher: “the first year you see something you never anticipated, you feel like you prepped for it but you didn’t. It’s a process you have to go through.” When asked to think about major takeaways from the program as a whole, she noted the concept of social justice as this program’s unique contribution to her education as an educator. She explained that although she did not end up teaching in an urban school, she still integrated social justice in her practice by giving her students voice: “for example when we do review, I let them talk a lot, what you wanna learn today, what you want to review on? Give them more opportunity to have a choice.” She was asked again to rate how heavily she included strategies of social justice in her practice on a scale 1 to 5 (1 not at all and 5 heavily) and her answer (2) remained the same as in the third interview.

In this concluding interview, her definition of social justice had changed. It reflected more of her experiences in her resident year. She defined it as “giving students choices, realize their situation, seeing what struggle they have, take ownership of their own learning not just

follow through the textbook and do what the teacher tells you to do.” She emphasized student choices and invariably, her definition aligned with her practice at this interview as well.

When asked how she had incorporated social justice into her practice, she explained that when setting up the classroom rules in the beginning of the year they incorporated community guidelines. Asking students: “what do you think a functional and effective classroom would look like, what do you think the teacher has to do, what do you think the students have to do.” She adds “we kind of came up with the rules together as a class, not just the teacher assigning the rules. Giving them the power, making them feel like they belong to the class, not just somebody who is just receiving the knowledge.” She also acknowledged the outcome of sharing her power with her students, “the kids wanna play around with you because you gave them that power.” However, she noted that if a student violated a class rule, another student would challenge their own classmate to follow the rules which was the outcome she was hoping for. The link between her definition of social justice “giving students choices” and practices of social justice “creating classroom rules as a class” is straightforward and aligned.

When asked how her understanding of social justice had changed post her resident year, she noted her ability to work outside of the mandated curriculum. The experiences of teaching during her resident year enabled her to bend some of the rigid curricular expectations, “follow what my admin had to tell me and do my own thing.” She engaged in the struggle of establishing her autonomous teacher identity, which traditionally left her without much power in her vocation. Her understanding of social justice post resident year was predicated on challenging the mandated curriculum, which restricted her attempt to establish a student centered practice. She also admitted that she lacked the practical knowledge of incorporating social justice

in her teaching practice, “I don’t know what to do” to be more social justice oriented. Seemingly, appropriating social justice notions into practice were still very challenging for Sully.

### *Conclusion*

Over the course of the four interviews, Sulley increasingly demonstrated conceptual understanding of social justice but her practical strategies were still underdeveloped and limited in scope. Her takeaways about social justice were more informative rather than explorative or practically experimental. Moreover, her lack of knowledge of educational disparities prior to entering the program influenced her practice of social justice in the classroom, because above all, she concentrated learning about the manifestation of social injustice in school and society, rather than, acts of defiance through her teaching practice.

It is noteworthy to mention that Sulley’s concept and practice of social justice, in each interview, closely corresponded with each other, further indicating her unison approach towards social justice.

In the next section, I introduce Truth Revealed who had the most commitment to social justice education from the initial interview. I chronologically present and analyze the evolution of her understanding and practices of social justice.

## **Truth Revealed**

### *Candidate profile*

The following excerpt beautifully introduces Truth Revealed and her motivation to become a social justice educator.



I always wanted to become a teacher when I was young, when you grow up you just gotta work, get a job, make money, but I got a job in the prison system here in California, I rushed through my education trying to advance. I came from a poor background, more poverty, you don't really have guidance, you just know you gotta get education to be successful in America. So when I went to the prison system I was overwhelmed at the number of Hispanics and Blacks from urban poor areas that I saw. I thought this is insane, there is something wrong but you don't know what it is. At first I was a correctional officer, the job is very dehumanizing to them, telling them when to get up and take a shower, when to brush their teeth, as if they can't figure this out themselves, but they can. The way it's done, it's not helping them. Everything is backed up, the services are backed up, the mental health is pills pills pills. It's not psychotherapy, like if I was going to go for therapy I would expect the therapist to dig down deep into my history and ask me questions, see me cry and express myself, whereas there, it's like here I am here to classify you and give you a pill because I have more people waiting. It's obvious that people come from disadvantaged areas and historically have been oppressed and their lives and families have been broken, you know a lot of substance abuse and drugs and prostitution just trying to survive, people are in survival mode in that area from being oppressed in American society. Throughout getting my education and working in there at the same time, I was shocked because I didn't grow up in America, I grew up mostly in Germany and when I came back to America like high school age, I didn't understand why people act the way they do based on skin color, it blew my mind that people look at my skin color and assume things about me. But if you grow up here, you, it's like you don't recognize it because you are so used to it. I think it was a blessing that

I got to leave America and come back and not get used to it, and know that there is something wrong. Because even people who do it with no bad intention, just do it because that's just how society is. Working in the prison system, going through the files and seeing all these histories and abuse and no one is getting help, treatment, cognitive therapy, no services, give them \$200 and a change of clothes and good luck. You really don't think this person is gonna go out and steal after the 200 is gone? It'll be gone in one day, as soon as he gets off the bus he has to go buy, where is he gonna stay most of the families don't want them to come back. I saw the breakdown in the files, no one had an education, when they were teenagers there was a break, somewhere in high school, middle school where they never finished school. And I thought there is the break in the system, if somehow we can catch them and lift them up, provide services when they are still children and we don't lock them up every single time they do a behavioral issue, that's just a reaction from a social problem and oppression, we can fix the problem, it seems like if everybody got on the same board at the educational part, man, the next generation would be a beautiful thing.

Truth's history with poverty and racism as well as her activist aspirations are well captured in the above biographical account. She describes herself as an African American/Black heterosexual female. Her content area specialty is social studies in secondary education. Her social justice commitment was born through her experiences working in the prison system. She made it her goal to promote education in urban communities to interrupt the mass incarceration of Black and Brown kids. She noted that her decision to pick this program was primarily because of its social justice focus.

### *First interview*

At the first interview, unlike any other participant, Truth radiated passion, thrill and genuine joy to be part of a program that emphasizes social justice as part of its mission. She was awaiting a transformation through the program “how can TEP help me feel like I can go out there and be transformational?” she asked. Referring to the keynote speaker’s speech at the TEP orientation, who had written a poem about revolution in education, she said “something is happening, a revolution, the universe is saying if you free up all that stuff, you are part of it.” She explained how the program made her feel excited about the possibilities of making a difference in this world: “I have a lot to offer, they make you feel that way, I have never felt that way in any other program.”

At the first interview, she defined social justice in terms of one big concept: humanizing education. Humanizing education is making students feel inclusive and not alienated from society, regardless of their language, religion or (ethnic) culture. She said “it should be un-American if you are saying and acting like there is only one culture” unfortunately, in reality “if you don’t have a lot of money, certain culture, certain race, you are not part of American society.” She explained that because of exclusion and racism students drop out of schools “that’s how I felt when I was in school, I thought I don’t belong here and I wanted to drop out and the teachers didn’t blink, and it’s like, drop, then now my classroom is quiet, everyone is obeying.” She recalled a personal story to exemplify how racism and deficit mentality can affect young urban students.

I had a teacher in eighth grade, I came back from Germany so I knew two languages, so I was really good with languages and Latin endings, I got the highest score in her class and I was the only black student and she told me [that] I was cheating, ‘she must have

cheated’, so she started looking at my desk at my hands, ‘she must have cheated’, then she made me retake the test and I took it again, and I got a higher score and I didn’t know she was being discriminatory against me, I thought I love taking tests, I love learning, I love languages, so I was like, sure, I’ll take it again. The second time she was looking at the desk and like ‘no way’. Then she just ignored me for like two semesters so I just dropped out of her Latin class. It was my favorite subject.

Truth earnestly disproves of the racism and neglect that is deeply saturated in urban schools “we gotta stop doing that, we gotta include everybody...we use the educational system to oppress” instead of cultivating acceptance and belonging.

When asked to explain how she planned to integrate her idea of social justice into practice, she discussed three strategies. First, she took up her own teaching style “I definitely want to be a teacher as a coach, instead of teacher as an authoritarian.” Second, encourage student-led activities and group projects. Third, teach students about the common link of oppression around the world, instead of only focusing on the urban struggles “sometimes we just get focused on urban fight ...there is other people oppressed over here and why are they oppressed here, why are they oppressed there, what are the common themes running there?”

### *Conclusion*

Truth’s starting understanding of social justice entailed a sweeping vision of inclusiveness and empowerment. Her practice of social justice was grounded in facilitating and guiding students in their learning, allowing them to take the lead in their learning and introducing them to overarching forms of oppression. While the major focus at the first interview was recounting how racism negatively affects students’ identities and educational future by reflecting on her own personal experiences, at the second interview, she grappled with ways to heal from it.

### *Second interview*

During our second interview, Truth was equally motivated and passionate about her engagement with social justice in education. At the start of the interview, she said “my experience overall has been really transformational in many ways, for me personally, the program offers a lot of opportunity for healing...teachers have caused so much trauma over the years. It was nice to heal with teachers.”

Her focus in defining social justice had narrowed from the first interview. She defined social justice by focusing on self reflection, critical awareness and the promotion of academic confidence among students. She said “social justice means getting an individual to want to do inner work...Inner work is raising awareness, when individuals have a higher awareness of what’s going on” and are “engaged and learning the curriculum, because the content relates to their lives, they care about what they are learning.” She also noted that students needed to realize “that they are capable, that they have potential.” She referenced personal struggles to highlight her assertion. Growing up she had no self empowerment, she was doubtful of her academic capabilities and even in graduate school she thought she wasn’t good enough for the teacher education program, “I was able to resolve that confidence in this program with teachers and getting rid of that trigger. I had so many open wounds. I get to heal with teachers.” Interestingly, healing through inner work and gaining confidence—which is her definition of social justice—are the forms of transformation she was experiencing at this point in the program.

Her understanding of putting social justice into practice focused on storytelling; creating media projects to tell stories relevant to students’ lives and experiences in their community. She explained that using the wide variety of media allows them to create and control their stories. She believes that media projects help students to be more vocal and get their message out more

successfully. Moreover, the way others respond to these untold stories will show the value of speaking out, “let them see how valuable their stories are as other people respond to their stories” She explained that many students deal with similar traumas and sharing them is a form of healing. It is through healing that many disenfranchised students will be able “to restore self worth and self value.”

When asked how her understanding of social justice has evolved after completing her first year in the program, Truth explained that she views social change differently now. Social change, she believes, must start from the students, if students find their passions and natural inclinations: “If more people focus on becoming better in whatever it is that they are good at, looking at agency of what can be done, things just naturally start to work out better for everyone. People start caring, people start loving, people start sharing and giving because they release of whatever that was holding them back.”

### *Conclusion*

Her second interview response defining social justice indicates a more refined concept than initially articulated. She discussed the importance of engaging in inner work and critical self reflexivity, raising awareness of social issues and lastly, instilling academic confidence among urban students. Respectively, her practice of social justice centered on enabling students’ stories and lived experiences of injustice to be validated and vocalized in the classroom and through mediated forms.

### *Third interview*

The third interview took place two weeks before the start of Truth’s resident year. This interview focused largely on practices of social justice. When asked how she has prepared for teaching, she discussed her preparation for the school year as follows: “I did a little bit of

preparing for 10<sup>th</sup> grade history, modern, [and] world history. I looked at how would I do it, from what standpoint? What would be my essential question? The visuals in there, I am a very visual person. For history, I thought of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, I would go to that, I love that book, with my background oh man, it'll be beautiful."

Truth's residency was at a community day school for girls only, located in poverty stricken areas of South Central, Los Angeles. She was volunteering at the writing program. Her goal was to empower the girls through "a creative writing experience, getting them to valuing their own voice." What is unique about Truth's placement is that she purposefully sought out a school or a program that she felt she could contribute most to, unlike many other candidates who were determined to have employment at any school to fulfill their residency requirement. She said "if I was in a place where everybody was doing ok, they are gonna be ok, I would have no passion to be there."

When asked to consider if her practice is social justice oriented she confidently, said "yes, definitely". There was no doubt in her mind that all her efforts and commitments in and outside of school were social justice oriented. When asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 how heavily her practice would include social justice practices, she didn't hesitate to say 5 (meaning heavily). She explained, "I would definitely say 5, I know they want us to go towards LAUSD but I was looking at the programs, charters that work with 'at risk' students, who have already dropped out or have been ordered by court to be in that classroom, I wanna work with them, that's where my heart is." Similarly, at the fourth interview, she reaffirmed heavily using practices of social justice (5) and restated "if I am not doing entirely social justice than I am not interested."

Similar to her approach of enacting social justice in the second interview, Truth discussed how media texts best enable her to engage in critical discussions about topics such as unity, poverty and civility. She gave an example of a music video called “Welcome to America” by Lecrae that she had presented for a class assignment, noting how powerfully it challenged issues related to “the military complex, the prison complex, our justice system, [and]immigration” she said “his video is powerful, it can lead into a lot of American history, world history and modern day politics.” She also explained that engaging critically with media will prompt students to respond back with their own counter narratives, “motivate them with what I show them and see what they can come up with.” Her strategies of enacting social justice in both the second and third interviews focus on critical media literacy and honoring the voices of students whose stories are not normally recognized in the mainstream media.

### *Conclusion*

Truth’s practice of social justice is embedded in empowering students’ lived stories of oppression to be acknowledged and addressed. She believes that using media as a medium for disseminating counter narratives heightens critical consciousness’ and supports the healing process.

### *Fourth interview*

At the fourth interview, held at the end of the two year program, Truth reflected back on her experiences in the program to highlight some of the major influences in her transformative educational experience. She first, mentioned influential works such as Shawn Ginwright’s *Hope and Healing in Urban Education*, Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Duncan-Andrade’s body of literature, as well as the program’s advisors themselves, that have played



prominent roles in her growth and success. She appreciated how her advisors connected teaching with storytelling, love, critical awareness and social justice.

In this last interview, Truth defined social justice in terms of *care* and giving *voice* to students. She said:

I would define it as caring; we are human in the classroom and we are dealing with fragile human beings, we have to care, we have to be critical and let people express themselves. They came here to express something unique. We want them to express, write and read and function. We want to care about their stories. It matters. My story affects the way I work in the world, their stories affect how they see themselves in the world. It's caring, being human.

She recollected her struggles dealing with her teachers' neglect and lack of care to offer support when she had lost her father. "When I was in high school, I lost my father and no one cared, no place in the classroom for anyone to care that you lost a parent. It's like, it's not mentioned, 'broken relationships and being abused and neglected'. These things I went through teachers didn't ask anything personal, they don't care."

It is these personal experiences that illuminate for Truth what social justice is in education; caring for students and healing through storytelling. As a result of having lived through the struggles of poverty, educational neglect, outright racism and internalized oppression, she has realized how inspirational her story of resilience and triumph can be for students who are currently facing those realities. Referring to teachers in urban schools she said, "it matters if you hire someone who has experiences in trauma, violence and broken relationships and has healed and transformed and they wanna be in that space to do the same in urban areas.

It's a valuable thing that's hard to find." Truth's understanding of social justice always has a referential meaning.

Her material practices of social justice were aligned with her definition of social justice. She further clarified this alliance as "listening, to hear their [students'] story, to acknowledge it, to be present." She explained that her "lesson plans were all based off of personal prompts" to encourage students to tell their stories, form a community in the classroom and find "collective hope." Similar to the first three interviews, where she spoke of giving voice to students' personal stories, in the last interview Truth further reiterated this as her way of enacting social justice. She also admits to the difficulties that arise from allowing oneself to be vulnerable in the classroom which causes intense emotions.

When asked how her concept of social justice has evolved since the beginning of her resident year she explained how it became more personal for her. She said that at a conference a new recognition had dawned on her, and she inscribed that moment as follows:

I was thinking it's really our own thing that we went through, kind a like a story of the lady who couldn't get medical care for her family and watched her family die, and she became a doctor, because she never wanted anyone to ever go through that again. So social justice became finding that, in ourselves, this personal thing that we have dealt with, our soul had a mission to deal with it, so we can go out in the world and be that. The soul comes first in this journey and then you have to find a theory to articulate. Social justice is so personal to everyone.

Her understanding of social justice had evolved by her becoming aware that she needs to personalize her efforts of enacting social justice.

*Conclusion*

Over the course of the four interviews Truth remained excited and hopeful about the possibilities of empowering young urban students through education. Gradually, her understanding and practice of social justice all aligned, honoring students' voices and histories of injustice. Creating a space in an academic environment to voice personal stories of trauma, violence, poverty, neglect and racism to start the process of healing.

Interestingly, her healing transformation through this program also occurred through self-reflection, storytelling and the critical theories that were part of the formal curriculum as well as the advisors that supported her throughout. Truth's understanding and practices of social justice were all seamlessly linked to her personal history. Her experiences growing up in an urban school, in a broken family, and then working in the prison system, constantly dealing with social and institutional racism, in addition to her identity as a mother of three children and someone who leads a spiritual life and holds highly accomplished credentials, Truth is both an insider and an outsider, who is healing and offering a hand to heal. Her enthusiasm and passion for the work she aims to engage in is unparalleled when compared to the other participants in the study.

### **Luna**

Luna represents the majority of the participants in the program. Many of the participants were already aware of the concept of social justice and had applied to the program particularly for its social justice emphasis. Even within this majority, some were more versed, articulate and aware while others were less experienced and uninformed about social justice compared to Luna. In addition to her centrist understanding of social justice among the group, I chose to share her experiences because her efforts of enacting social justice in her resident year are rather distinctive.

### *Candidate profile*

Luna describes herself as a Mexican American, straight, low income female. Her subject area specialty is multiple subjects for elementary education. Her formal teaching experience includes volunteering in urban elementary, middle and high schools in San Jose for the duration of a year. She has worked at a childcare center as a teacher's assistant and then as a teacher for over a year.

Although it is a cliché, she said "I have always wanted to teach as long as I can remember." She loves working with children, she especially, wants to "help her community, the Latino community because, there is a of lot immigration issues and tension and many disadvantages of not being educated" she wants to learn how she can return to her community "and be of support and help and break a lot of the negative cycles." She felt safe enough with me to share that she is undocumented and that is the reason she couldn't pursue any jobs after college.

### *First interview*

In the first interview, she explained that her definition of social justice had already evolved in the three weeks she had been in the program. She said, "before I would say equal opportunity for everyone" but now it's "providing the different tools needed to each student to succeed along with everyone else." Her understanding of social justice is framed within an instructional approach that academically accommodates underserved students to achieve scholastic success.

When asked about how she planned to enact social justice in the classroom, she discussed two concepts. First, "getting to know the students" which involved "observations, [and] spending one on one time with them" and second, establish partnerships with their parents,

“getting feedback from families, that’s a huge part of the partnership” so that learning and teaching is more effective.

As is evident, her initial understanding and practices of social justice were limited to instructional differentiation and building relationships with students and parents.

### *Second interview*

At the start of our second interview, Luna briefly reflected on her experiences of student teaching. She observed major differences between her two guiding teachers in the same school; one teacher who was a UCLA TEP alumni and one who wasn’t. She noted:

In my first placement [with UCLA TEP guiding teacher] there was a lot of community building and lack of it in the other class. I saw a lot of collaboration between 1st graders [UCLA TEP guiding teachers’ class] they were for the most part trying to look after each other and help each other. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3rd grade, I saw a lot of chattering, wanting to get called on, wanting attention, kind of like stepping over each other to get to the top.”

Observing two classes with and without a social justice orientation crystallized the differences among students’ behavior and collaborative work.

In this second interview Luna provided the same definition of social justice; meeting students’ different needs “finding equitable opportunities for students, differentiating every child in every classroom ...making sure that I know what those needs are, providing the opportunities where they can all be at the same playing field.” She also highlighted the importance of enabling students’ voices to be heard, saying “finding multiple entryways for everybody to have their voice heard.” Her aim was rooted in differentiating rather than critical notions of being heard. She was referring to students who don’t like to speak up in class, but could still have another venue for self expression.

When asked about her practices of social justice she explained two approaches: first, establishing partnerships with parents, and second, using media as a way to develop critical questioning. First, she discussed engaging parents in school projects and offer herself to serve as a ‘parents’ center’ of sorts even for non school related needs. She said “finding the communication with parents from the beginning, I need your help, whether its help with a project or talking about their occupation.” But, moreover, “ parents can come to me as a resource, if the schools don’t have a parents’ center and they need help with whatever it is, if it’s an immigration issue and I need to talk to a lawyer and be like here is this resource in the community you can go to.” It is evident that she was determined to establish partnership with parents beyond the interests of her students’ academic success and more committed to serving the community of her students.

Second, she discussed her plans of incorporating media analysis to enhance students’ critical thinking. Teaching students to question who creates media messages, what messages are communicated, whose perspectives are dominant and who is represented. Her goal was “finding the mesh between both how to make these academic by incorporating reading, writing and math and doing it strategically and with a purpose.” In many ways, she had an integrated practice in mind; justifying the critical content against the mandated standards.

When asked about how her concept of social justice had evolved over the past academic year, she expressed being more aware of how social justice transpires in practice. “I had a more conceptual understanding of it before but being in a class [student teaching] I can see it. It’s nice to see it in play, in action.” Seeing social justice in action meant being aware of it theoretically as well as understanding the strategic implications of all the small decisions the teacher makes in the classroom. She referenced as an example “the books you choose to bring,” the topics a

teacher chooses to discuss, the opportunities a teacher finds to talk about injustice instead of dismissing it. She had witnessed her guiding teacher avoid opportunities to discuss explicit gender stereotypes voiced by students in the classroom, “my former guiding teacher was reading a book and one of the characters had a [male dominant] occupation and the kids were like why is that girl doing that?...she did not talk about it.” Luna mentioned another incident with a substitute teacher: “there was a sub once, a girl said I like to play a video game and the sub said ‘oh video games are for boys.’” She admitted that it is easier to notice these missed opportunities as an observer “than when you are doing the teaching.” She had become more aware of these practical applications of social justice and seemed more responsive to engage in dialogue about stereotypes. Clearly, her student teaching experiences advanced her understanding of actualizing social justice into practice in the classroom.

### *Conclusion*

In the second interview, Luna’s definition of social justice had remained the same; incorporating instructional differentiation. Another repeating concept from the first interview was parental involvement which she elaborated in much more detail. Her social justice practice was conceptualized in terms of engaging in critical media analysis and discussions challenging stereotypes.

### *Third interview*

At the third interview, which largely focused on Luna’s practice of social justice, Luna was already attending professional development at her new school site. She was hired by a relatively new charter school, teaching fourth grade students. Here is what she noted about the school “it’s very specific, the school’s mission is rigorous academics to get students to college and what I like about P.D. is that we are talking about specifics, in terms of expectations,

procedures, routines and we also have a curriculum.” Although, she seemed pleased to learn about the school’s straightforward expectations, later in the interview she shared her struggles with their disciplinary policy. She also disagreed with the premature assumptions about students’ anticipated misbehavior in the classroom. The principle and most teachers had assumed behavioral issues from students they hadn’t worked with before. She explained:

there are 7 teachers, 4 of them including the principle used to teach, *Teach for America*, but their teaching is based on teaching in other states, with other students, not necessarily in LA, so I feel there is a misconception that whatever behaviors they saw, they are gonna see it here, it may be true, but I don’t think it’s correct to assume that.”

When asked if she had thought of concrete ways to integrate social justice into her practice, she said “yeah, that’s gonna be challenging... the lessons are very scripted and very planned, I want the lessons to be more relevant, so once we get the detail done, she [the principle] will let us use our own reading material.” She explained how she has an elective period which will allow her to incorporate more critical content. She said “we are gonna have an interim period like our elective, where I will bring a lot of stuff I learned.”

She talked about two approaches for incorporating social justice in the classroom; daily community circles and relevant curriculum. Luna explained that community circles would promote friendships in the classroom and make the learning environment more congenial. She also mentioned learning about her students as much as possible to create curriculum relevant to their interests. She said, “the majority of the students are Latino from Central America and African American. I want to get to know them and do a survey to learn what they are interested [in] to help me guide what I chose for them to read.” For Luna, relevant curriculum and classroom community through friendships encompassed social justice in practice.



## *Conclusion*

Luna's practice of social justice is clearly aligned with the previous interviews. She still privileged building community in and outside the classroom and integrating relevant content in the curriculum as a way of enacting social justice.

## *Fourth interview*

During the fourth interview, like many participants, Luna discussed the general challenges of first year teaching. However, she was proud to admit that even though social justice oriented teaching was not encouraged at her schools site, she didn't lose sight of her intention to work towards her vision of social justice, "not letting go of our intentions even when the space is not there, creating that space to create the community that we want and not letting go of something that we believe in."

In this last interview, Luna defined social justices in terms of engaging students in critical and relevant content "social justice is creating this space to talk about tough issues," meaning teaching about stereotypes and generalizations.

When asked how this concept of social justice had changed after her resident year she said, "I understand what it is and throughout the year I have been able to put it into practice. It went from what it should be, to what am I doing to make it happen." Like many participants, Luna started to understand social justice more practically and even technically.

She shared three approaches for putting social justice into practice during her resident year; first, making her curriculum culturally relevant, second, establishing community and becoming an advocate for her students. First, she talked about integrating culturally relevant curriculum as a way of enacting social justice. She said "I created my last unit on immigration and they loved it."

I went from being very scared and not sure what I am doing to taking ownership, like ok this is what gets them engaged and this is what gets me motivated, ...I had a curriculum I had to use, that was not very engaging, so going with my intuition and creating my own lesson plans; like immigration and Donald Trump making these crazy remarks, it's so relatable to them, a lot of them have undocumented parents, 'what if he gets elected?' 'what's going to happen to my parents?'

She further detailed what her unit on immigration entailed. She had used Rene Colato's books that all have a theme related to immigration:

My unit was based around his books, one of them was about a boy who lives in San Diego and the mother gets deported to Tijuana, so the boy and father travel to Tijuana to visit mom. The book ends with the possibility that mom might come home one day. My kids didn't like that ending and because they wanted a happy ending to this story, one of my kids asked if they can write an ending to this story. Absolutely! They wrote their own ending using details from the text and things they knew from their parents and they shared them and read them in front of class.

Luna also shared how her students' writings were sent to the author and he sent in a video telling them he had read their endings and encouraged them to grow as writers. She noted that this relevant and critical assignment was very engaging for students.

Second, she discussed how establishing a community in her classroom had been one of the most rewarding takeaways for her. Community building in the classroom meant "being very respectful while students are critiquing each others' work, like non judgmental critique, working with partners or small groups" she noted that engaging students in fun activities served as ice breakers for them "so when we ask to work in groups and partners when they really know each

other that creates a stronger foundation for collaborative work.” She summed up “what a difference that makes in the classroom to create respect and empathy for each other.”

Third, she discussed advocating for a student who was being neglected and mistreated by the school. This student, Nelson (pseudonym) needed special attention because he likely had ADHD. She said I suggested maybe he has ADHD, the special ED teacher says, ‘of course he does’ then why don’t we tell the parent? Well if we suggest it, we have to pay for it.” She said “It made me so mad, we provide so many accommodations, they just isolate him and punish him [instead of providing the help he needs].” She explained how she was the only person who would look out for him. Other teachers complained about his behavior and expressed cruel and malicious comments such as “he is gonna end up in jail or kill someone” whereas the student didn’t have disciplinary issues in Luna’s class.

She brought up another incident during a school field trip where she had taken responsibility to chaperon Nelson who was otherwise banned from attending the field trip. She thought “there is only one opportunity to go to the Wallis [Performing Arts Theater] in Beverly Hills, I said, he will be with me the whole time and he was fine.” Time after time she alone had stepped up to defend Nelson as other teachers and the principle neglected to accommodate his needs and only reprimanded his behavior. Luna had found yet another opportunity to advocate for Nelson when she sat down to renew her contract with her principle at the end of her resident year. She told her “I don’t think Nelson needs to be retained. I said he needs accommodations to learn, she heard me, that it’s our responsibility.” It is apparent that Luna’s persistence to not give up and fight for a student even though her colleagues and principle continued to deny help is telling of her strong sense of commitment to fairness. Luna was in a school environment that

did not foster social justice values, yet her efforts of integrating critical content, building community, and advocating for the mistreatment of her student is exceptional.

### *Conclusion*

In each interview, Luna had articulated strong connections between her understandings and practices of social justice. Her social justice conceptions and practices progressively grew and expanded in each interview. Her core beliefs of community building, pedagogical equity, critical and relevant curriculum, and lastly care and advocacy seamlessly molded and solidified her social justice oriented teaching practice.

### **Overarching Conclusions**

These detailed narrative accounts inform us of three findings: First, candidates' notions and practices of social justice are most impacted if their entering beliefs about social justice are already strong. Second, participants' strong social justice notions were mostly established and impacted by their personal histories. Third, participants who had strong commitments to social justice searched for their own ways of contributing to the practice of social justice.

### *Strong entering beliefs, strong commitment*

First, candidates who already have strong commitments, like Truth, and those at a more intermediate level such as Luna, integrated social justice into their practice more thoroughly, as compared to a candidate whose entering beliefs and understanding of social justice were not so firm, as is evident with candidate Sulley.

Sulley's notions of social justice expanded but remained disconnected from her teaching practice in terms of deliberate integration of social justice strategies in her practice. Remarkably, Sulley's intention to continue engaging with social justice in her practice was very strong. Her

main takeaway from the program was her newfound awareness of social justice oriented teaching practice. It is interesting to see that although her conceptions and practices of social justices were limited, her commitment to become a social justice educator was strong. It is important to note that for those candidates who are being exposed to social justice education (including theory and methods of application) for the very first time, the program impacts their commitment to aspire towards a social justice practice. How quickly and vigorously they adapt a social justice practice depends on their teaching experience, school climate, support systems and ongoing self-reflection. Enacting a social justice practice does not happen within a single program it is an ongoing, intentional and collaborative process.

Truth experienced the most transformation in the program and she had the highest entering level of commitment. As early as the end of the first year, she said “my experience overall has been really transformational in many ways, for me personally, the program offers a lot of opportunity for healing.” Healing for her was overcoming internalized deficit ideology about her academic capabilities “I had a hard time thinking I am good enough to do this, [TEP] I was able to resolve that confidence in this program.” Besides undergoing personal transformation, her theoretical understanding had expanded and her practice was also enriched. She mentioned social justice theories and concepts that had the most impact on her thinking, such as the notions of agency, healing and storytelling through media messages. She sought out specific opportunities for teaching disempowered and disenfranchised youth who had been through the criminal justice system so that her experience and knowledge can have the most impact on them. She couldn’t envision herself doing anything else but social justice oriented practice “now, I can never ever do something I don’t wanna do, go back to do something I don’t want to do, I am working with people I wanna work with and it’s so powerful.”

Luna's notions and practices of social justice were also highly impacted. Luna had selected UCLA's program because of its focus on urban schools in low income communities, she said " I connected with that, because that's what I wanted to do, that's what I have been trying to do all along." Her increased social justice commitment became evident as a result of her acts of resistance in day to day classroom teaching. Luna was placed in a school with little administrative support for the practice she aimed to forge. Instead of feeling powerless, her story illustrates efforts of integrating social justice into a traditional classroom. She incorporated critical media literacy and discussions of stereotypes and generalizations into the mandated curriculum. She was critically reflective of even the smallest decisions she had to make in class "who to call to the board" as well as establishing a community in the classroom as the foundation for future collaborative work. Her unwavering advocacy to stand up for her student and demand access to treatment is another example of her resolute commitment to social justice. Unlike traditional classrooms, she attended to her students' emotional needs instead of dismissing them as non academic matters. Lastly, she had assumed a role of a counselor and a therapist:

There was this instance where we had a deep community circle a student asked me 'can we talk about something we are worried about?' She shared being worried that her neighbor's house, it got caught on fire and she is wondering if they are ok.

Another student who is very positive and always shares these positive stories, he ended up sharing he was worried about his dad drinking too much and mom didn't wanna live with him anymore but was staying because dad was the provider of the family.

It can easily be concluded that the teacher education program also impacted Luna's –who had intermediate entering beliefs of social justice commitment and vast practices of social justice.

*Social justice commitment stems from personal history*

The second conclusion of the case studies reveals that participants' strong social justice beliefs and practices were mainly influenced by their personal histories. Sulley had not personally experienced oppressive realities, nor had she been aware of them. Sulley was also an immigrant, presumably documented, (unlike Luna) but she lacked the personal reference of marginalization. She had attended an affluent school in a well off community. Learning about social and educational injustice for the first time during her graduate studies made her cognitively motivated to contribute to change. Whereas, Truth and Luna had either worked in or had gone through the urban education system, and had seen their communities suffer from structural oppression such as unfair immigration laws, reckless incarceration of men of Color, poverty, lack of resources and opportunities. Their ardent commitments to contribute to change were personally driven.

Truth's personal, educational and employment history had illuminated for her the underlying problems of marginalization based on race and class. Her first hand knowledge of racism and classism had emboldened her to pursue a teacher education program aimed at making a difference. At the first interview she had said "how can TEP help me feel like I can go out there and be transformational?" Her embodied knowledge of being marginalized was an advantage in the program, because she didn't need to learn about injustice, but instead learn about forms of advocacy and activism.

Similarly, Luna had shared that her social justice commitment had stemmed from her aspirations to give back to her community. She said "for me living in California a lot of it has to do with culture, really helping my community the Latino community, there is a lot immigration issues and tension and many disadvantages of not being educated." As an undocumented student she has personally faced the limiting educational and social opportunities and those debilitating

feelings have inspired her to be a resource to a community who struggles with being undocumented. Her motivation to serve her students' parents by means of information sharing related to immigration laws and practices is personally bound.

*Personal attribution to social justice education*

The third conclusion of this study indicates that participants who were more committed to social justice searched for their unique attribution to the practice of social justice. This is best illustrated with Truth's and Luna's last interviews.

Truth explained "around February this year, social justice become really personal to myself. Last year it was just a thing we were doing, its wasn't personal where I could say this is me this is where I fit in, this is what I do, my soul wants to do. I couldn't find that. I was looking for it." Truth realized that her attribution is to offer healing to her students by showing them that she cares about them and that she wants to hear their stories. She said

there is a lot of students who go through the criminal justice system at a young age after they have lost someone, or have been abused and neglected and law enforcement [keeps] doing these raids and search[es] for no reason...They need healing not more trauma, the system doesn't care. As they get older they really believe that no one cares about them.... I want to work in the criminal justice system, because I think that those who are in there are a victim first, and if they heal they have a lot to offer.

She noted the reactions she gets relaying her interests to work with students with a criminal justice history. She said "I hear these guys speak from hopelessness and I encourage them and they pause, they are like no one ever says these stuff to us." Other reactions include shock and disbelief: "They are just shocked that I am there. Why are you here? You are coming from UCLA, it's so big and great. One lady said to me, don't waste yourself in a prison. Why is it



wasting ourselves in the prison, why are we throwing our life away. If I was in a place where everybody was doing ok they are gonna be ok, I would have no passion to be there.” Truth personalized her social justice efforts through what she called “healing pedagogy” for students who have had run ins with the criminal justice system. She primarily focused on healing from trauma and internalized racism.

Similarly, Luna found her personal attribution to social justice education through incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy. She explained “for example when I did the unit on immigration, there was so much participation, they all wanted to talk about it, because it was meaningful to their life.” In the beginning of her resident year she was “confused” following a mandated curriculum that was far distant and less engaging for her students. She said, “I went from being very scared and not sure what I am doing to taking ownership, like ok this is what gets them engaged and this is what gets me motivated.” She incorporated books and many discussions about immigration to engage her mostly Latino students. Luna’s heightened social justice commitment emboldened her to pursue a practice that was personally motivating and culturally relevant. Since, Sulley’s social justice practice was still developing there was no indication that she was making attempts to personalize her efforts of social justice.

To recap, analyzing the interview accounts of three participants with little to high levels of commitment—theoretically and practically—to social justice, it is evident that first, strong entering beliefs about social justice notions and practices are heightened in the program. Second, participants’ strong social justice notions were already mostly influenced by their personal histories. And lastly, participants with strong commitments to social justice searched and found ways of contributing to the practice of social justice that were true to them.

## Chapter 6: Social Justice in Theory and Practice

This chapter provides an analysis of two major concepts I had set to examine: defining social justice theoretically and social justice in practice. This study was only able to capture the changes that occurred during the necessarily limited time period of the study.

Unlike the individual case studies in the previous chapter, I explore these two concepts by utilizing a group analysis. The group consisted of 12 richly diverse participants. It included participants mostly from secondary education and one participant from primary, single and multiple subjects, social studies and math and sciences, as well as socially diverse in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation (see Table 2).

Overall, it was revealed that there was more clarity and growth among all participants about the concept of social justice from the time they started the program and finished the program. Participants either developed their initial notions, articulated them more clearly, or adapted new understandings of social justice in education. Social justice in practice yielded the same theme of *critical and relevant curriculum* in each interview. Nonetheless participants collectively came to integrate critical and relevant curriculum guided by students' personal histories of injustice.

Each of the two sections below-social justice definitions and social justice in practice-include an overview of the dominant themes that emerged in each interview chronologically, followed by a section conclusion. I begin by reviewing participants' definitions of social justice in the first interview, discussing the two dominant themes: recognize inequality and pedagogical equity.

## Social Justice Definitions

### *Interview 1*

Participants' starting conceptions of social justice were generally vague and one dimensional. Their understandings of social justice were limited to two notions: predominantly the recognition of inequalities and the promotion of pedagogical equity (see Table 5.1). First, I outline how their definition of social justice focused on recognizing inequalities.

### *Recognizing inequalities*

Participants discussed recognizing inequalities mostly from a structural perspective. Robin asserted that through recognizing inequality we can bring about change "recognizing that there are inequalities in the education system, in our government, in politics, in everything and recognizing that you can change those." Similarly, Alice explained that recognizing our involuntary involvement in the structural inequality is a step forward towards change: "I think a lot about systemic inequality and structures that make systemic inequity happen and acknowledge how each of us plays a role in that." Sarah gave an example of structural inequality such as the funding structure for schools being tied to income and property taxes jeopardizing equal education. Besides defining social justice as a way of recognizing structural inequality, participants had also brought up recognizing inequality in teacher-student relationships, inequality of resources in urban schools and recognizing the unequal treatment in society based on race, class and culture.

It is commonly known that the recognition of injustice is among the very first steps towards achieving social change. Subsequently, it is to be expected that participants define social justice as recognizing inequality at their first interview, because many are themselves learning

how to recognize institutional inequality in and outside of education. Although a majority (8 participants) defined social justice by recognizing existing educational and social inequalities some discussed the importance of achieving pedagogical equity.

### *Pedagogical equity*

While the above participants placed more emphasis on recognizing inequality, there were participants who defined social justice as pedagogical equity; the notion of accommodating students' learning needs and styles through instructional strategies. For example, Monique explained this concept well, referring to classroom instruction she said introducing new content needs to be cut "into pieces for them" or "spoon-feed" to them, to make it more accessible for students rather than just delivering new content. In other words, to disseminate academic content in ways that better meet students' learning styles. Similarly, Luna argued that meeting students' specific academic needs is what social justice is as opposed to offering equal education, she said, "before the orientation, I would say equal opportunity for everyone, now providing tools needed for students to succeed".

To reiterate, pedagogical equity is strictly bound to instructional strategies for accommodating students' academic needs. Although not explicitly stated, pedagogical equity promotes academic success and by extension opens up social and economic opportunities to historically underserved students. This is likely the motivation behind stressing pedagogical equity as a way of defining social justice. Recognizing that students have different needs and making an effort to address those needs are very important, but equity based on race, class, gender, privilege and power was absent from their definitions.

Additionally, participants equated pedagogical equity with social justice because for so long, urban teachers have operated from a deficit framework, lowering their expectations for

English language learners and the racially and economically underserved students that accommodating their different educational needs is now seen as a social justice intervention.

### *Conclusion*

Overall the participants defined social justice through two primary approaches: either recognizing social inequality or through promoting pedagogical equity. Their definitions of social justice mirrored their starting understandings of social justice, predicated on recognizing injustice. Additionally, they had conflated pedagogical equity with equity that embraces a critical notion of social justice signifying participants' limited starting understanding of social justice in education. In the next section, I analyze the data from the second interview. The second interview, produced much more intricate and wide-ranging responses to the question of defining social justice.

### *Interview 2*

At the second interview participants' articulations of social justice had expanded. Similar to the first interview, some of the dominant themes were repeated: such as recognizing inequalities and promoting pedagogical equity. Similar to the first interview, participants predominantly (8 participants), discussed recognizing inequalities but strongly emphasized academic success which was the difference from the first interview. Subsequently, at the second interview, the two new themes had emerged: agency and personal commitment to social justice (see Table 5.1). Two participants talked about student agency in terms of empowerment and voice and two other participants, focused on how social justice commitments must be personally motivated rather than be imposed upon teachers. In the subsequent, section I outline participants' second interview responses including repeated and new themes. First, I discuss the theme recognizing inequality and promoting academic success.

*Recognize inequalities and promote academic success*

Participants had defined social justice as recognizing inequalities in the first interview, similarly at the second interview; they also noted the importance of recognizing inequities with the difference of including academic success. Allan explained this connection well. His intent was to have his students:

Recognize some of the inherent flaws in society today, like the issues of institutionalized racism and white supremacy, that don't always necessarily get called into question.

Trying to get students conscious and critical about how society functions and what they can do to close a lot of these gaps in gender, ethnicity, in race and sexuality. It's kind of two fronts, if I can have them think through those ideologies and support those ideologies and grow as thinkers in that regard that's perfect but if they leave the classroom being able to think better, being able to articulate themselves better and really having access through those opportunities that they didn't have before that's another way in which social justice transpires.

For Allan social justice can be reflected either through students' academic success or through both academic success and critical awareness of social injustice. Similarly, Andy explained that promoting academic performance, which is another way of achieving social justice, doesn't need to focus on Eurocentric content but instead it can be more relevant and meaningful to the lives and histories of the students: "They need to be conscious human beings, be able to see how things tie in together, not just see things for face value but see the context and understand this is how I impact the world and someone else impacts the world. I am gonna try my best to put the latter first, if you use the [academic] content to build critical awareness then the content will be

more meaningful for them, when something is meaningful they will retain it more and use it better.”

Others discussed recognizing inequality in terms of resources; promoting equal distribution of resources to increase students’ academic performance. Marissa was appalled by the stark differences in resources between her own educational background and the school she was student teaching in. She compared her affluent neighborhood high school with good academic reputation, team sports, equipments, supplies and qualified teachers to Dorsey High School in South LA. She said: “My understanding of social justice is that these inequalities shouldn’t exist, that such a difference in resources, whether its tools in the classroom or teachers or after school programs. It’s a problem. We need to do whatever we can to support the other students [urban students] to have all of these resources as well, so they are not at a disadvantage.”

At this interview participants grappled with infusing critical awareness with traditional academic achievement. More often than not, participants equated resource equality with social justice primarily as a call to transform academically low performing urban schools. Associating resource equality with academic success undermines many competing goals of social justice, such as activism, defiance, critical self-reflection, and critical consciousness. Similar to the first interview, pedagogical equity was again discussed as a definition of social justice, however, this time by only two participants (as compared to four previously).

#### *Pedagogical equity*

Pedagogical equity was again understood as flexing instructional strategies to meet students’ different learning needs. This is an instructional understanding of social justice, primarily focused on academic performance. Monique said: “My definition of social justice is

not treating everybody equal, because equal is not always equitable but help people reach their potential by different needs. Some people need one help others two or three.” Similarly, Luna talked about meeting the different needs of her students to ensure a fair playing field: “Finding equitable opportunities for students; differentiating, every child in every classroom is gonna have different needs, making sure that I know what those needs are, [and] providing the opportunities where they can all be at the same playing field.” Monique and Luna contend that equality is accommodating teaching practices to individual students’ needs for social justice to transpire. Besides the two recurring themes of recognizing inequality and pedagogical equity, social justice was defined through agency and personal commitment.

### *Agency*

Social justice defined as agency was conceptualized as self-empowerment and voice. Alice noted: “I think for me social justice education is really about space for critical consciousness and action, and so I guess social justice itself is about agency and empowerment, having the space and means to act upon your world, and to have some self determination.” Sarah emphasized the importance of voice “social justice is helping people speak for themselves not just coming in and giving them[students] the tools to access the veins of power and working against those things[social injustices].” These two participants understood social justice in terms of creating a classroom environment that enables students to self-empower.

### *Personal commitment to social justice*

While many defined ways to achieve and promote social justice, two participants focused on how such commitment must be motivated. Jonathan argued that an understanding of social justice “is not something that you can go find... It has to come within you, you can’t go find social justice in a book, it has to come from your own personal experiences. Maybe for one



person it looks more like from a gender perspective or race perspective or class. I think that's where you have to build it [by asking yourself ]where did your social justice awareness come from?"

Similarly, for William social justice is also something that is personal, he explains that he would best serve his students by exposing them to narratives of injustice that he has a personal connections to. He said:

I believe that being a social justice educator means that it's my responsibility to bring those to the table [narratives of Asian American immigrants] if we only cater to those student population that we have and when they go out to the rest of the world and interact with people they haven't seen, we don't give them the knowledge, the tools to interact with them. We look different but there are [commonalities] and building on that commonality. Ethnic studies in LA has a very black and brown heavy focus, which is very understandable given the student population, but there is a big Asian population and going back to model minority thing, they don't really have to worry about ethnic studies. Before I was thinking, oh it's all about helping the students we are working with. Am I really helping them, if I only focus on that particular populations' stories? Am I really helping them? the answer would be no. I need to bring all of them as much and as often as I can. That's how I will tap into what I believe is being a social justice educator.

As an Asian American male, William feels passionate to share counter narratives about his ethnic history that has many parallels with oppression that many students of Color—particularly Black and Brown—have endured in their histories and continue to deal with presently. Thus, he feels that his significant contribution is to add to the pool of counter narratives, to expose his

students to untold histories of discrimination of Asian Americans in the U.S. In sum, Jonathan and William both argue that social justice commitments must have roots in personal experiences and it is only then that they can build and expand an authentic social justice teaching practice for themselves.

### *Conclusion*

Compared to the first interview, the notion of social justice had changed for all participants. Even though many had articulated the same definition during the first and second interviews (Marissa, Monique, Luna, Robin) their responses became progressively more developed. It is clear that after one year in the teacher education program, all of the participants cultivated a more expansive understanding of social justice.

It is also important to mention that although participants' notions of social justice had developed, they were still defined through a single concept at both the first and second interviews (besides one participant at the second interview). I mention this to infer that a deeper and richer understanding of social justice must utilize a multifaceted approach. Defining social justice in education through a single concept usually indicates participants' limited grasp of social justice.

The next section reveals participants' self-reported reflections related to how their understanding of social justice had changed after completing the first year in the teacher education program.

### **Self-Reported Evolution of Social Justice after the First Year**

When participants were asked whether their notions of social justice had evolved after one year in the program, overwhelmingly 11 out of 12 participants acknowledged having

adopted a new concept of social justice. Three themes had emerged from the participants' evolving notions of social justice.

1. More than half explained that their concept of social justice has become less theoretical and more practical
2. Some of the participants realized that change must start from students
3. Others discussed being more reflective in their practice.

First, I discuss the dominant theme which is how participants' understanding of social justice had become more practical and less theoretical.

#### *Less theoretical*

Ten participants shared that the concept of social justice became less theoretical and more practical at the end of the first year in the program. Andy explained: "before it was this theoretical, beautiful, inspiring thing in your books, but it still is, [she paused] I have realized that social justice is an active choice every single day, little things, am I gonna do this worksheet, and lecture or am I gonna have them interact and problem face learning." Additionally, Andy explained how social justice inflects her practice "[social justice] has touched upon all of those things like, classroom policy, classroom routine, policy on the use of technology." Just like Andy majority of the participants' understandings of social justice had become rooted in practical, instructional strategies for the classroom. The two other themes that had emerged in addition to sharing their newly formed practical understandings of social justice were participants' recognition that change must originate from students and the importance of reflecting on their practice.

### *Change starts with students*

Four participants discussed how their understanding of social justice has changed in terms of realizing that change must start from their students. Although social justice has different meanings for each of these participants, they all argued that social justice advocacy must be initiated by their students. Sarah explains this notion in great detail:

If there is a change at the school, I don't want it to be like the new person coming in and changing it for the better. That's not a way of making lasting change, as one sole individual martyring themselves to make it better, that's a weird individualism triumphs over. It can't be just me and I am not the appropriate face for it, I can't be the figurehead for it. It's relieving in a way. I can show students different routes where they can make change. I kind of prefer to being a facilitator and helping students be agents of change, I feel like that's more sustainable in the role of a teacher than it is 'I am the agent of change.'

Similarly, Allan noted "so I can ask the questions and I can do my best but ultimately it is their [students'] choice whether or not they want to follow social justice oriented thinking. At least if they come out aware, I'd like to hope, that's worth the effort of teaching it." Participants were in agreement that social justice advocacy is not something to impose on students but rather expose them to critical ideologies and hope it will intrinsically motivate activism.

### *Reflective practice*

Three participants shared their new understanding of social justice in terms of being more reflective in their practice. Jonathan explained that his notion of social justice has evolved by deeply embracing the process of reflection. He said that reflection should be understood "as a

process than as a task. ” He referenced a quote from a professor at a conference who had shared the notion that “your reflection should never follow your practice, your practice should always follow reflection,” as a very powerful and influential motto for him moving forward.

Sarah’s reflections centered on her social identity as a white, non-urban teacher. She expressed discomfort being a white teacher to minority students, because of “the weird awkward white savior thing, like, I am gonna come and fix the ghetto. ” These thoughts were constantly present in her mind. She explained “I can overcome that stereotype by not being the person to make change, I can be in the background, being the person giving the tools or negotiating or creating the ties between schools and community organizations.” This reflective process made her realize the importance of being a local teacher: “I have realized how vital it is to be local in a place to be an educator.” These participants shared how their understandings of social justice had evolved by being more reflective of their practices including the impact of their social identity. In sum, participants’ understandings of social justice evolved in three ways:

1. For ten of the participants social justice had become less theoretical and abstract.
2. Four participants had become more cognizant that change must start from students.
3. Three participants had become more reflective of their practice as a social justice educator.

The next section presents participants’ responses to the question of defining social justice at the fourth interview. As mentioned earlier, participants were not asked to define social justice at their third interview because the focus of the third interview was primarily on the practices of social justice.

Additionally the gap (two months in the summer) between the second and third interviews was very small to have had any significant impact on their understating of social justice.

#### *Interview 4*

The fourth interview took place at the end of the second year, which also marks the end of the program. At this point participants had completed one year of student teaching, their entire coursework, inquiry-based research project and the one year residency requirement. These last interview responses were much different in comparison to the previous two interviews. The dominant theme defining social justice was giving students voice by yielding the academic space for personal stories to be heard and validated. Consistent with the previous two interviews, the themes of recognizing inequality and promoting academic success, and pedagogical equity were again repeated at this last interview (see Table 5).

#### *Voice*

The foremost leading theme in defining social justice was giving students voice. Eight participants articulated this concept. Robin had put it simply: “it’s making sure your students feel like they have a voice in the classroom, they belong in that space, and they know that they have a voice.”

Similarly, Alice noted:

I want all students in my classroom to understand, I believe that their voice is important, their experiences are important, that everything about them matters both in the classroom and outside of the classroom. It’s important to have that awareness.” Alice discussed giving students the academic space to share their experiences:

... that for students to have an academic language to talk about their personal experiences, to contextualize their experiences and what they see in their

communities, the things their parents have gone through as immigrants, to understand there is academic language to that, there is validity for that in the classroom and outside is huge for them.

Allan also had realized that giving students voice to share personal stories is powerful:

as I am reading the stuff my students are revealing to me, it's started to turn the corner, it's really powerful and heartbreaking stuff and it makes me think what else can I do? I have students sharing a lot of stories of loss, non nuclear household, whether that's one parent missing, they carry so much with them, these students are so powerful and they are so brave to continue to get up everyday. I didn't do a good job of bringing that up in them before. It started to transpire as I am about to leave. It's stuff like that that will change my perspective in years to come.

Allan had realized that allowing students to share their personal histories and to be heard is an act of social justice. He discussed the emotional intensiveness involved in writing and sharing stories: "I had my juniors write something powerful and personal to them and I got to dig into them and pieces of their history, just now they are working on their personal statements and have students crying while they are writing, because for the first time I have students unpacking a lot of their traumas, feeling out their voice. It really makes me wanna re-establish that as something more important going forward.

These eight participants emphasized the concept of giving voice to students, especially to their personal stories—stories of loss, injustice, strength and resilience, which have shaped them into who they are. For participants giving their students voice and encouraging them to tell their

stories is a powerful way to open up discussions about critical issues allowing them to actively co-construct meaning from their lived experiences and engage in dialogue searching for change.

### *Recognize inequalities and promote academic success*

Similar to the previous two interviews, six participants defined social justice as recognizing inequality and promoting academic success as part of their social justice definition. Jonathan explained: “Social justice is your ability to have students question everything around them, their world... it’s having them question things they may not have exposure to. It opens their eyes to different ways of being, there may be students in my class who are questioning their sexual orientation.”

He had shown a movie in his class, that dealt with the struggles and complexities of being gay in our society, in order to discuss the realities of homophobia. He said: “I am giving light to that, I am affirming that.”

Additionally, Jonathan wanted his students to “be academically successful and look at the world critically and challenge the status quo” He contends that: “social justice educators dismiss the academic part of school, yes historically it has be aligned with middle class white norms, just because of that we are not going to ill-prepare our students, like we are not gonna do writing because it [is] not social justice. You can’t do one or the other, you have to have both.

In sum, half of the participants defined the concept of social justice as promoting critical awareness and academic achievement, a theme that has repeatedly been present in all interviews.

### *Pedagogical equity*

As with the previous interview responses, four participants conceptualized social justice in terms of pedagogical equity in the classroom. Robin explained: “It’s equity in the classroom, not equality like everyone gets a red pencil or everyone gets a highlighter so we can all highlight



together, but what can I do so you understand this text. For some people highlighting the main idea is fine, for some they need to read it five times before they understand the information in the text.”

Similarly, Andy asked “what is equitable? Giving everyone the same thing or is it providing the extra needs so that they are on the same page.” It is evident that for these participants, ‘equality’ just by itself, is an inadequate goal and solution. Equity as an instructional strategy is an intentional and deliberate support that aims to reach equality. Although, recognizing inequality and pedagogical equity were themes that were mentioned previously, at this last interview participants were able to articulate these concepts in a more developed fashion, offering examples and explanations in more detail.

### *Conclusion*

At this fourth interview half of the participants defined social justice through more than just one primary concept, in comparison to only one participant from the first and second interviews combined. Defining social justice through multiple concepts is expected given participants’ multifaceted engagement with social justice through student teaching, coursework and their inquiry-based research project that enabled them to understand the multi-dimensional and complex nature of social justice.

In sum, at the fourth and concluding interview social justice was conceptualized as:

1. Giving voice to students to share their personal stories
2. Recognizing inequalities and promoting academic success
3. Incorporating pedagogical equity (see Table 5.1)

In the subsequent section, I discuss participants’ self-reported evolution of social justice at the fourth interview.

## **Self-Reported Evolution of Social Justice after the Second Year**

Participants were asked again, after their second year and upon completing the program, if their understanding of social justice had changed. Similar to their responses after the first year, 11 out of 12 participants noted that their notion of social justice had changed after completing their resident year. Similarly, most participants shared that their notions of social justice have become less theoretical and more practical. Additionally, they discussed two new themes: dealing with defiance from students and administration and lastly, questioning their social justice commitments realizing that social justice is a process. First, I detail how participants discussed their evolution of social justice claiming it has become less theoretical.

### *Less Theoretical*

The most common response reported by eight participants, was that the concept of social justice had become less theoretical for them and more practical. Luna and Alice both asserted that social justice had become a practical instructional challenge. Alice noted “some of that idealism transforms into; how do I do this practical work in my classroom every single day?” Luna said, “I understand what it is and throughout the year I have been able to put it into practice. It went from what it should be to what am I doing to make it happen [in the classroom].” Similar to the second interview responses, most participants evaluated the evolution of the concept of social justice in terms of its practical utility. Next, I discuss participants realization that social justice oriented practice is met with resistance from students and local administration.

## *Defiance*

Given that participants had opportunities in their resident year to teach with a social justice orientation, they encountered opposition from students and their local administration. Three out of the five participants discussed this opposition coming from students and the other two discussed resistance from their administration.

Robin discussed experiencing opposition from some of her students, noting: “I remember trying to talk to my students about racism, we read all these speeches and did all these things and they were like ‘why does this matter?’” Similarly, Alice mentioned how she expected her lesson plans to have a powerful impact, saying: “I thought I planned a really powerful activity for my students and they are all yelling over each other and it’s not going anywhere, and the respect I wish they had for each other isn’t there. I was thinking I am gonna build positive relationships with my students and not be a robot and not treat them as robots and everything will be fine, which is not that easy.

Alice defended her students’ lack of cooperation: “My students have been socialized in a schooling system that trains them to be a certain way, I saw very deeply internalized in my students this; good student, bad student narrative, very competitive individualism happening, manifesting academically and behaviorally.”

Alice faced defiance from her students as well as her administration. She was under a heavy pressure to justify her social justice agenda to her principal. She said “with me worried that my principle is gonna walk in at any second and really sometimes having intense anxiety about that,” she had to explain how her lesson plans about social issues fit into the college prep class she was teaching. Alice explained that she did always have a justification for how she weaved in social issues into the college prep class, and most of the time her principal did approve

her lesson plans. Nonetheless, the anxiety of constantly seeking approval was exhaustive for Alice.

The resident year allowed many of the participants the chance to employ social justice oriented practices and face the difficulties that come with it. In addition to conceptualizing the evolution of their social justice beliefs practically and through dealing with defiance, few participants discussed their understanding that social justice is a process and they questioned their place in it.

*Social justice is a process: Where do we fit in?*

Three participants explained that their commitment to social justice continually needs to be questioned and unpacked as social justice is constantly evolving. Jonathan said: “Social justice is so much bigger than myself, that I can’t own it and be like ‘I am the social justice teacher in my school’, no that’s a disservice to what social justice is. It is a collective struggle, it is a process.”

Similarly, Andy emphasized the constant act of questioning how her identity as a social justice teacher adapts to the evolving nature of social justice: “I realize that social justice is something that is constantly evolving and you have to include yourself into these critical teacher spaces that makes you think and constantly question your idea of social justice.”

These participants’ reflections on their commitment to social justice as a process indicate their understanding of the elusive nature becoming a social justice educator.

Table 5.

*Individual definitions of social justice in interviews 1- 4*

	<b>interview 1</b>	<b>interview 2</b>	<b>interview 4</b>
Sarah	Recognize Inequality	Agency	Agency
Andy	Pedagogical Equity	Recognize Inequality + academic success	Recognize inequality + academic success, Pedagogical Equity
Marissa	Recognize Inequality	Recognize Inequality	Voice
William	Recognize Inequality	Personal commitment Recognize Inequality	recognize inequality + academic success
Truth	Recognize Inequality	Recognize Inequality + academic success	Voice Recognize Inequality + academic success
Allan	Pedagogical Equity	Recognize Inequality + academic success	Voice Recognize Inequality + academic success
Alice	Recognize Inequality	Agency	Voice, Pedagogical Equity
Monique	Pedagogical Equity	Pedagogical Equity	Pedagogical Equity
Jonathan	Give Back to Community	Personal commitment Recognize Inequality + academic success	Voice, Recognize inequality + academic success
Luna	Pedagogical Equity,	Pedagogical Equity	Recognize inequality + academic success
Robin	Recognize Inequality	Recognize Inequality	Voice, Pedagogical Equity
Sulley	Recognize Inequality	Recognize Inequality	Voice

Note: Only one participant, Monique, defined social justice as pedagogical equity in all three interviews.

Table 5.1

Group theme-definitions of social justice in interviews 1-4

Social Justice Definitions		
Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 4
Recognize inequalities	Recognize inequalities promote academic success	Voice
Pedagogical inequity	Pedagogical equity	Recognize inequalities promote academic success
	Agency	Pedagogical equity
	Personal commitment to social justice	

### Overarching Conclusions

#### *Introduction*

The responses engendered as a result of being asked to define social justice during all of the interviews ranged between recognizing injustice and taking action. Some chose to highlight the problems of injustice, such as structural discrimination and lack of awareness; while others, discussed the goals and visions of social justice that can transpire through education such as academic success, pedagogical equity and giving students voice. Interestingly, most participants defined social justice in terms of recognizing injustices during their first interview but started to focus on student empowerment in their second and fourth interviews. This indicates that participants' understating of social justice shifted from identifying the problems to thinking

about ways of addressing them. I highlight three significant concepts that identify participants' evolution in terms of how they came to define social justice.

1. Discussing how participants progressively conceptualized social justice as a practice to empower students
2. Critiquing the practical notions of social justice as a measure of growth
3. Recognizing the lack of critical self-reflection among all participants who are motivated to teach from a social justice orientation.

#### *Social justice as a practice to empower students*

Starting with the second interview, participants realized that change must start from their students; acknowledging their agency and power to transform themselves. At the last interview (fourth interview) participants articulated this notion more clearly. Their definition of social justice came to be primarily articulated as a concern for giving voice to their students. They opened up the academic space to guide students through sharing their personal stories in order to facilitate critical discussions about social injustice. This approach enables students to share the realities of their oppression and consequently make them more critically aware of that oppression, "giving them a degree of epistemological authority" (Allan & Rosato, 2009, p. 167). They unpack knowledge through self-reflection. The content of learning corresponds to unraveling personal phenomenon critically.

Personal storytelling has the capacity to organically reveal the dynamics of oppression and although it demands greater vulnerability it can also promote compassion and strengthen collaboration among students. It is also therapeutic as students see the parallels between their struggles. Attending to the affective faculties of students, instinctively contributes to their emotional health and as a consequence can advance their academic motivations. Similarly, bell

hooks has argued that the learning and teaching process must be practiced “in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students, [it] is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (1994, p. 13). This emotional and cognitive separation is emblematic of traditional schooling. Participants employing a social justice practice contested this divide.

Additionally, many of the participants (Sarah, Jonathan, Allan, Truth) recognized their students’ resilience and wisdom as a result of listening to them share personal struggles with poverty and racism. By default this teaching method also interrupts and challenges teachers’ deficit thinking about urban students. Moreover, it equalizes the power between the teacher and the students. When students’ voices dominate the discourse, it foregrounds their authority in the classroom.

Surely, personal storytelling is a powerful form of promoting student transformation. Participants progressively came to define social justice in terms of empowering their students by breaching the academic spaces for personal stories of injustice to have legitimacy and merit.

#### *Social justice growth measured by pedagogical strategies*

After each academic year, participants were asked how their understanding of social justice had evolved; during the second and fourth interviews, participants predominantly maintained that they were less constrained by the theoretical conceptions of social justice. Their growth was measured by the expansion of the methodological and practical tools of social justice. This evaluation of how the concept of social justice had evolved indicates some of the inherent problems of appropriating social justice in education; its abstract nature. Educational scholarship grounded in social justice is deliberately non-prescriptive and therefore teachers’ attempts to evaluate their increased theoretical concepts of social justice are much more difficult



to do. Instead, it was in its practical applications of social justice that majority of the participants justified their growth.

Additionally in both interviews, (second and fourth) three (different) participants discussed their growth in terms of their increased level of reflection in their teaching practice. Reflections encompassed participants' heightened awareness of their identity as a social justice teacher and their commitments within the social justice tradition. Participants' reflections cannot be characterized as critical self-reflections, which entail the ongoing process of deconstructing dominant ideologies that greatly affect their teaching in all of its spheres. In the next section, I critique the lack of engagement in critical self-reflection among the participants.

#### *Lack of critical self-reflection*

After the first year in the program, participants started to discuss their personal motivations and reflective practices as part of their definition of social justice. A significant and fundamental aspect of teaching about inequalities is being engaged in a critical reflective process of examining one's own beliefs and taken for granted assumptions. Very few participants in this study discussed their process of critical self reflection as an important factor of their understanding and practice of social justice. Three participants, at the second interview, had tentatively discussed engaging in critical self-reflection (Sarah, Allan, Johnathan). Truth was the only candidate who discussed her engagement with the process of critical self reflection. Warren (2002) has argued that "instead of expecting improvement by changing students or their families, adding new curriculum, or increasing the education of teachers, researchers must consider the belief systems of educators as they interact with students and affect the culture of the classroom and school at large" (p. 110). Expanded knowledge of oppression is not enough to meaningfully promote social justice. The fact is that no one person, teacher of Color or White is immune to the

oppressive preconceptions that manifest in schooling such as deficit thinking, otherizing and stigmatizing. Effective teaching practices for social justices are contingent upon teachers' ongoing critical self-reflections that promote awareness of their oppressive beliefs and practices.

Teachers' engagement in critical self reflection will impact their curriculum, classroom policies, facilitation and interaction with students, parents, and the larger educational community. Especially for predominantly White teachers, Higinbottom (2013) asserts that "recognizing and reflecting on one's own privilege is recognized as a necessary first step in order to begin to enact social justice in schools" (pg. 128). Similarly, Reason and Broido (2005) have argued that "effective and sustainable [social justice] behavior requires a solid foundation of self-understanding—that is, understanding based on continuous critical reflection into the roles of power and privilege in one's life and relationships" (p. 81). It is rather surprising that so few participants barely mentioned engaging in the process of critical self-reflection as it is an indispensable part of what makes up a social justice practice.

### **Social Justice in Practice**

In addition to being asked to define social justice, participants were also asked how they will employ their notions of social justice in material practice. The first three interviews inquired about the participants' plans on how to integrate social justice into their teaching practice, while the last interview asked participants how they had already integrated social justice into their practice during their resident year. In all four interviews, the dominant theme was that of making content relevant and critical to students. Although in each interview the dominant theme was the same (integrating *critical and relevant curriculum*), each interview had a different emphasis. The first three interviews had two identical themes: first, make content relevant and critical; and second, promote community building (see Table 6). Although participants' self-reported

evolution of social justice was discussed in terms of learning the practical strategies of social justice, interestingly the dominant practical strategies of social justice remained the same across all interviews. First, I discuss how participants planned to integrate social justice into their teaching during the first interview.

## **Interview 1**

### *Critical and relevant curriculum*

In the first interview, eight participants thought of ways to intervene in the mandated curriculum by extending discussions to global oppression, immigration and poverty and relate the content to students' lives. William talked about exposing his students to counter narratives in history, especially related to Chinese migratory workers and the unfair treatments and laws set up for them in the early 1900's. He intended to teach his students the historical precedent of anti immigrant sentiments in the United States. At this first interview, for many participants, *exposure* to critical and relevant academic content was significant. Besides discussing critical content and making it relevant, participants talked about community building as a way of practicing social justice (see Table 6). In fact, across all interviews the concept of community was understood in two ways, first, as a support system in the classroom and second, reaching outside of the class to students' parents or their community at large to establish partnerships.

### *Community building*

In the first interview, four participants discussed community building either in or outside of the classroom. Monique, referring to community in the classroom, said "we are a community and we need to help each other. You finished early, fine, now I am proud of you, go help somebody else." Luna extended community building beyond the classroom to students' families: "that's a huge part of the partnership; it's never going to be as effective if you don't have that

partnership with parents.” Similarly, Jonathan said, “it’s having a responsibility to see yourself as a community member as well not just a classroom teacher as you have responsibilities to the students and their families, its more than I just teach English.” For these participants, community building among students or with parents is a way of appropriating social justice.

## **Interview 2**

### *Critical and relevant curriculum*

In the second interview, based on their student teaching experiences, participants discussed their plans of integrating critical discussions into the mandated curriculum. They gave examples of activities and projects they intend to incorporate into their classes. Activities such as engaging with media critically through making short documentaries about issues in their community, writing a critical narrative piece, reading narratives of the voiceless, and engaging in a science project to study how pollution effects urban inner cities; all in an effort to offer supplemental critical content that’s often missing in the mandated curriculum. Jonathan talked about his strong commitment to making education more relevant and critical by “bringing curriculum to students, not students to the curriculum.” He gave examples of how he made course content relevant to his students and discussed current issues related to the Arizona SB1070 bill and the Stop and Frisk law enforcement practices. The aim among most participants was to make their curriculum both relevant and critical. Similar to the first interview, participants identified building community as a way of putting social justice into practice.

### *Community Building*

During the second interview, five participants discussed community building inside and outside of the classroom (see Table 6). Alice explained ideas she had thought about for creating a community based on care and justice. She said: “I was thinking a lot about how to build

community, having collective accountability and collective care among students. Thinking about participation structures; if it's possible to create this class community where students notice who is being seen and who isn't, where students are doing the work of compassionately checking in with other students. That's something I have been thinking about."

Jonathan discussed community building outside of the classroom by redirecting his students to see the assets in their communities. He said "as social justice educators, it's easy to focus on the negative how are we being oppressed, but flipping it and saying what is valuable, what are the positives of where we live?" His statement is an example of an affirming and constructive form of community building outside of the classroom.

### **Interview 3**

#### *Critical and relevant curriculum*

In the third interview, two weeks before the starts of the school year, most of the participants had job assignments and were going to start teaching as resident students. Similar to the first and second interviews, the emphasis during this interview was twofold; to raise critical questions from mandated books and create curriculum that's uniquely relatable to their students, shared by seven participants.

Many discussed specific ways they had already planned to challenge mandated books such as *Animal Farm*, *The Odyssey*, *House on Mango Street*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Crucible*, in ways that were more critical than how such texts are normally interpreted. They discussed giving opportunities for students to speak back to injustice in class through writing assignments, making documentaries and learning to engage in critical ideological criticism. Robin convincingly said that her entire focus is critical: "Well yeah, that's pretty much all I am gonna do. We are gonna read a lot of, well two novels, *The Great Gatsby* which is about the American

dream, what does it really look like? What does society tell us it is and what do you think it is? Is it just? We are gonna read *The Crucible* how justice was given. I have to read it and break it down about equality and equity.”

Sarah also shared how she planned to make her mandated books more critical: “One of the books I get to teach my 9th graders is *Animal Farm*, so I know I’ll be able to talk about revolution. Towards the end, one of the animals gets hurt and they sell him to a blue factory, so one of the propaganda characters was like oh no we didn’t sell him to the blue factory, we took him to the hospital he died from his injuries.” She intended to draw parallels “with what’s been happening to people dying in police custody” she said “I am thinking that might be a really good tie in.”

Andy discussed creating her curriculum around labor unions and local labor movements, current and historical, given that her students attending the trade-tech charter school will be transferring to union construction jobs after graduation. She said: “I am trying to create lessons around unions and labor movements because San Pedro and Long Beach are historical for labor, especially with our students going into these jobs, we wanna make sure they know their rights as workers and the history of that, so definitely I am going to be covering labor leaders in the labor industry and not just Caesar Chaves but also including movements they might not have known, more local history.”

Again, it is evident how participants weave critical content with relevant content to more productively engage their students into academics. Similarly, besides challenging the mandated curriculum through critical and relevant supplemental content and discussions, some participants discussed ways of community building as a way of employing social justice.

### *Community building*

In the third interview, four participants discussed community building, mostly outside of class. Alice had come up with a community engagement project. She described her ideas of community building as a long term and ongoing practice. She explained: This is a loose idea that I haven't really planned out well, but I don't wanna do it this year if I can't do it well, something that has students looking at their community and connecting that to what their visions are for themselves. Try to interact, the goal should not be for students to go to college and get out of their communities that have all these problems but what are the wealth of amazing things that come from these communities? How can that be built upon by students?

Her ideas of community building encourages students to recognize and reflect upon the positives of their communities and moreover, connect their future aspirations to the betterment of their communities. Overall, participants had discussed more concrete instructional strategies for building community during the second and third interviews as opposed to the broader and more generalized notions they had offered in the first interview.

### **Interview 4**

#### *Critical and relevant curriculum*

In the fourth interview the dominant theme once more was critical and relevant curriculum discussed by nine participants (see Table 6). What was very different about this theme was that relevance was associated with personal reflection and critical was similarly linked to critical self reflection. Let me explain: during their resident year, participants had given their students the latitude to tell their stories of injustice and had encouraged critical self-reflection, instead of, them as the educator "teaching" about injustice like they had done in previous interviews. In the

first three interviews they had discussed their pedagogical strategies of creating critical discussions, questions, projects; while this in interview they had focused on giving their students voice to uncover their real life injustices critically.

Allan shared how he integrated social media as a familiar outlet for students to engage in critical self-reflection, “social media isn’t going to be less relevant for them and it has a lot of use for social justice because being heard is so crucial and that’s a platform in which that happens, especially with student fluency it becomes really useful to leverage that for something, academically and for personal.” He explained his assignment in greater detail: “What I had them do was begin writing a time that was unjust to them, a lot of them at that point hadn’t opened up to me as much as I would have hoped for, so they made up stories. I told them to start writing as if they were writing that to a friend on facebook, where I explicitly give them the ok to using emojis to not worry about grammar, to curse if that’s authentic to what they are writing. This assignment encouraged his students to self-reflect and allowed the class to engage with critical content that is personal and relevant.

Similarly, Robin noted “my favorite lesson from the year comes from, MLK’s *The Other America* speech” she explained that most of her students are from south Los Angeles and they live in *The Other America*. Her students gave presentations about what *The Other America* is like: “I live in *The Other America* because there are roaches in my apartment, there are homeless people everywhere, no one has a job where I live.” She explained further: “After that we had a discussion, why are there two Americas, how did it get like this? Did it just start right now, MLK wrote this in the 60’s? ‘What has changed? What hasn’t changed?’ Some students felt helpless, nothing is ever gonna change, some were like wait there are ways we can do this [make change].”



Robin had intended to show her students that change can be achieved in different degrees and by utilizing various approaches: “a lot of times we think I am not MLK, Malcom X, I am not Cesar Chaves and aint’ gonna be a leader like this that influences the whole world” she noted that her students learned that they have power in many other ways “even if it’s writing a letter to a mayor, or calling the board of education to ask them about something.” Robin had emphasized available forms of resistance as part of her critical and relevant curriculum.

One other unique characteristic about the fourth interview responses was the emphasis placed on forms of resistance. Some participants had purposefully encouraged students to learn about resistance movements and think about ways they can challenge social issues. Andy’s reflections exemplify this best: “What I learned that was super important is that in every lesson there should be something that lets students show their empowerment, because topics such as racism or oppression, historical discrimination is heavy stuff and in my student teaching I wasn’t as aware of it but now I feel it, ‘maybe it’s the smaller classroom’ so I try to include historical experiences, for a community that might have been negative experiences, but I always try to find examples of resistance and resilience.”

She also explained how her final project gave her students the option to research a resistance movement “I let them create a pop up book and I gave them a list of resistance movements in the U.S. and they were able to create a pop up book and write a piece on that.”

As mentioned earlier, the fourth interview responses that inquired about students’ practical ways of enacting social justice fit under the repeating theme of critical and relevant curriculum, but participants’ answers were much more developed and backed by actual practices employed in their resident year.

### *Community building*

In the fourth interview, it was revealed that only Jonathan had put into practice the notion of community building. Jonathan described the community building project he had his students work on: “In groups they had to chose one issue in their neighborhood , instead of what’s wrong in that neighborhood, they had to interview two people who are affected by this issue and find out young people’s role in solving this problem. It is very problem posing, [referring to Freireian, problem posing education ] what is your responsibility in improving the situation?” Jonathan’s intent was to engage students in concerning issues in their community and give them the opportunity to grapple with it critically and seek forms of resolution.

The rest of the participants who had consistently planned to engage in community building—in or outside of the classroom—as stated in the first three interviews, didn’t mention utilizing community building projects. Perhaps, the notion of community building had stayed within theoretical parameters for them. The same way theory informs practice, practice also informs theory and since they did not have the opportunity to engage in community building practices as first year teachers, the concept remained at the theoretical level for them.

Table 6.

*Social justice in practice in interviews 1-4*

	<b>interview 1</b>	<b>interview 2</b>	<b>interview 3</b>	<b>interview 4</b>
Sarah	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum
Andy	Community Building	Community Building	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum
Marissa	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Community Building	Listen
William	Critical Curriculum	Critical Curriculum	Critical Curriculum	Critical Curriculum
Truth	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Relevant Curriculum
Allan	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum
Alice	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Community Building	Community Building	Critical and Relevant Curriculum
Monique	Community Building	Community Building	Community Building	Relevant Curriculum
Jonathan	Community Building	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Community building
Luna	Community Building	Community Building	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum
Robin	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Community Building	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Critical and Relevant Curriculum
Sulley	Critical and Relevant Curriculum	Provide Resources and academic success	Community Building	Listen

## Overarching Conclusions

Social justice in practice is both *what you teach* and *how you teach it*. In all four interviews participants discussed these two notions. They discussed the “*what to teach*” in terms of engaging in critical and relevant discussions and *how to teach* through personal narratives and establishing community in and outside of the classroom. In the subsequent section, I analyze the implications of the dominant theme: critical and relevant curriculum, and explore personal and institutional transformation as a form of social justice enactment.

### *Critical and relevant curriculum*

It is clear that participants deliberately chose to engage in issues of injustice in their classrooms. Relevant curriculum that links students’ interests and experiences with social and educational oppression was understood as a way of intrinsically motivating students into learning. I choose to emphasize their responses from the fourth interview which can demonstrate their cumulative understandings of putting social justice into practice. At the fourth interview, participants reasoned that what is relevant is also critical. Making their curriculum relevant and critical meant they can teach about oppression and how their students are implicated in the oppressive structures, but still, abide by the mandated curriculum. This is how participants negotiated the tension between combining traditional literacy with critical literacy. Moreover, across the four interviews, participants’ understandings of social justice in practice changed from teachers encouraging critical awareness to giving students the power to co-construct the meaning of social justice through their lived experiences.

Advancing personally relevant and critical curriculum raises students’ awareness that “external barriers and institutional limitations hinder the individual from achieving access to opportunities that lay outside the self” (Heyback, 2009, p. 239) which is empowering for

marginalized students, who are often told that their lack of successes is self inflicted.

Questioning social constructions that maintain systematic oppression will stimulate students to see their personal situation in light of these broader frameworks and challenge their own internalized oppression.

In addition to helping students overcome internalized deficit ideologies, Porfilion and Malort (2011) have noted that “to view social stratification as a byproduct of economic and social systems that operate to serve the interests of the political and economic elite, rather than as a consequence of an individual’s lack of effort or a cultural group’s deficiency” (p. 76) will challenge teachers’ deficit frameworks. When teachers learn to deconstruct the educational system that has historically neglected urban communities, it will illuminate for them the untapped potential and resilience of their students.

Subsequently, many of the participants encouraged personal storytelling and critical discourse to promote self transformation. To validate students’ experiences and realities blurred the binary between academic intellectuality and personal transformation. In the next section , I discuss the implication of promoting students’ self-transformations.

### *Institutional transformation*

Becoming a social justice educator connotes a form of enactment; wherein, mere awareness of existing oppression and its causes are inadequate conditions. Participants have argued that enactment must be intrinsically motivated. They have largely advocated enacting social justice through curricular development, instruction and relationship building to promote critical consciousness among their students. This form of promoting transformation, which almost all of the participants advocated in this study, fails to acknowledge institutional transformation.

It is also significant to work towards institutional transformation by destabilizing dominant structures. In the educational landscape structural transformation would include equalizing the disproportionate funding of urban schools, the elimination of high stakes testing, the hiring practice to even up faculty of color, demanding curricular realignment of canonical texts to include non dominant voices, incorporating social justice pedagogy in national and state credentialing requirements and evaluations and establish professional development of current teachers to learn about social justice oriented teaching practices. The participants in this study did not challenge how their practice(s) of teaching for social justice imperils the institution. Is liberating ourselves or our students from the dominant structures sufficient enough to the goals of rupturing the system? These are questions and discussions that did not come up in the interviews. Integrating critical and relevant perspectives into the curriculum and promoting personal transformation by themselves are insufficient to the goals of wider educational transformation that is need.

### **Cross-Theme Analysis: Social Justice Definitions and Practices**

In the two sections above there is clear evidence that participants' definitions and practices of social justice grew and matured over the two year teacher education program. Analyzing participants' social justice definitions and practices of social justice separately, the development is clear. Moreover, the apparent link between the two variables informs their interconnectedness and praxis, implying a strong commitment to a social justice teaching practice. Across all interviews participants' conceptions and practices of social justice had a solid association (see Table 7).

Table 7.

*Cross-theme analysis interviews 1-4*

<b>Social Justice Definition</b>	<b>Social justice in Practice</b>
<b>Interview 1</b>	<b>Interview 1</b>
Recognize inequality	Critical and relevant curriculum
Pedagogical equity	Community building
<b>Interview 2</b>	<b>Interview 2</b>
Recognize inequality	Critical and relevant curriculum
Pedagogical inequality	Community Building
Agency	
Commitment	
<b>Interview 4</b>	<b>Interview 4</b>
Voice	Critical and relevant curriculum(give voice to personal stories)
Pedagogical equity	

Table 7 shows that in interviews 1 and 2, *critical curriculum* corresponds to *recognizing inequality*. Additionally, *pedagogical equity* loosely relates to *relevant curriculum*, inferring the accommodation of students’ interests or learning needs/styles. Similarly, in the fourth interview, the two dominant themes were giving *voice* to students to tell their *personal stories* of injustice. The link was the strongest at the fourth interview.

*Teaching philosophies and social justice definitions and practices*

In addition to the two variable analyses, I also explored how participants’ *teaching philosophy* is correlated with their definitions and practices of social justice. The analysis of the participants’ teaching philosophies to deliberately reveal the interrelationship between these three concepts has yielded conflicting results.

A teaching philosophy conveys participants' core values, dispositions, and teaching methods, beyond ensuring that students achieve academic success. It is a compounded concept. Teachers' daily pedagogical strategies, disciplinary policy, assessment of learning, interactions with students and colleagues, power dissemination, non academic values and character building, among other notions are all grounded in a teacher's teaching philosophy. This analysis examined whether social justice in theory and practice remained separate or had merged with participants' teaching philosophies to further infer about their deep commitment to a social justice practice. I assumed that strong links between social justice theoretically and practically with participants' teaching philosophies will indicate more commitment towards cultivating a social justice oriented practice.

What is most notable is that there is both cohesiveness and disconnection between participants' teaching philosophies and their definitions and practices of social justice. The interconnectedness is best revealed during the first and second interviews. For example, in the second interview, participants' teaching philosophy embraced (see Table 8):

1. Accommodating students' learning interests
2. Introducing critical discussions
3. Community building

Similarly, participants' practices of social justices yielded two themes:

1. Having relevant and critical curriculum
2. Community building.

Correspondingly, their dominant definition of social justice was:

1. Recognize inequality by integrating critical content and promoting academic success.



Table 8.

*Interview 2 cross theme analysis*

Social Justice Definition	Social justice in Practice	Teaching Philosophy
<b>Interview 2</b>	<b>Interview 2</b>	<b>Interview 2</b>
Recognize inequality and promote academic success	Critical and relevant curriculum	Accommodating students' interests
Pedagogical equity	Community Building	critical discussions
Agency		Community building
Commitment		

It is clear that in interview 2, participants' *practices of social justice* are impacted by their definitions of social justice and their teaching philosophies. For example, *critical content* is a notion present in all three categories. In the same way, *accommodating students' interests*, *pedagogical equity* and *relevant curriculum* are all rooted in the notion of relevant pedagogy. Moreover, in interview 1, there is a strong link between *all* three variables (see Table 9). The interconnections among these three concepts signify a firm interlaced beliefs and subsequent practices of social justice.

Table 9.

*Interview 1 cross theme analysis*

Social Justice Definition	Social justice in Practice	Teaching Philosophy
<b>Interview 1</b>	<b>Interview 1</b>	<b>Interview 1</b>
Recognize inequality	Critical and relevant curriculum	Accommodate academic needs
Pedagogical equity	Community building	Promote critical awareness

To the contrary, in the fourth interview, participants' teaching philosophy didn't align as closely with their definitions and practices of social justice (see Table 10). Although there was a link, it wasn't as strong as in interviews 1 and 2.

Their definitions of social justice dominantly encompassed the notion of voice:

1. Giving students *voice* to tell their own stories of injustice

Putting *social justice into practice* was conceptualized by:

1. Having *critical and relevant curriculum*
2. Encouraging students to tell their personal histories of injustice.

Although their definitions and practices were very closely related in this fourth interview, they were somewhat related to their teaching philosophy, which was mostly conceptualized as

1. Accommodating students' academic needs and interests
1. Community building

Table 10.

*Interview 4 cross theme analysis*

Social Justice definition	Social Justice in Practice	Teaching Philosophy
<b>Interview 4</b>	<b>Interview 4</b>	<b>Interview 4</b>
Voice	critical and relevant curriculum (voice, personal stories)	Accommodate academic needs and interests
Pedagogical equity		Community building

Note: Community building was not a dominant theme it was mentioned by three different participants in interviews 2 and 4.

Participants' teaching philosophy of *accommodating academic needs and interests* are connected with pedagogical equity in terms of differentiating instruction and loosely connected with *relevant curriculum* preparing instruction with the students' interests in mind. However, in the fourth interview (more so than in previous interviews), *relevant curriculum* was largely rooted in

critical self reflection but the teaching philosophies were dominantly articulated with non critical expectations.

In sum, there was a strong link between teaching philosophies and the definitions and practices of social justice in the first two interviews, but much less interconnectedness in the fourth interview. In the fourth interview, social justice in theory and practice was not firmly anchored in participants' teaching philosophies but was rather adapted as an auxiliary conception. This cross themed analysis shows that adapting a social justice practice is invariably complex and constantly evolving.

## Chapter 7: Pre and Post Survey Assessment

To triangulate the data from the longitudinal interviews, I incorporated a pre and post assessment survey (see Table 11) called *Learning to Teach for Social Justice* (LTSJ-B) (Enterline et al., 2008). Participants completed the pre assessment survey within the first three weeks into the program in October of 2014. The post survey was administered towards the last two weeks of the program in May of 2016. Since there were only 12 participants, which is a small sample group, I analyzed the data qualitatively instead of conducting statistical analysis, which is the most common method of analysis for this survey (Enterline et al., 2008).

The findings reveal very little difference between the pre and post assessments, indicating slight uncertainty about challenging institutional inequalities. In this chapter, I provide analysis of the survey findings:

1. Overview the *easy to endorse* set and *difficult to endorse* set as a group by comparing the pre and post test data together.
2. Examine the themes in the survey across both *easy and difficult* sets to reveal which items contributed the most to the small difference between pre and post assessments.
3. Summarize the conclusions and discuss the parallels between the longitudinal interview findings.

Table 11.

*LTSJ-B Survey*

Please insert the corresponding number onto the provided line. (i.e. <u>  1  </u> ).
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree)
1. An important part of learning to be a teacher is examining one's own attitudes and beliefs about race, class, gender, disabilities, and sexual orientation. _____
2. Issues related to racism and inequity should be openly discussed in the classroom. _____
3. For the most part, covering multicultural topics is only relevant to certain subject areas, _____
such as social studies and literature. _____
4. Good teaching incorporates diverse cultures and experiences into classroom lessons and discussions. _____
5. The most important goal in working with immigrant children and English language learners is that they assimilate into American society. _____
6. It's reasonable for teachers to have lower classroom expectations for students who don't speak English as their first language. _____
7. Part of the responsibilities of the teacher is to challenge school arrangements that maintain societal inequities. _____
8. Teachers should teach students to think critically about government positions and actions. _____
9. Economically disadvantaged students have more to gain in schools because they bring less into the classroom. _____
10. Although teachers have to appreciate diversity, it's not their job to change society. _____
11. Whether students succeed in school depends primarily on how hard they work. _____
12. Realistically, the job of a teacher is to prepare students for the lives they are likely to lead. _____

Note\* The highlighted items identify the *easy to endorse* set.

***Survey Data Analysis***

The analysis is divided into two sets:

1. *Easy to endorse* items; such as 1,2,4,7 and 8
2. *Difficult to endorse* items; such as 3,5,6,9,10,11 and 12 (Eterline et al., 2008, p. 277).

There are five *easy to endorse* items and seven *difficult to endorse* items (see Table 11). For example, it is easier to endorse or strongly agree with item 4:

Item 4. Good teaching incorporates diverse cultures and experiences into classroom lessons and discussions.

Than it is to strongly disagree with item 10 with a score of 1:

Item 10. Although teachers have to appreciate diversity, it's not their job to change society.

Enterline et al., define *difficult to endorse* items to be macro level critiques challenging institutional discrimination:

These beliefs depend on recognizing inequities in the larger society, challenging the idea that school and society are meritocratic, and embracing teachers' roles as activists and advocates who can contribute to larger social movements that challenge these inequities as part of the job of teaching (2008, p.279).

The subsequent section separately analyzes these two sets, starting with the *easy to endorse* set.

#### *Easy to endorse set*

The five *easy to endorse* statements (1,2,4,7 and 8) sought a 25 point total score for each participant. In other words, 25 points was the highest possible points in this set, indicating strong social justice beliefs in the *easy to endorse* set only (see Table 12). The pretest results indicate that 8 participants attained 25 points implying that they answered 5 (strongly agree) to the five *easy to endorse* questions. Moreover, 11 out of 12 participants endorsed questions 1, 2 and 4 with a score of 5 with the exception of Sulley (see Table 12).

Participants' responses to these five statements were summed and then the average was taken from the sum; yielding an average pretest score of 24.25 (see Table 12). It is immediately evident that the group's incoming social justice beliefs were high, based on the five statement pre test survey results. This is not surprising because half of the participants during their interview

indicated social justice as the primarily reason—and the other half noted social justice as their secondary reason—for applying to UCLA’s teacher education program (discussed in Chapter 3).

Table 12.

*Pre-test easy to endorse set*

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 4	Item 7	Item 8	
Sarah	5	5	5	4	4	23
Andy	5	5	5	5	5	25
Marissa	5	5	5	4	5	24
William	5	5	5	5	5	25
Truth	5	5	5	5	5	25
Allan	5	5	4	4	5	23
Alice	5	5	5	5	5	25
Monique	5	5	5	5	5	25
Jonathan	5	5	5	5	5	25
Luna	5	5	5	5	5	25
Robin	5	5	5	5	5	25
Sulley	4	4	5	4	4	21
						Average
						24.25

To compare the difference between the pre test results and the post test results, the same calculation was used to come up with the average score in the *easy to endorse* item set. The post test survey indicated an average score of 23.6 (see Table 13). The post-test data reveals that only 4 participants had attained 25 points, which is half of the participants from the pre-test survey with 25 points. The difference between the two average points of 24.2 (pre-test) and 23.6 (post-test) is 0.6 points. In other words, 0.6 points lower post test scores. This indicates 0.6 points weaker social justice beliefs than the pretest score in the *easy to endorse* set.

Table 13.

*Post-test easy to endorse set*

Post Test	Item 1	Item 2	Item 4	Item 7	Item 8	Total
Sarah	5	5	5	4	5	24
Andy	5	5	5	5	5	25
Marissa	5	5	5	4	4	23
William	5	5	5	5	5	25
Truth	5	5	5	5	5	25
Allan	5	5	5	4	5	24
Alice	5	5	5	5	5	25
Monique	5	5	5	4	3	22
Jonathan	5	5	5	5	5	25
Luna	5	4	5	5	4	23
Robin	5	5	5	4	4	23
Sulley	4	3	5	4	4	20
						Average
						23.6

Sulley’s responses stand out in the group. She attained a total of 20 post-test points and 21 pre-test points marking her endorsement the lowest in the group in the *easy to endorse* question set.

As the case studies in Chapter 5 have highlighted Sulley came into the program without any knowledge of social justice. Therefore her beliefs of social justice are much weaker compared to the rest of the group specifically in the *easy to endorse* item set. However, the regression isn’t due to Sulley’s responses but the low endorsements for items 7 and 8 discussed in greater detail in this chapter. Next, I analyze the *difficult to endorse* set and compare the results from the pretest with the posttest.

*Difficult to endorse set*

The second set of items (3,5,6,9,10,11 and 12) are the *difficult to endorse* items, which are negatively scored, meaning the lower number indicates stronger social justice beliefs. The lowest number possible is 7, which denotes responding with a score of 1 (strongly disagree) to the seven *difficult to endorse* items (3,5,6,9,10,11 and 12).



Similarly, the negatively scored scale items were first summed up and taken the average for both the pretest and the posttest surveys. The pretest results indicate an average score of 13.4 and the posttest score is 13.8, showing a slight 0.4 point increase in the *difficult to endorse* item set (see Table 14 and 15). The 0.4 point increase implies weakening of social justice beliefs. Items 11 and 12 contributed the most to this regression, discussed in more detail further in the chapter.

Table 14.

*Pre-test difficult to endorse set*

Pre-test	Item 3	Item 5	Item 6	Item 9	Item10	Item11	Item 12	Total
Sarah	2	2	1	2	1	3	1	12
Andy	2	2	2	1	1	2	4	14
Marissa	1	2	1	3	2	2	2	13
William	2	4	3	4	1	4	2	20
Truth	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Allan	4	1	2	5	1	1	1	15
Alice	1	2	3	1	1	2	4	14
Monique	3	3	1	5	2	3	2	19
Jonathan	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	10
Luna	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	8
Robin	1	1	2	1	1	1	5	12
Sulley	2	2	2	1	2	4	4	17
Average								13.4

Table. 15

*Post-test difficult to endorse set*

Post-test	Item 3	Item 5	Item 6	Item 9	Item 10	Item 11	Item 12	Total
Sarah	3	2	1	1	1	1	2	11
Andy	2	2	1	2	1	2	4	14
Marissa	1	2	2	3	2	2	2	14
William	2	4	3	5	3	4	3	24
Truth	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Allan	4	2	3	3	2	2	2	18
Alice	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	10
Monique	1	2	3	1	2	2	3	14
Jonathan	2	3	2	1	1	2	2	13
Luna	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	9
Robin	1	1	2	1	2	3	4	14
Sulley	2	1	3	1	3	4	4	18
Average								13.8

It is evident that only one person has the strongest social justice beliefs, Truth with a total of 7 points. William had the lowest endorsement of social justice beliefs with a score of 20, along with Monique 19 and Sulley 17 in the *difficult to endorse* set. Truth was the only participant that scored the highest points , 25 on the *easy to endorse* questions and the lowest 7 points on the *difficult to endorse* items for *both* the pre-test and post test surveys, indicating that her beliefs of social justice are the strongest of the group in each survey.

Sulley had the second and third weakest endorsement of social justice, trailing behind William who had the highest score in both *difficult to endorse* pre (20) and post (24) surveys. The findings revealing that Truth has the strongest social justice beliefs and Sulley the lowest, support the case study’s (Chapter 5) case selections for Truth to represent high awareness and Sulley the lowest awareness of social justice issues.

To recap, the difference between the *easy to endorse* pre and post assessments was 0.6 and the difference between *difficult to endorse* pre and post assessments was 0.4, yielding the average difference for all items to be 0.5 points. Simply put, the overall change between the pretest and the post-test among all items is half of a one point.

*Distribution among easy to endorse and difficult to endorse averages*

There were substantial differences in the distribution of endorsing social justice beliefs between the *difficult to endorse* items in comparison to the *easy to endorse* items. Closely examining the pre test scores of *easy to endorse* and *difficult to endorse* sets (see Table 16) magnifies the difference.

For the *easy to endorse* set 25 points was the highest possible points and the average score among the group was 24.25 a difference of 0.75 points or 3%. Conversely, in the *difficult to endorse* set 7 points was the strongest endorsement, but the average was 13.41 with a difference of 6.41 points or 48%. It is clear that participants on average had far weaker social justice beliefs in the *difficult to endorse* set than in the *easy to endorse* set (see Table 16).

Table 16.

*Difference in the average points*

Sets	possible points (strong SJ)	average	Difference	%
Easy to endorse	25	24.25	0.75	3%
Difficult to endorse	7	13.41	6.41	48%

*Direction of change in easy to endorse and difficult to endorse sets*

Besides, identifying participants’ *easy to endorse* and *difficult to endorse* set total and average points, in this section I discuss how each participant evolved within each set (see Table 17).

### *Easy to endorse pre and post tests*

I calculated the difference between the sums of the *easy to endorse* pre and post-test items to reveal how each participant changed their beliefs. A positive number indicates stronger social justice beliefs, a negative number represents weakening social justice beliefs and the number zero stands for no change (see Table 17).

Five participants didn't change their already strong beliefs of social justice and had maintained a score of 25 points in the pre and post surveys (Jonathan, Alice, Truth, William, Andy). Two participants increased their beliefs of social justice (Sarah and Allan). Five participants' social justice beliefs weakened (Sulley, Robin, Luna, Monique, Marissa).

To recap, 7 out of 12 participants had strong social justice beliefs in the *easy to endorse* pre and post surveys. In fact, participants whose social justice beliefs had weakened would still be considered as having strong social justice beliefs. While a score of 25 represents the highest social justice beliefs across the five statements—marked by (strongly agree) rating—a score of 20 represents agreement (agree) with the five social justice oriented statements. Besides Sulley (who also agrees with the social justice oriented statements) everybody had above 23 points. Clearly, participants whose social justice beliefs had weakened still maintain strong social justice beliefs in the *easy to endorse* set.

Table 17.

*Measuring change in pre and post easy to endorse set*

Name	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
Sarah	23	24	1
Andy	25	25	0
Marissa	24	23	-1
William	25	25	0
Truth	25	25	0
Allan	23	24	1
Alice	25	25	0
Monique	25	22	-3
Jonathan	25	25	0
Luna	25	23	-2
Robin	25	23	-2
Sulley	21	20	-1

Similarly, this calculation was repeated for the negatively scoring items in the *difficult to endorse* set (see Table 18). To reiterate, a negative score here indicates stronger social justice beliefs. Two participants had no change marked by a zero (Truth and Andy). Three participants had a negative score, which indicates strengthening social justice beliefs (Sarah, Alice, Monique). Seven participants had a positive score indicating regression (Sulley, Robin, Luna, Jonathan, Allan, William, Marissa), which I discuss in detail in the subsequent sections.

Table 18 reveals that 5 participants including those who had no change and those whose beliefs were strengthened (Truth, Andy, Sarah, Alice and Monique) in the post survey, have strong social justice beliefs. These five participants' post test survey points in the *difficult to endorse* item set ranged between 7-14 points, indicating *strong disagreement* but mostly *disagreement* with the 7 *difficult to endorse* statements. I also include Luna in the group of five participants totaling it to six participants, because her pre and post survey results indicate that she

has the second strongest social justice beliefs, even though in the post test she had +1 point increase.

In sum, half of the participants *disagreed* with the 7 *difficult to endorse* statements, which indicates that their social justice beliefs are strong.

Table 18.

*Measuring change in pre and post difficult to endorse set*

	Pretest	Post-test	Difference
Sarah	12	11	-1
Andy	14	14	0
Marissa	13	14	1
William	20	24	4
Truth	7	7	0
Allan	15	18	3
Alice	14	10	-4
Monique	19	14	-5
Jonathan	10	13	3
Luna	8	9	1
Robin	12	14	2
Sulley	17	18	1

The next section, examines each items from both *easy to endorse* and *difficult to endorse* sets by means of grouping the statements together that have a shared theme to analyze participants' changing social justice beliefs thematically.

### **Thematic Group Analysis**

It is particularly noteworthy that among the two *easy* and *difficult* sets combined the difference between the pre and post assessments is very small, less than one point. The thematic analysis in this section reveals that the small change is due to participants' evolution on one key concept which is about challenging institutional inequalities. Examining items across both *easy*

and *difficult to endorse* sets, I correspondingly grouped together four themes. I closely examined these themes:

1. Institutional inequalities
2. Deficit ideology
3. Critical and relevant content
4. Critical self reflection

First, I discuss institutional inequality and deficit ideology represented mostly in the *difficult to endorse* set.

### *Institutional inequalities*

The LTSJ-B survey sampled limited social justice beliefs including measuring participants' beliefs about challenging institutional inequalities. Three items from the *difficult to endorse* (10, 11,12) and two items from the *easy to endorse* (7 and 8) sets sought to gauge participants' beliefs about institutional inequality and deficit ideology: Here are the 5 statements inquiring about candidates' beliefs of challenging institutional inequalities, items:

Item 7. Part of the responsibilities of the teacher is to challenge school arrangements that maintain societal inequalities.

Item 8. Teachers should teach student to think critically about government positions and actions.

Item 10. Although teachers have to appreciate diversity, it's not their job to change society.

Item 11. Whether students succeed in school depends primarily on how hard they work.

Item 12. Realistically, the job of a teacher is to prepare students for the lives they are likely to lead.

The above 4 statements (besides item 10) consistently, in both pre and post interviews, had the weakest endorsements. Table 19 shows how items 7 and 8 had the lowest endorsement. Table 21 shows how items 11 and 12 had the highest endorsement (negatively scored).

Table 19.  
*Easy to endorse pre and post test results*

Pre test	1	2	4	7	8
Sarah	5	5	5	4	4
Andy	5	5	5	5	5
Marissa	5	5	5	4	5
William	5	5	5	5	5
Truth	5	5	5	5	5
Allan	5	5	4	4	5
Alice	5	5	5	5	5
Monique	5	5	5	5	5
Jonathan	5	5	5	5	5
Luna	5	5	5	5	5
Robin	5	5	5	5	5
Sulley	4	4	5	4	4
Group total	59	59	59	56	58

Post Test	1	2	4	7	8
Sarah	5	5	5	4	5
Andy	5	5	5	5	5
Marissa	5	5	5	4	4
William	5	5	5	5	5
Truth	5	5	5	5	5
Allan	5	5	5	4	5
Alice	5	5	5	5	5
Monique	5	5	5	4	3
Jonathan	5	5	5	5	5
Luna	5	4	5	5	4
Robin	5	5	5	4	4
Sulley	4	3	5	4	4
Group Total	59	57	60	54	54

Items 7 and 8 are part of the *easy to endorse* set, which had the lowest endorsement compared to the other 3 items (1, 2, 4) which participants easily endorsed indicating strong social justice beliefs (see Table 19).

Item 7 indicates that only two participants, Monique and Robin, had changed their initial *strongly agree* response to *agree* with the notion that teachers need to challenge educational and societal inequities (see Table 20). The rest of the participants had maintained their initial, largely high endorsements.



Similarly, for item 8 three participants had lowered their *strongly agree* (Marissa, Luna, Robin) endorsements to *agree* and one participant (Monique) had become *uncertain* about teaching students to critically interpret government positions and actions.

Although, there is weakening post survey results for statements 7 and 8, it is important to remember that the strongest possible social justice beliefs for the group for each *easy to endorse* item is 60 points and participants were not too far from it in both pre and post tests for the *easy to endorse* question set. Participants' responses were in the range of strongly agreeing with the two statements. A mere agreement (agree) vs strong agreement (strongly agree) would result in total of 48 points; all of the participants had accumulated a score above that threshold. Despite their slightly weakening endorsements in the post survey participants mostly, strongly agreed with statements 7 and 8:

Item 7. Part of the responsibilities of the teacher is to challenge school arrangements that maintain societal inequalities.

Item 8. Teachers should teach student to think critically about government positions and actions.

Table 20.

*Items 7 and 8: Pre and post test results*

Item 7	Pre-test	Post-test	Item 8	Pre-test	Post-test
Sarah	4	4	Sarah	4	5
Andy	5	5	Andy	5	5
Marissa	4	4	Marissa	5	4
William	5	5	William	5	5
Truth	5	5	Truth	5	5
Allan	4	4	Allan	5	5
Alice	5	5	Alice	5	5
Monique	5	4	Monique	5	3
Jonathan	5	5	Jonathan	5	5
Luna	5	5	Luna	5	4
Robin	5	4	Robin	5	4
Sulley	4	4	Sulley	4	4
Group Total	56	54	Group Total	58	54

Note\* highlighted participants show stronger social justice endorsements, while red participants indicate regressing social justice beliefs.

The three statements (10,11 and 12) about challenging institutional inequalities under the *difficult to endorse* set revealed regression (higher score) in the post survey results (see Table 21).

Table 21.

*Difficult to endorse pre and post test results*

Pre-test	3	5	6	9	10	11	12
Sarah	2	2	1	2	1	3	1
Andy	2	2	2	1	1	2	4
Marissa	1	2	1	3	2	2	2
William	2	4	3	4	1	4	2
Truth	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Allan	4	1	2	5	1	1	1
Alice	1	2	3	1	1	2	4
Monique	3	3	1	5	2	3	2
Jonathan	1	2	1	1	2	2	1
Luna	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Robin	1	1	2	1	1	1	5
Sulley	2	2	2	1	2	4	4
Group Total	21	24	20	26	16	26	28

Post-test	3	5	6	9	10	11	12
Sarah	3	2	1	1	1	1	2
Andy	2	2	1	2	1	2	4
Marissa	1	2	2	3	2	2	2
William	2	4	3	5	3	4	3
Truth	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Allan	4	2	3	3	2	2	2
Alice	1	1	1	1	1	2	3
Monique	1	2	3	1	2	2	3
Jonathan	2	3	2	1	1	2	2
Luna	1	1	1	1	1	3	1
Robin	1	1	2	1	2	3	4
Sulley	2	1	3	1	3	4	4
Group Total	21	22	23	21	20	28	31

Taking a closer look at items 11 and 12 reveals that many of the participants had become more uncertain about challenging institutional inequalities (see Table 22). For Item 11, which alludes to the notion of meritocracy, two participants changed their responses from *strongly disagree* to *uncertain* (Luna and Robin) and one participant moved to *disagree* (Allan). However, two participants changed their responses from initially *uncertain* to *disagree* and *strongly disagree*. (Sarah and Monique).

Item 12 stood out the most because it revealed the weakest social justice beliefs in both pre and post test results under the *difficult to endorse set*. Statement 12 alludes to the notion that teachers bear the responsibility of how students will live their lives into adulthood. This statement disregards educational and societal inequalities by individualizing teacher’s efforts to be the most significant predictor of student success in life.

Three participants (Jonathan, Allan, and Sarah) changed their responses from strongly disagree to disagree and two participants (Monique and William) had indicated *uncertainty* from their initial *disagree* responses. Conversely, Alice changed her *agree* answer to *uncertain* and Robin had moved from *strongly agree* to *agree* (see Table 22).

Items 11 and 12 reveal the most conceptual uncertainty in pre and post test survey results. For example, the strongest social justice beliefs would indicate a group total score of 12 points (strongly disagree) for each of the two items. If participants merely *disagreed* with the statements they would be in the range of 12-24 points (*disagree*). If they were uncertain they would be in the range of 24-36 points (*uncertain*). It is evident that participants' responses for items 11 and 12 resided between the 26-31 point range, indicating uncertainty (see Table 22).

Table 22.

*Items 11 and 12: Pre and post test results*

Item 11	Pre-test	Post test	Item 12	Pre-test	Post test
Sarah	3	1	Sarah	1	2
Andy	2	2	Andy	4	4
Marissa	2	2	Marissa	2	2
William	4	4	William	2	3
Truth	1	1	Truth	1	1
Allan	1	2	Allan	1	2
Alice	2	2	Alice	4	3
Monique	3	2	Monique	2	3
Jonathan	2	2	Jonathan	1	2
Luna	1	3	Luna	1	1
Robin	1	3	Robin	5	4
Sulley	4	4	Sulley	4	4
Group Total	26	28	Group Total	28	31

Note\* highlighted participants show stronger social justice endorsements, while red participants indicate regressing social justice beliefs.

Similar to items 11 and 12, item 10, also fits under the theme of challenging institutional inequality, under the *difficult to endorse* set. However, item 10 looks much different. Item 10

refers to the notion that it's not the teachers' job to change society. This item had the lowest endorsement (negatively scored) among the five *difficult to endorse* items in both pre and post tests; indicating the strongest social justice beliefs in the *difficult to endorse* set (see Table 21). Although item 10 had the lowest endorsement in the post test results, there was a 4 point regression from the pre-test results. Two participants (Sully and William) had changed their initial responses from *strongly disagree* and *disagree* to becoming *uncertain* in the post survey. Allan and Robin changed their *strong disagreements* to *disagree* (see Table 23).

Like all items (7,8,11,12), under the theme institutional inequalities, participants noted more *uncertainty* and *disagreement* vs *strong disagreement* in the post survey.

Table 23.

*Item 10: Pre and post test results*

Item 10	pre-test	Post test
Sarah	1	1
Andy	1	1
Marissa	2	2
William	1	3
Truth	1	1
Allan	1	2
Alice	1	1
Monique	2	2
Jonathan	2	1
Luna	1	1
Robin	1	2
Sulley	2	3
Group Total	16	20

In sum, it is mostly in the above five items (7, 8, 10,11,12) regarding institutional inequalities that participants' post test scores were much weaker. There was growing uncertainty about items

10, 11 and 12. Next, I discuss the theme related to deficit ideology which was exclusively under the *difficult to endorse set*.

### *Deficit ideology*

In addition to statements measuring participants beliefs about institutional inequalities in the *difficult to endorse* question set, there were three statements (5,6 and 9) that related to measuring participants' deficit ideologies:

Item 5. The most important goal in working with immigrant children and English Language learners is that they assimilate into American culture.

Item 6. It's reasonable for teachers to have lower classroom expectations for students who don't speak English as their first language.

Item 9. Economically disadvantaged students have more to gain in school because they bring less into the classroom.

In the pre-test survey, item 9 claiming that “economically disadvantaged students have more to gain in school because they bring less” had the most endorsement of the three deficit laden items (see Table 24). Conversely, in the post-test, it had the lowest endorsement, mainly because of three participants; Monique had drastically changed her *strongly agree* answer to *strongly disagree*, Allan had changed his response from *strongly agree* to *uncertain*, and Sarah's response moved from *disagree* to *strongly disagree* (see Table 24).

Similarly, item 5 had a lower endorsement in the post test in comparison to the pretest, indicating less endorsement of the belief that “teachers goal in working with immigrant and English Language learners is to assimilate into American culture”. Four participants (Alice, Monique, Luna, Sulley) had changed their beliefs from *disagree* to *strongly disagree*,

Conversely, Allan moved from *strongly disagree* to *disagree* and Jonathan moved from *disagree* to *uncertain* (see Table 24).

Item 6 was the exception among the three deficit measuring items. Unlike items 9 and 5, item 6 had an increase in endorsing the notion that teachers need to “lower classroom expectations for students who don’t speak English as their first language”. Three participants (Monique, Jonathan, and Marissa) moved from *strongly disagree* to *disagree* and *two participants* (Allan and Sulley) changed their *disagree* answer to *uncertain* in regards to lowering their expectations for non English speaking students (see Table 24). Although there was an increase in endorsing item 6, participants still *disagreed* with item 6.

Table 24.

*Items 5, 6 and 9: Pre and post test results*

Item 5	Pre-test	Post test	Item 6	Pre-test	Post test	Item 9	Pre-test	Post test
Sarah	2	2	Sarah	1	1	Sarah	2	1
Andy	2	2	Andy	2	1	Andy	1	2
Marissa	2	2	Marissa	1	2	Marissa	3	3
William	4	4	William	3	3	William	4	5
Truth	1	1	Truth	1	1	Truth	1	1
Allan	1	2	Allan	2	3	Allan	5	3
Alice	2	1	Alice	3	1	Alice	1	1
Monique	3	2	Monique	1	3	Monique	5	1
Jonathan	2	3	Jonathan	1	2	Jonathan	1	1
Luna	2	1	Luna	1	1	Luna	1	1
Robin	1	1	Robin	2	2	Robin	1	1
Sulley	2	1	Sulley	2	3	Sulley	1	1
Group Total	24	22	Group Total	20	23	Group Total	26	21

Although there was more uncertainty in items 5 and 9 in the pre-test, it moved towards *disagreement* in the post-test. In the post test, participants *disagreed* with items 5, 6 and 9. For example, a total group score of 12 (strongly disagree) indicates *strong disagreement* with deficit oriented statements. A score between 12-24 (disagree) indicates *disagreement* and 24-36 indicates *uncertainty* with the deficit oriented statements. Overall, participants' responses to the 3 deficit oriented statements indicate that they disagreed with the deficit statements in the post survey.

In the next section, I discuss the second two themes in the survey which are mostly under the *easy to endorse* items set.

#### *Critical and relevant curriculum*

I grouped items 2, 4 and 3 together to represent the theme critical and relevant curriculum.

Items 2 and 4 which are under the *easy to endorse* set had scored among the highest endorsements in the pre-test survey.

Item 2. Issues related to racism and inequality should be openly discussed in the classroom.

Item 4. Good teaching incorporates diverse cultures and experiences into classroom lessons and discussions.

Item 4 had the highest endorsement in both pre and post tests (see Table 19). Item 2 had a lower endorsement in the post test, because two participants lowered their endorsements: Sulley changed her *agree* response to *uncertain* and Luna moved from *strongly agree* to *agree* (see Table 25).



Table 25.

*Items 2 and 4: Pre-and post test results*

Pre Test	item 2	item 4	Post Test	item 2	item 4
Sarah	5	5	Sarah	5	5
Andy	5	5	Andy	5	5
Marissa	5	5	Marissa	5	5
William	5	5	William	5	5
Truth	5	5	Truth	5	5
Allan	5	4	Allan	5	5
Alice	5	5	Alice	5	5
Monique	5	5	Monique	5	5
Jonathan	5	5	Jonathan	5	5
Luna	5	5	Luna	4	5
Robin	5	5	Robin	5	5
Sulley	4	5	Sulley	3	5
Group total	59	59	Group Total	57	60

Item 3 is also under the critical and relevant curriculum theme but is an item from the *difficult to endorse* set, which is negatively scored (see Table 26).

Item 3. For the most part covering multicultural topics is only relevant to certain subject areas such as social studies and literature.

Although the group total for this item had remained the same, there were individual changes.

Monique had changed her response from *uncertain* to *strongly disagree*, while Sarah had changed her response from *disagree* to *uncertain* and Jonathan moved his position from *strongly disagree* to *disagree*. It was interesting that Marissa and Sully who teach math and science both disagreed with this statement; while Sarah and Jonathan both English teachers had changed their initial stronger disagreements (see Table 26).

Table 26.

*Item 3: Pre and post test results*

Pre and post test	Item 3	Item 3
Sarah	2	3
Andy	2	2
Marissa	1	1
William	2	2
Truth	1	1
Allan	4	4
Alice	1	1
Monique	3	1
Jonathan	1	2
Luna	1	1
Robin	1	1
Sulley	2	2
Group Total	21	21

In sum, Items 2, 4 and 3 respectively had strong endorsements, implying that participants’ beliefs of social justice was highest among these items. Critical and relevant curriculum was a dominant theme that emerged from the longitudinal interviews discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. These findings support the conclusions from the interviews discussed further in the overarching conclusion section. In the next section, I discuss the notion of critical self-reflection, similar to items 2 and 4 in the *easy to endorse* set, had strong endorsement in the pre and post survey results.

*Critical self-reflection*

Item 1 represents a very high scoring *easy to endorse* item, related to critical self-reflection:

Item 1. An important part of learning to be a teacher is examining ones’ own attitudes and beliefs about race, class, gender, disabilities, and sexual orientation.

In both pre and post surveys, everybody *strongly agreed* with this statement besides Sulley who had merely *agreed* with it (see Table 19). Interestingly, the longitudinal interview data revealed that participants hardly mentioned being engaged in critical self reflection, which is an ongoing, emotionally and cognitively engaging process. I had expected more participants to mention this practice as an indication of them working through it. The survey results show that they strongly agree with the concept, but how rigorously they are engaged with it is unclear. It is very possible that participants theoretically agree with the practice of critical self reflection but have not yet engaged in its practice.

### **Overarching Conclusions**

It is important to highlight one of the most significant conclusions; which is that participants' starting social justice beliefs were already strong and for the most part remained strong, except for a slight movement towards uncertainty particularly related to institutional inequalities. In this concluding section, I summarize the four themes that were analyzed above and discuss the parallels between the survey findings and the conclusions from the longitudinal interviews (discussed in Chapter 6). The four themes emerged through combining related survey items together:

1. Institutional inequalities
2. Deficit ideology
3. Critical and relevant curriculum
4. Critical self-reflection

#### *Institutional inequalities*

First, the slight difference between the pre and post survey results is due to participants becoming more uncertain about institutional inequalities. The five items below which indicated

the most regression between pre and post assessments all allude to the notion of institutional inequalities.

Item 7. Part of the responsibilities of the teacher is to challenge school arrangements that maintain societal inequalities.

Item 8. Teachers should teach student to think critically about government positions and actions

Item 10. Although teachers have to appreciate diversity, it's not their job to change society.

Item 11. Whether students succeed in school depends primarily on how hard they work.

Item 12. Realistically, the job of a teacher is to prepare students for the lives they are likely to lead.

Participants' efforts towards challenging institutional inequalities were naturally less strong, because they were just becoming part of the institution, and therefore expectations to "challenge school arrangements" and "critically assess government positions and actions" had less primacy for first year teachers. Commonly, first year teachers face numerous challenges as they transition from being students to their new roles as teachers. Some of those struggles are associated with learning about their schools' expectations and procedures, building relationships with students, colleagues and administrators, learning about the community and engaging in daily instructional planning, differentiating, and assessing. In the interviews, participants had described their social justice enactments primarily grounded in curricular and instructional restructuring; such as the selection of books and assignments to reflect more critical and relevant topics (discussed in Chapter 6) without mentioning intentional efforts of addressing institutional inequalities.

Additionally, the survey revealed participants' low awareness of institutional inequalities. Their sizeable endorsements and uncertainty about the two notions that teacher's "prepare students for the lives they are likely to lead" and students' success being dependant "primarily on how hard they work" indicate their lack of awareness of institutional inequalities. In reality, teachers' impact on students' success is not isolated from institutional inequalities such as underfunded schools, lack of resources in the classroom, lack of access to higher education, poverty and crime which together affect students' chances of success. These findings are similar to the interview findings concluding that participants made no reference to challenging institutional inequalities. Moreover, the survey illuminates participants' lack of awareness of how institutional inequalities affect urban students.

### *Deficit ideology*

In addition to measuring participants' beliefs on institutional inequities, the survey measured their deficit ideology. Interestingly, awareness of institutional inequalities and resisting deficit ideology, which are grouped together under the *difficult to endorse* set, are intricately related. Increasing awareness of institutional inequalities enables teachers to realize that the limitations of their students' achievements are bound to the historical and structural forces that limit students' opportunities, access and resources to achieve success, rather than the deficit ideologies about their students' capabilities and motivations.

The findings reveal that participants disagreed with the deficit statements in the post survey results, in comparison to their somewhat uncertain pre-test results. They disagreed with the notion that economically disadvantaged students "bring less into the classroom". They disagreed about "lowering their expectations" for English learners and "assimilating them into American culture", items 5 and 6 and 9.

Item 5. The most important goal in working with immigrant children and English Language learners is that they assimilate into American culture.

Item 6. It's reasonable for teachers to have lower classroom expectations for students who don't speak English as their first language.

Item 9. Economically disadvantaged students have more to gain in school because they bring less into the classroom.

These findings are aligned with the longitudinal interview conclusions (discussed in Chapter 6). In the interviews, participants had consistently emphasized pedagogical equity or differentiating instruction to meet their students' different academic needs, instead of the alternative "lowering expectations" for them. Additionally, participants fundamentally advocated for students' experiences and voices to be validated in the classroom, discrediting the idea that urban students "bring less into the classroom". They had opened up space in their classrooms for students to share their experiences and knowledge of oppression. It is through these social justice practices that participants defied deficit ideology. Participants' disagreements with deficit oriented beliefs revealed through the survey, was strongly supported by their self-reported practices of social justice discussed in the interviews.

### *Critical and relevant curriculum*

One of the themes that indicated strong social justice beliefs in the pre and post survey results was critical and relevant curriculum. The conclusions from the survey indicate participants' strong endorsements of incorporating "diverse" voices in the curriculum and "issues related to racism and inequality." Additionally, participants disagreed with the notion that "covering multicultural topics is relevant to certain subjects", items 2, 3 and 4

Item 2. Issues related to racism and inequality should be openly discussed in the classroom.

Item 3. For the most part covering multicultural topics is only relevant to certain subject areas such as social studies and literature.

Item 4. Good teaching incorporates diverse cultures and experiences into classroom lessons and discussions.

These conceptions indicated strong social justice beliefs and closely matched with the dominant theme of *critical and relevant curriculum* articulated by participants at the interviews. In the interviews, participants had explained enacting social justice by discussing issues related to inequalities particularly racism, homophobia and immigration. They fervently believed that the inclusion of “diverse cultures and experiences into the classroom lessons and discussions” made learning more relevant and critical. Additionally, the two participants who taught math and science disagreed with the notion that social justice is “only relevant to certain subject areas such as social studies and literature.” The strong link between these highly supported conceptions from the survey, and the self-reported practices of enacting social justice from the interviews, is certainly clear.

### *Critical self reflection*

The survey also indicated that participants highly endorsed the notion of critical self reflection in both pre and post assessment results as in Item 1:

Item 1. An important part of learning to be a teacher is examining ones’ own attitudes and beliefs about race, class, gender, disabilities, and sexual orientation.

However, unlike the themes, institutional inequalities, critical and relevant curriculum and deficit ideology that were closely aligned with the conclusions of the longitudinal interviews,

participants' strong endorsement of engaging in critical self reflection is not supported by the interview results. The interview data reveal that participants didn't discuss critical self reflection as a contributing factor to becoming more social justice oriented in their practice. This indicates a discrepancy between their beliefs of critical self reflection revealed in the survey, and their actual engagement in the practice of critical self reflection.

Overall, the survey findings which measured participants' social justice beliefs by and large closely reflected participants' self reported practices discussed in the interviews. Participants' strong beliefs in critical and relevant curriculum as well as non deficit oriented teaching practices were supported by their self-reported practices discussed in the interviews. In the same way, participants' lack of awareness and efforts challenging institutional inequalities were evident in their interview accounts. The only inconsistency between the survey and interview findings was the notion of critical self reflection, which was highly endorsed in the survey but wasn't discussed in the interviews.



## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

In the current unsettling political environment, where critical and oppositional discourses are jeopardized, social justice educational agendas will likely be further pushed to the peripheries. In a time of alt-right conservatism, outright discrimination and economic and environmental injustice taking center stage, the efforts of teaching and learning in a socially conscious and politically responsive way is vitally significant.

As Chapter 1 has argued, the movement of privatizing education, headed by the current Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and backed by the Trump Administration, deduces education to an apolitical technical skill. This governing trend is part a global economic movement known as neoliberalism that has emphasized minimal governmental intervention and regulation in the market economy and the public enterprise (Apple 1996; Torres, 2009). The reconstruction of the institution of education will further “beget a culture of compliance, which is valued over critique” (Johnson, 2013, p. 14).

Conversely, social justice education is a critique of the prevailing educational trajectory and the social order that is dehumanizing and oppressive. Championing education to serve as a counter-hegemonic practice to deconstruct, de-legitimize, de-normalize power and knowledge allows us to envision education as being capable of empowering personal and institutional transformation. Paulo Freire’s philosophy of education has contributed tremendously to this vision. Freire situated teaching and learning in the lived experiences of the marginalized, enabling the development of consciousness and ongoing dialogue, which he believed would lead to praxis.

The pursuit of social progress through education, utilizes a wide range of pathways. In this dissertation, I have focused on the preparation of teachers who are being trained to teach

towards social justice. I explored and mapped out teacher candidates' notions and self-reported practices of social justice—at different times during their teacher education program—to provide clarity on the numerous ways this theoretical construct is being understood and applied by a diverse group of candidates.

The research questions I pursued related to how teacher candidates' conceptions and self-reported practices of social justice changed from the time they entered the program to the time they completed it:

1. What are the teacher candidates' initial conceptions of social justice before they start their course of study?
2. What are the teacher candidates' initial beliefs about putting social justice into practice before they start their course of study?
3. What are teacher candidates' conceptions of social justice after their first year in the program?
4. What are teacher candidates' practices of social justice after their first year in the program?
5. What are teacher candidates' conceptions of social justice after their second year in the program?
6. What are teacher candidates' practices of social justice after their second year in the program?

Using a qualitative longitudinal design, I conducted four interviews with 12 participants; one in the beginning and one at the end of each academic year. The findings of the study are separated between individual case studies, presented in Chapter 5, a group thematic analysis outlined in Chapter 6 and a pre and post assessment survey, discussed in Chapter 7.

This closing chapter includes the following sections:

1. Summary of the findings from Chapters 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7
2. The implications for teacher education and recommendations for future research
3. The limitations of the study
4. Concluding thoughts

## Chapter 5 Summary

The interview accounts of Truth, Luna and Sulley were selected to represent the evolution of social justice beliefs and practices of candidates with varying levels of social justice beliefs. Truth's case study represented high awareness of social justice, Sulley's case study represented low to no awareness of entering social justice beliefs, and Luna's account represented moderate levels of awareness of social justice beliefs evaluated at the beginning of the program. The case studies of these three candidates revealed three findings.

First, the program had the most impact on the candidate who had the strongest commitment to social justice. Truth's case study personifies this finding. Truth had experienced personal transformation; healing from past schooling wounds and gaining confidence in her academic capabilities. Sulley, on the other hand, had gained conceptual clarity of social justice, but didn't experiment with applying her new found social justice beliefs into practice. Sulley's unawareness of social injustice in education prior to starting the program made for a steep learning curve. Nonetheless, she was determined to pursue her intention to teach with a social justice orientation. Luna who symbolized moderate social justice beliefs at the beginning of the program, had also increased her social justice beliefs, and had prudently applied her vision of social justice into practice during her resident year.

Second, based on the three case studies, it was revealed that the strong social justice beliefs were mostly developed as a result of candidates' personal histories with injustice. Truth and Luna both had experienced forms of social and educational injustice which had emboldened their praxis towards teaching for social justice. Truth's first hand experiences of utter discrimination in her educational background, combined with poverty and familial trauma were instrumental factors to her social justice advocacy. Similarly, Luna's undocumented immigrant

status which disoriented her future ambitions impacted her social justice development. Truth's and Luna's confining experiences had imbued in them a sense of social justice spirit. This finding is consistent with Dorman's (2012) study, which has similarly concluded that "the factor which had the strongest influence on the teachers' appropriation level of the critical awareness tool is a key element of identity: personal biography and history...the teachers' life experiences prior to entering the teaching profession affected how they approached teaching for social justice and equity" (p.24).

Third, the three case studies revealed that participants who had strong commitments to social justice personalized their social justice practice. For example, Luna's status as an undocumented student contributed to her heavy focus on the topic of immigration in her classroom. She personalized her social justice teaching to reflect the issues she and her mostly Latino/a immigrant students were deeply affected by. Similarly, Truth's emphasis on teaching that is concerned with healing from internalized racism through storytelling is informed by her personal transformation in the program, which prompted her to open up and tell her story of oppression, start healing from it and foster empowerment. Luna's and Truth's practices reflected their own unique attributions towards teaching for social justice as a result of their personal histories with injustice.

To sum up, the case studies revealed that the program had the most impact on the participants with the strong commitment to social justice. Second, it became evident that strong social justice beliefs are rooted among candidates' personal histories with educational or social injustice. Lastly, participants with strong awareness of social justice personalized their practice representing their unique attribution to teaching towards social justice.

## Chapter 6 Summary

To discern the multiple developments of teacher candidates' conceptions and practices of social justice, I utilized a thematic group analysis to organize and explore the collected data from the longitudinal interviews. The thematic group analysis revealed new understandings about how teacher candidates define and practice social justice.

First, participants defined social justice through the following three dominant themes across all four interviews: *recognize inequality and promote academic success*, provide *pedagogical equity* and lastly, give *voice* to students. Second, participants discussed enacting social justice through two themes: *critical and relevant curriculum* and *community building*. Cross-analyzing these themes indicate a strong relationship between participants' definitions of social justice and their practices of social justice.

These themes taken all together, contributed to the salient conclusion that candidates conceptualized social justice as a practice to *empower marginalized students*; especially at the last interview, which mostly centered on giving students voice to share their personal histories of injustice, and in the process, learn to recognize the embedded inequalities, internalized dominant assumptions and consider forms of resistance.

Participants were asked to self-reflect and reveal how their conceptions of social justice had evolved after completing each academic year. Majority shared learning about the practical applications of social justice through the course content they were exposed to in the program. This finding is interesting, given that one of the known difficulties in adapting a social justice practice is not in grasping its theoretically dense nature but the practical applications of it. To explain this finding, I draw from the works of critical scholars that condemn the permeating neoliberal values in education (Apple, 1996; Giroux, 2012; Hedges, 2009; Klein, 2007; Torres,

2011). I suspect that because the prevailing philosophy of schooling has become more technical and mechanistic, teachers seek methodological and prescriptive approaches to substantiate proficiency and professional development, which explains why participants in this study measured their evolution on the concept of social justice by their mastery of applied practice.

One of the last findings to highlight from Chapter 6 relates to the concept of critical self-reflection. Perhaps, one of the most significant aspects of cultivating a social justice teaching practice is the ongoing engagement in the process of critical self-reflection. Most participants did not allude to their practice of critical self reflection, signifying their remote understanding of it.

To recapitulate, the findings from Chapter 6 reveal:

1. A strong relationship between participants' definitions of social justice and their self-reported practices of social justice.
2. Participants' culminated conceptualizations of social justice centered on the notion of empowering marginalized students.
3. Participants measured their increased knowledge of social justice by their heightened competence to apply it in practice.
4. Lastly, most participants didn't mention or allude to engaging in the practice of critical self reflection as a precondition to becoming a social justice educator.

### **Chapter 7 Summary**

In an attempt to triangulate my data and cross verify the conclusions of the interviews, I administered the LTSJ-B pre and post assessment survey intended to measure participants' entering and exiting beliefs about social justice. The survey results have yielded the following four themes: institutional inequalities, deficit ideology, critical and relevant curriculum, and critical self reflection, separated into *easy to endorse* and *difficult to endorse* items. Institutional

inequalities and deficit ideology were grouped under the *difficult to endorse* items' set, whereas, critical and relevant curriculum and critical self reflection were grouped under the *easy to endorse set*.

The findings from the survey revealed the following four conclusions:

1. Participants' starting social justice beliefs were already strong and remained strong, except for an increased uncertainty related to challenging institutional inequalities.
2. The two themes that indicated the strongest social justice beliefs and endorsements in the pre and post survey results included; using critical and relevant curriculum in the classroom, and the importance of teacher's engagement in the practice of critical self reflection.
3. Participants strengthened their social justice beliefs pertaining to deficit ideology, they largely disagreed with the deficit oriented statements in the post survey, in comparison to their uncertain beliefs in the pre-test survey.
4. Lastly, the survey reveals that the participants' social justice beliefs by and large aligned with their conceptions and self reported practices uncovered in the longitudinal interviews.

### **Implications**

This study contributes to understanding the evolution of social justice beliefs and practices among teacher candidates. Based on the findings of this dissertation, I recommend several implications for teacher education and make recommendations for future research.

#### *Implications for teacher education*

1. While it's useful to build consensus about ways of infusing social justice into a teaching practice, it is very important to recognize and validate the multiplicity of social justice understandings and enactments that are predicated on teachers' personal and unique identities and lived experiences.

The case studies of Luna and Truth have shown that teachers with strong commitment to social justice personalize their teaching to reflect their unique awareness and knowledge related to teaching about injustice. Luna had personalized her social justice practice to focus on issues of immigration because her undocumented status and immigrant identity had afforded her a vision of social justice that was unique to her but accessible and vital for her mostly Latino/a students. Similarly, Truth's emphasis on healing pedagogy and storytelling stemmed from her lived history tainted with racism and poverty, along with her extensive work experience in the criminal justice system, had given her a unique vision and opportunity for enacting social justice. Teacher education programs that are oriented towards social justice must create the conditions—by means of validating the multiplicity of social justice enactments—for teacher candidates to find and foster their distinctive attributions to this practice.

2. The case studies of Luna and Truth revealed that strong social justice beliefs are intricately situated in candidates' lived history and educational backgrounds fraught with racism, poverty, neglect and anti immigrant policies that strongly shaped candidates' dispositions and practice towards actualizing their vision of social justice in education. This epistemic privilege, afforded to candidates, is immensely powerful and transformative in working with urban students. Thus, I suggest recruiting candidates who reflect the urban student population, who can personally identify with the struggles of their students, and guide them towards self-empowerment and success, based on their lived experiences breaking barriers and achieving success. Unfortunately, there hasn't been an increase in recruiting and retaining diverse teachers and teacher educators that reflect the urban student population (Spalding, et. al., 2010).
3. This study has also shown that a teacher education program that emphasizes social justice provides a strong intervention for those who are completely unaware of social justice when they enter the program. Attaining greater understanding of social justice among those who are not pre-disposed to the aims of the program is a notable triumph. Sulley's



case study has illustrated that although her practices of social justice were very limited, her commitment towards this orientation was much stronger. Gaining conceptual understanding of social justice and embracing its vision is an important starting point towards building a social justice practice. Future research will determine how her commitment towards social justice transpires post graduation.

4. The survey findings indicated that participants highly endorsed the concept of teachers' engagement in critical self reflection. The interviews from the program director and advisors inform that deconstructing teacher's identity is a large part of the program's effort to imbue a social justice teaching practice among its candidates. Nonetheless, most of the participants didn't mention being involved in the process of critical self reflection in the longitudinal interviews. I would strongly recommend integrating more intentional assignments, projects, advising and seminar discussions that place further emphases on the significance of teachers' reflexivity as a precondition to developing a social justice teaching practice.
5. Lastly, participants self-reported enacting social justice strictly through pedagogical mutations, which may subdue efforts towards challenging institutional inequalities. The survey results indicated participants' limited awareness of institutional inequalities in addition to, the interview findings revealing participants' uncertainty about challenging institutional/educational inequalities. The program must devote greater effort to teach candidates about the economic and sociopolitical structural inequalities that have and continue to create profound barriers for urban students to have equal educational opportunities. Such emphases should embrace the limitations and possibilities for

beginning teachers to navigate the restraints and repercussions, and authenticate their resistance towards institutional/educational inequities.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this dissertation suggest that future research should engage in more comprehensive studies using mixed research methods to highlight the inherent intricacies in adapting a social justice practice.

1. This dissertation did not conduct a study on how UCLA's teacher education program funnels their ideals and visions of social justice to their teacher candidates. It would be valuable to document the structures and inner-workings that reveal the systems and practices in place promoting teaching for social justice from a programmatic perspective.
2. The interview accounts of almost all the candidates imply that their social justice practice promotes, or will promote, academic engagement among their students. Teachers who have engaged students in critical perspectives attest to the positive relationship between academic performance and their social justice oriented practice (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). I would suggest future research to examine the academic motivations of students who are taught by social justice oriented teachers from UCLA's TEP, compared to the academic motivations of students taught by traditional teachers. Academic motivations may be analyzed by looking at students' participation rates, number of completed homework assignments, reflection papers and in class researcher observations that reveal increased academic motivation and engagement. It is well documented that UCLA's TEP graduates stay in urban schools at higher rates than the national average (Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003) which demonstrates their dedication and commitment, but further studies are necessary to realize the link between scholastic achievement of their students and their social justice oriented practices.

3. UCLA's teacher education program places a great deal of value on its efforts to build community with urban schools and encourages its candidates to promote community building in their classrooms. In this study, community building remained a theoretical construct. In the first three interviews many shared how they would integrate social justice into their practice through community building, but at the end of their resident year, only one person had shared incorporating community building in his practice. It would be illuminating to learn how community building in or outside of the classroom is actualized, as well as its associated challenges in practice.
4. Because of the LAUSD's hiring freeze in the 2015-2016 academic years, 10 out of 12 candidates ended up teaching in charter schools. It would be important to compare candidates' experiences integrating social justice in charter schools vs. LA unified schools. Given the growing expansion of charter schools, these findings would serve as fruitful grounds for further theorizing on the nature of social justice education in charter schools. Do charter schools espouse more or less social justice oriented values than district schools? Do charter schools exacerbate the educational inequities for disadvantaged students? Considering its inherent competitive model of operation are charter schools foundationally antithetical to social justice oriented education? These research questions are important to consider in a time of large scale reconfiguring of public education.
5. Over the two year interview process, many of the participants expressed gratitude for partaking in this research study. They explained how the study had given them the opportunity to reflect on their notions and subsequent practices of social justice in very explicit ways (discussed in Chapter 3). As such, I recommend UCLA's TEP to conduct entering interviews, mid program interviews and exiting interviews, to reveal the

- conceptual and practical evolution teacher candidates undergo. Similarly, Ana Maria Villegas (2007) has argued that assessing teacher candidates' dispositions towards social justice must be a fair and desired pursuit for teacher education programs, "teacher educators cannot ignore their students 'entering and developing beliefs'" (Villegas, 2007, p. 373). Although there are clear expectations for what candidates should be gaining from the program, in terms of becoming a social justice educator, it is unclear how this development unfolds. Learning about candidates' evolving understandings of social justice will inevitably help candidates by giving them the opportunity to reflect on their conceptions and practices of social justice, as well as the program leadership, including teacher educators, to better accommodate and nurture the learning needs of their students.
6. Future research should explicitly focus on learning about teacher candidate's engagement with critical self reflection. Critical self-reflection allows candidates to self-interrogate, re-process knowledge and confront emotions in the process of challenging racial, class and heterosexual interlocking and reproducing structures of domination. This study revealed a discrepancy between candidates' strong endorsements of engaging in critical reflection and the lack of indication that candidates are actually engaging in such practice. Noted repeatedly in this study, critical self reflection is the cornerstone to building a social justice practice, it is the deliberate link between theory and practice.
  7. Continuing this longitudinal study beyond the completion of the teacher education program into the first years, will inform what conceptions and practices candidates take with them or leave behind given the struggles they are met with in their respective schools and classrooms. I will continue this longitudinal research with the same candidates to study their unfolding social justice beliefs and practice over the course of several years.

### **Limitations**

There are numerous limitations in this study which mostly emanate from the research design:

1. This study has primarily relied on self-reported practices of social justice. Since my research methods do not include observational/ethnographic data, I cannot confirm any existing discrepancies between teacher candidates' notions and practices of social justice. Observational data from student teaching and residency field placements would have been very valuable for examining candidates' practices of social justice. It is likely that my observations would note certain practices as examples of social justice, even if candidates didn't refer to it during their interviews. For example, I could have observed strong relationship building in the classroom, which implies community building, even if candidates didn't bring it up in the interviews, this data collection would lead to different conclusions in the study.

Another example of observational data that could have provided more in-depth insights about the practices of social justice is by examining how participants with high levels of social justice awareness enact or apply their visions into practice during their residency. Strong awareness and commitment to a social justice practice doesn't necessarily translate to effective social justice practices. Dover's (2015) research study has suggested that even candidates who have strong social justice orientations experience difficulties integrating social justice into their practice.

2. The failure to obtain and analyze documents and artifacts such as candidates' inquiry-based research projects, related reflective journal assignments and their self-constructed syllabus is also a known limitation. Each of these artifacts communicates particular dimensions of social justice, because each are intentionally produced for different contexts and goals. For example, candidates' syllabus for their resident year would enable different interpretations of their social justice conceptions, in comparison to their

reflective journal assignments. To get a comprehensive portrait of candidates' social justice beliefs and practices requires examining the properties of different artifacts in corroboration with interview and observation data.

3. The inability to have captured candidates' entering beliefs of social justice before starting the program is another limitation. The interviews began three weeks into the program and the pre-test survey was completed within the first two weeks. Within this fairly short period, three participants had admitted of already changing their definitions of social justice. It is likely that more participants had adapted a new understanding of social justice but didn't disclose it at the interviews. The failure to access candidate's retrospective perceptions of social justice before the start of the teacher education program was a limitation due to circumstances beyond my control. I was only able to recruit candidates three days before the start of the program, at their orientation day, and therefore the selection and first interviews were completed within the first week three weeks into the program.
4. Given the time constraints for participants and myself, I did not incorporate member checks as I had planned on doing at the start of the study. According to Merriam (2009) member check also called respondent validation is a form of ensuring internal validity, "taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible" (p. 229). The opportunity to confirm if their experiences are captured in my interpretations accurately, and seek further clarifications on their assertions would have enhanced the quality of my data and analysis.
5. This research project attempted to study change in conceptions and teaching practices which is already fraught with numerous restraints. Change can take place immediately or

incrementally in an unknown future. Change can be visible such as pedagogical restructuring in the classroom, but it may also be invisible such as overcoming deeply ingrained thoughts of racism. Change is either provisional or permanent, but always highly context-dependent. Change is not always linear and therefore an elusive and complex process to study. The findings that I report strictly represent conceptual and practical change among candidates within the short duration of the teacher education program. The results do not indicate how participants' conceptions and practices will evolve and transpire post graduation.

6. Lastly, I am engaged in the process of critical self-reflection and continue exploring how critical race, queer, critical cultural, post colonial and post-structural feminist theories can contribute to social justice. While I note this a limitation, I also recognize that this process of examining critical theory and self-interrogation will always be incomplete and pose a limitation to future research studies I undertake.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This study only provides a glimpse into the ongoing development of teacher candidates who are starting out their career oriented towards a social justice practice. Teacher development is an ongoing, intricate process that never reaches the finish line.

The overarching conclusions in this study indicated that teacher candidates' social justice conceptions were rooted in providing students with critical content and ensuring academic success through intentional, instructional strategies. Participants' practical applications of social justice which had been articulated through encompassing critical and relevant curriculum, corresponded with their conceptions of social justice. At the end of the program, participants' conceptions and practices of social justice heavily focused on giving voice to marginalized students' stories of oppression to empower them. It had also become evident that participants'

strong social justice awareness and practical commitment was due to their personal biographies and history of marginalization. Participants' with a personal history of social injustice personalized their teaching practice to reflect their unique advocacy. The survey findings which tested participant's social justice beliefs closely complemented the results from the interview data. One clear discrepancy between the survey and interview findings revealed that participants highly endorsed the practice of critical self reflection in the survey but didn't mention it in the interviews. The overall longitudinal change is marked by the expansion of participants understandings of what constitutes social justice.

As I designed this study, my initial goal was to find out if a unified vision of social justice can be cultivated upon the completion of the program. Although there is some adherence to a common understandings of social justice and its practices, I have learned that despite the commonalities, participants understand and work towards social justice in their unique paths. Chubbuck explains that the pursuit of the meaning of social justice must acknowledge, validate and support the different efforts, gifts and capabilities teachers offer towards teaching for social justice.

The key to effective social justice education, then, is not uniform responses from all teachers but rather collaborative approaches where each teacher acts for justice using his or her abilities while offering emotional and collegial support to others whose gifting allows them to act for justice in a different realm. One will stand before the school board to argue for policy revisions; another will kneel to explain fractions to a struggling student. These teachers are not operating in opposition to each other; their efforts for justice are complementary. (Chubbuck, 2010, p. 207)



The multiplicity of social justice enactments should be supported, given that they include the practice of critical self-reflection and the ongoing investigation of power and knowledge. To fulfill the promise of a meaningful social justice education for the betterment of all members of our society, we as teachers, scholars and policy makers need to allow ourselves to re-imagine school as a place that does not perpetuate inequalities but instead a place where transformation is catalyzed.

## APPENDIX A

### TEP Orientation Recruitment Script

Congratulations and welcome to UCLA! I am a third year Ph.D student in the SSCE division, conducting research about Teacher Education Programs. I am seeking volunteers for my study and offer a small compensation.

Would you like to earn \$25 per interview? There are total of 4 interviews spread over two years. Two interviews each year. The general theme of the interviews are based on your overall experiences at UCLA's Teacher Education Program from the semester that you begin and towards the end of your study. If you are interested please fill out the sign up sheet that is going around to be considered for this exciting study.

Thank you and I look forward to your participation.

## APPENDIX B

### Descriptive Candidate Profiles

#### **Sarah**

**1<sup>st</sup> interviewee** describes herself as white, bi/pansexual and lower/working class woman. She teaches English in secondary education. She comes from a single parent, poor family background. She always knew she wanted to be a teacher, and her earliest memory of teaching dates back 10 years ago tutoring her youngest sibling who was just entering grammar school. Her teaching experiences include; swimming instructor to little kids, and tutoring at America Read, writing programs, after school programs, and EOP (which she was also a member of).

#### **Andy**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Interviewee** describes herself as an Asian-American, straight, middle class woman. Her subject area is social studies in secondary education. Both of her parents have had teaching experiences. Education was very important in her family. She immigrated at the age of three and education was an “avenue to learn the culture”. Looking back to her educational background she admits it has been very traditional, nonetheless she felt very inspired by her teachers. She asserts that teaching is one of those careers “you can really find your passion in” and not separate your job from your passions. Her teaching experiences include being a student teacher for 8<sup>th</sup> grade over one academic year. She has done tutoring, volunteering at children’s homes with disabilities, worked as a teacher’s assistant at an occupational therapy clinic, which she highly considered pursuing as a career, and lastly, she has been involved in Sunday school through her faith center.

#### **Marissa**

**3<sup>rd</sup> interviewee** describes herself as a Latina, heterosexual, middle class female. Her area of specialty is biology in secondary education. She is a STEP (Science Education Teaching Program) student. She started her undergraduate studies with an interest to do research in the scientific field, more specifically amnion-biology. Her teaching experiences at City Lab which is a club on campus (undergrads prepare lesson plans for high school student to get them interested in science) got her so interested that she took up science education as a minor. Her teaching experiences include student teaching 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade biology courses.

#### **William**

**4<sup>th</sup> interviewee** describes himself as a Chinese, middle class male. He teaches social studies at a secondary level. He was born in the United States. He describes that he has had a “mixed upbringing, my mom being first generation and my dad being second generation” immigrant. He discovered he had “an act for explaining and presenting information” during his high school years where he tutored his peers. It all started back in Mr. Reises’s Algebra 2 class, who was really good at explaining things “he would use visual formats” introduce new formula by starting with the quadratic formula” and that made the material easy to absorb. William started tutoring his peers in that class and discovered how much he enjoys it. His teaching experience includes tutoring an afterschool program to 4<sup>th</sup> graders.

### **Truth**

**5<sup>th</sup> interviewee** describes herself as an African American/black heterosexual female. Her content area specialty is social studies in secondary education. She grew up mostly in Germany. She always knew she wanted to be a teacher. Her teaching experience includes being a correctional officer, then a counselor in prison, “I saw the breakdown in the files, no one had education, when they were teenagers there was a break somewhere in high school, middle school they never finished school.” To make a difference she teaches specifically urban students who are struggling in school. She is also a mother of three children.

### **Allan**

**6<sup>th</sup> interviewee** describes himself as a Southeast Asian/ Vietnamese heterosexual male from a lower middle class background. He teaches English in secondary education. He knew he wanted to be a teacher from when he was 5 or 6 years old. It was Ms. Berrets AP class that genuinely engaged, challenged and excited him as well as convinced him to pursue teaching as a career. His teaching experiences include tutoring kids at a community center in Chinatown, being a writing tutor in college, putting together workshops to help high school student apply to colleges and teaching a transitional summer course for freshman in college.

### **Alice**

**7<sup>th</sup> Interviewee**- she describes herself as a white/Jewish queer middle class woman. She specializes in social studies in secondary education. When she was young she never had an answer for “what do you want to be when you grow up?” She explained that in high school she had amazing teachers, who were young and out of TEP from Stanford. The strong personal connections with teachers engaged her academically, “I had a teacher as hero complex” in high school which led to her interest in teaching in high school. During her undergraduate studies she was engaged in social justice oriented organization that provided SAT prep for low income, first generation students. She also worked with students in New Orleans who wanted to rebuild their schools after Hurricane Katrina.

### **Monique**

**8<sup>th</sup> Interviewee**- She describes herself as a Hispanic, low middle class, woman. Her area of specialty is English in secondary education. She decided to be a teacher recently, her previous experience as a substitute teacher had been very negative. She wanted to teach ESL (English as a Second Language) to adults until her volunteering experience in a high school working with ESL learners. She says “my life just changed”. She worked with these students for a year and witnessed their immense progress. She says “I heard their complaints, and I started reflecting on my own struggles and my own career as a LAUSD student”. Her earliest experience teaching was in third grade to indigenous boys from Oaxaca, I taught them Spanish so that the teachers can teach them English. She has been teaching Sunday school at her church for almost 10 years. More recently she has organized an arts and craft group for young girls, mothers and grandmothers to share the experience of learning from each other.

### **Johnathan**

**9<sup>th</sup> Interviewee**- He describes himself as Latino, straight middle class male. His area of specialty is English in secondary education. His interest in becoming a teacher dates back to his middle and high school years as a student in an outreach program that was social justice oriented. He

later got a job at an outreach program in his neighborhood preparing low income Latino immigrant students for post secondary education. The program also consisted of community based projects such as trying to get the only local park to be more available for its residents. He helped start an internship program focused on professional development. He says one of his students really influenced his decision to pursue a career in teaching as oppose to other related interests such as being a principle or a policy maker.

### **Luna**

**10<sup>th</sup> interviewee-** Describes herself as a Mexican American, straight, low income female. Her subject area specialty is multiple subjects for elementary education. She says “ I have always wanted to teach as long as I can remember”. She loves working with children. She wants to help her community the Latino community because “there is a lot immigration issues and tension and many disadvantages of not being educated, how can I come back to my community and be of support and help and break a lot of the negative cycles”. Her formal teaching experience includes volunteering in urban elementary, middle and high schools in San Jose. For over a year she has worked at a childcare center as a teacher’s assistant and then as a lead teacher. She has been babysitting for over 7 yrs. She felt safe to share that she is undocumented and that is the reason she couldn’t pursue any jobs after college.

### **Robin**

**11<sup>th</sup> interviewee-** describes herself as African American, straight, working class female. She specializes in the subject of English in secondary education. She did not want to be a teacher until during her undergraduate study abroad to New Zealand. There she worked with academically struggling teenagers. She also attributes her zeal to becoming a teacher to great English teachers she has had in middle and high school. She says “I love teenagers and I feel like they are a group of individuals who are overlooked a lot, because they are hard to deal with they have all these attitudes and hormones, no one wants to deal with that, I just know when you have these relationships and you want and care, they can do great thing”. Her teaching experience also includes bible studies, “it’s like lesson planning without standards”

### **Sulley**

**12<sup>th</sup> interviewee-** describes herself as an Asian/ Taiwanese heterosexual, low income female. She specializes in Math for secondary education. Her mother was a teacher in Taiwan and has influenced her decision to become a teacher. She has immigrated to the U.S between nine to ten years ago and is pleased to have had the chance get a public education and be successful. Her teaching experience has been through a STEP program. She has taught a pre-calculus course in high school. She has been a private tutor for a very long time, tutoring for SAT’s and homework. She notes that she is much more effective one-on one because “you can see what they[students] have trouble with and you can target it, but for the class setting you can’t assess where the individual students are at.”

## APPENDIX C

### Mining Themes

Sarah's responses to the question regarding integrating social justice into practice in all 4 interviews.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> interview**

In her first interview Sarah discussed two ways she would adapt social justices in her practice; giving students more choices and encouraging them to critically analyze the texts they read in class. First, she emphasized giving students the choice in selecting the books and writing assignments of interest because "students who are in the lower income schools are given less choices." [Choice and relevant content] Second, she highlighted the importance of "connecting what's going on in the classroom to what's going on in the real world." She shared how her students (in her student teaching) were able to critically analyze the novel *Catcher in the Rye* by discussing concepts such as privilege and adolescent angst and putting all that into the context of its time [critical content].

Theme from 1<sup>st</sup> interview: critical and relevant curriculum

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Interview**

In her second interview, her understanding of putting social justice into practice shifted from enabling more choices for students to teaching them about forms of activism. First, she explains that silence isn't an option, "not pretending that a lot of things don't exist, like calling out the problems that are going on, that might be the trash and mold and rats on campus, we can also talk about racism, sexism, and the isms." [relevant and critical content] Second, she discussed the importance of talking about and showing how change can happen and "showing genuine examples of young people making change." As well as "talking about the kinds of activism that happens online." [critical content]

Theme from 2<sup>nd</sup> interview: critical and relevant curriculum

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> Interview**

In the third interview Sarah discussed implementing social justice in two ways. First, she explained that mandatory readings must be questioned critically; "why are we reading these books from only these persons? What would the books be if they were written from these other character's perspectives?" She noted that books such as *Animal Farm* can easily elicit critical discussions about revolution, standard land, and killings in police custody. Moreover she was certain about discussing racism and sexism in her honors class, which she assumed would be dominated by white students [critical content]. Second, to implement social justice was to relate curriculum to students' lives. While researching about the school Sarah had learned that there is

a standing lawsuit against the school for negligence in a sexual harassment case. She explained that as a result of this incidence, she deemed it important to focus on “issues of consent, healthy relationships, and being a bystander.” In addition to making content more relatable, she also planned to have a monthly circle to check in with students in terms of what their needs are and how best their needs are being met, “what do you wanna learn in the class, what do you need this class to be like? What is their goal how do I engage with it”[relevant content].

Theme from 3<sup>rd</sup> interview: critical and relevant curriculum

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Interview**

In the fourth interview, Sarah noted that it took her the first semester to figure out her teaching goals “If I am honest it took me the first semester to know what I am doing.” She had assigned an argumentative research paper “where they picked any topic they wanted topics some kids they were why I shouldn’t wear a helmet while skateboarding, or how black culture is being culturally appropriated. Doing the paper and taking action.” [critical and relevant]

Theme from 4<sup>th</sup> interview: critical and relevant curriculum

## APPENDIX D

### First Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose to become a teacher? What factors have influenced you to pursue a career in education?
2. Please tell me about your teaching experiences? What subject matter/grade level/public/charter?
3. How long have you been teaching?
4. What is your teaching philosophy?
5. Why did you pick this specific TEP at UCLA?
6. What does social justice mean to you? How would you define it?
7. How do you plan to put your concept/understanding of social justice into practice in your classroom? How have you incorporated (or presently incorporate) SOCIAL JUSTICE in your classroom?.
8. What challenges have you encountered or encounter currently in your attempts to teaching for social justice?
9. What challenges do you anticipate encountering in the classroom while attempting to integrate your social justice agenda?
10. In what way do you expect or desire UCLA's TEP to assist you in your teaching for social justice?



## **APPENDIX E**

### **TEP Coursework**

#### **ED 301**

##### **Introduction to Information and Presentation Tools**

2 Units, S/U grading

Sequence of laboratory sessions providing pre-service teachers with an introduction to the education technology infrastructure and classroom presentation tools. Introduction to resources and services, email functions and the internet. Presentation software and multimedia elements will be introduced and explored.

#### **ED 315A/B**

##### **Principles and Methods for Teaching Reading (Multiple Subject)**

3 Units, S/U grading

#### **ED 318A/B/C**

##### **Integrated Methods for Elementary Teachers**

4 Units, S / U grading

Examination and development of instructional programs and the analyses and practices of instructional methods for teaching K-6 content. Emphasis is placed on an interdisciplinary approach that integrates content areas and infuses literacy, technology and strategies for second language learners. These methods courses are aligned with the CA state frameworks and the CA content standards for grades K-12, including the English Language Development Standards, all of which address the needs and interests of diverse students.

#### **ED 319**

##### **Integrated Mathematical Methods for Elementary Teachers**

3 Units, S/U grading

Lecture, three hours. Mathematics Methods course focusing on details of children's mathematics thinking and then uses that information as a way to ground learning about the teaching of mathematics.

**ED 320A/B/C****Secondary Content and Literacy Methods**

3 Units, S / U grading

Examination and development of instructional programs and the analyses and practices of instructional methods for teaching content in grades 7-12. Emphasis is placed on an interdisciplinary approach that integrates content areas and infuses literacy, technology and strategies for second language learners. These methods courses are aligned with the CA state frameworks and the CA content standards for grades K-12, including the English Language Development Standards, all of which address the needs and interests of diverse students.

**ED 330A****Observation and Participation**

3 Units, S / U grading

Students will have an opportunity to observe and participate in designated urban school sites with low-income, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse student populations. Throughout the observation and participation period, students will analyze effective strategies for achieving learning for all students, including constructivist instruction, socio-cultural approaches, and appropriate use of educational technology. A key component of this phase is the students' active engagement in reflection on issues in the schools they are observing.

**ED 330B****Student Teaching Preparation**

4 – 8 Units, S/U grading

**ED 330C****Student Teaching**

4 – 8 Units, S / U grading

Students will be assigned to student teach in designated school sites with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse student populations. Throughout the student teaching period, students as novice teachers will plan, implement, and assess daily lessons and units as well as actively engage in reflecting on issues specific to school–community relations. Increased daily responsibilities in ED 330C.

**ED 360A/B****Novice Seminar**

3 Units, S / U grading

Analysis of basic principles and concepts of planning, conducting, and evaluating units of curriculum and instruction. Emphasis on study and utilization of constructivist strategies and their application in elementary and secondary schools. Examinations of different methods of computer literacy and teaching subject matter. Students may conduct ethnographic inquiry of the local community of their designated partnership district.

**ED 405 A/B/C****Teaching in Urban Schools**

3 Units, Letter grade

A: Cultural Identity; B: Diverse Perspectives; C: Community Action

Participatory course series which explores issues of identity development, positionality and development as a teacher for urban school populations; issues and socio-cultural realities of diverse student populations; and examines urban school communities, their identities and ways of understanding and interacting.

**ED 406****Social Foundations and Cultural Diversity in American Education**

3 Units, Letter grade

An intensive consideration of American society, particularly its racial and cultural diversity. Topics include historical development of American society, manifestation of cultures and ways to learn about students' cultures. Examination of issues of racism, ethnic and gender differences, perspectives of cultural diversity, and impact on educational and classroom instruction.

**ED 407****Psychological Foundations of Education**

3 units, Letter grade

Analysis of learning processes in school situations. Processes of human motivation, affective, cognitive, social, and personal development of children and adolescents, evaluation of learning, individual differences, and implications of relevant theory and research.

**ED 409****Language Structure, Acquisition, and Development**

3 Units, Letter grade

Theoretical foundations of language structure and first and second language acquisition, with focus on major themes of current research that provide a framework for schooling of English Language Learners. Rationale for bilingual/English Language acquisition and development programs. Historical and current theories and models of language.

**NOTE:** The 413 series of courses is required for the BCLAD Spanish Emphasis credential

**ED 413A****Language and Culture**

2 Units, Letter grade

This course focuses on the language of emphasis for a bilingual teacher. Students will practice the listening, reading, speaking and writing competencies required for bilingual classrooms. At the end of the course an assessment will be made to determine the BCLAD candidate's proficiency.

**ED 413B****Methodology for Primary Language Instruction**

3 Units, Letter grade

This course will consider models for developing the cultural and language skills of home speakers of the language of emphasis; practice in the use of activities to develop student ability to use language for real-world and academic purposes in culturally appropriate ways, and the use of approaches to develop and assess the quantity and quality of learner language. It will also consider models for teaching academic content in the primary language for delivering the core curriculum to bilingual and limited-English proficient students as well as methods for assessing content knowledge and related skills.

**ED 413C****Culture of Emphasis**

3 Units, Letter grade

This course is culture-specific. It discusses the commonalties of the culture of emphasis in its home country or countries; major historical periods and events; values and belief systems and expectations; communications systems; demographics, roles, and status; family structures, function, and socialization; humanities and the arts; experiences of the people of the culture of emphasis in the United States and California; major historical periods and events; historical and contemporary demography; migration and immigration; contributions; relationship between the culture of emphasis and the dominant culture; relationships among different groups within the culture of emphasis and the dominant culture; and relationships among different groups within the culture of emphasis.

### **ED 425**

#### **Principles of Teaching Exceptional Individuals**

3 Units, Letter grade

Examines approaches for teaching exceptional individuals in special and regular education programs. Principles and assumptions underlying alternative approaches are examined. Emphasis is placed on individualizing curriculum and classroom management.

### **ED 466**

#### **Critical Media Literacy: Teaching Youth to Critically Read and Create Media**

4 Units, Letter grade

Preparation for educators to teach K-12 students to explore their relationships with media by critically questioning media representations and creating their own alternative media messages. Critical media literacy combines theoretical foundations of cultural studies and critical pedagogy with practical classroom applications of new digital media as well as traditional print-based means of communication. Exploration of media representations of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other identity markers. Educators critically question media and technology, as well as explore new alternatives for creating multimedia messages in their own classrooms. Analysis and creation of media projects related to teaching required.

### **ED 481**

#### **Knowledge and Inquiry in the Classroom**

4 Units, Letter grade

This course focuses on the logical features of instruction and their application to inquiry techniques in teaching and learning. It deals with various conceptions of truth, belief, and fact and opinion, and their application to classroom learning situations.

**ED 490A**

**Instructional Decision-Making**

4 Units, Letter grade

This course focuses on the analysis of instructional models relevant to public school education, especially effective and equitable education for racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. Assumptions, procedures, and constraints of a range of strategies are considered in terms of learner, content, and socio-cultural context.

**ED 491**

**Curricular Decision-Making**

4 Units, Letter grade

This course focuses on analysis of the influence and tensions of psychological, societal, cultural, and instructional factors in curricular decisions. It provides examination of a range of approaches for the practical problems that classroom teachers face in making curricular decisions.

**ED 498 A/B/C**

**Directed Field Experience**

8 Units, S/U or Letter grade

Clinic to be arranged. Field experiences designed to increase understanding of student fields of study.

**ED 597**

4-12 units, S/U grading

Preparation for Master's Comprehensive Examinations or Doctoral Qualifying Examinations

Tutorial, to be arranged. Individual study for master's comprehensive examinations or for Ph.D. or Ed.D. qualifying examinations. May be repeated for credit.

## APPENDIX F

### Second Interview Questions

1. It has been 1 academic year since we spoke last; briefly, tell me about your experiences in the program.
2. What have you taken away from the program thus far?
3. What is your teaching philosophy?
4. What does social justice mean to you? How would you define it?
5. Have you noticed an evolution in your understanding of SOCIAL JUSTICE?
6. How do you plan to put your concept/understanding of social justice into your practice?
7. What challenges do you anticipate encountering in the classroom while attempting to integrate your social justice agenda?
8. In what way do you expect or desire UCLA's TEP to assist you in your teaching for social justice?
9. Do you have any plans for the summer?

## APPENDIX G

### Third Interview Questions

1. Will you have a teaching position in the Fall? If so, Where?
2. Have you had some time to prepare for your classes?
3. Preparing for your classes, have you thought of concrete ways to integrate social justice teaching strategies into your lessons?
4. On a scale of 1-5 how heavily will your practice include strategies of social justice? 1 not at all and 5 heavily.
5. Do you consider your teaching practice social justice oriented?
6. Do you anticipate challenges teaching in a social justice oriented practice at your school?



## APPENDIX H

### Fourth Interview Questions

7. Please tell me about your teaching experiences in your resident year?
8. Looking back to the two years in the program what are the major take aways?
9. What is your teaching philosophy?
10. What does social justice mean to you? How would you define it?
11. Has your understanding of social justice changed since the beginning of your resident year?
12. How have you integrated social justice teaching strategies into your lessons in concrete/practical ways?
13. On a scale of 1-5 how heavily did your practice include strategies of social justice? 1 not at all and 5 heavily.
14. Do you consider your teaching practice social justice oriented partially or entirely.
15. What challenges did you face teaching in a social justice oriented practice at your school?
16. What kind of support or help would you have liked to have from the program?
17. Would you like to add anything, is there anything you would like to share?

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