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## Social Justice Teaching in the Elementary General Education Classroom

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SOCIAL JUSTICE TEACHING IN THE ELEMENTARY GENERAL EDUCATION  
CLASSROOM

By  
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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Education.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Overview

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy” (n.d.). This quote by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. poignantly describes why an attitude of social justice is important. However, it is important to note that social justice is often overlooked in the standards-based educational environment in which we are currently navigating. Students often are not given time to process topics of social justice within the educational system. This means that we are leaving our students vulnerable during those important times of strife that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. refers to in his quote. We aren’t helping to provide them with the proper tools nor a critical frame of reference to properly handle times of “challenge and controversy.” Thus, they may be the ones to stand back and remain silent during challenging times, which is often just as powerful in a negative way as standing up for the rights of others can be in a positive way. Thus, I believe the following research question to be especially relevant to today’s society: *what are effective strategies for teaching social justice to elementary students and how will using them affect elementary students’ attitudes toward and knowledge of social justice?*

The rest of chapter one will give an overview of my person journey to this study by explaining how this question became something that I am passionate about. The following chapter will also further address the rationale and significance of this study, why it is important to students, and why it is important to society in general.

### **Personal Journey to This Study**

My personal journey to the study of the topic of social justice began in a small town in North Dakota. I grew up in a very small town of 500 people with an extremely homogenous population. I often found myself interested by diversity but never surrounded by diversity. During this time, my parents passed on to me a strong belief in standing up for what is right. The prevailing belief around me was that human beings were all the same and that we should all be treated the same regardless of the color of skin. I know now that there are holes in this belief, but at the time I believed it wholeheartedly.

Once I graduated from high school I attended a university in Bismarck, North Dakota. The population of Bismarck is much bigger than my hometown, and, although it is still somewhat homogenous, I found myself surrounded by more diversity than before. I enjoyed getting to know people from other cultures, and I seemed to be drawn to those who were different from me. I almost actively sought them out because I was hungry for more knowledge on what else existed in the world beyond my small town upbringing. It was at University of Mary that I took classes that broadened my mind. I learned about world religions, other cultures, and important happenings in the world. I began to change my viewpoint that we were all the same. I began to realize that human beings are all very

different, and the real challenge is to accept those differences and find common ground. Thus, I also began to realize that we did not all need the same things. I began to have an equity mindset instead of an equality mindset. I came to the understanding that we all should get what we need, which may or may not be equal.

Once I graduated from college, I moved to Bloomington, Minnesota in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and found myself more surrounded by diversity than ever before. I student taught at a very diverse, low income school in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. I fell in love with the melting pot of cultures that I experienced there and decided that I needed to find a job at this or a similar school. This experience further cemented my ideas that we each deserve what we need, which may not necessarily be equal.

After graduating mid-year upon completing my student teaching, I found a job as a teacher's assistant at Head Start preschool again in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. I experienced some things there that further ignited my passion for equity and social justice. The students there desperately needed the "head start" that this school was there to provide them with. However, I witnessed one of the head teachers come to work sick, lay down on the floor for the first half of the day while the kids did nothing, and then leave around noon. I found out later that she came in for a half day because she would still get paid for the whole day as long as she was there for half of the day. In my first close experience with true social justice I spoke out about this completely unprofessional and damaging behavior, which was only one of the many travesties I witnessed. However, it did not end well for me. I ended up being let go from my position as I was

too outspoken. I do not regret my actions, though, as I know I stood up for what was right. I will never forget this experience as it is one of the key points in history that helped to ignite a passion in me for social justice.

Soon after this I found myself working in a situation which seemed to be completely the opposite of my former employment. I was hired to work as an assistant teacher at a tuition-based Montessori preschool. The tuition for attending this school was quite steep, so I was able to experience a financially well-off set of students and families. I found myself appalled by how much more privilege these families had access to than my former students did. The education that was provided here was certainly top notch, especially in comparison with the Head Start that I had formerly been employed at. I realized that in most cases money really does buy better circumstances and opportunities. This further sparked an interest in me for how to make things more equitable for all students.

During my experience at the Montessori school, I finalized my teacher's license and left there to become a substitute teacher with the goal of finding a permanent teaching position. I eventually found a job teaching at a very diverse, low income school in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. This is where I am currently still employed. Our school and district place a strong emphasis on equity, so I received a lot of training in this area. I also continued to learn the most from my students and families and made sure to listen to what they felt they needed. I found myself still noticing how inequitable the access to opportunities is based on wealth in our country.

It was at this point in time that I decided that I wanted to learn more about education and how I could help this problem. I decided to go back to school to get my Master's degree in education at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota. I took a class in educating for social justice and was exposed to the beliefs of Paulo Freire. I began to realize that instead of trying to be the savior for my students I must instead do my best to awaken the power that lies within them. True change and dissent must come from the oppressed not from the oppressors. This is when I began to understand that social justice education is truly one of the best answers to a hugely unjust system that permeates not just education but everything. I can continue to fight for justice myself, and I will, but the strongest impact will be to teach my students to fight for their own rights. Now I am left with the question of how to do this in the most effective manner possible. To answer this question, I will rely on the research and methods of others, find what works best, and then test this research on my own students to determine its validity and impact.

### **Significance of Study**

In the United States, we are currently navigating an educational climate based on test scores and standards-based learning. While neither of these things is bad in and of themselves, the way that they are being used in our educational system often means that many crucial topics of study are not included in the curriculum. Social justice should be included as one of those topics of study. There are many reasons why social justice should be a key component of any curriculum, and I will state some of the reasons below.

We live in a society in which so-called "alternative facts," or false statements, are considered valid and reported as true or at least viable. This means that it is more

important than ever that students learn to look at current events and news with a critical eye. We as teachers should be teaching students how to take in information, decide what is true and false, and what action needs to be taken based on that information. Students need to be able to identify valid research and sources and evaluate information for logical fallacy and inaccuracy so that they are able to avoid making conclusions and acting on false information. However, this is not a common practice in today's educational environment. Therefore, most students are left defenseless when faced with the many opinions and biases presented to them. Without knowing it, they are often passive receivers and then distributors of others' opinions and false information. Nowhere is this more apparent than on social media where false information spreads like wildfire. With social justice education, students would learn to look at current events, news reports, and everyday conversations with a critical viewpoint.

Another reason that social justice education is so important is that students need to learn to identify and then speak out against inequities in our country's systems. Our students are the future adults of this world, and they have the capability to change the world for the better. However, they also have the capability to do nothing and let things remain the same. In my opinion, it would be a travesty to let their potential for change go to waste. Through social justice education, students would learn to identify and speak out on issues of inequity. When this becomes normal for students and people in general, I believe we will begin to see great changes in the world.

Social justice education is also especially important for at risk students. These students are the ones typically oppressed and marginalized by today's inequitable

systems. They are also the ones with the most power to change these systems and their own circumstances. They often are not aware of how much power lies within. Social justice education allows them to tap into this power and use it to speak out on and change systems and situations that are inequitable. This type of education teaches students to first recognize inequity and then understand how to effectively cause changes in those systems that are inequitable.

### **Summary**

Social justice education has clear benefits and positive implications for today's learners. My research question for this study is as follows: what are effective strategies and resources for teaching social justice to elementary students and how will using them affect elementary students' attitudes toward and knowledge of social justice? This chapter has provided an overview of why this question is a passion of mine. I grew up in a very homogenous environment, but circumstances in my life brought about a passion for diversity and equity. Through study of many prominent researchers in the area of social justice including Paulo Freire, I have come to the conclusion that the most beneficial and lasting change needs to come from within my students.

This chapter also provided a rationale for this area of study as being one of importance in education today. Students live in a world in which critical thinking skills are paramount as they are inundated with a plethora of information, some of which is valid and some of which is not. Students must learn to distinguish facts from opinions, and they must also be able to recognize inequitable systems and situations. Then they must understand how to speak out effectively against these systems and situations so as to

affect change. Social justice education offers the opportunity to hone these skills in students so that they may become effective change agents in today's society.

In chapter two, the literature on social justice education is reviewed so as to determine the most effective way of implementing social justice education. Chapter three gives an overview of what type of project I chose to create and why. Chapter four provides an overview of what I learned from creating this project as well as its implications for education in general.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Overview

Social justice education is extremely valuable in today's society. It is invaluable in creating democratic citizens who will fight for human rights and equality. However, it is not a new concept. One can trace the foundations of social justice education to various theories and theories of the past. However, it is only recently that social justice education has gained momentum as a valuable mainstream teaching practice. Research does exist to support the importance of social justice education and to outline strategies for teaching social justice, but it is not widespread. Thus, this capstone will focus on the following significant question: *What are effective strategies for teaching social justice to elementary students and how will using them affect elementary students' attitudes toward and knowledge of social justice?*

Adams & Bell (2016), define a socially just society as one in which all members have their basic needs met. What then is social justice education? According to Wade (2007), "Social justice education empowers students to analyze the root causes of injustice, promote equal opportunity for all people, and learn from multiple perspectives on an issue or topic within a collaborative, experiential approach to teaching and learning" (p. 159). This first section of chapter two provides an overview of why social

justice education is important in today's society. The first part of the section discusses social injustice as it relates to our current society. The second part of the section addresses the current social and political climate and how this relates to a need for social justice education. The third part of the section will discuss how social justice education helps to address social injustices in society.

In addition to a need for social justice education in society, there are many voices that contribute to the concept of social justice education and are essential to understanding social justice education and its purpose. The second section of chapter two will explore some of those theories including the theories of Karl Marx, Paulo Freire, and bell hooks.

The final section of chapter two will give examples of current research strategies and methodologies that can be used in teaching social justice education. The first part of this section will discuss the foundations for creating an environment that is conducive to teaching social justice education. The last part of this section will give an overview of strategies such as critical literacy, service learning projects, and the nonviolence approach that are helpful for teaching social justice education.

### **A Case for Social Justice Education**

Social justice education is becoming increasingly popular in mainstream education. Teaching for social justice is commonly found in many preservice teaching programs. It is no wonder that this is the case because our current society cultivates many unjust and inequitable practices. For example, according to Rothstein (2015), students from low income families have less access to preventive health care and outside

academic resources, and these disadvantages, among others, contribute to less academic achievement than their more affluent peers. It is important that we educate students on social justice so that unjust practices and inequitable access to opportunity will one day be a thing of the past. The following section focuses on what social injustices exist in today's society and why social justice education is important for all students.

**Social injustice today.** Social injustice exists as much today as it did in the past. Many people relate social injustice to slavery or the civil rights movement and see it as something that has already been remedied. However, social injustices still occur quite frequently and can be seen both through societal data and anecdotal accounts. For example, the achievement data to be described later from the National Education Center of Statistics (2015), shows that race matters for academic success in the United States. According to Rothstein (2014), part of this problem is that schools today are often segregated today by race and socioeconomic status as a result of unjust societal systems that disproportionately keep people of color in poverty and grouped in the same area. Many Americans, especially white Americans, consider school and societal segregation to be a thing of the past. Often, the social injustices that occur in today's society are particularly dangerous as they are often systemic and go largely unnoticed by those belonging to the dominant culture or race.

Unfortunately, social injustice exists prominently in the educational system in America. To illustrate this, one needs to only look at the dropout rates in education. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2019), in 2016 the dropout rate for the following racial demographics of students ages 16 to 24 is as follows: Black -

6.2%, Hispanic - 8.6%, American Indian and Alaskan Native -18.2%, White – 5.2%, and Asian – 2.9%. The breakdown of dropout rates based on students' socioeconomic status is as follows: lowest – 7.2%, middle low – 5.3%, middle high – 3.9%, and highest – 3.6%. These dropout rates indicate a higher level of disconnect from the education system for those who represent a low socioeconomic status and/or are Black, Hispanic, or Native American. This is a consequence of living with an education system that has not adjusted to and provided for an increasingly diverse population of students.

Social injustice is also painfully apparent within our educational system in the area of student achievement. The achievement gap is a significant problem in our country, and a viable solution has yet to be implemented. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2015), an achievement gap exists for students based on race with white students consistently scoring better in both reading and mathematics than students of color, especially Hispanic and Black students. According to Duncan (2011), an achievement gap also exists between students from families of a high socioeconomic status and those of a low socioeconomic status. Unfortunately, this gap is also becoming wider with time, and research shows it already exists as early as kindergarten (Duncan, 2011).

Why do these gaps exist in our educational system? The answer lies in an educational system that advertently and inadvertently perpetuates the ideals and values of white culture. According to Rector-Aranda (2016), though the population of students in the United States is increasingly diverse and varied with their own ideals and knowledge to share, predominantly Euro-centric beliefs, histories, and culture are shared with any

consistency. Even standardized tests meant to rank or sort were mostly created by white people according to white, dominant norms (Rector-Aranda, 2016). They test knowledge through multiple choice questions on a paper or computer when many cultures demonstrate knowledge orally or in performance tasks, and they incorporate knowledge from the dominant culture that isn't explicitly taught within questions (Rector-Aranda, 2016). This creates an educational system that a large portion of the population cannot relate to or properly access.

Even attempts to reform schools to deal with the issue of inequity in the educational system can be full of social injustice. According to Rector-Aranda (2016), school reform can be extremely lucrative for certain interests while not actually producing proven results. For example, No Child Left Behind was extremely beneficial to companies that provide standardized testing services, but failed to achieve its intended purpose which was that every child demonstrate academic proficiency (Rector-Aranda, 2016). Thus, the very initiatives meant to help the problem of social injustice within the educational system can essentially rob the system all while further perpetuating current inequities and privileges within the system. High stakes testing is one example of this as the scoring and administration of these tests are a big business. According to Rector-Aranda (2016), schools have focused on restructuring using “broad curricular standardization, competition, high-stakes testing and accountability, vouchers and other school choice programs, and the privatization of educational public goods, all of which create opportunities for businesses, politicians, and philanthropists to exploit educational misfortune for their own advantage” (p. 10).

The discipline systems in schools can also serve to perpetuate inequities in education. Urban schools often operate with policies and procedures very much similar to those of prisons such as the use of metal detectors, searches, and zero tolerance policies (Rector-Aranda, 2016). These types of policies and procedures lead to the conscious and unconscious profiling of youth based on race and appearance (Rector-Aranda, 2016). The people in charge of implementing this type of system have racial bias and thus end up overseeing a system that targets students of color unfairly and leads to students of color being overrepresented in discipline data. (Rector-Aranda, 2016)

Once students are pulled out of the classroom for discipline, they are missing the education to which they are entitled. Students of color may have different communication styles related to their culture that are different from their mostly white teachers. Quite often misunderstandings based on differences in cultural communication can lead to days of instruction missed. Also, the fact that these schools operate so much like prisons is ironic considering the fact that many students who go to urban schools, specifically students of color and students from a low socioeconomic background, will statistically become part of the justice system at some point. This is referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline theory (Rector-Aranda, 2016). Latinos and African Americans are statistically more likely than White people to be incarcerated at some point in their lifetimes (Nellis, 2016). This injustice begins in schools that condition students of color to injustice and maltreatment within disciplinary systems. According to Barnes & Motz (2018), a student targeted by disciplinary systems in schools can often begin to view themselves as a “troublemaker” which can lead to a self-fulfilling prophesy in which those students then

becomes actual “troublemakers”. This eventually leads to legal issues as this identity persists outside of school as well and often into the teen years and adulthood.

Many examples of social injustice exist outside of the education system as well. For example, a wage gap exists between families of color and white families. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), the average weekly salary for workers who are white is \$1,006 while the average weekly salaries for workers who are African American and Hispanic are \$740 and \$712 respectively. This weekly amount adds up to quite a large wage gap over time and leads to an imbalance in quality of living as well as decreased access to healthcare and education for African American and Hispanic families compared to white families.

Social injustice exists systemically in many areas in the United States including the workforce and the educational system. However, one area of systemic social injustice that has been gaining a lot of attention in recent years is the injustice that exists within our judicial and law enforcement systems. According to the Nellis (2016), who works with The Sentencing Project, which is an organization dedicated to creating a more fair justice system and addressing racial inequities within the justice system, African Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at 5.1 times the incarceration rate of whites and Latinos are 1.4 times as likely to be imprisoned verses whites. In fact, in eleven states, at least 1 in 20 adult black males are in prison. These statistics point to many systemic issues within our judicial systems as well as other systems in our country.

The systemic injustices in education, the workforce, and the judicial system can be seen as interrelated. In addition to the conscious and unconscious prejudices of people

that affect systemic injustices, access to education affects wage, wage affects quality of living, quality of living affects the likelihood of being drawn into crime, and both wage levels and crime rates affect access to education.

**Why social justice education?** Many of the social injustices in society, including those formerly discussed, are perpetuated by both those empowered by them and by those disempowered by them. This concept is called hegemony. According to Adams & Bell (2016), “Through hegemony, the reproduction of advantage and disadvantage come to be assumed as natural, normal, ‘business as usual,’ even by those who are disempowered” (p. 10). It is hard for everyone to step outside of “business as usual,” no matter their race or culture. It is much like trying to swim upstream. Trying to go outside of an established system is work and takes conscious effort. According to Adams & Bell (2016), this type of system can be imposed upon society from the top down or it can be something everyone actively participates in without realizing it. It can be embedded in texts, discourse, and the everyday interactions of people. According to Adams & Bell (2016), certain privileges and advantages are seen as being fair and deserved often by both those receiving them and by those who are not. For example, some people see requiring an ID to vote as a clear-cut issue. However, when one considers other perspectives, this creates barriers for only certain people to vote as people without transportation and/or who live in poverty are less likely to have an ID and/or be able to easily acquire one. This then causes these people to be less likely to vote or even be able to vote. If voter ID were required, certain people would be privileged over others. When one looks beneath his or her own assumptions, one can see that these privileges are not the result of hard work or

dedication in a fair system but are the result of an unfair system meant to give advantages to those who are already with power.

How does all of this fit into social justice education? One can argue that to fight against a system that is so ingrained in the mindsets of and internalized by both the oppressors and the oppressed, education and awareness are key. According to Adams & Bell (2016), in order to fight an unfair system, everyone must learn to analyze power. Adams & Bell state that we must ask the following questions regarding the normalized practices of society: “In whose interest do systems operate?” and “Who benefits and who pays?” (p. 18). When one can learn to question the status quo and ask these questions, new and better avenues of possibility can and will begin to open.

However, many people must learn to question power in order for all of this to be possible. According to Adams & Bell (2016), in order to see change in institutions, which are complex, it often takes help from those inside and outside the institution or community as well as from the oppressors and the oppressed (p. 114). To create this type of consensus and encourage a large number of people to confront the social injustices within society, educators must teach about social justice in schools. In fact, it can and should be embedded in all subjects as well as explicitly taught. If everyone learns to question power and the status quo, many positive changes can and will be made in society.

Social justice education provides an opportunity for both the oppressed and the oppressors to realize their roles within an oppressive system and then also an avenue to change those roles to make them more just. According to Gerrard (2013), social justice

education provides a place for students to name, discuss, and debate concepts such as freedom, equality, and justice. This can then be tied to emancipatory actions in which students participate in applying their understandings of these concepts to the world around them. This, if done on a large scale, can lead to widespread change. According to Freire (2000), “To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection”(p. 88). Thus, debating the concepts of social justice often leads one to see how problematic and pervasive social injustice is. This then leads to taking action to change injustice that has been discovered through discourse and debate. Social justice education, then, is especially important in the elementary grades as students must build a foundation in social justice and the ideas involved in order to effectively address these issues as they become older.

Many social injustices exist in today’s society. The goal of social justice education is to prepare students for an unjust world that requires their attention, action, and reflection. The first section of the chapter focused on what social injustices permeate our society and how social justice education can help to remedy these injustices.

### **Evolution of the Voices Behind Social Justice Education**

The idea of social justice education has been built on the foundation of the ideas and voices of many theories and theorists. To fully understand social justice education, one must understand the voices behind it. The following section of chapter two will focus on the evolution of some of the voices to contribute to social justice education. First the

work of Karl Marx will be described, then the theories of Paulo Freire will be examined, and finally the work of bell hooks will be expounded upon.

**Karl Marx.** Karl Marx lived and worked in Germany in the 1800's and developed an interest in socialist ideologies that were gathering strength in Germany at the time. Many of his ideas are referred to as Marxisms. However, some of these ideas have been twisted throughout the years and have not been used as Marx intended (Anyon, 2011). Many people associate Marxism with communism, which has gained a bad connotation in America as many dictators have implemented this system. However, Marx was not an ultimate proponent of capitalism (Anyon, 2011).

Marx believed that an economic system built on capitalism was essentially unfair and led to inequalities. In fact, he believed that inequity is built into the system of capitalism in order to make it function (Anyon, 2011). Workers/employees and owners of businesses, especially large corporations, have a profoundly unequal relationship which leads to an inequity in wealth distribution as well as the potential for poor working conditions as the needs of the workers are diametrically opposed to the interests of the owners. Marx saw that this inequity would lead to continual class struggles such as strikes or political demonstrations (Anyon, 2011). Marx also saw that this inequity in class was ultimately responsible for other inequities in society as well such as in social standing, education, living conditions, and opportunities. Thus, Marx believed that advancement in a capitalist society might not have as much to do with one's merit as one thinks but more to do with one's background and social standing. Instead of capitalism, Marx was in favor of a democratic sharing of profits and resources (Anyon, 2011).

Marx also believed that the class who rules over material production also has control of mental production, meaning the media, culture, and education (Anyon, 2011). Marx strongly believed that it is necessary to liberate education from the influence of the more affluent ruling class (Marx and Engels, 1976). At the same time, Marx also recognized that educational institutions can be pivotal in developing protest against dominant culture and social injustices. He saw it as a bit of a catch-22 in that a change in education was necessary to develop a properly functioning system of education, but a properly functioning system of education is the means to change (Anyon, 2011).

Marx is especially relevant to today's society as many of his predictions on how capitalism would function in the long term are coming to pass. He predicted a decline of the middle class, which is happening in the US today (Anyon, 2011). He also foresaw that corporations would essentially control the media, which is especially true today. It is quite difficult to ascertain fact from fiction when there is an inherent bias in the way it is presented and by whom it is presented (Anyon, 2011). Today, corporations have a great amount of influence both in the government and within the media. However, Marx was especially right that corporations and the upper class would essentially control education. Standardized testing, for example, is a big business, and it is no coincidence that these tests are required by public schools at the cost of the state or for entrance into upper level education or careers at the cost of the citizen. According to Hilliard (2000), standardized testing and its data have shown limited results in increasing achievement and often serve the purpose of determining the ability of students and labeling them as intelligent or lacking intelligence even though IQ and achievement have been shown to be malleable

through quality instruction and exposure to educational experiences. Hilliard goes on to say that this means that students with increased access to quality education and experiences who are typically more affluent students will score higher on these tests which are often used as a gateway to higher education and even as a prerequisite to enter into certain professions.

Marx saw that the world would require changes to be made to the education system to help liberate society. Social justice education can do just that. This is a wonderful segue into Paulo Freire and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as he believed that education can open people's eyes to social possibilities.

**Paulo Freire.** Paulo Freire completed his work on education, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in 1970. He believed that in society there are oppressors and the oppressed. The oppressed are essentially dehumanized and exploited by the oppressors who gain power over the oppressed (Freire, 2000). There are many examples of this happening throughout history, some with surprising relation to one another. Two examples would be the Native American genocide when the North American continent was invaded by Europeans and Hitler's genocide during World War II. These events are separated by many decades and yet related. According to Loewen (1996) Hitler modeled his extermination of Jewish and the Roma after the European and American extermination of Native Americans. Although this has happened quite frequently throughout history and still occurs today, there is hope. It is possible for society to reverse this historical pattern of having a group or groups of people who are being oppressed. According to Freire (2000), "In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation,

they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform”(p. 34). Thus, if the oppressed embrace their own power and rise-up, there is potential for a more just society.

To Freire (2000), the relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed is especially important throughout the process of liberating the oppressed. The relationship cannot be one of pity or help for the oppressed because this is not true liberation.

Liberation must be a mutual process between oppressors and the oppressed in which they work in solidarity to obtain the common goal of liberation for all. Those who were originally oppressors who now fight in solidarity with the oppressed must continually examine themselves for prejudices and biases that were ingrained in them at one time. If not, they may inadvertently bring these ideals into the struggle for liberation (Freire, 2000).

Freire (2000) believed that praxis, or “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” is the way to liberation and social equality (p. 133). He believed this could happen through education, although not through the traditional banking concept of education practiced in many places where students are simply “filled” with knowledge. According to Freire (2000), “Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information” (p. 74). This means that a problem is posed and both teacher and students become learners and teachers at the same time through dialogue and action-reflection.

Freire believed that the world could overcome oppression through the proper use of education. His idea of an ideal education system is very similar to what most research

suggests social justice education should look like. bell hooks, who drew some of her ideas from Freire, provides an even more modern take on social justice education.

**bell hooks.** bell hooks wrote one of her most famous works, *Teaching to Transgress*, in 1994. Just as Freire (2000) did, bell hooks (1994) believes that the system of education in which students are willing receptacles of compartmentalized knowledge is not the route to the liberation of society. She chose to challenge this type of education in her work. hooks (1994) believes in seeing students as “whole human beings with complex lives and experiences” (p. 15). She also believes, as Freire did, that education is a mutual process. Students and teachers share their roles and are both empowered through the process of education. However, hooks expounds on this by stating that we must elicit voices not traditionally emphasized in society. All student voices must be heard.

Throughout her work, hooks (1994) also calls on teachers to be self-actualized. This means that teachers should continually seek to foster their mind, body, and spirit through care, knowledge, and reflection. According to hooks (1994), “Professors who embrace the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply” (p. 23). Thus, knowing how to care for oneself in mind, body, and spirit and actively doing so allows for one to more easily teach in such a way so as to foster such things.

bell hooks (1994) also states that no education can be politically neutral. Even simply the pedagogical content that is taught is a political decision. hooks believes in overtly challenging and discussing some of the politics of racism, sexism, heterosexism,

classism, etc. in the classroom as a way to challenge bias and create dialogue. This, however, can only be done once a classroom community and a sense of shared commitment is created.

Karl Marx, Paulo Freire, and bell hooks are just some of the voices behind social justice education. However, each one of them has contributed important ideologies without which social justice education would not be what it is today. The next section of chapter two focuses on how to do what it is that Marx, Freire, and hooks envisioned that teachers should do. Thus, strategies for social justice education will be illustrated in the next section of the chapter.

### **Strategies for Teaching Social Justice Education**

Many researchers in the field of social justice education have come up with various strategies for how to teach social justice education. They include: creating a foundation for teaching social justice in the classroom (Adams & Bell, 2016), including absent narratives (Baker, 2011; Seely & Tropp, 2012), the use of critical literacy and writing in teaching about social justice (Seely & Tropp, 2012; Baker, 2011), and the use of service learning projects to teach about social justice issues and practice activism (Butin, 2007; Wade, 2007; Mitchell, 2007; Warren, 1998). The following section of this chapter will focus on some of these strategies and methodologies.

**Foundation of social justice education.** According to Adams & Bell (2016), there are five dimensions to think about when planning an effective social justice education course. The first dimension involves who one is as self and instructor. Teachers bring many facets of their own personalities, cultures, social identities, biases, and knowledge with

them into the classroom. The first dimension demands that teachers examine who they are and how it affects those around them through self-reflection before teaching social justice education to students (Adams & Bell, 2016). Only then can they be ready to face the complex topics and issues that arise when teaching social justice. If teachers cannot accurately describe their own culture and how it affects them as well as demonstrate a basic understanding of social justice topics and definitions like white privilege, implicit bias, prejudice, racism, etc., their instruction in social justice education will be largely ineffective and potentially harmful to students' understanding of social justice and the issues involved in this topic. In fact, according to Milner (2009), student achievement often suffers when teachers cannot or will not consider their own racial backgrounds and/or those of their students when planning for instruction and/or teaching. Milner goes on to say that this is because many students of color feel alienated and out of place in a learning environment that is not inclusive of and conducive to their own cultures. According to Freire (2000), people who were originally oppressors who now fight in solidarity with the oppressed must continually examine themselves for prejudices and biases that they may still have and be committed to consciously eliminating them. Thus educators have a duty to do what Freire described, and, if this is not done, social justice education will not be effective.

The second dimension to think about when designing a social justice education course involves thinking deeply about the students who are being taught (Adams & Bell, 2016). Students have multiple social identities and differing awareness of these social identities. They also have different interests and motivations and varying comfort levels

and experiences with discussing social justice topics (Adams & Bell, 2016). These all must be taken into consideration when designing a plan for teaching social justice education. Baker (2011) agrees with the premise that knowing your students is important and should play a role in determining content and how it is taught. She found that her Latina students needed resources that reflected their identity and culture when learning about history.

The third dimension involves the curriculum or what is being taught (Adams & Bell, 2016). In social justice education it is important to establish the learning outcomes for what is being taught. According to Adams & Bell (2016), it is crucial to decide what learners should know, what they should be able to do, and what critical perspectives they should understand and practice using. It is also important to ask the following questions when choosing activities and materials: “Who is included? What is included? How is it included? From whose perspective? And using what sources?” (Adams & Bell, 2016, p. 61) hooks, (1994) touched on this idea as well by stating that we must elicit voices not traditionally emphasized in society. She states that students need to see things from different perspectives but should also see themselves reflected in the subject matter in a way that they can relate to at some point, which is often not the case for students of color as they are often eliminated from the dominant narrative and thus the curriculum.

The fourth dimension deals with the pedagogy of teaching social justice education or how it is taught (Adams & Bell, 2016). Adams & Bell (2016) suggest using a range of pedagogical strategies and approaches when teaching social justice education such as approaches that facilitate concrete experience (discussions and simulations), reflective

observation (processing questions), abstract conceptualization (conceptual models), and active experimentation (action projects). The research of Wade (2007) and Butin (2007) further supports the use of active service learning projects as a method for teaching social justice education. Also, the research of Seely & Tropp (2012) on the importance of using critical literacy as a technique for teaching social justice includes the use of journaling to process questions and quality literature to promote discussions on topics. When structuring activities it is important to identify key concepts and objectives, establish how progress will be assessed, design the learning activities, organize the directions, procedures and materials for each activity, develop a way to process each activity, and properly sequence the learning activities (Adams & Bell, 2016).

The fifth dimension involves the climate and dynamics of the classroom in which the content is being taught (Adams & Bell, 2016). This means that the instructor should make sure that all participants feel heard and respected and that the students view the instructor as trustworthy and knowledgeable. Also, students should be able to develop relationships in which they can engage with each other in ways that support learning. hooks (1994) agrees with this idea that a classroom community and shared commitment are necessary for students to challenge bias and create dialogue. Finally, the content and the pedagogy should feel relevant and culturally inclusive for the students (Adams & Bell, 2016).

Adams & Bell (2016), also state that there are three phases that a social justice education course should cycle through. The first phase is the confirmation phase. This is the time when expectations are set up and participants are “confirmed,” or made to feel

safe and open to risk-taking. The second phase is the contradiction phase. During this phase, students are asked to question prior beliefs and understandings. This stage can feel rather unsettling as students ask questions, explore, and take risks. The final phase is the continuity stage. This phase is when students get closure by pulling together and summarizing what they have learned. They also think about how they might integrate what they have learned into their everyday lives and make a plan for action (Adams & Bell, 2016).

**Critical talk and writing.** It is important in social justice education to provide spaces for students to discuss and write about social justice issues. These opportunities can be more structured such as discussion or writing prompts, or they can be freeform opportunities such as sharing and journaling. According to Baker (2011), providing opportunities like these for her students helped her students to open up about their life experiences and examine what “normal” meant for their lives. It also helped them to begin to question this so-called “normal,” and they began to make decisions about whether what was “normal” to them was, in fact, socially just. In her study, Baker (2011) provided opportunities for students to journal about social justice issues and how they related to their lives. Her results show why this type of writing is extremely important for students when they are learning about social justice.

**Examining content: who’s missing?** To truly teach in a way that promotes social justice, it is crucial that teachers examine content for bias and to discover absent narratives. Often bias toward the dominant culture or against minority cultures can be hidden within school and teacher traditions that have not been critically examined. An

example of this can be as simple as singing Mother Goose rhymes to young students as these rhymes are often well known only by white children and present a European perspective. This creates a divide between kids that are able to connect with the teacher through shared knowledge, and those that are not. Another example of absent narratives and curricular bias is a history book that does not present famous historical figures from multiple cultures and races. Baker (2011) describes a project in which students needed to give an oral presentation in which they took on the persona of a historical figure. She found that her Latina students did not have any Latina historical figures in the history book to choose from. This lack of representation posed a problem as her Latina students did not have any readily available historical figures that they could connect to and see themselves in. She encouraged them to look elsewhere, and she helped them to find some Latina historical figures they could connect to.

In another study, Seely & Tropp (2012) found that eliciting multiple perspectives not usually presented within dominant culture, or absent narratives, was key in inspiring effective poetry from students. Teachers in the study were encouraged to use examples that reflected the culture of their students, many of them Latin(x) students. Soon students were integrating Spanish phrases into their poetry that more accurately reflected their lives and culture. Often the perspective of Latin(x) students is not adequately acknowledged nor accurately represented within dominant culture nor within the educational system. Representation within classroom instruction helps students from underrepresented cultures better connect with what is being taught.

**Service learning projects.** Service learning projects are another great way to teach social justice in the classroom. According to Butin (2007), service learning projects are projects in which students pick a societal issue to improve upon and then work together to do so. The process of students choosing a topic can be guided so that students have a limited number of choices or teachers can choose a more open-ended approach. Teachers may also choose a topic for students to explore based on their observations of their students' interests throughout other lessons and assignments. This type of project can easily incorporate some of the components of social justice education through students analyzing and making decisions about societal issues before taking action (Butin, 2007).

Some of the key components that a service learning project should have to also be considered a social justice project are being student-centered, collaborative, experiential, analytical and multicultural as well as involving some sort of intellectual research (Butin, 2007). Wade (2007) adds to this that projects may also have an activist component to them as well as the opportunity for students to examine the values involved in the topic. A project does not have to have all of these components at the same time to be social justice oriented, but these components do serve as a guideline for creating a social justice service learning project (Butin, 2007).

Social justice service learning projects are beneficial for students because they have the potential to lead students to analyze the root causes of societal issues that are important to them (Butin, 2007). Students are focused not just on helping people and improving situations, they are equally focused on figuring out why the problem exists in

the first place. They take that knowledge and use it to make their own decisions about how to act versus simply being told what to do to help by an adult or organization.

According to Mitchell (2007), this type of social justice oriented service learning is also referred to as critical service learning as it requires thinking critically about issues.

According to Butin (2007), who interviewed 40 social justice educators in grades K-12 on their social justice education practices, some common themes exist in high quality social justice education projects. The first theme is that students are encouraged to ask questions about the world around them and teachers help them develop projects based on those interests. The second theme is that students often use letter writing as a tool of activism by writing to politicians or people in power. The third theme is that teachers should model their own enthusiasm for their own projects and activism. This helps create more student interest and inspire students as they work toward social justice themselves (Butin, 2007). Mitchell (2007) further outlines some common themes in quality critical service learning projects. Projects should include attention to social change, involve students questioning the distribution of power, and involve students making meaningful and authentic relationships with each other and with the community they are serving.

There are many social justice themes that can be explored through critical service learning projects. According to Warren (1998), students should be encouraged to explore some of these topics in the classroom before being exposed to them within the wider community. Students can and should discuss and research concepts like distribution of power, socioeconomic status, and race within the classroom before becoming activists in

these areas through critical service learning (Warren, 1998). This leads to informed viewpoints and more practical ideas for how to advocate for and act on their ideals.

**Critical literacy.** Critical literacy is an approach to literacy in the classroom that is highly useful for social justice education. Seely & Tropp (2012) describe four practices which reflect critical literacy in the classroom. These practices are questioning the status quo, soliciting multiple perspectives, a focus on sociopolitical subjects, and taking action in regard to social justice. Seely & Tropp (2012) conducted a study of two schools in which teachers were asked to integrate critical literacy into the classroom through poetry. Poetry was found to be an especially useful tool with which to approach critical literacy as it allowed students to more easily put words to the emotions and lives. Students were also able to listen to texts on various sociopolitical issues and respond to them through writing their own poetry. This is an example of how critical literacy and social justice education are linked.

According to Seely & Tropp (2012), writer's workshop is a way to integrate critical literacy into the classroom. "A writer's workshop focuses on writers and how to do the things that writers really do—research, explore, collect, interview, talk, read, and write" (Seely & Tropp, 2012, p. 14). This type of approach to the process of writing makes it much easier to focus on the aspects of critical literacy and integrate social justice into writing. In writer's workshop, the focus is more on the process of writing versus the product.

**The nonviolence approach to social justice.** A nonviolence approach to teaching social justice education fits well within a school community as a focus in schools should

be on teaching students to respect and get along with one another and the community at large despite any differences among them. According to Wang (2013), the principle of nonviolence goes beyond whether or not physical aggression is used. It is an approach to social justice that focuses on the compassionate side of humanity verses advocating hate and divisiveness. It focuses on the collective versus the individual and asks how one might differ for another rather than how one is different from others (Wang, 2013). Students are encouraged to acknowledge the differences of all and do their best to accept and accommodate for those differences. Thus, this type of approach fits well in the community of an elementary school as students are asked to learn to care about one another and the needs of all. A nonviolent approach to education also advocates for focusing on the inner work of social justice just as much as the outer work (Wang, 2013). This means that students must be allowed an outlet for and time to process the difficult emotions that may come up during confronting social injustice.

One particular way that Wang (2013) suggests teaching the nonviolent approach to social justice is through the use of role-play. Students are asked to act out situations of conflict and solve problems through nonviolent, caring means. Students are asked to identify and address each person's needs in the situation and discuss how those needs might be met through negotiation. Throughout this process students are encouraged to assume best intentions on both sides of a disagreement.

**Websites with activities.** Many popular websites exist with a plethora of activities for teaching social justice. The Teaching Tolerance website, for example, has many activities ready and available for classroom teachers to use for teaching social justice. These

activities range from activities meant to mix different types of students up to activities meant to help students understand and process the unfairness of racism and prejudice (Teaching Tolerance, n.d.). These activities can be extremely useful and beneficial for students. However, it is important to caution educators that these activities are not based on research or results. Therefore, teachers should use this site and others as helpful resources for teaching social justice education but not as the foundation for social justice education. Social justice education is much more than just a set of activities and treating it as such would allow students to only graze the surface of what social justice really is.

### **Explanation of Research**

Overall, the research for actually applying social justice education in an elementary setting is rather sparse at present. While the data stated in chapter two clearly demonstrates that there is an issue with social justice in the country, not many people are taking the time to study how education can be a factor in creating a more socially just world. This is interesting because many great minds and theorists have written many great works on social justice education. Overall, social justice education needs to be studied more to determine what particular methods are most effective for elementary students to begin to develop the tools needed to think critically about societal issues, identify how to affect change, and act on their knowledge. My toolkit of resources will help contribute to this research and will hopefully be one of many others to follow as this is clearly an area of need in our country.

## Summary

At the beginning of this chapter, the case for social justice education was presented. It was found through data that we live in a socially unjust country with many issues to be addressed. Once it was made clear that social injustice does, in fact, exist, it was possible to explore how social justice education could be part of the solution to our society's issues. Social justice education was thought by some researchers to be a way to teach students how to critically think about and act on society's injustices.

Once a case for social justice education was established, some of the voices behind social justice education were explored. The voices explored included Karl Marx, Paulo Freire, and bell hooks. Karl Marx contributed ideas about capitalism and the way it impacts education. Paulo Freire proposed a type of education that would lead students to think critically and learn alongside the teacher. Bell hooks expanded on Freire's work by adding that we must care for the whole student in mind, body, and spirit.

At the end of chapter three, researched strategies for social justice education were described. Some of these strategies included critical literacy, active service learning projects, critical talk and writing, the nonviolence approach, websites, and examining content for missing voices. All of these are strategies aimed at getting students to think critically about the world around them and act accordingly. In chapter three, I will describe how I used some of these strategies to create an active service learning project for my students that reflected their lives and interests.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

#### Introduction

In chapter one I shared my own journey of learning about different cultures and social justice as well as why social justice education is a passion of mine. In chapter two, I explored literature that explained the need for social justice education, provided a background on a few of the voices behind social justice education, and suggested some strategies for implementing social justice education. In this chapter I will provide an overview of my project, information about the research paradigm behind the project, the method used for the project, the audience the project is intended for, a detailed description of the project, and the timeline used for implementation of the project. This chapter explains how my project was designed to answer the question: *What are effective strategies for teaching social justice to elementary students and how will using them affect elementary students' attitudes toward and knowledge of social justice?*

### **Overview of the project**

The project I designed based on my research in chapter two is a toolkit of various teaching resources and materials for elementary teachers. The toolkit includes lists of websites with information about social justice education and downloadable resources, lists of children's literature that addresses social justice themes, lesson plans, journal prompts for students, examples of service learning projects focused on social justice, and a list of books on social justice education for educators to explore the topic further.

This section of chapter three focused on providing a general overview of the project that was created which is a toolkit for teachers looking to teach social justice education to elementary students. The next section of this chapter will discuss the overall context of the project.

### **Context for project**

While developing this project, I implemented some of the strategies detailed in the literature review. First, it was important that I applied the foundational practices of Adams & Bell (2016). I first examined my own culture so as to determine how it might affect the decisions I made in choosing resources, information, and literature to include in the toolkit. I then made sure to examine my toolkit and the lesson plans and materials it contained for any missing perspectives in the information I was presenting (Baker, 2011; Seely and Tropp, 2012).

I decided to include active service learning projects in the toolkit because much of the research in the literature review pointed to the effectiveness of this instructional practice in social justice education. According to Butin (2007), service learning projects

are projects in which students pick a societal issue to improve upon and then work together to do so. This type of project can easily incorporate some of the components of social justice education through students analyzing and making decisions about societal issues before taking action (Butin, 2007). This is why I included examples of active service learning projects for teachers to use in the toolkit.

I also provided a list of journal prompts that encourage students to explore their own cultures, examine multiple perspectives, and think about social justice and how to take action. Students using journaling as a component of critical writing to explore social justice is a method that Baker (2011) promoted as an effective strategy. It allows students to explore and express their thoughts on social justice in an honest and safe way.

This section of chapter three focused on the context of the project and why I chose to include the resources that I did. The resources were chosen based upon what current research says is most effective for implementing social justice education. The next section of this chapter will discuss the audience the project is intended for.

### **Audience**

This project was designed for elementary teachers who desire information about and resources for teaching social justice education to elementary students. The toolkit is specifically designed for elementary aged students from kindergarten through sixth grade. As I researched the topic, I discovered how few resources for and research articles on social justice education are geared toward this age group. This means that resources like this toolkit are scarce and are an area of need in education. Hopefully this toolkit will encourage more elementary educators to explore social justice education in their

classrooms and add more knowledge, experience, and research to the little that is currently available.

It is important, however, that before educators utilize this toolkit that they develop an appropriate mindset in regard to social justice, bias, the concept of white privilege, and system inequity. This is something that can be done through the list of literature for teachers that is provided in the toolkit. Many of the books discuss concepts like white privilege, implicit bias, systemic inequity, and equity mindset. Teachers should spend some time exploring these topics and gaining a foundational understanding of social justice before attempting to address these topics in the classroom.

This section of chapter three focused on the audience that this project is intended for. The project is a toolkit of resources and information for teaching social justice education intended for elementary educators to use with elementary students in grades K-6. Teachers should have a foundational understanding of social justice and the issues involved before using these resources in the classroom. The following section will give a detailed description of the project.

### **Project description**

The project includes the following resources for elementary educators who want to implement social justice education in the classroom: websites, lists of children's literature related to social justice education and categorized by topic, a list of reference books for educators on social justice and social justice education, lists of social justice lessons that are organized by theme, a list of possible social justice journaling prompts for students, and a list of ideas for social justice active service learning projects. I chose

these resources based upon the research done in the literature review. In choosing all of these resources I kept in mind the following criteria: examining resources for bias (Adams & Bell, 2016), inclusion of student voice and representation of students (Baker, 2011), the use of multiple perspectives and absent narratives (Seely & Tropp, 2012), as well as the importance of the use of critical literacy in social justice education (Seely & Tropp, 2012) through quality literature and exploring social justice topics through writing (Baker, 2011).

When researching and developing ideas for service learning projects, I kept in mind some of the key components that a service learning project should have to also be considered a social justice project. These components include being student-centered, collaborative, experiential, analytical and multicultural as well as involving some sort of intellectual research (Butin, 2007). Wade (2007) adds to this that quality projects may also have an activist component to them as well as the opportunity for students to examine the values involved in the topic. I kept this research at the forefront when developing the list of service learning projects.

When developing a list of reference books for educators to help them build a foundational mindset for teaching about social justice, I considered which books would help educators examine their own identities and viewpoints in a critical way (Adams & Bell, 2016). According to hooks (1994), no education is politically neutral as the choices in what is to be taught and how it is to be taught are inherently political decisions. I chose literature that would help guide teachers toward curricular choices that challenge the

politics of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, etc. in the classroom as a way to challenge bias and create dialogue.

This section of chapter three provided a detailed description of the project created which includes a list of websites with information about social justice education and downloadable resources, a list of children's literature that addresses social justice themes, lesson plans, journal prompts for students, examples of service learning projects focused on social justice, and a list of books on social justice education for educators to explore the topic further. The following section will discuss the timeline I used to implement this project.

### **Timeline**

The timeline that I utilized for my project was to attempt to implement the resources in the social justice education toolkit in my own classroom over the course of 2-3 months. I ended up spreading it out over 3 months, as the topics involved are deep and nuanced and deserve to be explored fully. I found that this was an appropriate amount of time to be able to explore quite a few of the topics and resources provided in the toolkit. I was able to provide a foundational understanding for students about social justice education and the history of social justice, explore a variety of social justice issues, examine one issue more fully that was of particular interest to students (they chose immigration policy), and create and implement an active service learning project that addressed that issue. Of course, the toolkit could easily be used over the course of an entire school year, as there are so many topics and avenues to explore in regard to social justice.

This section of chapter three focused on the timeline that I used to implement this project. I implemented the resources in the social justice education toolkit over the course of 3 months in order to explore the topics fully and completely. The following section will provide an overview and conclusion of chapter three.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter three provided an overview of the project, explained the context behind the project, described the audience the project is intended for, gave a detailed description of the project, and described the timeline that was used for implementation of the project. The project is a toolkit designed for elementary educators teaching in grades K-6 that includes websites, children's literature, lesson plans, journal prompts, active service learning project examples, and a list of literature for educators to further explore the pedagogy of social justice education. This toolkit was utilized by me in my own classroom over the course of three months. Chapter four will document the results of utilizing this project in my classroom and my reflections on its effectiveness and future implications.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

#### Introduction

In chapter one I shared my own journey of learning about different cultures and social justice as well as why social justice education is a passion of mine. In chapter two, I explored literature that explained the need for social justice education, provided a background on a few of the voices behind social justice education, and suggested some strategies for implementing social justice education. In chapter three, I provided more information about the details of my social justice toolkit project, the reasoning behind my selections for this toolkit, the audience it is intended for, and the timeline for my own implementation of the toolkit. This capstone and the project associated with it were designed to answer the question: *What are effective strategies for teaching social justice to elementary students and how will using them affect elementary students' attitudes toward and knowledge of social justice?* This chapter will explore my thoughts on the process of creating and using this toolkit, describe my reflections on the effect of implementing this project on my students, discuss which research from the literature review was most influential in the creation and implementation of the toolkit, explore future implications and avenues of exploration based upon the results of the project, and describe how the results of this project will be communicated.

### **Thoughts on Process**

This process was extremely informative for me, even as a person who had previously sought out quite a bit of information on social justice and equity. I learned a lot about how to implement these ideas in an elementary classroom setting, which was very affirming for me as many of the methods I had already been using. As far as active service learning projects, I knew these to be good practice but hadn't yet implemented one in the classroom. Learning more about their importance through my research inspired me to take this on, and I was extremely pleased with this process and the results.

In the creation of this toolkit, I tried to pick resources that would be easy for teachers to seek out and use. After implementing the use of the toolkit in my own classroom, I removed a few resources as, even though they fit my researched criteria, they were not simple to use. As a teacher, I know that time is limited and precious, and I wanted the toolkit to be filled with resources that teachers would actually use.

Using these resources with my students was extremely informative and enriching for me as the students often responded in ways that I hadn't anticipated, had extremely unique contributions, and directed our inquiry into unexpected avenues. I found flexibility to be extremely important when teaching about social justice. It was very important for me to be responsive to my students and their questions and needs.

This section of chapter four focused on my thoughts on the process of creating and implementing this project. The following section will detail my reflections on the implementation of the project.

## **Reflections on Implementation**

I found that students responded extremely positively to social justice content. They are surrounded by these topics constantly and were actually very eager to discuss and process their thoughts. Most of my students are students of color and come from low income families, so these issues are usually ones that directly affect them. It was also important for my white students to discuss these topics as they were able to listen to and learn about other perspectives and see many of these issues in a new way.

By the end of the three month period in which I used these resources, students were able to have productive conversations about social justice issues that involved all students contributing fairly equally. At first they needed to do more partner sharing and writing so that all students would feel safe participating, but eventually, they had built enough of a foundation in these topics that all students were able to contribute even in a whole group discussion. Creating a supportive environment where all contributions are valued was key in getting to this point.

My students ended up focusing in on the topic of immigration policy as many of them are immigrants, refugees, and/or undocumented. They wrote letters to politicians that have some influence over immigration policy. They were especially focused on changing the policy of separating families at the border. They also created artwork that represented their viewpoints and feelings on this topic, which were very moving. Overall, students were able to take what they learned about social justice education and activism and apply it in a real world context and in a way that was meaningful to them. They

seemed to feel empowered and many expressed the desire to repeat this process with other social justice issues that were of interest to them.

In this section of chapter four I discussed my reflections on implementing this project in my classroom. Overall, students felt empowered and built a stronger community through this process. The following section will detail which research I found to be most influential in creating and implementing this project.

### **Most Influential Research**

I found much of my research to be extremely relevant and important to developing and implementing this project. My research on social justice theorists provided a foundation for my work, and my research on methods for implementing social justice education in the classroom provided practical ideas for developing and using my toolkit.

Adams & Bell (2016) were extremely influential as far as providing a framework for implementing social justice education strategies in the classroom. The five dimensions of social justice education that they describe in their book were key to providing a foundation for implementing social justice education in the classroom. Without examining one's mindset, thinking critically about who one is teaching and what is being taught, exploring topics with students through a variety of approaches, and creating a safe environment in which to explore these topics, social justice education would be ineffective and potentially harmful instead of helpful to students (Adams & Bell, 2016)

Other research that I found to be extremely important was the research I found on active service learning projects. There was a lot of research available on this topic, which

illustrates its importance in the field of social justice education. The research that I found provided me with the criteria that I needed to design an active service learning project and choose appropriate ideas for other potential projects. Some of the key components that a service learning project should have to also be considered a social justice project are being student-centered, collaborative, experiential, analytical and multicultural as well as involving some sort of intellectual research (Butin, 2007). Wade (2007) adds to this that many quality projects include the opportunity for students to practice activism as well time for students to fully explore and examine the values involved in the topic.

In this section of chapter four I discussed which research I found to be most beneficial in creating and implementing this project. The following section will explore the future implications of this project and detail some possible future avenues to explore that were brought to light in researching, creating, and implementing this toolkit.

### **Future Implications and Avenues to Explore**

One of the most surprising findings to me through this process was how little research is available on teaching social justice education in an elementary setting. I was shocked by this as I know foundational knowledge to be important to cultivate at a young age. It was, therefore, surprising to me that social justice education has not been thoroughly explored at this age level. Thus, one area of need is more research on this topic in elementary classroom settings.

Something that I find to be disturbing is that there is no systemic process for addressing social justice education in schools given how important this subject matter is. Thus, the need to explore these topics is addressed by only a handful of teachers in a

haphazard way. This indicates the need for policy and standards related to social justice education that require this subject matter to be taught. This also means that teachers must be required to have a significant amount of professional development on equity mindset, identity, implicit bias, prejudice, white privilege, and systemic racism and classism in order to be able to effectively teach this content once it is required.

In this section of chapter four I explored the future implications of this project and the issues that it brought to light that need to be further explored. Overall, there is a lack of research on this topic for elementary students, and, since this content is extremely important, there needs to be policy that mandates that it be taught. The following section will describe how I plan to communicate the results of this project.

### **Method for Communicating Results**

This project will be posted in the Digital Commons at Hamline University and will be widely available for anyone interested. I also plan on putting a link to the project up on my own website so that people will be able to discover and use it that way as well.

Beyond simply making this project available digitally, I have also considered creating a professional development presentation based upon my research and findings from implementation. This would also provide me with the opportunity to share this resource with my colleagues. I discussed this with my principal, and she is interested, so this is something I will be developing in the coming months.

In this section of chapter four I discussed how I plan to communicate the results and implications of this project. I plan to provide digital access to my toolkit and paper as

well as create a professional development session based on my findings. The following section will provide an overview of and conclusion to chapter four.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter four explored my reflections on the process of creating and implementing this project, what I discovered while implementing the project, detailed which research I found to be most influential in creating and implementing this project, described future implications and avenues of exploration brought to light by this project, and conveyed how I plan to communicate the results of this project. Overall, I found elementary students to be extremely eager to explore and discuss social justice issues, which indicates it is an area of need and relevance for these students. This capstone and the project associated with it were designed to answer the question: *What are effective strategies for teaching social justice to elementary students and how will using them affect elementary students' attitudes toward and knowledge of social justice?* While I found my results to further my understanding of this topic and my essential question, I also found that more research is needed in this area. This is an extremely multifaceted area of study in which there is always more to be explored and learned.

As previously stated, Martin Luther King, Jr. said “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy” (n.d.). Affecting social change during times of “challenge and controversy” is not something one can do only once with any lasting results. This must be applied throughout one’s lifetime and the lifetimes of many others in order to create lasting change. My hope is that further exploration and research into the

area of social justice education will lead to this topic being addressed more consistently in elementary classrooms. When more people are inspired to affect social change and empowered with the tools to do so, we can all work together in the fight to create a more just world for all, and we will be far more likely to see our dreams realized.

## Appendix A

### Social Justice Websites

These websites were chosen because they have lessons and resources that help teachers address the five dimensions of social justice education described by Adams & Bell (2016) which include teacher reflection on identity and bias, learning about the students being taught, examining the curriculum for absent narratives and bias, using a variety of engaging methods to teach social justice education, and creating an inclusive and safe community for students to participate in. However, it is important to caution educators that these activities are not based on research or results. Therefore, teachers should use this site and others as helpful resources for teaching social justice education but not as the foundation for social justice education. Social justice education is much more than just a set of activities and treating it as such would allow students to only graze the surface of what social justice really is. It is important that teachers develop the mindset needed to teach this content first. Baker (2011) found that being able to identify bias and absent narratives in the curriculum and then address those issues was crucial in engaging her students.

#### Facing History and Ourselves

<https://www.facinghistory.org/>

- This website has various resources and articles for teaching about social justice as well as the opportunity to access an online lending library to borrow books.

#### Learning to Give

<https://www.learningtogive.org/>

- This website has helpful ideas and resources for teachers to use to help students to become involved in enacting positive change in the world as well as lesson plans and other practical resources for teachers.

### Radical Math

<http://www.radicalmath.org/>

- This website has a plethora of ideas and resources about how to integrate social justice education into mathematics.

### Social Justice Books

<https://socialjusticebooks.org/booklists/>

- This website has lists of children's books related to social justice themes that are categorized by topic

### Teaching for Change

<https://www.teachingforchange.org/>

- This website has lessons, articles, and other resources related to social justice education.

### Teaching Tolerance

<https://www.tolerance.org>

- Website with resources, lesson plans, and printables that are leveled by age and also categorized by topic or area of interest

## Appendix B

### Social Justice Children's Literature

According to Wade (2007), "Social justice education empowers students to analyze the root causes of injustice, promote equal opportunity for all people, and learn from multiple perspectives on an issue or topic within a collaborative, experiential approach to teaching and learning" (p. 159). In that spirit, the following books were chosen to support learning students' learning about injustice, prejudice, bias, social activism, and absent narratives. They were written by diverse authors and address a variety of social justice related issues. All books are appropriate for ages K-6 unless otherwise noted.

#### ***Social Justice History and Pioneers***

These books all include stories about social justice pioneers and the history of social justice.

- ***Child of the Civil Rights Movement***
  - *Shelton, P. Y., & Colón Raúl. (2013). Child of the civil rights movement. New York: Dragonfly Books.*
- ***Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez***
  - *Krull, K., & Morales, Y. (2013). Harvesting hope: The story of Cesar Chavez. Columbus, O.H.: Zaner-Bloser.*
- ***Henry's Freedom Box***
  - *Levine, L. (2007). Henry's freedom box. New York: Scholastic Inc.*
- ***Malala: My Story of Standing Up for Girls' Rights***
  - *Yousafzai, M., McCormick, P., Robbins, S. J., Stone, J., & Vaswani, N. (2019). Malala: my story of standing up for girls' rights. Solon, OH: Findaway World, LLC.*

- **Separate is Never Equal: The Story of Sylvia Mendez & Her Family's Fight for Desegregation**
  - *Tonatiuh, D. (2014). Separate is never equal: The story of Sylvia Mendez & her family's fight for desegregation. New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers.*
- **So Tall Within: Sojourner Truth's Long Walk Toward Freedom**
  - *Schmidt, Gary D./ Minter, Daniel (ILT). (2018). So tall within: Sojourner Truth's long walk toward freedom. Henry Holt & Co.*
- **The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a Young Civil Rights Activist**
  - *Levinson, C. (2017). The youngest marcher: The story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a young civil rights activist. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division.*

### **Activism/Organizing**

These books all focus on the idea of activism and how to put social justice into practice.

- **A is for Activist**
  - *Nagara, I. (2016). A is for activist. New York: Seven Stories Press.*
- **Ban This Book**
  - *Gratz, A. (2018). Ban this book. New York: Starscape.*
- **Counting on Community**
  - *Nagara, I. (2015). Counting on community. Seven Stories Press.*
- **Milo's Museum**
  - *Elliott, Z., & Wong, P. (2016). Milo's museum. Brooklyn, NY: Rosetta Press.*
- **Say Something**
  - *Reynolds, P. (2019). Say something. Lindfield, NSW: Scholastic Australia.*
- **Swimmy**
  - *Lionni, L. (1991). Swimmy. Logan, IA: Perfection Learning Corp.*
- **The Water Walker**
  - *Robertson, J. (2018). The Water Walker. Toronto: CELA.*

## **Economic Inequality**

These books all address the topic of economic inequality and how that affects people and opportunity.

- ***A Chair for My Mother***
  - *Williams, V. B. (2015). A chair for my mother. Winnipeg: Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, Alternate Formats Library.*
- ***Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type***
  - *Cronin, D., & Lewin, B. (2018). Click, clack, moo: cows that type. Fairfax, VA: Library Ideas, LLC.*
- ***A Different Pond***
  - *Phi, B., & Bui, T. (2019). A different pond. Fairfax, VA: Library Ideas, LLC.*
- ***Each Kindness***
  - *Woodson, J., & Lewis, E. B. (2013). Each kindness. Toronto: CNIB.*
- ***The Fair Housing Five & the Haunted House (Grades 3-7)***
  - *Mahdi-Neville, S. (2018). The fair housing five & the haunted house. New Orleans, LA: Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center.*
- ***Last Stop on Market Street***
  - *Peña Matt De la, & Robinson, C. (2017). Last stop on Market Street. London: Puffin.*

## **Immigration**

These books all address the topic of immigration and the nuances involved including the concept of undocumented immigration.

- ***Dreamers***
  - *Morales, Y., & Sananes, A. (2019). Dreamers. Solon, OH: Findaway World, LLC.*
- ***Islandborn***
  - *Díaz Junot. (2019). Islandborn. Solon, OH: Findaway World, LLC.*

- **La Frontera: El Viaje con Papa**
  - Mills, D., & Alva, A. (2019). *La Frontera: El Viaje Con Papa*. Barefoot Books.
- **Landed**
  - Lee, M., & Choi, Y. (2006). *Landed*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
- **Mama's Nightingale**
  - Danticat, E., & Parisi, A. (2017). *Mama's nightingale*. Oshkosh, WI: OSCI Braille Program.
- **My Name is Yoon**
  - Recorvits, H., & Swiatkowska, G. (2014). *My name is Yoon*. New York: Square Fish.

### **Ableism**

These books all deal with the topic of ableism and how the world currently gives privilege to able-bodied individuals.

- **Benny Doesn't Like to be Hugged**
  - Elliott, Z. (2017). *Benny doesn't like to be hugged.*: Zetta Elliott and Purple Wong illustrator. Rosetta Press.
- **The Black Book of Colors**
  - Cottin, M., Faria Rosana, & Amado, E. (2018). *The black book of colors*. Toronto: Groundwood Books.
- **The Deaf Musicians**
  - Seeger, P., Christie, R. G., & Jacobs, P. D. B. (2006). *The deaf musicians*. New York: Putnam.
- **Emmanuel's Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah**
  - Thompson, L. A. (2015). *Emmanuel's dream: the true story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah*. New York: Schwartz & Wade Books.
- **Featherless**
  - Herrera, J. F. (2005). *Featherless*. San Francisco, CA: Childrens Book Press/Editorial Libros para Niños.

## **LGBTQ Rights/Gender**

These books all focus on gender identification, gender discrimination, and introduce topics like transgender, homosexuality, and gender norms as well as focus on prejudice based on gender identification and sexuality.

- ***C is for Consent***
  - Morrison, E., & Orlove, F. (2018). *C is for consent*. United States: Phonics with Finn.
- ***I am Jazz!***
  - Herthel, J., Jennings, J., & McNicholas, S. (2014). *I am Jazz!* NY, NY: Dial Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) LLC.
- ***It Feels Good to be Yourself: A Book About Gender Identity***
  - Thorn, T., & Grigni, N. (2019). *It feels good to be yourself: A book about gender identity*. Toronto: CELA.
- ***One of a Kind, Like Me/Único Como Yo***
  - Mayeno, L., Liu-Trujillo, R., & Mlawer, T. (2016). *One of a kind, like me/Único como yo*. Oakland, CA: Blood Orange Press.
- ***Pink is for Boys***
  - Pearlman, R., & Kaban, E. (2018). *Pink is for boys*. Philadelphia: Running Press Kids.
- ***Red: A Crayon's Story***
  - Hall, M. (2018). *Red: A crayon's story*. Vienna, VA: Library Ideas, LLC.
- ***This Day in June***
  - Pitman, G. E. (2017). *This Day In June*. Magination Press.
- ***Who Are You?: The Kid's Guide to Gender Identity***
  - Pessin-Whedbee, B., & Bardoff, N. (2017). *Who are you?: The kids guide to gender identity*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

## **Race**

These books explore the concept of discrimination based upon race and skin color as well as the concept of white privilege.

- ***The Day You Begin***
  - Woodson, J., & López Rafael. (2019). *The day you begin*. Toronto: CNIB.
- ***The Hate U Give (Grades 5-9)***
  - Thomas, A. (2018). *The hate u give*. New York, NY: Balzer Bray, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers.
- ***Let's Talk About Race***
  - Lester, J., & Barbour, K. (2009). *Let's talk about race*. New York: Amistad.
- ***The Many Colors of Harpreet Singh***
  - Kelkar, S., Marley, A., & Singh, S. J. (2019). *The many colors of Harpreet Singh*. New York: Sterling Childrens Books.
- ***Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story About Racial Injustice***
  - Celano, M., Collins, M., Hazzard, A., & Zivoin, J. (2018). *Something happened in our town: A child's story about racial injustice*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.
- ***Skin Again***
  - hooks, bell, & Raschka, C. (2017). *Skin again*. Los Angeles, CA: Disney/Jump at the Sun.

## **Culture/Language/Religion**

These books explore different cultures/languages/religions and absent narratives that are not traditionally taught about in US schools. They also explore the idea of privilege and how this relates to culture and language.

- ***Amina's Voice (Grades 5-9)***
  - Khan, H. (2018). *Amina's voice*. New York: Salaam Reads.
- ***Going Down Home with Daddy***

- Lyons, K. S., & Minter, D. (2019). *Going down home with Daddy*. Atlanta: Peachtree.
- **Hip Hop Speaks to Children**
  - Giovanni, N., Medina, T., Perdomo, W., Scott, M., & Balouch, K. (2008). *Hip hop speaks to children: a celebration of poetry with a beat*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks Jabberwocky.
- **Indian No More (Grades 4-8)**
  - McManis, C. W., & Sorell, T. (2019). *Indian no more*. New York: Tu Books, an imprint of Lee & Low Books Inc.
- **Mommy's Khimar**
  - Thompkins-Bigelow, J., & Glenn, E. (2019). *Mommy's khimar*. Toronto: CNIB.
- **The Name Jar**
  - Choi, Y. (2013). *The name jar*. Columbus, O.H.: Zaner-Bloser.
- **Nimoshom and His Bus**
  - Thomas, P. M., & Hibbard, K. (2017). *Nimoshom and his bus*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: HighWater Press.
- **Ramadan Moon**
  - Robert Naïma bint, & Adl, S. (2011). *Ramadan moon*. London: Frances Lincoln Childrens..
- **Sing a Song: How "Lift Every Voice and Sing" Inspired Generations**
  - Lyons, K. S., Mallett, K., & Johnson, J. W. (2019). *Sing a song: How "Lift Every Voice and Sing" inspired generations*. New York: Nancy Paulsen Books.
- **We are Grateful: Otsaligheliga**
  - Sorell, T., Lessac, F., & Hummingbird, L. (2019). *We are grateful: otsaliheliga*. Solon, OH: Findaway World, LLC.

## Appendix C

### Social Justice Reference Books for Educators

The following books were chosen to provide a foundation for educator's learning about injustice, prejudice, white privilege, bias, social activism, and absent narratives as well as how to effectively teach about these topics. They are all great resources to help teachers address the five dimensions of social justice education described by Adams & Bell (2016) which include teacher reflection on identity and bias, learning about the students being taught, examining the curriculum for absent narratives and bias, using a variety of engaging methods to teach social justice education, and creating an inclusive and safe community for students to participate in.

#### ***Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools***

- Singleton, G. E. (2015). *Courageous conversations about race: A field guide for achieving equity in schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

#### ***Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong***

- Loewen, J. W. (2007). *Lies my teacher told me: everything your American history textbook got wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

#### ***Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom***

- Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: New Press.

#### ***Pedagogy of Confidence: Inspiring High Intellectual Performance in Urban Schools***

- Jackson, Y. (2015). *Pedagogy of confidence: Inspiring high intellectual performance in urban schools*. Place of publication not identified: Hawker Brownlow Education.

***Pedagogy of the Oppressed***

- Freire, P. (1978). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.

***Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching About Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word***

- Christensen, L. (2017). *Reading, writing, and rising up: Teaching about social justice and the power of the written word*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.

***The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, Language and the Education of African-American Children***

- Delpit, L., & Perry, T. (1998). *The real ebonics debate: Power, language and the education of African-American children*. Boston: Beacon Press.

***Rethinking Sexism, Gender, and Sexuality***

- Butler-Wall, A., Cosier, K., & Harper, R. (2016). *Rethinking sexism, gender, and sexuality*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.

***Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice***

- Adams, M., & Bell, L. A. (2016). *Teaching for diversity and social justice*. Routledge.

***Teaching the Taboo: Courage and Imagination in the Classroom***

- Ayers, R., & Ayers, W. (2014). *Teaching the taboo: courage and imagination in the classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

***Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom***

- hooks, b. (2017). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

***Teaching When the World is on Fire***

- Delpit, L. (2019). *Teaching when the world is on fire*. New York: The New Press.

***A White Teacher Talks About Race***

- Landsman, J. (2009). *A white teacher talks about race*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

***“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” and Other Conversations About Race***

- Tatum, B. D. (2017). *"Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?": and other conversations about race*. New York: Basic Books.

## Appendix D

### Social Justice Lessons

The following lessons were chosen from the reputable social justice website Teaching Tolerance because they all address social justice themes in a way that enhances student voice, cultivates student identity, creates a social justice mindset, encourages activism, and informs about various social justice issues and social justice history. The lessons often fit into more than one category, but I placed them in the category I felt they most embodied. Many of the lessons involve sharing and journaling which, according to Baker (2011), providing opportunities like these for her students helped her students to open up about their life experiences and examine what “normal” meant for their lives. There are also multiple opportunities within these lessons to develop active service learning projects based on social justice themes. Social justice service learning projects are beneficial for students because they have the potential to lead students to analyze the root causes of societal issues that are important to them (Wade, 2007).

### **Social Justice Foundation/Mindset**

- [Where We Stand](#)
- [Stars for Diversity](#)
- [Recognizing Discrimination](#)
- [What is a Family?](#)
- [What is Empathy?](#)

- [What is Compassion?](#)
- [Advertisements and You](#)
- [What's Fair?](#)
- [My Rights: Their Rights](#)
- [Communication - The Total Impact of Your Message](#)
- [Reading Ads with a Social Justice Lens](#)
- [Rethinking Discovery](#)
- [Why Frogs and Snakes Never Play Together](#)
- [Understanding Other Religious Beliefs](#)

### **Social Justice History**

- [Bus Boycott: Historical Documents Highlight Integration Milestone](#)
- [Defenders of Justice](#)

### **Activism**

- [Art and Activism](#)
- [Activism Online](#)
- [A Bullying Survey](#)

- [Allies: A Discussion Activity](#)

## **Identity**

- [Understanding Prejudice Through Paper Plate Portraits](#)
- [Collective Poetry](#)
- [Who We REALLY Are](#)
- [Different Colors of Beauty](#)
- [Looking at Race and Racial Identity in Children's Books](#)
- [My Multicultural Self](#)

## **Social Justice Issues**

- [What is Environmental Injustice?](#)
- [Understanding Hunger in the United States](#)
- [What are Gender Stereotypes?](#)
- [Who Is an Immigrant?](#)
- [Exploring Young Immigrant Stories](#)
- [The Rich Tapestry of Religion in the United States](#)
- [I See You, I See Me: Body Image and Social Justice](#)
- [What's So Bad About "That's So Gay"](#)

- [Calculating the Poverty Line](#)
- [Progressive City Planners](#)

These lessons all come from the website Teaching Tolerance:

Teaching Tolerance. (n.d.). Retrieved October 23, 2019, from <http://www.tolerance.org/>

## Appendix E

### Social Justice Journal Prompts for Students

The following journal prompts are merely a sampling of ideas to get your students started with exploring identity and writing about social justice topics. It is by no means exhaustive and should be adapted to best meet the needs of your particular students. According to Seely and Tropp (2012), writer’s workshop is a way to approach writing about social justice in the classroom. “A writer’s workshop focuses on writers and how to do the things that writers really do—research, explore, collect, interview, talk, read, and write” (Seely and Tropp, 2012, p. 14).

- What is something that you feel is unfair and why?
- Have you ever felt that someone judged you because of how you look? Tell about it and how that made you feel.
- If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be and why?
- What is culture and how does it shape who you are? Write about your own culture.
- What is diversity and why is it important?
- In this country, people who follow some religions are treated badly, but we also are guaranteed freedom of religion. Can we all believe different things and still get along? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, what does it take to be a good president? Why?

- Refugees are people who come to another country to escape danger. Should we take in refugees and help keep them safe? Why or why not?
- I really wish others knew this about me...
- Write about a time that you felt you were treated unfairly. How did that make you feel? Have you ever treated someone else unfairly? If so, explain.
- Using only 10 words, describe yourself.
- Make a list of everything that inspires you - people, ideas, places, art, music, etc.
- Not all people celebrate the same holidays as many are tied to religion and culture of which there are many. Should we celebrate holidays at school? Why or why not? If we celebrated a holiday at school that you don't celebrate and know nothing about, how would you feel?

## Appendix F

### Service Learning Project Ideas

Mitchel (2007) outlined some common themes in quality critical service learning projects. Projects should include attention to social change, involve students questioning the distribution of power, and involve students making meaningful and authentic relationships with each other and with the community they are serving. The following projects exemplify those criteria. As a note for implementation of these projects, according to Warren (1998), students should be encouraged to explore some of these topics in the classroom before being exposed to them within the wider community. Students can and should discuss and research concepts like distribution of power, socioeconomic status, and race within the classroom before becoming activists in these areas through critical service learning (Warren, 1998). This leads to informed viewpoints and more practical ideas for how to advocate for and act on their ideals.

- Partner with Special Olympics or another organization and have students partner with people with disabilities to discuss ableism and have students and their partners come up with a problem in the community related to ableism and a plan to advocate for change
- Students help organize a collection drive for food, clothing, and items that refugee families need
- Students organize an information night on a social justice topic and invite community members

- Students research local civil rights issues and present their findings and ideas for change to the city council or another group of local politicians.
- Students partner with a local activist or social justice group and come up with and execute a project together.
- Create PSA videos for social justice issues and present them in a screening
- Students create a survey for the community on what they perceive the biggest local issues of inequality to be and then analyze the results and present them to the community along with ideas to address the biggest issues.
- Students write politicians with their opinions on relevant social justice issues that are important to them.
- Students organize a protest on an issue that they are passionate about changing.

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