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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Silencing the Critics:

A Conceptual Framework in Teacher Preparation for Social Justice

by

Allison P. Schildts

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2015

Silencing the Critics:

A Conceptual Framework in Teacher Preparation for Social Justice

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by

Allison P. Schildts

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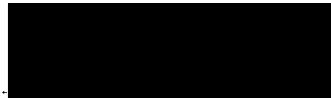
This dissertation written by Allison Schildts, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

3/30/2015
Date

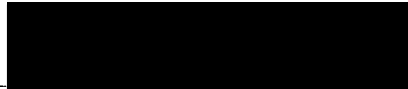
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DEDICATION

To my parents, my first teachers,

Pat and Jon Gustorf

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Silencing the Critics:
A Conceptual Framework in Teacher Preparation for Social Justice

by

Allison P. Schildts

Teacher preparation programs are making concerted efforts to prepare practitioners to transform urban education. Current studies rely heavily on self-reported data with little to no inclusion of the voices of teachers or perceptions of principals. This qualitative case study aimed to fill that gap by exploring how alumni of one social justice-themed University Teacher Preparation Program (UTPP) defined and implemented socially just teaching practices in urban elementary classrooms. Participants included six teacher alumni in their first, second, or third year of teaching, two supervising principals, and one UTPP staff member. Methods included semistructured interviews, full-day classroom observations, and a review of program documents. The study was guided by 12 characteristics of socially just teaching outlined in a new practice-based conceptual framework. Major findings combatted current critiques of social justice education and highlighted the importance of relationships, collaboration, craft, and selection in teacher preparation. Minor findings revealed the impact of school culture, critical reflection, and

teaching experience on social justice pedagogy. Recommendations include a need for UTPP to pay greater attention to the craft of teaching for social justice, develop assessment literacy in preservice candidates, and model activism inside and outside the classroom.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Background

Research has shown the need to cultivate teachers dedicated to increasing student achievement for *all* students, especially those considered marginalized or disenfranchised (Howard, 2003, 2006; Huerta, 2011; Nieto, 2000). As a response to this need, teacher preparation programs are making concerted efforts to prepare practitioners to transform urban education (Carter, 2008; Medina, Morrone, & Anderson, 2005). Yet, only recently has the scholarly literature begun to examine the implementation of this form of social justice–oriented pedagogy (Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu, 2010; Ayers, Michie, & Rome, 2004; Cochran-Smith, Reagan, & Shakman, 2009; Dover, 2009; Enterline, Cochran-Smith, Ludlow, & Mitescu, 2008; McQuillan et al., 2009; Picower, 2011; Reagan, Pedulla, Jong, Cannady, & Cochran-Smith, 2011; Whipp, 2013). Despite the current literature on social justice–themed teacher preparation programs, few studies have explored alumni teacher perspectives or the influence of teacher preparation theory on classroom practices. This qualitative study aimed to fill that gap by exploring how six alumni of one social justice–themed teacher preparation program defined and implemented socially just teaching practices in urban elementary classrooms.

My experience in a social justice–themed teacher preparation program significantly impacted the effectiveness of my practice. The difference it made is best conveyed through the story of one spunky student I will never forget.

In Fall 2010, a 10-year-old African American boy named Devon entered my fifth-grade magnet classroom in South Los Angeles. Prior to his arrival, I had been told by Devon's previous

teachers and school administrators to prepare for one of the most challenging years of my teaching career. In his fourth-grade year, Devon's endless energy was considered a constant disruption in the magnet teacher's classroom. As a result, he spent nearly half of each school day out of the classroom, either in the office or sitting in the corner of a neighboring room. He tested below grade level that year and had been recommended to exit the magnet program.

However, I refused to listen to the skeptics and eagerly welcomed Devon into my classroom. I believed that with a fresh start, high expectations, and a teacher who encouraged his unconventional learning style, Devon's potential would shine through. At the beginning of the year, I made an effort to get to know Devon, and I soon learned about the many obstacles he faced in his young life. His mom was suffering from kidney failure, his older brothers were not ideal role models, and he was taking medication to "tame" his Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). It was immediately evident that the traditional classroom experience would not work for Devon.

Instead, Devon needed a classroom experience that capitalized on his strengths and talents, offered flexibility, and encouraged interaction with his peers. From the beginning of the year, Devon thrived in the collaborative learning environment fostered in my classroom and was able to make valuable oral contributions to classroom discussions. Additionally, he was a remarkable public speaker and enjoyed the opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge through speeches, debates, and presentations. Inquiry-oriented tasks sparked his endless curiosity, and classroom learning games helped him grasp difficult concepts. In just a few short months, Devon began to experience success in the classroom, and his peers praised him for his improvement. In

fact, it was not a surprise to me when he scored above grade level at the end of the school year. What I remember most, however, is the proud look I saw on Devon's face nearly every day.

I am confident that my implementation of socially just teaching practices, rooted in the theory I learned during my teacher preparation program, made a significant difference in Devon's educational experience in my classroom. As a result, I am passionate about studying the ways in which teachers with similar teacher preparation training translate social justice theory into classroom practices.

Social Justice in Teacher Education

Why is It Important?

For many new teachers, teacher education programs serve as the foundation for practice in working with students in urban schools that may have backgrounds different than their own. Ukpokodu (2007) maintained that traditional teacher preparation programs have pervasive assimilationist ideologies that mold teachers to fit the current context of education. Furthermore, she concluded that teachers are often socialized into status quo climates, lack a faculty commitment to multicultural education (hold only a moralistic perspective on diversity as opposed to a critical, antiracist perspective), and adhere to behaviorist thinking where the teacher is socialized to the banking model of teaching, and prevailing practices focus on basic skill acquisition, rote memorization of facts, and scripted curricula (Milan, 2010).

Nieto (2000) argued that what novices learn in teacher education programs can have enormous impact on the attitudes and practices teachers bring with them to the schools where they work. Numerous scholars have described social justice as a reflective prerequisite for new urban school teachers, calling them to confront their own ideologies around issues of race, class,

and culture before entering their own classrooms (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Therefore, it is essential that preservice teachers be given the opportunity to explore their cultural identities, understand perspectives other than their own, and be exposed to the ways in which race, social class, and poverty have historically impacted the education of minority students (Hughes, 2010).

To better meet the needs of all students, Villegas (2007) believed it is critical for preservice teachers to examine their personal ideologies as well as develop a greater understanding of the influences of discrimination and prejudice on the lives of children:

The overriding goal of the social justice agenda in teacher education is to prepare teachers who can teach all students well, not just those traditionally well served by schools, so that, as adults, all are able to participate equitably in the economic and political life of the country. (p. 372)

Given the growing underachievement of minority students, the need for teacher preparation programs to develop teachers dedicated to social justice remains urgent (Howard, 2003; Howard, 2006; Huerta, 2011; Nieto, 2000).

What is Social Justice–Themed Teacher Education?

For the purposes of the current study, the term social justice teacher education (SJTE) was used to describe teacher preparation programs aimed at preparing teachers to work for greater equity and justice in schooling and society (Zeichner, 2009). Nieto (2000) described social justice teacher education as a perspective that involves looking critically at why and how schools are unjust for some students by analyzing school practices and policies, curriculum, instructional materials, and tracking practices. More recently, Picower (2011) maintained that

educators must have a political analysis of how inequality, oppression, and power operate as a starting place for social justice teaching.

What Does the Research Say?

In response to growing criticism of their efforts, many teacher education programs are driven by efforts to document and measure their impact (Cochran-Smith, Reagan, & Shakman, 2009). However, only recently has the research begun to investigate how to best assess the impact of social justice-themed teaching programs and what should count as a measure of such programs' successes.

Researchers and practitioners at Boston College constructed learning to teach for social justice as an assessable outcome of teacher preparation (Cochran-Smith, Reagan, & Shakman, 2009). Furthermore, Cochran-Smith, Reagan, and Shakman (2009) argued for the need to move beyond the narrow vision of test-only accountability to include other outcomes such as preparing teachers for diverse populations, teaching students to participate in a democratic society, ensuring equitable learning opportunities, and working to make schools more caring and just.

Recent studies have explored these alternative interpretations of outcomes by examining how teacher education program graduates understand the concept of teaching for social justice, how they engage in social justice practices within differing school practices, and the effects of their teaching on pupil learning (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, et al., 2009; McQuillan et al., 2009; Whipp, 2013). However, these studies examined only a small sample of teacher education program graduates emerging from Catholic University Teacher Preparation Programs. Exploring the outcomes of public teacher education programs for social justice adds a new dimension to the limited body of research that currently exists.

University Teacher Preparation Program

The focus of this study, a University Teacher Preparation Program (UTPP), posited itself as a graduate program that prepared aspiring teachers to become urban educators committed to social justice. Housed at a public university located in California, UTPP was founded in 1992 and was guided by eight core principles. The program asserted that it would (a) embody a social justice agenda; (b) foster sustained engagement in teaching and learning; (c) attend to the moral, cultural, and political demands of teaching; (d) blend theory and practice; (e) collaborate across institutions and communities; (f) participate in collaborative inquiry within communities of practice; (g) focus simultaneously on professional education, school reform, and reinventing the university's role in K–14 schooling; and (h) mirror diverse, caring, antiracist, socially responsible learning communities. Exploring the practices of teacher graduates from UTPP adds to the limited body of empirical evidence related to teacher preparation graduate outcomes.

As mentioned, little is known about how social justice educators translate their theoretical beliefs into pedagogical practice (Dover, 2013). In other words, additional research about what happens to teachers after they leave a social justice–oriented teacher preparation program such as UTPP was needed (Agarwal et al., 2010). Specifically, it was important to know more about how UTPP alumni translated their theoretical learning during preparation into classroom practice.

Socially Just Teaching Practices

Paulo Freire (2011) argued that teachers working with historically marginalized populations must be able to resist the “banking model” style of education that ignores the strengths, talents, and individuality of culturally diverse students. They must become aware of how expectations, school curriculum, and discipline often work to reinforce stereotypes or

perpetuate the status quo (Skiba, Knesting, & Bush, 2002). Prevalent in the literature is the notion that social justice must embody the beliefs that all students can and will succeed and that their backgrounds and communities can contribute to their learning (Howard, 2006). In response, teacher preparation for new teachers should promote effective classroom practices with a vision for equity and community participation (Ayers et al., 2004).

Educators committed to improving education must first acknowledge the inherent intellectual abilities of all children and build their teaching practice to reflect high expectations for their students (Howard, 2006). This practice must include building a bridge of understanding, making space for students' voices to be heard, and helping students access the language of power (Delpit, 1995). Thus, developing culturally relevant teaching practices that are inclusive of students' diverse backgrounds are essential tools for educators committed to social justice (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

For the purposes of this study, a synthesis of leading scholars' definitions of socially just teaching led to a practice-based definition of socially just teaching as a commitment to the following: (a) maintaining high expectations, (b) honoring students' diverse backgrounds, (c) implementing culturally relevant teaching practices, (d) fostering caring relationships, and (e) engaging in an action-based cycle of critical self-reflection that recognizes one's personal assumptions and biases (Delpit, 1995; Freire, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999; Wade, 2007). For teachers to implement socially just teaching practices in urban classrooms, teacher education programs must include social justice as a foundation (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

The low achievement of minority students in urban schools is an issue that demands the immediate attention of the education community (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). Because many new educators begin their careers in urban schools working with diverse students (Ladson-Billings, 1995), it is essential to cultivate effective teaching practices for working with diverse students. In response to this growing need, teacher preparation courses and university professors are making concerted efforts to foster the ability in new teachers to transform urban education (Carter, 2008; Medina et al., 2005). However, given the current debate over the legitimacy of such programs, further evidence is needed about graduate outcomes in teacher education for social justice (Enterline et al., 2008).

While some scholarship exists on what social justice looks like in theory, fewer studies examine what social justice looks like in the classroom (Agarwal et al., 2010; Ayers et al., 2004; Cochran-Smith, Reagan et al., 2009; Dover, 2009; Enterline et al., 2008; McQuillan et al., 2009; Picower, 2011; Reagan et al., 2011). Specifically, we need examples of socially just teaching practices alumni are using in urban elementary classrooms (Dover, 2009). Further, teachers' voices have been glaringly absent from prior research (Milan, 2010). In response to these limitations, the aim of this study was to have teachers articulate their own definitions and understandings of social justice through interviews and classroom observations. Finally, in the small number of studies that do exist, findings relied primarily on self-reported data with little triangulation in the methods. Through the voices of alumni teachers, this study sought to learn more about the ways in which UTPP graduates translated the social justice theory learned during their teacher preparation courses into classroom practices.

Research Questions

In an attempt to add to the limited literature on outcomes associated with alumni of social justice–themed teacher preparation programs, this study focused on three primary research questions:

1. What do alumni of a social justice–themed teacher preparation program consider to be socially just teaching practices?
2. How do alumni teachers implement socially just teaching practices in urban elementary classrooms?
3. What influences of the program do alumni identify as contributing to their implementation of these classroom practices?

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study aimed to understand what six alumni of one social justice–themed teacher preparation program considered to be socially just teaching practices. Additionally, the study sought to discover how these teachers implemented socially just practices in their urban elementary classrooms and to identify the key contributors to their ability to implement such practices. Finally, to strengthen the validity of the data through triangulation, the study aspired to learn more about the supervisors’ perceptions of the teachers’ socially just teaching practices.

Conceptual Framework

To bridge theory and practice, social justice education was examined through the lens of a new classroom-based conceptual framework. Although not mutually exclusive, 10 tenets of socially just teaching, prevalent in the literature, were divided into three categories central to the

classroom experience: ecology, curriculum, and teaching and learning. The 10 tenets are identified in Figure 1.

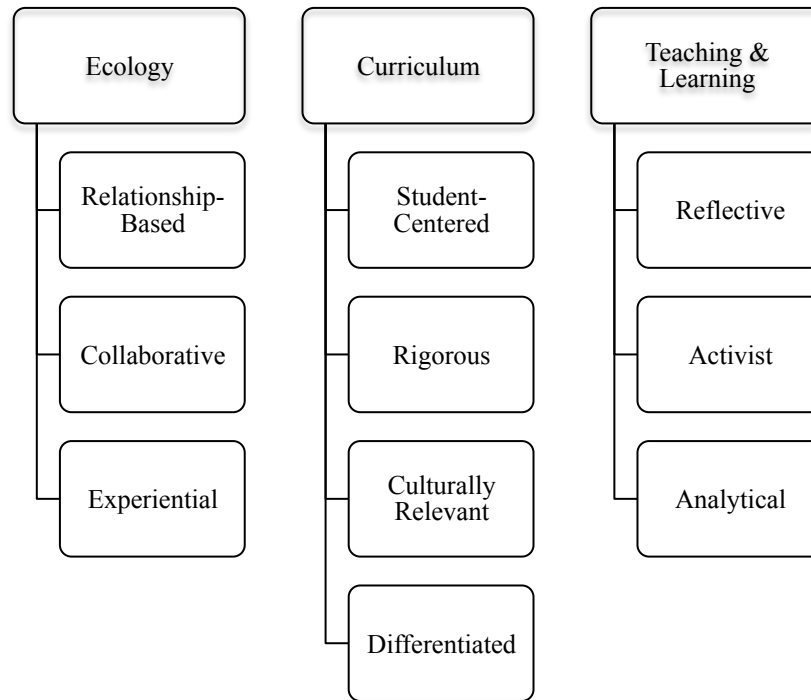


Figure 1. Social justice education in the classroom.

Note. Although arranged vertically, each characteristic carries equal weight.

Believing that social justice must be authentic and relevant to students, Rahima Wade (2007) identified characteristics of social justice education that were augmented to guide this study. According to Wade (2007), quality social justice education is (a) student-centered, (b) collaborative, (c) experiential, (d) analytical, (e) activist, (f) intellectual, (g) multicultural, and (e) value-based. Although important, intellectual, multicultural, and value-based were not included in the framework; instead, they were replaced with more contemporary terms prevalent in the literature. For the purpose of this practice-based study, I expanded five of Wade's essential tenants to include five additional components of social justice education evident in the literature: (a) culturally relevant (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002),

(b) relationship-based (Howard, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999), (c) reflective (Darder, 2002; Howard, 2003; Sleeter, 2011), (d) differentiated (Santamaria, 2009), and (e) rigorous (Howard, 2006). The new conceptual framework provided the foundation for socially just teaching in the design and methods of the study, and will be further explained in the literature review.

Significance of the Study

The study may have significance in the current climate of education for a few distinct reasons. First, the research provides UTPP with valuable information about the practices of their alumni including how they defined and implemented socially just teaching practices. In addition, alumni provided valuable feedback on the most significance influences of the program. As a result, the program received feedback on its strengths as well as information about areas for improvement. Although this case study provided a detailed analysis of how alumni of one program defined and implemented socially just teaching practices, other programs may profit from the results as well.

Beyond the program studied (UTPP), the findings may also provide a model for consideration by other teacher preparation programs. By replicating the study, teacher education program leaders may benefit from an understanding of how alumni of their program define and operationalize socially just practices in their classroom. Specifically, university professors might gain a greater conceptualization of how their work impacts the formation of social justice educators. Furthermore, this study might offer insight for other programs into the strengths and weaknesses of teacher preparation coursework, training, and preparation.

The study also holds promise for combating the critics of social justice-themed teacher preparation programs. Findings provide empirical evidence to support the positive impact that

social justice educators are having in the classroom and can be used to combat the current critiques of social justice–themed teacher preparation programs (Enterline et al., 2008).

Finally, the study compiled the work of leading scholars along with the perceptions of teachers and principals to create a new practitioner-friendly conceptual framework for what social justice education looks like in the classroom. Teacher preparation candidates might benefit from learning about concrete examples of socially just teaching practices prior to their own work in urban schools. In addition, the framework has the potential to be utilized by teachers, principals, and school leaders as a tool for reflection, feedback, lesson planning, or professional development.

Methodology

This qualitative case study aimed to understand how six alumni of a social justice–themed teacher preparation program defined and implemented socially just teaching practices in their urban elementary classrooms. Because the voices of the teachers were central to the investigation, a qualitative case study was the ideal methodology in this case. As Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) noted, “The central focus of qualitative research is to provide an understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants” (p. 16).

Participants

Research participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach. I began by working with university personnel affiliated with UTPP to identify potential participants who met the criteria for the study. All participants had to have: (a) graduated from UTPP between 2009–2013, (b) worked at a public or charter school, and (c) taught in an elementary (K–8) self-

contained classroom. The six teacher participants were recruited utilizing my personal networks as a UTPP alumnus.

Site

Participants selected for the study worked at urban elementary schools in California. Therefore, the selection of the participants dictated the public charter schools where the research was conducted. Approval was obtained from the University Teacher Preparation Program (See Appendix A), the local district's Committee for External Research Review (See Appendix B), and school site administrators. In the end, the six participants were spread across two urban, public charter schools: Bright Hope and Excel. Four teacher participants resided at Bright Hope charter and two taught at Excel.

Data Collection

The evidence needed to answer the three primary research questions was collected from multiple data sources. First, I analyzed UTPP documents outlining the mission, guiding principles, coursework, and program requirements to gain an understanding of the program's philosophy and approach to preparing teachers to implement socially just teaching practices. To add greater depth to this data, I interviewed the UTPP director about the design and purpose of the program.

I conducted pre- and postobservation teacher interviews, utilizing a semistructured protocol, to determine what the alumni teachers considered to be socially just teaching practices. Subsequent to the preinterview, I conducted a daylong observation in each of the participating teachers' classrooms. Spending the entire day in the classroom afforded me the opportunity to capture the nuances of the school day including classroom routines, transition times, and teacher-

student interactions. During that time, I used a formal observation protocol in each content lesson to document the evidence of socially just teaching practices in the classroom. Following the observation, I conducted a postinterview with each teacher, which allowed him or her to reflect on how he or she believed socially just teaching practices were employed and offer feedback on the conceptual framework.

Finally, I completed supervisor interviews to gather information about the supervisors' perspective of the teachers' implementation of socially just teaching practices. The Executive Director at Bright Hope and CEO at Excel willingly participated in these interviews. This data provided an additional dimension to the self-reported data provided by the teachers. Further detail about the implementation of the methods will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Limitations of the Study

Research Positionality and Bias

As a graduate of the university teacher education program involved in this study, I held researcher bias. I graduated from the program, and I believe in its mission of teaching for social justice. In an attempt to practice reflexivity, I began by acknowledging and then intentionally revealing the underlying assumptions that led me to formulate a set of definitions, questions, or presentation of findings (Gay et al., 2012). Most significantly, my interpretation of socially just teaching practices guided this study. Although I used the work of prominent scholars in the field (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll et al., 2005; Valenzuela, 1999), I constructed the definition of socially just teaching and the conceptual framework used to guide this study. As a social justice educator, I selected a narrow, classroom-oriented definition and framework to guide my research. After years of personal frustration over an absence of practical examples of

social justice in the classroom, I felt it was important to construct a user-friendly tool that the everyday teacher could draw from in thinking about, planning, and implementing socially just teaching practices in the classroom. To combat this potential limitation of a self-created framework, participants were given the opportunity to explain their understanding of socially just teaching practices at the onset of the study and to offer feedback on the conceptual framework during the final interview. In addition, documents produced by the teacher preparation program being studied were utilized to understand the social justice theory promoted by UTPP.

Validity

Multiple strategies were employed to ensure the validity of the qualitative research conducted (Gay et al., 2012). To begin, I used triangulation, “the process of using multiple methods, data collection strategies, and data sources to obtain a more complete picture of what is being studied and to cross-check information” (Gay et al., 2012, p. 393). Throughout the study, I reviewed participant interviews, UTPP documents, and observation data to strengthen the cohesiveness of the findings. Furthermore, I conducted persistent and prolonged observation, allowing for opportunities to identify pervasive qualities as well as atypical characteristics. Finally, to combat the potential for misinterpretation of the data, I conducted member checks to discuss the data with participants before it was shared in final form.

Delimitations

The goal of this study aligned with the goal of qualitative research, “to understand what is happening and why” (Gay et al., 2012, p. 395). The small sample size of teachers ($n = 6$), selection of only one teacher preparation program, and specificity of the urban charter school context limited the generalizability of the findings. In other words, the findings may only benefit

the teachers and teacher preparation program involved in the study. However, there may be some applicability or transferability to a similar setting, particularly those who have a vested interest in preparing social justice educators.

Definitions of Key Terms

Alumni: Alumni are defined as individuals who, at the time of recruitment, had graduated from the two-year University Teacher Preparation Program (UTPP) and had been teaching for one to five years.

Socially Just Teaching: For the purposes of this study, social justice for teachers was operationally defined as a commitment to maintaining high expectations, honoring students' diverse backgrounds, implementing culturally relevant teaching practices, fostering caring relationships, and engaging in an action-based cycle of critical self-reflection that recognizes personal assumptions and biases (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll et al., 2001; Valenzuela, 1999).

Social Justice Teacher Education (SJTE): For the purposes of the study, the term social justice teacher education (SJTE) was used to describe social reconstructivist-oriented teacher preparation programs aimed at preparing teachers to work for greater equity and justice in schooling and society (Zeichner, 2009).

Social Justice–Themed Teacher Preparation Program: A University Teacher Education Program (UTPP) that posited itself as a program that prepares aspiring teachers to become social justice educators in urban settings.

Teaching Practices: From the perspective of justice, this involved not just what teachers did, but also how they thought about their work and interpreted what is going on in schools and

classrooms; how they understood competing agendas, posed questions, and made decisions; and how they formed relationships with students (Cochran-Smith, 2008).

Summary

In response to the continued underachievement of marginalized students, teacher education programs across the country have developed programs aimed at preparing educators capable of transforming urban education through socially just teaching. However, little is known about the outcomes of such programs causing some educational leaders to question their legitimacy (Enterline et al., 2008). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the outcomes of one social justice–themed teacher preparation program to understand what six alumni knew about socially just teaching practices, document how they implemented these practices in the classroom, and identify the most significant influences of the program. This study sought to address current gaps in the literature, namely the absence of the teachers' perspectives and the translation of theory into socially just pedagogical practices of urban elementary educators.

Organization of the Study

This qualitative study, aimed at understanding the practices of six alumni of a social justice–themed teacher education program, is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 presents a synthesis and analysis of existing research, theory, and literature related to social justice, teacher education programs, and socially just teaching practices. Limitations of current studies or gaps in existing research will be highlighted to articulate the need for the current project.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology. This section includes a detailed description of how the study was conducted, how evidence was collected, and how data were analyzed. The

rationales for the selection of study participants, research sites, and data collection methods employed are discussed. Additionally, the reliability and validity of the study including interview and observation protocols are explained.

Chapter 4 presents the data and articulates the findings of the study. Attention is paid to connecting all findings to the purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, and literature discussed in Chapter 2. Finally, Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study's findings, makes recommendations for practice, and offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In an attempt to add to the research on outcomes associated with alumni of social justice–themed teacher preparation programs, this study focused on three primary research questions:

1. What do alumni of a social justice–themed teacher preparation program consider to be socially just teaching practices?
2. How do alumni teachers implement socially just teaching practices in urban, elementary classrooms?
3. What influences of the program do alumni identify as contributing to their implementation of these classroom practices?

In this review of the literature, I begin by examining justice building in education including its history and modern-day definitions. Subsequently, I make the case for its significance in contemporary education. A review of social justice in teacher preparation—including its theoretical underpinnings, program design, critiques, and promoted classroom teaching practices—follows. I then define the conceptual framework, a self-adapted model of social justice education in the classroom. To build a case for the study, existing research on program outcomes and teacher practices is analyzed, and gaps in current scholarship are articulated. Finally, the mission, purpose, and requirements of the University Teacher Preparation Program (UTPP) are described.

Justice Building in Education

In the early 20th century, progressive philosopher John Dewey (1916) argued that schools do not exist apart from society. The realization of a just society, Dewey contended, requires the active participation of all society's members in a democratic society. A more just society will only emerge, Dewey insisted, when individuals most burdened by injustice are involved in working for social change. Building on these ideals, more contemporary scholars, critical theorists, and progressives have maintained that for true justice to be achieved in education, society must move beyond simple ideas of distributive justice and address issues of poverty, prejudice, power, and discrimination embedded in social structures (Anyon, 2005; Lynch & Baker, 2005). Furthermore, Shields (2009) contended that the ongoing achievement gap between White and minority students could be attributed not only to inequitable access, but also to experiences of marginalization, prejudice, discrimination, and racism that lead to disparities outside of school.

Economic and social distress can prevent children from developing their full potential and certainly can dampen the enthusiasm, effort, and expectations with which urban children and their families approach K–12 education (Anyon, 2005). Anyon (2005) argued that the struggles in urban education require more than just attention to pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment. In agreement, scholar Connie North (2009) added that we must not deny the larger social and economic forces that threaten education.

To combat these forces, Villegas and Lucas (2002) argued that it is necessary to develop teachers who are socially conscious, have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, see themselves as capable of bringing about change, understand how learners construct

knowledge, know about the lives of their students, and use their students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 2005) to design instruction that builds on what they already know. Of course, whether or not social justice is important in education is largely dependent on the role that education plays in society.

What is the Purpose of Education?

In *Teacher Preparation for Democracy and Social Justice*, Michelli and Keiser (2005) espoused four purposes for public education: (a) preparing students to be critical, active participants in US democracy; (b) providing students with access to knowledge and critical thinking within the disciplines; (c) preparing students to lead rich and rewarding personal lives, and to be responsible and responsive community members; and (d) preparing students to assume a place in the economy. With these foundational goals of education guiding this study, I now examine the status of contemporary education, and explain why justice building in our current educational climate is so important.

Why is Justice Building Important?

In the current climate of education, Robinson (2010) articulated, schools operate like factories with the aim of producing uniform products. According to Giroux and McLaren (1986), “in place of developing critical understanding, engaging student experience, and fostering active and critical citizenship, schools are redefined through a language of politics that emphasize standardization, competency, and narrowly defined performance skills” (p. 219). Through a one-size fits all approach, public education appears to contain structural inequalities that are magnifying difficulties and ultimately widening the achievement gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged.

Diversity. The United States is a diverse country with a shifting population. A significant part of this shift is due to drastic changes in the Hispanic population, which according to the US Census Bureau (USCB) surged 43% in 10 years, rising to 50.5 million in 2010 from 35.3 million in 2000. Hispanics are now the nation's largest minority, constituting 16% of the nation's total population (USCB, 2010). According to the Shrestha and Heisler (2011), if the current trends continue, the population of Hispanic or Latino origin is projected to steadily increase through 2050, rising to nearly 30.2% in 2050. Following Hispanics, Blacks are the next largest minority population, consisting of over 12.9% of the nation's population. Additionally, between 2000 and 2050, the Asian population is expected to increase from 14.4 million to over 34.3 million (Shrestha & Heisler, 2011).

While the country's statistics steadily change, the rise of the Hispanic population in California continues to outpace the national average. According to the USCB (2010), the Hispanic population accounts for over 38% of California's total population. The impact of the growth was felt even more in the county studied, where 48% of the county residents identified themselves as Hispanic (USCB, 2010). Yet, as statistics demonstrate, urban public schools are failing to meet the needs of their diverse student bodies.

Achievement. Since the inception of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB), a greater emphasis has been placed on closing the achievement gap for minority students. However, a 2013 Stanford University study found no consistent evidence that NCLB (2001) accomplished this goal (Reardon, Greenberg, Kalogrides, Shores, & Valentino, 2013). According to recent trends in fourth and eighth grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math and reading scores, the achievement gap between White and Hispanic students in California

exceeds the national gap (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2010). Furthermore, within the district being studied, results showed fourth-grade Hispanic students had an average math score 33 points lower than the average among White students and an average reading score that was 28 points lower.

While some progress has been made in narrowing the gap between White and Black students (a change of two to five points), White students had an average score at least 26 points higher than Black students in each subject (Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). In California, the 29-point gap between White and Black students in both reading and math exceeds the national average.

As demonstrated by the data and supported by the work of Geneva Gay (2002), US educational practices have not been very responsive to ethnically diverse student populations. While addressing macro-level changes including economic disparity, institutional racism, and public policies are necessary to achieving social justice, it is equally important to foster a grassroots approach, addressing equality and opportunity from the ground up. Picower (2011) suggested that teachers, through their work in classrooms and communities filled with marginalized and disenfranchised youth, could be a critical piece of this movement. As a result, it is important to examine the theory and practices that teachers can employ to support learning for *all* students.

Scholars' Perspectives of Socially Just Teaching Pedagogy

Although there is vagueness in the literature about what is meant by “working for social justice” (Zeichner, 2009), a set of practices repeatedly appears in the literature about how teacher educators can present conceptions of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that teachers need to

enact socially just teaching in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Howard, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2008; North, 2009). To create a conceptual framework for social justice in the classroom, it is important to explore the scholarly literature related to a socially just teaching pedagogy.

North's Theory of Social Justice Literacy

Through dialogue with teachers about the substantive meanings, implications, and promise of education for social justice, North (2009) discovered that social justice teaching required the development of five forms of literacy: functional, critical, relational, democratic, and visionary.

Functional literacy. First, students must develop functional literacy, skills-based instruction that provides students the ability to survive and adapt to the world. However, merely having the ability to function is not sufficient for social justice education (North, 2009).

Critical literacy. In addition, students must develop critical literacy—the ability to recognize and address social inequities—if they are to participate in the creation of a more just society. Schooling, however, should go beyond the imparting of critical knowledge. Rather, it must embody “a more robust vision of critical literacy, which includes developing a deeper understanding of sociopolitical issues, taking a stand on those issues, analyzing multiple perspectives, and being able to name and identify injustices when they arise” (North, 2009, p. 74).

Relational literacy. Relational literacy emphasizes a process theory of caring, which highlights the value of close, high-quality interpersonal relationships between teachers and their students (North, 2009). Although important, the development of critically enlightened and caring citizens is not always sufficient to the realization of more just communities (North, 2009).

Democratic literacy. Students also need communication and relational skills that expose and address conflict, known as democratic literacy (North, 2009).

Visionary literacy. Finally, visionary literacy calls for courage and the ability to visualize a different reality involving three processes: developing a story for our personal lives and the world, doing our best to realize the story through action, and preparing for the roadblocks (North, 2009).

In developing a vision for social justice, North (2009) also argued that context matters. Cultivating multiple literacies is important for robust social justice education, but some will matter more than others depending on the community, school, or classroom situation. Teaching for social justice involves unpredictability, partiality, and contradictions (Kumashiro, 2008). This work is unfinished in nature, but teachers can employ strategies that enable students to speak and listen to one another and forge common ground (North, 2009).

Nieto and Bode's Features of Social Justice Education

Nieto and Bode (2008) presented four features of social justice education. They suggested that social justice education must: (a) challenge, confront, and disrupt misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes that lead to structural inequality and discrimination; (b) provide all students with the resources—both physical and emotional—necessary to learn to their full potential; (c) draw on the talents and strengths that students bring to their education; and (d) create learning environments that promote critical thinking and support agency for change.

Howard's Theory of Transformational Pedagogy

Howard (2006) described transformational pedagogy as the place where passion for equity intersects with cultural competence and leads to culturally responsive teaching in

classrooms and schools. Transformational pedagogy, he argued, means teaching and leading in such a way that more students, across more of their difference, achieve at a higher level, more of the time, without giving up who they are. In addition, transformational teachers are passionate and vigilant in their efforts to expand the arena of their own political consciousness, to unravel the roots of dominance that stifle achievement, and to create schools that are worthy of our students.

Carlisle, Jackson, and George's Principles of Social Justice Education in Schools

Carlisle, Jackson, and George (2006) transformed social justice education into a set of specific principles intended to offer a framework that is both broad enough to be relevant across school settings and specific enough to be useful as a reflective and evaluative tool. The five principles include: (a) Inclusion and equity, (b) High expectations, (c) Reciprocal community relationships, (d) System-wide approach, and (e) Direct social justice and education and intervention. Although important, these principles focus more on school environments and less on practical pedagogical practices for teachers.

Cochran-Smith's Principles of Pedagogy for Social Justice

Through her extensive work with the Social Justice Teacher Preparation Program at Boston College, Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004) identified six principles of pedagogy for social justice educators. First, social justice educators must enable significant work within communities of learners by developing a deep knowledge of subject matter, holding high expectations for students and themselves, and creating learning communities, which foster a shared responsibility for learning with collaborative groupings. Second, teachers must build on what students bring to school with them including their knowledge, interests, and cultural and linguistic resources.

Third, social justice educators must teach skills and bridge gaps so that students learn how to connect with what they do know and use prior skills to learn new ones. Lastly, teachers must commit to working with individuals, families, and communities, to diversify forms of assessment, and to make inequity, power, and activism explicit parts of the curriculum.

Dover's Conceptual Framework of Teaching for Social Justice

Grounded in an adapted version of Cochran-Smith's (2004) six principles of social justice education and the literature on culturally responsive education, multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and democratic education, Dover (2009) created a framework for social justice in K–12 classrooms that consisted of six key principles. Teachers must:

1. Assume all students are participants in knowledge construction, have high expectations for students and themselves, and foster learning communities.
2. Acknowledge value, and build upon students' existing knowledge, interests, and cultural linguistic resources.
3. Teach specific academic skills and bridge gaps in student learning.
4. Work in reciprocal partnership with students' families and communities.
5. Critique and employ multiple forms of assessment.
6. Explicitly teach about activism, power, and inequity in schools and society.

Dover's (2009) work provided some concrete examples for how social justice principles might actually be employed in the classroom. However, the framework did not present a user-friendly summary of specific characteristics that could be operationalized by teachers.

Additionally, the framework did not include the voices of teachers or principals. Therefore, it is

important to further examine the literature on specific practices that teachers can utilize to foster social justice in the classroom.

Socially Just Teaching Practices

Believing that social justice must be authentic and relevant to students, Wade (2007) identified eight characteristics of social justice education. According to Wade, quality social justice education is (a) student-centered, (b) collaborative, (c) experiential, (d) analytical, (e) activist, (f) intellectual, (g) multicultural, and (e) value-based. Although important, intellectual, multicultural, and value-based characteristics have taken on numerous iterations over the years. Therefore, the first five characteristics are relevant in the context of contemporary education and were adapted to create the conceptual framework outlined in the next section.

Wade's Characteristics of Social Justice Education

Student centered. Creating a classroom community in which students feel valued and respected leads to students openly sharing ideas and working together on issues of importance to them (Wade, 2007). Traditional methods of schooling that place the teacher as an authoritarian, dictating knowledge to students must be abandoned in favor of a learner-centered model of education (Waxman & Tellez, 2002).

Collaborative. Creating a classroom community in which students feel valued and respected will lead to students openly sharing ideas and working together on issues of importance to them (Wade, 2007). In Freire's (2011) notion of problem-posing education, students are considered critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher.

Experiential. Through active participation in the community and the school, students experience authentic concepts and ideas in engaging, hands-on ways (Gay, 2000; Wade, 2007).

Analytical. As students critique prevailing norms and examine underlying assumptions, they consider whose voices are left out, who makes the decisions, and how best to effect change (Wade, 2007). Academic skills development and content mastery are also linked to social justice education (SJE) (Duncan-Andrade, 2005). Moving away from a celebration of diversity and a focus on individuals, SJE concentrates on systems of oppression, power, and privilege and makes the hidden curriculum explicit (Hackman, 2005; Picower, 2011).

Activist. Students need real opportunities to work for social justice in their lives and to make key choices about issues of concern to them and strategies for social change (Wade, 2007).

The inside-the-classroom work is often the first step in becoming a fully-realized social justice educator. However, social justice education is incomplete without teachers and students engaging in further action for change outside of the classroom (Picower, 2011). According to Picower (2001), “If educators continue to work as individuals within their classrooms, creating small democratic environments for a few students, they will never reach the ultimate goals of social justice because they will never address the root causes of inequality” (p. 8). Remaining within the safety of their classrooms, teachers leave social justice only half done. Teachers might raise the awareness of their students about particular topics, but will be unable to impact the root causes of issues of injustice. Outside of the classroom, teachers must take action to challenge oppressive systems that create inequality.

In addition to Wade’s (2007) characteristics, I reviewed the scholarly literature and identified five additional tenets that appeared essential to contemporary social justice education in the classroom. Socially just teaching must also be (a) culturally relevant, (b) differentiated, (c) rigorous, (d) relationship-based, and (e) reflective.

Contemporary Scholars' Characteristics of Social Justice Education

Culturally relevant. In her article, "Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching," Geneva Gay (2000) defined culturally relevant teachings (CRT) as "[using] the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). Researchers in the field of CRT maintained that when taught through a familiar filter, ethnically diverse students experienced greater access to the curriculum, which in turn supported their academic achievement (Gay, 2000; Haberman, 1995; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

A synthesis of the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching practices is presented in Table 1. Gay (2000) defined CRT using six descriptive, philosophical characteristics while Ladson-Billings (2001) took a more teacher-focused approach, providing three broad indicators of CRT. In contrast to these more theoretical descriptors, Villegas and Lucas (2002) identified five specific methodologies that can be enacted in the classroom. While each scholar presented the information differently, common themes of authentic dialogue, high expectations, student-centered learning, and fostering critical consciousness emerged in all philosophies.

Table 1

Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices Comparison Chart

Villegas & Lucas, 2002	Ladson-Billings, 2001	Gay, 2000
1. Involving all students in the construction of knowledge	The role of the teacher is to foster ...	Culturally relevant teaching is identified as ...
2. Building on Personal and Cultural Strengths	1. Academic achievement	1. Empowering
3. Helping students examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives.	2. Cultural competence	2. Transformative
4. Using varied assessment practices that promote learning.	3. Sociopolitical consciousness	3. Validating
5. Making the culture of the classroom inclusive of all students		4. Comprehensive
		5. Multidimensional
		6. Emancipatory

Note. Adapted from “Culturally Responsive Differentiated Instruction: Narrowing Gaps Between Best Pedagogical Practices Benefiting All Learners,” by L .J. Santamaria (2009). *Teachers College Record*, 111(1), 225. Used by permission.

Through daily instruction, teachers are capable of reconstructing and redefining the current constructs of education that negatively impact minority students. If educational processes, especially those related to teaching, can make a difference in student achievement, then developing a comprehensive understanding of culturally relevant teaching practices is essential (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Although it is an important part of socially just teaching, culturally responsive teaching does not automatically equate to social justice. Rather, it is one strategy that classroom teachers employ to make learning accessible and relevant for all children.

Differentiated. In her article, “Culturally Responsive Differentiated Instruction: Narrowing Gaps between Best Pedagogical Practices Benefiting All Learners,” Santamaria (2009) identified a critical gap in culturally relevant teaching research and literature. Culturally relevant teaching, Santamaria (2009) argued, emphasizes culture without much attention to

linguistic differences, which are important to acknowledge because students' language acquisition is often the principal source of misunderstanding in schools. In response, Santamaria (2009) proposed a more inclusive pedagogy, one that merged the philosophies of culturally relevant teaching and differentiated instruction as a more appropriate method for meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

Through a five-year qualitative case study of two highly effective elementary schools in North San Diego, Santamaria (2009) concluded that best teaching practices are those that consider all learners in a classroom setting and pay close attention to differences inherent to academic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity. As a result, Santamaria (2009) encouraged school reform to focus on a hybrid pedagogy that links theoretical models and reconciles best teaching practices.

Rigorous. Howard's (2006) Achievement Triangle summarized the dimensions of knowing that are necessary to be an effective educator, including three dimensions of action: rigor, responsiveness, and relationships. Rigor means holding a life-long commitment to personal and professional growth. According to Howard (2006), "rigor means being relentless in our belief in our students' capacity to learn, and being equally vigilant in improving our capacity to teach" (p. 129).

Reflective. Before implementation, socially just teaching practices must be given careful thought and reflection; otherwise there is the potential for adverse effects that negatively impact student perceptions and beliefs (Howard, 2003; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Taylor, 2010). Sleeter (2011) identified four simplistic conceptions of the practice that have detrimental, if not harmful, effects on student learning, including: cultural celebration, trivialization, essentializing culture,

and substituting culture for political analysis of inequalities. Educators must examine their own biases, histories, and theories of justice before implementing this critical praxis (Howard, 2003).

Additionally, social justice education must be viewed as a reflective process. Teachers must confront their own ideologies around issues of race, class, and culture (Delpit, 1995). Delpit (1995) argued that educators must also engage in a continuous, action-based cycle of reflection where they examine the outcomes of their practices and the impact on student learning.

Relationship-based. Through a three-year ethnographic study of Mexican youth, Angela Valenzuela (1999) demonstrated the importance of relationships and their direct connection to student motivation. She identified school-based relationships as well as organizational structures and policies designed to erase student's culture as the cause of student failure. As a result, she emphasized the need for teachers to embrace a more authentically caring ideology. "A caring pedagogy," Valenzuela (1999) stated, "would build bridges wherever there are divisions and it would privilege biculturalism out of respect for the cultural integrity of their students" (p. 266).

Furthermore, Gary Howard (2006) included relationships as one of three dimensions of action in his Achievement Triangle. An authentic professional relationship, Howard (2006) articulated, is one that communicates clearly to students—through words, actions, and attitudes—a sense of connection that acknowledges the value of each child. Trusting relationships are the cornerstone for learning. Therefore, quality social justice education must be relationship-based. An authentic professional relationship is one that clearly communicates to students' knowledge of truly knowing them through words, actions, and attitudes,.

Through a synthesis of these leading scholars prevalent in the literature, I constructed a new practice-based conceptual framework, which served as the foundation for socially just teaching in the design of the study.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, social justice education was examined through the lens of a practice-based conceptual framework, beginning with the lived experiences of children and moving toward developing students' critical consciousness as agents for social change. Although not mutually exclusive, the 10 tenets of socially just teaching prevalent in the literature (Banks, 2003; Darder, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Freire, 2011; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Santamaria, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Wade, 2007), were divided into three categories central to the classroom experience: ecology, curriculum, and teaching and learning. These categories emerged from an analysis of the classroom life, conversations with fellow teachers, and feedback from educational leaders. Ecology describes characteristics central to the life of the classroom; curriculum contains characteristics connected to content; and teaching and learning includes characteristics related to instructional pedagogy. A summary of the framework design was shown in Figure 1.

A synthesized description of the 10 essential characteristics of social justice in the classroom, along with their theoretical grounding, is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Characteristics of Social Justice Education in the Classroom

Characteristic	Description	Source
Student-Centered	A classroom environment in which students feel valued and respected leads to students freely expressing ideas and becoming involved in issues of importance to them.	Wade, 2007 Nieto & Bode, 2008
Collaborative	Students and teachers work with each other to solve problems, expand their knowledge, and create change.	Wade, 2007 Freire, 2011
Experiential	Through active participation, students experience key concepts and ideas in engaging, hands-on ways.	Wade, 2007 Gay, 2000
Rigorous	Students are immersed in rigorous, standards-based academic work as they apply skills and knowledge to real-world issues. Teachers hold high expectations for both behavior and academics.	Wade, 2007 Howard, 2006 Nieto & Bode, 2008
Analytical	By critiquing current norms and underlying assumptions, students and teachers learn to consider whose voices are absent, what perspectives are presented, who makes decisions, and how best to effect change.	Wade, 2007 Freire, 2011
Culturally Relevant	Teachers create a bridge between students' home and school lives by utilizing the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to inform the lessons, curriculum, and methodology.	Gay, 2000 Ladson-Billings, 2001 Villegas & Lucas, 2002
Differentiated	Teachers must recognize multiple perspectives are informed by different values. Instruction must be catered to the values and needs of each student.	Wade, 2007 Santamaria, 2009
Activist	Students and teachers need real opportunities to work for social justice in their lives and to make key choices about issues of concern to them.	Banks, 2003 Nieto & Bode, 2008 Cochran-Smith, 2004
Relationship-Based	Teachers must be persistent in establishing authentic, caring relationships with their students.	Valenzuela, 1999 Howard, 2006
Reflective	Teachers and students participate in a continual cycle of dialogue and critical reflection aimed at confronting their own ideologies and improving their learning.	Delpit, 1995 Darder, 2002

To promote equitable classroom teaching, preservice teachers need exposure to the tenets of socially just teaching. Thus, teacher preparation programs committed to creating change in

urban communities must make conscious efforts to embed these critical characteristics into the fabric of their programs.

Components of Social Justice–Themed Teacher Education Programs

In this section, I examine the key features of social justice–themed teacher preparation programs, including (a) a transformative structure and curriculum, (b) the promotion of social justice theory, (c) the development of teacher beliefs and dispositions, and (d) components of exemplar program design.

Strands of Teacher Education

Sleeter (2009) argued that social justice in teacher education could be conceptualized as being comprised of three strands: (a) supporting access for all students to a high-quality education that builds on their cultural and linguistic backgrounds; (b) preparing teachers to foster democratic engagement; and (c) preparing teachers to be advocates by situating sociopolitical inequities. All of this, she maintained, must involve dialogue in which those who occupy positions of privilege learn to listen to, hear, and work with those who do not.

Transformative Structure and Curriculum

Reconceptualized teacher education, Ukopokdu (2007) suggested, should be transformative in structure, curriculum, and pedagogy. Transformative programs, she reasoned, must also include comprehensive professional development on multicultural teaching, social justice education, and self-transformation. Universities must create and offer courses on teaching for social justice, integrate issues of justice across the curriculum, diversify faculty and student populations, and create and foster a community of practice (Ukopokdu, 2007). Preparing teachers with a sociopolitical orientation will enable them to (a) raise and heighten their

awareness of inequities, (b) learn to teach with hope and integrity, (c) learn to rise above bureaucratic red tape, and (d) learn to resist becoming contributors to educational inequities.

Promoting Social Justice Theory

Picower (2011) argued that education for justice should hone the abilities of educators to engage on three levels. First, they must recognize and analyze injustice and how it operates to create and maintain oppression. Second, teachers must be willing to integrate this analysis into academic teaching in the classroom. Finally, teachers must expand their social justice work outside of the classroom as activists, with students and on their own, to combat issues of oppression.

Developing Teacher Beliefs and Dispositions

According to Villegas (2007), teachers need a broad range of skills and pedagogical expertise. A significant body of research suggests that teacher beliefs about students have significantly shaped the expectations they hold for student learning. As a result, developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions should be central goals of teacher education for social justice. Dispositions are “tendencies for individuals to act in particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs” (Villegas, 2007, p. 373).

A focus on candidates’ beliefs requires a shift away from the training model to a learning model that emphasizes how teachers construct knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) urged teacher education programs to examine patterns of actions—preferably in classrooms—from which to infer the candidate possesses that disposition. These actions might include (a) setting high performance goals for students, planning and implementing an enriched curriculum; (b) helping students examine text from multiple

perspectives; (c) differentiating instruction for English language learners; (d) making connections to their life outside of school; (e) using culturally relevant materials, actively engaged activities; and (f) creating an inclusive classroom community.

Social justice teacher education efforts must look to include all those concerned with improving educational outcomes for children, including K–12 educators, college and university faculty and staff, community members, and parents to participate and make decisions about how teachers are prepared (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). A social justice–oriented program should model inclusive social relations. “Teaching for social justice is an activity with a political dimension in which all educators are responsible for challenging inequities in the social order and working with others to establish a more just society” (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, et al., 2009, p. 352). Developing teachers’ dispositions and attitudes toward social justice are only one of several components that teacher preparation programs must incorporate into their design.

Exemplar Program Design

The experiences of prospective teachers must be carefully organized so that they can apply their knowledge in skillful ways in the classroom. Darling-Hammond (2010) examined the design of seven exemplary teacher education programs that produced extraordinarily well-prepared graduates. The findings revealed common features, including:

- A common clear vision of good teaching integrated throughout all facets of the program to create a cohesive learning experience.
- Well-defined standards of practice and performance that are used to guide and evaluate coursework and clinical work.

- A strong core curriculum taught in the context of practice and grounded in theory including a knowledge of child development, social and cultural contexts, curriculum, assessments, and pedagogical practices.
- Extended clinical experiences—at least 30 weeks of supervised practicum or student teaching opportunities—that are carefully chosen.
- Extensive use of case methods, teacher research, performance assessment, and portfolio evaluation that confront real problems of practice.
- Explicit strategies to help students confront their own deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about learning and the experiences of people different from themselves.
- Strong relationships, common knowledge, and shared beliefs among school and university-based faculty jointly engaged in transforming teaching.

In addition to these features, exemplar teacher preparation programs must prepare their candidates in research-based classroom management strategies, beginning with foundational courses and continuing to their experience as student teachers (Greenberg, Putman, & Walsh, 2014).

Classroom management. Strong instruction and establishing positive rapport are important features of socially just teaching, but do not replace the need for management strategies. Programs committed to social justice should also consider the literature on culturally responsive classroom management techniques. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran (2004) have explained that the goal of culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) is “to create an environment in which students behave appropriately, not out of fear or punishment or

desire for reward, but out of a sense of personal responsibility” (p. 28). To achieve this goal, they proposed a conception of CRCM that includes five essential components:

1. A recognition of one’s own ethnocentrism.
2. Knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds.
3. Understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context.
4. Ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies.
5. Commitment to building caring classrooms.

Teacher preparation programs must find ways of encouraging preservice teachers to examine their own biases and assumptions, to learn about students’ cultural backgrounds, and to develop pedagogical practices that respect and affirm diversity (Weinstein et al., 2004).

Teacher education programs that can not only claim but also provide evidence of exemplar components in their program design stand a greater chance of empirically combatting the critics of social justice–themed education.

Critiques of Social Justice–Themed Teacher Education

Villegas (2007) asserted that underlying the debate about social justice are varying definitions of the goals of public education, the role of teachers, the nature of knowledge, and the conceptions of learning, teaching, and learning to teach. Beyond this, some critics say that the social justice agenda is political indoctrination and detracts from the real goal of teacher education, which is giving teachers the knowledge and skills needed to teach students effectively (Villegas, 2007).

According to Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Lahann, Shakman, and Terrell (2009), “Teacher education for social justice centers on kids feeling good and teachers being politically correct,

while nobody pays attention to learning” (p. 625). Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, and colleagues (2009) synthesized the current arguments, which are critical of social just teacher education into four overlapping critiques prevalent in the discourse.

Ambiguity Critique

The ambiguity critique is grounded in the notion that there is considerable variation in the meanings of the term *teacher education for social justice*. Essentially, this critique maintains that social justice is under theorized, and the field lacks a shared definition. The lack of clarity in the field at large about what constitutes social justice teacher education and the lack of knowledge regarding the practices that support such an effort make it possible for numerous programs and institutions to lay claim to teacher education for social justice (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009).

Knowledge Critique

The knowledge critique is the most prominent of the current critiques. This critique argues that teacher education for social justice is about teachers being nice, children feeling good, and everybody ignoring knowledge. It is grounded in the claim that teacher education programs with social justice goals place too much emphasis on progressive political goals at the expense of conveying subject matter knowledge and basic skills. In other words, critics argue that teacher education inappropriately characterize teaching as a political activity (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt et al., 2009).

Ideology Critique

The ideology critique is closely related to the knowledge critique in that it makes the same assumptions about the apolitical nature of academic knowledge. Evaluating prospective teachers on the basis of moral values, political perspectives, and certain dispositions is a blatant

misuse of the gate-keeping powers of professional accreditors. In other words, teacher candidates should be judged on their knowledge and performance, not their politics and personality. The central assumption in this case is that professional education can be and ought to be apolitical, value-free, and neutral when it comes to moral and ethical issues (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, et al., 2009).

Free Speech Critique

Finally, the free speech critique maintains that teacher education programs that promote social justice curtail candidates' freedom to think and say whatever they wish, which is counter to the mission of the modern university to foster an open intellectual atmosphere of free thought and speech. Underlying this critique is the assumption that teacher preparation ought to be apolitical and that liberal faculty members whose views are privileged dominate universities (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, et al., 2009).

In summary, the knowledge critique targets content and purpose, the ideology critique aims at gate keeping, and the free speech critique targets the intellectual climate. Although they claim otherwise, the critiques of teacher education for social justice are political and ideological.

To address these critiques, social justice teacher education would benefit from considering how other disciplines conceptualize the notion of justice and connect it with other social movements aimed at achieving justice (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). In order to avoid the pitfall of remaining largely symbolic and rhetorical, teacher educators must challenge the field to “develop a range of conceptions and practices that would provide some guidance in terms of the vision of teaching and learning and the practices of such a reform effort” (McDonald

& Zeichner, 2009, p. 606). To silence the critics, teacher education programs that promote social justice must make greater efforts to produce outcomes-based research supporting their practices.

Teacher Preparation Policy

In 2014, the US Department of Education launched an initiative entitled *Improving Teacher Preparation: Building on Innovation*. The initiative claimed that institutions were not adequately preparing preservice teachers and lacked the information needed to identify where graduates go to teach, how long they stay, and how they perform in the classroom. Essentially, it was believed that more needed to be done to examine the outcomes of teacher preparation. As a result, the initiative laid out proposed regulations and key indicators for monitoring teacher preparation. Proposed regulations to improve the availability of information on teacher preparation and offer transparency into the performance of teacher education programs would (a) build on innovative systems and progress in the field to encourage all states to develop meaningful systems to identify high- and low-performing teacher preparation programs, (b) ask states to incorporate more meaningful outcome measures and improve the availability of relevant information, (c) reward only those programs deemed to be effective with eligibility for grants, and (d) offer transparency into the performance of teacher preparation programs through the creation of a feedback loop among programs, prospective teachers, employers, and the public.

To achieve these objectives, several key indicators were outlined including: (a) evidence that the program produces candidates with content and pedagogical knowledge and quality clinical preparation, (b) teacher and employer feedback, (c) employment outcomes, and (d) student learning outcomes (US Department of Education, 2014). Clearly, the initiative showed that more must be done to gather information about the outcomes of teacher education.

Research on Social Justice Teacher Education

According to Cochran-Smith (2004), "Teacher education for social justice-as an idea and a reality-stands at a crossroads where there are multiple paths" (p. 156). If the project is to move forward, we must conceptualize and act on teacher education as both a learning problem and a political problem. Three specific actions are essential:

1. Public critique of prevailing policies and agendas related to teacher quality, recruitment, preparation, and certification;
2. Development of a diversified and rigorous program of empirical research regarding teacher education that rationalizes and operationalizes social justice as an outcome; and
3. Identification and analysis of exemplary and innovative programs, projects partnerships, and modes of inquiry and assessment that can serve as the building blocks for other teacher preparation efforts with the goal of social justice.

Cochran-Smith (2004) maintained that teacher education for social justice needs to develop further as an area of scholarly inquiry. Specifically, more studies are needed linking theory and practice. Currently, only a tiny portion of the research related to the social justice agenda has examined the effects of teacher preparation, or what prospective teachers actually do with what they learn in teacher preparation courses, fieldwork experiences, and community projects. The major challenge is developing rich and sensitive outcomes measures that take all aspects of "successful teaching" for social justice into account (including principal evaluations, classroom pedagogy, social activism) and them map forward from, or backward to, teacher preparation.

In response to these concerns, this investigation sought to understand how graduates of one social justice–themed teacher education program translated the theory learned during teacher preparation into socially just classroom pedagogy.

Research on Social Justice Theory and Implementation in the Classroom

Several small empirical studies have sought to explore teachers' perceptions and beliefs about socially just teaching practices after they leave social justice–themed teacher preparation programs (Ayers et al., 2004; Borrero, 2009; Carter, 2008; Cochran-Smith, Reagan, et al., 2009; Dover, 2013; Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Flores, 2007; Picower, 2011; Whipp, 2013). However, only a limited number explored the impact of teacher education programs on beginning teachers' implementation of classroom practices (Agarwal et al., 2010; Cochran-Smith, Shakman, et al., 2009; Dover, 2013; Enterline et al., 2008; McQuillan et al., 2009; Reagan et al., 2011).

Theory Studies

In a 2007 study, Maria Flores explored the experiences of four new teachers as their commitments to social justice collided with urban school culture. Even though these beginning educators had a sense of who they wanted to be as teachers and of the practices that would best serve their diverse students, they were not always able to enact their ideals. Barriers included an emphasis on standardization, tension with veteran colleagues, and a medical model of schooling that sought to diagnose students (Flores, 2007). Despite these challenges, the strength of these teachers' ideals allowed them to move forward in their purpose. The beliefs these teachers cultivated in their teacher preparation enabled them to resist the school's reproductive culture. These findings speak to the important role that universities and teacher preparation programs can

play in promoting enduring ideals and images of practice to support the long-term success of social justice educators (Flores, 2007).

A separate study revealed the importance of creating opportunities for successful teachers to reflect on their practice and share with less successful colleagues (Duncan-Andrade, 2005). In an effort to develop and support the development of student-empowering social justice themes in teachers' practice, a critical inquiry project (CIP) was created. Seven teachers participated in a three-year CIP in at Power Elementary School in an urban Southern California neighborhood. The group allowed effective teachers who espoused a pedagogy of social transformation to share their philosophy and practice with colleagues. Findings showed that the strategy proved effective and mutually beneficial for all the participants. Implications for practice suggested that school leaders would benefit from developing a better understanding of effective urban teachers' philosophies and practices, and putting a system in place to support the professional growth of all teachers where successful practitioners could be used as resources (Duncan-Andrade, 2005).

Additionally, hoping to paint a portrait of what "make a difference" looks like, a five-year Social Justice CIP, based on the earlier work of Duncan-Andrade (2005), was started with former teacher education students who wanted support during their first years of teaching (Picower, 2011). This study explored the challenges of developing and supporting teachers' sense of social justice activism with three different groups at various stages in their careers (oppositional preservice teachers, emerging social justice educators, and experienced activist educators). By understanding the triumphs and challenges that preservice and in-service teachers face, it was believed that teacher educators would be in a better position to develop the kind of political analysis that lay the foundation for teacher activism.

Findings revealed that educators had a desire to teach about social justice, but faced a variety of obstacles including negotiating mandated curriculum, high stakes testing, and resistant colleagues. To combat this state of fear and alienation, the CIP team members achieved four objectives:

1. Worked together to build a safe haven that supported their pedagogical efforts;
2. Camouflaged their social justice pedagogy within their classroom;
3. Prepared students to become critically conscious thinkers, and in some cases went public with their voices after the first year; and
4. Became successful in one key component of SJE: creating classrooms in which their students analyzed social issues.

However, the participating teachers found few to no opportunities for themselves or their students to address social change outside of the classroom.

As with other research that has failed to adequately address how teachers can engage young people in actively transforming their communities and worlds, teachers in this study struggled to become activists themselves. Few opportunities exist to prepare or support teachers to engage in this component of social justice (Picower, 2011). As a result, there are fewer teachers actually taking on this role. This creates tension for teachers who know they should be doing more. According to Picower (2011), “Many teachers do not have detailed vision of a just world that could serve to motivate potential action for liberatory change” (p. 85). Implications showed that a broad agenda for social change is needed including reconciling the vision, moving toward liberation, and standing up to oppression. Teacher activists “prepare their students to be critically conscious participants in the world and then work alongside them to stand up for justice,

particularly educational justice” (Picower, 2011, p. 109). Without teacher activists, students will never know the liberatory potential that education holds.

Teachers who enter the field specifically with the hopes of working toward social change are often the first to leave the profession as they find themselves alienated and alone while trying to navigate highly political terrain (Miech & Elder, 1996). Picower (2011) suggested that preparing educators for urban settings is not enough. If teacher education wants to truly honor its commitment to providing educators who can teach in solidarity with their communities, she asserted, the field must continue to support graduates as they struggle through the difficulties of beginning to teach. New teachers need protection from hostile environments, to practice developing curriculum, and a community of like-minded people who are going through what they are going through (Picower, 2011). Beyond studies that explored teachers’ philosophies of social justice, it is important to review studies that have examined the implementation of these theories of socially just teaching in the classroom.

Classroom Practice Studies

Informed by critiques indicating that prior research related to teacher education for social justice generally focused on attitudes and beliefs without connecting teacher preparation to teacher performance, Cochran-Smith, Reagan, and colleagues (2009) examined not just what teachers said about social justice, but also how they taught in classrooms and what kinds of learning opportunities they provided to pupils. The primary methodologies employed were interviews and observations with preservice and first-year teachers focused on the following research questions: (a) What are teacher candidates’/first-year teachers’ understandings of what it means to teach for social justice, and how do these relate to classroom teaching? That is, what

do teachers say about teaching for social justice? (b) How do these understandings play out in practice? That is, what do teacher candidates/first-year teachers actually do in classroom contexts? (c) What are the implications of these findings for understanding the theme of social justice in pre-service teacher education?

Findings showed that despite their interest in teaching for social justice, the teachers in this study seldom offered critiques of the larger structures and arrangements of schooling, such as grading, tracking, and labeling of pupils, even though these kinds of challenges were quite consistent with the stated agenda of the program. Although a critical or activist perspective was not detected in most participants' responses, the study did find that teachers believed their work could make a difference. However, the teachers understood making a difference in terms of their own classrooms and were skeptical of their ability to influence structural change. Although this study was similar to the current study, it differed in three ways. The current study sought to (a) triangulate the data through supervisor interviews, (b) examine the link between socially just teaching and teacher preparation, and (c) utilize a new framework of social justice in the classroom.

Hoping to contribute to the dearth of research that directly examined teaching practices of candidates once they have graduated from teacher preparation programs, researchers out of Boston College examined the extent to which 22 novice teachers implemented practices related to social justice in their mathematics instruction (Reagan et al., 2011). Through the development and use of the Teaching for Social Justice Observation Scale (TSJOS), the researchers investigated the extent to which novice teachers implemented socially just teaching practices in the classroom. Additionally, the study examined which socially just practices were linked to

pupil learning. All participants, recent graduates of a social justice–themed teacher preparation program, were observed twice using the TSJOS over a four-to-six week period. While it was found that most teachers implemented a moderate degree of practices related to social justice, several novice teachers were shown to struggle with implementing these practices. It was discovered that teachers who exhibited a higher degree of practices related to social justice also tended to have pupils who scored higher on the postassessment. The results of this study suggested that specific indicators related to teaching for social justice can be identified and measured using an instrument. Prior to this study, a reliable scale of measuring such practices did not exist.

While the previously mentioned Boston College study aimed to measure the implementation of socially just teaching practices by alumni of social justice–themed teacher preparation programs, it differs from the present study in a few significant ways. To begin, the TSJOS instrument was not used. In place, a protocol that drew from contemporary scholars and allowed for the infusion of teachers’ perspectives was created. Second, the study did not directly link teacher implementation practices back to the theory taught in their teacher preparation program. The current study addressed these limitations through the inclusion of teachers in defining socially just teaching and through a reflection on the link between the teacher preparation program and beginning teaching (Reagan et al., 2011).

Lastly, in an effort to address the ambiguity critiques that plague the term "teaching for social justice," Dover (2013) examined how 24 secondary English Language Arts teachers from 13 states taught for standards-based context. Specifically, the study addressed how teachers conceptualized teaching for social justice, and how they addressed principles for teaching for

social justice using a standards-based curriculum. Qualitative methods included an open-ended questionnaire about teaching for social justice and an evaluation of one lesson plan that considered an example of teaching for social justice. Findings revealed that the teachers' use of critical pedagogy, emphasis on civic responsibility, and use of culturally responsive techniques supported the theoretical basis for socially just teaching. In summary, participants' descriptions of social justice revealed three central emphases: curriculum, pedagogy, and social action.

Although Dover (2013) examined the link between socially just teaching theory and classroom implementation, the study differed from the present study in a few significant ways. First, all data collected by Dover (2013) were self-reported, thereby limiting the findings to only the teachers' intentions regarding teaching for social justice. As suggested by Dover (2013), future observational research was necessary in order to assess the relationship across teachers' social justice intentions, classroom practices, and student outcomes. Furthermore, the research focused solely on implementation in the secondary language arts classroom. Finally, the study did not specifically examine the ways in which participants' teacher preparation influenced their conceptions of social justice. In hopes of addressing these lingering questions, my study examined the practices of alumni emerging from a social justice-themed teacher preparation program.

Similarly, Whipp (2013) conducted an exploratory study that investigated how 12 graduates from one justice-oriented preparation program conceptualized socially just teaching after a year of teaching in an urban school and what preprogram, program, and postprogram factors the teachers described as influences on their practice. Participants emerged from a midsized Catholic university, and data sources included semistructured interviews, a

demographic survey, and student teaching narrative evaluations by supervisors. The study found variations in the teachers' orientations toward socially just teaching, with definitions falling into three categories: consciousness raising, culturally relevant teaching, and caring. Major influences on teachers' practices included prior life experiences, program fieldwork, courses, mentors, and support during the first year. This study relied heavily on self-reported data and failed to include comprehensive classroom observations. It was suggested that future studies follow graduates into the classroom, which was a central aim of this investigation.

University Teacher Preparation Program

The University Teacher Preparation Program (UTPP) central to this study embodied a social justice agenda across its curriculum. Located in California, UTPP's mission statement read, "We strive to provide excellence in pre-service education and to improve urban schooling for racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse children." The two-year graduate program allowed candidates to earn a preliminary teaching credential and masters' in education in a cohort model. According to its website, the UTPP curriculum emphasized the structural dimensions of inequity, the need for social and political activism, the centrality of multiculturalism, and the vital importance of understanding competing notions of race, culture, and identity. UTPP's vision of educational change occurred through teaching and learning that provided students the skills, dispositions, and insights they needed to recognize and subvert social injustice across their academic and life trajectories. Thus, they advocated socially just approaches to teaching and learning that recognized and valued students' assets, provided them multiple forms of participation, facilitated critical thinking, motivated them to learn, revealed high academic and personal expectations, and reflected culturally relevant pedagogies. More

detailed descriptions of the program's principals, requirements, and design are presented in Chapter 3. Thus far, only a handful of studies examining the outcomes of UTPP have been conducted (Cantor, 1998; Quartz, 2009; Quartz, Priselac, & Franke, 2009).

UTPP Research Studies

A longitudinal study of the program, using data collected between 2000 and 2007, found that UTPP had a positive impact on workplace retention. Data showed that 59.8% of UTPP graduates stayed in teaching, while 28.4% changed roles in education (Quartz, 2009). In addition, graduates were almost three times more likely than other highly qualified teachers nationwide to stay put in the same school over time. While it is clear that UTPP achieved some success in urban teacher retention, more research is needed to explore the link between UTPP's preparation and its impact on classroom practices.

A second qualitative study aimed to address how UTPP's social justice agenda influenced the identity development of alumni as teacher activists (Montano, Lopez-Torres, Pacheco, & Stillman, 2002). During in depth-interviews, alumni were critical of UTPP's failure to provide an in-depth analysis of social justice that promoted activism inside and outside of the classroom. Participants revealed that becoming effective agents of change required them to participate in activist organizations outside of their teacher preparation program. In other words, findings revealed that UTPP lacked a clear commitment to fostering and supporting teacher activism in the program. As a result of this research, it was suggested that social justice-themed teacher education programs consider three initiatives: (a) a community social action practicum prior to student teaching; (b) a reciprocal relationship with community, labor, and civil rights activists; and (c) the requirement that teacher educators partake in a practicum for social justice through

participation in activist work alongside their students. Although some teacher education programs are arming students with theory and research that facilitate and support the development of social justice philosophy, more must be done to promote critical activism.

Because Montano, Lopez-Torres, Pacheco, and Stillman's (2002) research was conducted over 10 years ago, one may assume that the passage of time and maturation of the program will yield different results. Second, a weakness of this study was its reliance primarily on self-reported interview data with no classroom observation data to support the teachers' activism in the classroom. More recent research, supported by both interview and observation data, as was the case in the current study, is needed to ascertain whether or not UTPP is adequately preparing teachers to be activists in the classroom.

Of the limited existing research on UTPP program outcomes, only one study examined the alumni teachers' ability to translate theory into practice (Cantor, 1998). Findings from this small four-teacher case study revealed that the university-district partnership had a positive effect on the teachers' ability to blend theory with practice. Cantor's study presented a model for exemplary teacher education programs but did not examine specific socially just classroom teaching practices. While there is some information available about UTPP program outcomes, it is clear that more research is needed to inform the program about the ways in which alumni define and implement socially just teaching practices after they graduate.

Summary of the Literature

The absence of empirical evidence connecting teacher preparation for social justice with graduate outcomes is a major critique of the research on teaching and teacher education for social justice. Further research is needed to examine the influence of teacher preparation on the

classroom practices of alumni. While recent studies have explored how graduates conceptualized and implemented socially just teaching practices in the classroom, very few have explored the influence that the theory learned in teacher preparation has had on graduate teachers' classroom practices. Additionally, previous studies relied heavily on self-reported data with no triangulation of methods to support the findings. Of those that did include classroom observations, it was often in a single subject area for a short period of time.

This study addressed these gaps in the literature in a number of distinct ways. First, data collection was triangulated through the use of participant interviews, classroom observations, and supervisor interviews. Second, the voices of the participants were central to the study, as alumni teachers had the opportunity to define what social justice meant to them. Third, conducting full-day classroom observations in elementary classrooms allowed for social justice teaching practices across multiple subject areas to be studied. Finally, the study explored the ways in which the theory learned in the teachers' preparation program influenced the implementation of his or her socially just teaching practices.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the rationale for the research design, provide site descriptions, explain the participant selection process, and identify the data collection methods. In addition, I articulate the limitations of the study including threats to validity and reliability. This research was a qualitative case study that examined how alumni of a social justice–themed teacher preparation program defined and implemented socially just teaching practices in urban, elementary schools in California. The study included classroom observations, document review, and interviews with teachers and supervisors.

Research Questions

To add to the literature on the outcomes associated with social justice–themed teacher preparation programs, this study focused on three primary research questions:

1. What do alumni of a social justice–themed teacher preparation program consider to be socially just teaching practices?
2. How do alumni teachers implement socially just teaching practices in urban, elementary classrooms?
3. What influences of the program do alumni identify as contributing to their implementation of these classroom practices?

Rationale of the Qualitative Approach

The central focus of qualitative research is to provide an understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants and the teachers

themselves (Gay et al., 2012). Because qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem, it was the most appropriate design choice for studying how teachers articulate and implement socially just teaching practices (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, the exploration of a defined unit of analysis, the implementation of socially just teaching practices, aligned with the qualitative research goal of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009).

Unlike quantitative research, the qualitative approach considers the context, and honors the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2009). This approach allowed me to consider the individual context of the teachers' school sites as they applied their definition of socially just teaching. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative data collection occurs in natural settings and the researcher does not control the context (Gay et al., 2012). As an observer in the teacher's classroom, I did not influence the classroom context in any significant way. Qualitative researchers also try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study, which involves reporting multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2009). In this study, I looked to gather both the teachers' and supervisors' perspectives, and I reviewed documentation about the program in order to create a more complete picture of the implementation of socially just teaching practices.

According to Gay and colleagues (2012), "Qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insights about a particular phenomenon of interest" (p. 7). Additionally, time-intensive data collection is used to understand the participants' perspective (Gay et al., 2012). In this study, the use of pre- and postinterviews, daylong observations, and document analysis provided a great depth of data about the

implementation of socially just teaching practices. In qualitative research, interactive collaboration with the participants is essential so that participants have a chance to shape the themes or abstractions that emerge from the process (Creswell, 2009). While detailed protocols were used to guide the interviews and observations, open-ended questions allowed the teachers' voice to shape the themes of socially just teaching.

Case Study Method

The desired outcome of this study—understanding how teachers defined and implemented socially just teaching practices—aligned nicely with the purposes of a case study design. A case study is considered an appropriate choice of research method if the researcher is interested in studying a process (Gay et al., 2012). Case studies are utilized to investigate a contextualized contemporary phenomenon within specified boundaries (Hatch, 2002). More specifically, case studies are useful when describing the context of the study and the extent to which a particular innovation has been implemented (Gay et al., 2012). In this case, the extent of the implementation of socially just teaching practices was examined within the specified boundaries of urban elementary schools.

As Creswell (2009) has explained, “Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (p. 13). Because this study aimed to explore in depth the implementation of socially just teaching practices, a case study was the most natural fit. A second objective of the study was to gather sufficient information to provide concrete examples of the ways in which UTPP alumni implemented socially just teaching in urban schools. Because case studies result in thick

descriptions, this methodology was the most appropriate for generating adequate data to share the alumni teachers' experiences (Gay et al., 2012).

Research Program

The focus of this study was the University Teacher Preparation Program (UTPP) housed at a public university located in California. UTPP was a full-time graduate program that allowed students to earn a teaching credential and Masters of Education (M.Ed.) degree in two years. During their novice year, candidates took foundational coursework and methods classes while completing observational fieldwork and two student teaching assignments. During the second year, residents took on full-time teaching positions in urban communities while participating in weekly seminars and completing a master's degree. In all published material, UTPP posited itself as a program that prepared aspiring teachers to become social justice educators in urban settings. In sum, UTPP strove "to prepare teachers to have the commitment, capacity, and resilience to promote social justice, caring, and instructional equity in low-income, urban schools and communities" (UTPP website).

UTPP was guided by seven principles that the university believed were important for teacher development and addressed the needs of prospective classroom teachers:

1. Social justice guides our theory, practice, and inquiry stance (reflective, critical, action-oriented, and socially responsive research). Social justice recognizes the essential value of every student and encourages reflection and action that challenges discriminatory practices and social problems including racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia (program website).
2. A reciprocal dynamic between theory and practice, based on reflection, inquiry,

- collaboration, and field experiences prepares teachers with the knowledge, skills, and commitment to deal with the multiple barriers to educational success for low-income, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. This dynamic is necessary for teachers to remain engaged in renewal throughout their careers.
3. Collaborating with schools, communities, and families is essential for change to occur in low-performing, hard-to-staff schools that serve low-income, racially, culturally, linguistically diverse populations of students. Change is possible when people are accountable to each other, express themselves authentically, and negotiate common understandings that support collective action. As teacher candidates collaborate with all members of the school community to share in the work of teaching, they develop trust, mutual understandings, and meaningful relationships. These coalitions and shared commitments help transform urban classrooms, schools, and communities (Oakes, Franke, Loef, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002).
 4. Teaching has moral, cultural, and political dimensions. Therefore, teachers must assume activist roles and develop strategies to challenge and disrupt the inequities that pervade urban schools in order to successfully serve the needs of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students (program website).
 5. Collaborative inquiry within communities of practice and research involving educational researchers, clinical faculty, Guiding Teachers, administrators, and community members guide the theories, content, and process of the teacher education program and inform changes in the programs as they may develop. Such dialogue provides participants with opportunities to make their knowledge explicit, to argue

and challenge one another's beliefs, and to forge new ways of making sense of existing practice (Oakes et al., 2002).

6. Supportive environments are an essential component for the development of transformative professionals. To countervail socialization in many school settings and provide support for novice teachers and apprentices, a sustained engagement with our teacher education program and peers promotes self-renewal, resiliency, and a life-long commitment to being social justice educators. Also, through participation and collaboration with one another in supportive environments, teacher candidates feel more comfortable to try new strategies and understandings that stretch their skills and capacities, which in turn lead to the development of new practices (program website).
7. Our teacher education programs must mirror the diverse, caring, antiracist, socially responsible learning communities that we seek to create in schools.

Rooted in these guiding principles, the core purposes of UTPP were (a) to prepare program graduates to be transformative professionals based on Giroux's (1988) "transformative intellectual": the educator who has

a social vision and commitment to make public schools democratic public spheres, where all children, regardless of race, class, gender and age can learn what it means to be able to participate fully in a society that affirms and sustains the principles of equality, freedom and social justice. (p. 215)

The transformative intellectual has "the courage to take risks, to look into the future, and to imagine a world that could be as opposed to simply what is" (Giroux, 1988, p. 215); (b) to support novice teachers in acquiring the skills to provide rigorous standards-based content when

teaching in urban schools; and (c) to prepare teacher candidates with the commitment, capacity, and resilience to promote social justice, caring, and antiracism in urban schools to student populations traditionally under-served by high quality educational programs, especially low-income racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students.

Requirements for admission to UTPP included: (a) minimum 3.0 undergraduate GPA, (b) three letters of recommendation, (c) written statement of purpose, (d) group interview, and (e) educational skills testing scores. On average, UTPP admitted a diverse group of 170 new novice teachers each year (Quartz, 2009). Compared to the nationwide average of 82%, only 34% of UTPP were White. Asian (31%), Latino (25%), Black (5%), and other (5%) made up the remaining 66% of UTPP candidates (UTPP Website, 2015).

Amongst concerns over the stability of teaching jobs, UTPP had seen a recent decline in the number of applicants. The number of students in the program, however, had remained relatively stable. Budget cuts forced multiyear layoffs in the local district, requiring the program to allow residents to explore less traditional employment opportunities such as teacher's aide and charter school positions.

Research Participants

Nine research participants, including six teachers, two supervisors, and a UTPP staff member, were selected for the study using a purposive sampling approach.

Teachers

To be eligible for the study, teacher participants had to have (a) graduated from UTPP between 2009–2013; (b) worked at a public, public charter, or independent charter school; and (c) taught in an elementary (K–8) self-contained classroom. It was important to work with

teachers in their first, second, or third year of teaching so that they would be better able to link their dispositions about social justice to their teacher preparation experience. Due to the passage of time, more experienced veteran teachers, might have had more difficulty associating their philosophy and style with UTPP. With these criteria in mind, I obtained the consent of UTPP (See Appendix A) and worked in collaboration with a UTPP staff member to identify nine potential teacher participants who met all required criteria.

At that time, I sent an email to the nine potential teacher participants, outlining the study, inviting them to participate, and explaining that participation was strictly voluntary. Initially, I received only four responses. I then emailed the four interested participants, began to establish rapport, and reviewed the key components of the study that may place demands on their time, including classroom observations and one-on-one interviews. Upon completion of this orientation process, all four participants agreed to participate and signed informed consent documents. Initially, securing the additional two teacher participants was a challenging task as I faced a lot of hesitation and resistance. Therefore, I decided to begin the research with the four teachers and hoped that further participants would sign on as teachers were able to share their experience. Although they did not initially respond to my invitation, two additional teacher participants, with the encouragement of their principal, agreed to join the study a month later, bringing the grand total of teacher participants to six. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were used throughout the study. A summary of the teachers' background, education, and experience is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Profile of Teacher Participants

Teacher (Pseudonym)	Gender	School	Ethnic Identification	Grade Level	Teaching Experience	UTPP Graduation
Juan	Male	Excel	Latino	Fifth	Three years	2012
Angelica	Female	Excel	Chinese	Third	Three years	2012
Gabriel	Male	Bright Hope	Filipino	Fifth	Two years	2013
Heather	Female	Bright Hope	Caucasian	Seventh	One year	2013
Nancy	Female	Bright Hope	Polish/Cuban	First	One year	2013
Beatriz	Female	Bright Hope	Latina	First	One year	2013

In addition to the demographic information presented above, a brief snapshot of each teacher is provided in the next section.

Juan. Juan was a fifth-grade teacher in his third year at Excel Charter. In the two prior years, he had taught third and fourth grade. In his classroom, Juan had 26 students, 12 male and 14 female, from low-income families. All students were of Mexican or Salvadorian descent and approximately half were identified as English language learners. Furthermore, three students had Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and required additional services. To meet the needs of his students, Juan created and wrote his own curriculum so that his students could engage in authentic learning experiences. While his classroom was not a perfect model of organization, it was a perfect reflection of Juan’s teaching philosophy. The walls were filled with student-generated projects and formed a web of learning. The students moved around Juan’s room comfortably and Juan showed his passion for teaching and desire for educational change during his lengthy interviews and full-day observation.

Angelica. Angelica was also in her third year of teaching at Excel Charter. She taught third grade and had taught third and fourth in her prior years. Angelica had 26 students, all of Hispanic descent, with six identified English learners and three students with special needs. Her classroom was extremely well organized, with traditional bulletin boards displaying student work,

academic standards posted, a designated library area, and projects across content areas.

Additionally, a parent and community corner with resources, in both Spanish and English, was available for families. Students were hanging out in her room before the school day began and were anxious to spend time with Angelica during their recess and lunch breaks. Angelica was a very hands-on teacher, offering encouragement and support to her students throughout the day.

Gabriel. Gabriel was in his second year of teaching fifth grade at Bright Hope Charter. On the day I observed, Gabriel had only 15 students in his classroom because three boys had been suspended by the principal for behavior issues the prior day. Of the 15 students, seven were Black, and the remaining students were Hispanic or Latino. Gabriel's classroom was neatly arranged with a small sample of student work displayed throughout the room. My visit came on the heels of state testing, which impacted the complexity of the room environment. As mandated by the test, all visible learning charts and resources had to be removed. During both the interviews, Gabriel was soft spoken and reserved and offered very brief responses.

Heather. Heather was in her first year of teaching seventh grade at Bright Hope Charter. Prior to starting at Bright Hope, Heather worked at an urban inquiry site, which provided after-school services to homeless youth. Heather had 25 students, 18 of whom were Hispanic and seven Black. Six students had special needs, and five were English language learners. Heather was well prepared with clear lesson plans and objectives for the day. Her classroom was organized with an abundance of books available and student work on display. Heather gave her students freedom to move around or leave the classroom as needed to use the restroom or get water. Heather's excitement and love for her students was evident during her interviews.

Nancy. Nancy was in her inaugural year as a full-time first-grade teacher at Bright Hope. During the previous year, she served as a teaching assistant in grades four, five, and six. Her class consisted of 22 students, 10 Black, and 12 Hispanic. All students were considered low-income, and 11 were English language learners. Additionally, two had speech needs and two had IEPs. Nancy's classroom was a colorful, vibrant room with clear definitions of space for working and learning. Bulletin boards displaying student writing, math, and art flanked the walls. Several teacher-created posters documenting class rules, standards, and learning objectives could be seen throughout the room. Nancy was very energetic and included humor, expression, and movement into her teaching.

Beatriz. Beatriz, Nancy's partner teacher, was also in her first year of teaching first grade at Bright Hope. In her previous year, she worked as a teacher's assistant before taking over for a kindergarten teacher who left on maternity leave. In her classroom, Beatriz had 22 students, half Black and half Hispanic or Latino. Additionally, she had nine English language learners. Beatriz's classroom was centered around a large multicolored rug with a mixed seating arrangement consisting of small groups, partner, and individual desks. The walls were covered with math activities, artwork, student writing, and community social studies projects. Several visually appealing, teacher-created posters outlining rules, procedures, and content could be found throughout the space. Beatriz had a soothing voice and exhibited a patient demeanor with all students.

Principals

To add depth to the data, the teachers were asked to identify a supervisor who was familiar with their practice that I could interview. The four Bright Hope teachers recommended

that I speak with Anne, the executive director. Anne was a founding member of the school and had acted in that capacity since Bright Hope's opening in 2006. I approached Anne during one of my site visits and invited her to participate. She agreed and was interviewed twice throughout the course of the study, once in May 2014 and once in July 2014. The two Excel teachers suggested that I speak with Jack, the school's CEO since its opening in 2011. I reached out to Jack via email, and he agreed to participate. It was difficult to find time in his schedule at the end of the school year, so Jack was interviewed only once in August 2014.

UTPP Staff Member

In addition to reviewing UTPP documents, I interviewed one UTPP staff member to further validate program information. Maribel, the director of UTPP, was selected because she had been a long-standing faculty member for nearly 15 years and understood the mission and evolution of the program. I reached out to Maribel via email, she agreed, and an initial interview date was set for the summer 2014. However, due to schedule conflicts, the initial interview had to be cancelled and rescheduled for October 2014. As a result, this interview was the final component in data collection. Although not originally scheduled to occur last, I found it profitable to speak with the Maribel after having interviewed and observed the teachers. This allowed me to further refine my interview questions based on initial findings. Due to demands in her schedule, the interview had to be shortened to 30 minutes.

Research Sites

The selection of the participants dictated the public or charter schools where the research was conducted. In other words, because I was only able to find first-, second-, or third-year teachers working in the charter school context, the research sites had to be public charters instead

of district elementary schools. Before finalizing the participants, consent was obtained from administrators at the two public charter schools where teachers' had expressed interest in the study, Bright Hope and Excel. The public charter school sites varied from the surrounding district elementary schools in a few significant ways. For example, both public charter school participating in the study were granted complete autonomy to manage their budget, design daily schedules, select curriculum, and hire teachers. In contrast, surrounding district elementary schools were often mandated to spend funds according to district regulations, use scripted math and language arts programs, and adhere to strict scheduling guidelines. Furthermore, students attending the schools had to apply for admission and parents were required to be actively involved as a contingency of admission. Compared to the local district schools, the administrators, teachers, and staff at the public charter schools had more power and responsibility in designing the school culture.

Bright Hope

Founded by community health leaders and educators in 2006, Bright Hope, a K–8 public charter located in an urban area of a large metropolitan city, was one of the two schools included in the study. According to its website, Bright Hope was a free public charter open to any student and its vision was to “nurture the academic, social, emotional, and physical development of each child.” Furthermore, according to its mission, Bright Hope’s “approach to teaching and learning encourages student initiative and ownership, promotes inquiry, foster dialogues, generates awareness of healthy choices, and expands and strengthens thinking processes.” As stated by their executive director, the school aspired to deliver rigorous instruction in a caring environment.

Admission was by application and lottery only. At the time of data collection, the faculty consisted of 20 full-time teachers and 35 part-time faculty and staff. Class sizes varied by grade level, but the average student-to-teacher ratio was 22:1. The school had two locations approximately one mile apart. Together, the two sites housed over 400 predominately low-income Hispanic and Black students in grades TK–8. Students at both sites were required to wear school uniforms.

The largest site, Upper Campus, housed grades three through eight and was located in a building on the campus of a public elementary school. This site had its own entrance, main office, computer lab, and teacher’s lounge, but no cafeteria or auditorium space. An outdoor eating area was created to accommodate classes during breakfast and lunch. The facilities were outdated, resembling the neighboring public school with which they shared a playground space.

The second site, referred to as Lower Campus, housed kindergarten through second grade. This campus was located in a large parking lot with one stand-alone building that accommodated two kindergarten classes, computer lab, and main office. Two additional portable buildings held two first- and two second-grade classrooms. Outside there was a small covered lunch area, tented space, tetherball poles, and basketball hoop. Other than that, there was no dedicated playground or play space.

Excel

Opened in 2011, Excel was a tuition-free charter school located across town from Bright Hope. Excel served over 450 low-income students in grades K–5 across three sites, but hoped to eventually expand to serve K–6. Approximately 98% of the students were Hispanic, and over half were designated English language learners. Excel’s mission was “to ensure the academic

success of children by providing a rigorous and effective education program built on the pillars of excellence, equity and engagement.” According to the CEO, the teachers worked closely with one another and the students learned by doing. The school’s website reported that Excel had 31 full-time teachers and eight assistant teachers across the three locations.

Because the two teacher participants worked at the same site, my research took place at only one of Excel’s three locations. The site I visited shared a space with a local public elementary school. The school consisted of a two-story, stand-alone building and a few portable classrooms that surrounded a central, outdoor eating and concrete play space. Excel teachers also had limited access to the public school’s auditorium as needed. Students were required to wear uniforms and many participated in after-school program activities. Teachers were required to work an extended day, meeting to collaborate or tutor students after school.

Data Collection

To collect the evidence needed to answer the three primary research questions, data were gathered in multiple forms: interviews, observations, and documents. The triangulation of these three forms of data was one way to improve the confidence in reporting the findings (Hatch, 2002). Beginning with the interview phase, implementing the data collection incrementally allowed participants to become familiar and comfortable with the research process and with my presence (Hatch, 2002).

Interviews

The central strength of interviewing is that it provides a means for finding out what is on someone’s mind (Hatch, 2002). Furthermore, in-depth interviews explore informants’ experiences and perspectives by uncovering the meaning of structures that participants use to

organize their experiences and make sense of their world (Hatch, 2002). For these reasons, semistructured interviews were conducted with participants and their supervisors to gain an understanding of how the teachers defined and implemented socially just teaching practices.

Participant interviews. Teacher participants were interviewed twice throughout the study. The pre-interview occurred at the onset of the study and the postinterview took place immediately following the classroom observation. All interviews were audio recorded and digitally transcribed by an online service, *Adept Word Management*.

Pre-interview. Using a semistructured interview protocol consisting of scripted and open-ended questions, initial participant interviews were conducted for approximately 60 minutes at the teacher's school site. These on-site interviews allowed me to establish a trusting relationship with each teacher as well as to assess the school context prior to the observation phase. The goal of the pre-interview was to find out what the teachers' considered to be socially just teaching practices (Research Question [RQ] 1). The emergent design of the study meant that the teacher's interview responses were used to inform the observation protocol used for data collection during the classroom observation. In other words, in addition to the characteristics of socially just teaching outlined in the theoretical framework, I added characteristics identified by the teacher in his or her initial definition of socially just teaching to the observation protocol.

Post-interview. A 60-minute postinterview took place with the teacher immediately following the daylong classroom observation. A second semistructured protocol was used to debrief the observation, reflect on the lessons taught, and allow for the teacher's input on the characteristics of socially just teaching that were used to guide the study.

Supervisor interviews. Following the participant interviews, a 30-minute, semistructured interview was conducted with a school supervisor who had knowledge about the teacher's practice. Supervisors were asked to share their perceptions of the teachers' practice including their strengths and area of need as well as offer input on the conceptual framework. As previously stated, the supervisor was identified in collaboration with the participating teacher. At Excel, both teachers suggested that I speak with Jack, the founder and CEO of the school. During this interview, I asked questions about the practices of his two teachers, Juan and Angelica. At Bright Hope, all four teachers asked that I speak with the principal, Anne. I conducted two interviews with Anne. During the first interview, we discussed the practices of Heather and Gabriel. Because I did not observe two of her teachers until June, the second interview took place via telephone. At that time, I asked questions about Nancy's and Beatriz's teaching practices.

According to Hatch (2002), "When interviews are used in conjunction with observation, they provide ways to explore more deeply participants' perspectives on actions observed by researchers" (p. 91). For this reason, classroom observations to explore the teacher participants' socially just teaching in practice followed the initial interview.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations served as the second significant form of data collection in the study. As Hatch (2002) has explained, "The goal of observation is to understand the culture, setting, or social phenomenon being studied from the perspectives of the participants" (p. 72). There are several significant advantages to conducting observations in the field: (a) the researcher has a first-hand experience with the participants, (b) the researcher can record

information as it occurs, (c) unusual aspects can be noticed, and (d) it is a useful way to explore topics that may be uncomfortable for participants to discuss (Creswell, 2009).

Throughout the observations, I largely operated as a complete observer, a researcher who observes without participating (Creswell, 2009). However, at the request of the teacher, I did assist some students with academic activities as needed. Each teacher participant was observed for one full school day. The full day observation, from approximately 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., allowed me to gather information about how socially just teaching practices were embedded in the classroom routines and procedures, utilized across content areas, and evident in classroom management techniques. Additionally, the full-day observation strategy was an attempt to reduce the possibility that a teacher was merely “putting on a show” for the one or two hours that an observer was in the classroom.

To gather data, an observation protocol was used. Originally, I had planned to use the protocol for 20 minutes during each content area lesson. However, during my first observation I soon realized that a 20-minute snapshot would miss many significant teaching moments. As a result, the observation protocol was used to record the teachers’ actions for the duration of each content lesson. Beyond that, anecdotal field notes were handwritten throughout the day. In an effort to minimize my intrusion on the classroom environment and reduce the potential for student distraction, all field notes were handwritten. Upon the completion of each observation, I digitally transcribed all observation data.

UTPP Document Analysis

In order to provide greater depth to the data, several UTPP documents were analyzed and summarized, including the application for admission, UTPP website, program handbook, course

syllabi, and year 1 alumni survey. “Unobtrusive data are useful to triangulation processes because their nonreactive nature makes them one step removed from the participants’ intervening interpretations, they provide an alternative perspective on the phenomenon being studied” (Hatch, 2002, p. 19). Collecting UTPP documents provided a behind-the-scenes look at the historical processes and context of the teacher preparation program from which the participants were chosen (Hatch, 2002). Document analysis has several advantages as a data collection technique: (a) it enables a researcher to obtain the language and words of the participants, (b) it is an unobtrusive source of information, (c) it represents data that are thoughtful in that participants have given attention to compiling them, and (d) it provides written evidence (Creswell, 2009).

Disadvantages of document analysis as a form of data collection are that the documents may include self-reported information, or they may not be authentic or accurate (Creswell, 2009). However, the use of multiple forms of data limited the weight placed on one single form of data. To further validate the authenticity of the data collected, an interview was conducted with the director of UTPP in October 2014. A timeline summarizing the data collection methods employed in this study is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of Data Collection

Data Source	Participants	Timeframe	Instrument
Pre-Interview	Six Teachers	April–May 2014	Initial interview protocol
Observation	Six Teachers	May–June 2014	Classroom observation protocol
Post-Interview	Six Teachers	May–June 2014	Second interview protocol
Supervisor Interview	Two Principals	May–August 2014	Supervisor interview protocol
UTPP Interview	UTPP Staff Member	October 2014	UTPP staff member interview protocol
Document Review	N/A	July–August 2014	Document summaries

Protocol and Instrumentation

To provide a focus and common framework, protocols were used during the interviews and classroom observations. According to Gay and colleagues (2012), “A protocol is a tool that provides structure for recording information from observation sessions” (p. 385). The protocols reflected the 10 characteristics of socially just teaching articulated in the conceptual framework as well as provided a space for the participants’ perspectives and interpretations of socially just teaching.

Interview Protocol

Four semistructured interview protocol were used throughout the course of the study. The pre-interview protocol was used during the first 60-minute interview with the teacher participants in April–May 2014 (See Appendix C). The postinterview protocol was used following the classroom observation in May–June 2014 (See Appendix D). The third protocol was used for the supervisor interview to place near the end of the data collection phase in May–August 2014 (See

Appendix E). The final protocol was used for the UTPP director interview at the completion of the classroom observations in October 2014 (See Appendix F). Each of the instruments combined structured and open-ended questions that allowed for the participants' perceptions and interpretations.

The interview protocols were field tested in October and November 2013. As a result of the test, probe questions for negative responses were added, ambiguous language was clarified, and specific examples of theory and socially just teaching practices were added. It was also decided that the interviewee would be provided with a copy of the interview questions to ease in their visual processing of the questions.

Observation Protocol

To gather information about the implementation of socially just teaching practices, a classroom observation protocol was used (See Appendix G). The observation protocol provided a space for the researcher to record data about the teacher's implementation of socially just teaching practices identified in the conceptual framework. As mentioned, I originally planned to use this section of the protocol for 20 minutes during each content area lesson. However, upon implementation of the protocol, I decided that 20 minutes was not adequate time to capture the depth of the teachers' words and actions. Therefore, the observation protocol was used for the entire content area lesson.

Prior to the use of the protocol, I gathered contextual information about the school population, demographics, and performance data using publicly available records (e.g., district or school website). Additionally, I asked the classroom teacher to provide publicly available information about his or her classroom demographics. No personally identifying student

information was collected in this study.

The protocol was field tested with a similar population in November 2013. As a result, additional space was provided to record field notes; letters, instead of numbers, were assigned to identify the tenets of socially just teaching.

Analysis

Data Preparation

Data preparation took place throughout the course of the study as interviews, observations, and document analyses were completed. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional third party—with the consent of the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher personally transcribed all observations and document summaries into digital data. Following transcription, I uploaded the triangulated data into the research software entitled *Max QDA*, a digital database used to support the coding process.

Treatment of the Data

Data were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of the research subjects, schools, district, and teacher preparation program. I was the only one with access to the audio recordings, observation notes, and transcribed data. These files were saved on a locked computer, requiring a password known only to the researcher. Following the publication of the findings, audio data were immediately destroyed. Transcribed interview and observation data will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

Manipulation and Analysis

The three primary research questions and conceptual framework guided the coding process. Prior to the start of coding, the conceptual framework was revised to include the

feedback and emergent themes that arose during the teacher and principal interviews. The revised framework, including a detailed description of its changes, is presented in Chapter 4.

Analysis. Employing the revised framework, I looked for language or terms in the interview and observation data that described the participants' understanding of socially just teaching practices. Using *Max QDA*, a typological analysis of the digital data was performed, dividing the data into elements based on the 12 characteristics of socially just teaching identified in the revised conceptual framework (Hatch, 2002).

In addition to the typological analysis, the digital data were analyzed using pattern analysis with data coded to identify emergent categories and themes including similarities differences, frequency, sequence, correspondence, and causation (Hatch, 2002). A text search was used to identify frequently used words or terms to add to the coding list. As a final method of analysis, I did an in-depth reading of the data and identified emergent concepts, using color-coded highlighters and notes in the margins. From the use of these coding techniques, common themes emerged and were compared with existing literature to shed light on the teachers' understanding and implementation of socially just teaching practices in the classroom.

Limitations of the Study

Research Positionality and Bias

As a graduate of the university teacher education program involved in this study, I possessed a researcher bias. In an attempt to practice reflexivity, I will begin by intentionally revealing my underlying assumptions that may cause me to formulate a set of definitions, questions, or presentation of findings (Gay et al., 2012). Most significantly, it was my interpretation of socially just teaching practices that guided this study. Although I used the work

of prominent scholars in the field (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll et al., 2005 Valenzuela, 1999; Wade, 2007), I constructed the characteristics of socially just teaching initially used to guide this study. As a social justice educator, I selected a narrow, practice-oriented definition to guide my research. To combat this potential limitation, participants were given the opportunity to explain their understanding of socially just teaching practices at the onset of the study and add their opinions on the conceptual framework.

Validity

Multiple strategies were employed to ensure the validity of the qualitative research conducted (Gay et al., 2012). Two significant disadvantages of interviews are that the information is filtered through the views of the interviewees, and the researcher's presence may bias responses (Creswell, 2009). To combat these limitations, interviews are often planned as parts of studies that include observations. Triangulation, "the process of using multiple methods, data collection strategies, and data sources to obtain a more complete picture of what is being studied and to cross-check information" (Gay et al., 2012, p. 393), took place throughout the study.

Participant interviews, UTPP documents, and observation data were reviewed to strengthen the cohesiveness of the findings. Furthermore, prolonged observation provided thick descriptions, which provided opportunities to identify pervasive qualities as well as atypical characteristics. To combat the potential for misinterpretation of the data, member checks (See Appendix H) were conducted to determine the accuracy of the findings and allow the participants to share their feelings before the research was presented in its final form (Creswell, 2009). Every effort was made to be transparent about researcher bias as a form of ascertaining validity.

Delimitations

The goal of this study aligned with the goal of qualitative research, “to understand what is happening and why” (Gay et al., 2012, p. 395). The small sample size, selection of only one teacher preparation program, and specificity of the urban charter school context limited the generalizability of the findings. In other words, the findings may only benefit the teachers and teacher preparation program involved in the study. However, there may be some applicability or transferability to a similar setting, particularly those with a vested interest in preparing social justice educators.

Timeline

An initial review of the relevant literature, formation of my research questions, and consultations with my chair commenced in the Summer 2013. During the Fall 2013, I conducted a more thorough review of the literature and established my research methods. Additionally, in November 2013, I submitted a proposal to the district committee for External Research Review (CERR). In January 2014, I received final approval from the district to conduct research at their school sites. I defended my proposal in March 2014.

Upon successful completion of the preliminary defense benchmark, I obtained school site permission and Loyola Marymount University IRB approval in April 2014 (See Appendix I). Following IRB approval, I recruited teacher participants and obtained informed consent from all participants. Interviews, full-day classroom observations, and document analysis took place from April through October 2014. Preparation, coding, and analysis of the data took place from July through December 2014. Implications and recommendations were written in January and February 2015 and the final defense took place at the end of March 2015.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

Through extensive qualitative data collection, this study investigated the ways in which six alumni of one University Teacher Preparation Program (UTPP) defined and implemented socially just teaching practices in urban elementary classrooms. Specifically, this study examined three primary research questions:

1. What do alumni of a social justice-themed teacher preparation program consider to be socially just teaching practices?
2. How do alumni teachers implement socially just teaching practices in urban, elementary classrooms?
3. What influences of the program do alumni identify as contributing to their implementation of these classroom practices?

To adequately answer these questions, data were collected through teacher participant interviews, full-day classroom observations, principal interviews, UTPP document review, and a UTPP director interview. In this chapter, findings from the data collection are reported and organized according to the three primary research questions, beginning with a description of the results from the comprehensive document review of UTPP's aims and objectives.

UTPP and Social Justice

In an effort to learn more about the goals and mission of the teacher preparation program being examined, several documents were reviewed and summarized including the admissions criteria, program website, handbook, first-year alumni survey, and a handful of available course

syllabi from the program. The program director, Maribel, was also interviewed to further triangulate the data. This section outlines the findings of these data, looking specifically at the program philosophy, structure, faculty, and coursework.

Program Philosophy

In all documents, it was evident that UTPP positioned itself as a program committed to promoting social justice in education. According to its handbook, UTPP “prepares teachers to have the commitment, capacity, and resilience to promote social justice, caring, and instructional equity in low-income, urban schools” (p. 6). The UTPP website stated that social justice guides the program’s theory, practice, and inquiry approach and “recognizes the essential value of every student and encourages reflection and action that challenges discriminatory practices and social problems including racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia” (program website). These claims were further supported by UTPP’s director, Maribel, who reinforced, “From orientation, I’ve talked about being reflective, culturally relevant, critiquing norms of the world and schooling and how that relates to learning.”

Maribel did not define UTPP as a traditional teacher preparation program. Rather, she thought about it as:

A program that does a really good job of balancing coursework and fieldwork and paying real close attention to connecting what candidates see in the field with the theoretical framework that we’re teaching them. I think one of the reasons why we’re atraditional is our students—they’re not thinking about “I need a bag of tricks in order to become a good teacher.” They have to really be intentional about the strategies that they choose based on what they know about their student, based on what they know about the

curriculum, and also, based on what they're comfortable with.

Although Maribel felt a responsibility to expose candidates to a wide variety of theoretical frameworks, she articulated the framework that was embodied most in UTPP is a sociocultural approach to learning as follows:

We firmly believe, and I think we don't only talk about it, but our own teaching as a faculty should reflect the fact that real deep learning happens in social spaces and in interaction with others, and that learning is very culturally mediated. Learning happens when you're connecting your past experience and who you are to this new content that is coming in and being able to grapple with that.

This sociocultural approach served as the foundation for the program's structure.

Components of the Program

The topic of social justice was evident in all strands of the program including selection, coursework, field experiences, and the role of faculty.

Candidate selection. As evidenced by the application checklist posted on the program's website, UTPP had a rigorous selection process, which required: (a) a minimum 3.0 undergraduate GPA, (b) an updated resume, (c) a written statement of purpose, (d) three letters of recommendation, (e) group interview, and (e) educational skills testing scores. In the written statement of purpose, prospective candidates were expected to articulate their particular interest in the program as well as detail their experiences working with children and youth in urban settings. These data show that from the moment candidates applied to the program, UTPP was assessing and evaluating their dispositions toward social justice. Furthermore, as an alumni of the program, I remember being encouraged during the group interview to voice my beliefs and

ideologies about the purposes of education and what it meant to be a social justice educator. In other words, candidates applying to UTPP were made very aware of the program's objectives, and the selection process was aimed at finding individuals whose values aligned with the goals and mission of the program. Once selected for admission, preservice teachers' dispositions toward social justice were further cultivated in the courses of study.

Coursework. According to the director, candidates in the program were encouraged to talk about the influences of race, class, and gender on whatever it was they were studying. No matter what the subject or course, candidates grappled with social issues that were affecting schools, whether that was talking about how and what to teach in a math class or how kids learn a language. As Maribel explained:

We begin, not with the pedagogues of teaching, but rather on kind of these macro issues of schooling. What does it mean to be schooled in contemporary society and how that is reflected of a history? A history of segregation sometimes, a history of patriarchy sometimes, a history of different conceptions of what the purpose of democracy is—because that's the foundation—what you experience in methods, and the foundation courses are different.

Maribel stated that one way in which UTPP distinguished itself from traditional teacher-training programs was through its set of 400-level signature courses entitled “Teaching and Learning in Urban Schools” that, according to her, were created based on what they knew about the special circumstances kids faced in the local community. Preservice teachers took the three signature courses during their novice year in the program, while they were completing their student teaching placements.

In the fall quarter, the 400 course focused on community, and candidates completed an ethnographic study of the community they were going to be student teaching in. The community project had taken many iterations over the previous 15 years, but the goal was always the same.

According to Maribel:

You have to know the community that you serve, the families, their life experiences, the resources, the assets, as well as the challenges in order for you to bring that into your classroom and make your curriculum relevant to children.

The goal of the first course in the signature series was for preservice teachers to understand better who they were in the community in which they were student teaching, who they would become as a teacher, and how the life experiences of the community affected teaching and learning (course syllabus). Then, in the winter quarter, the focus of the signature series shifted to identity.

The syllabus indicated that the identity course created a space for candidates to tackle head on what it meant to be a cultural being and how to blend all aspects of the candidate's culture and your positionality—how they positioned themselves in the classroom. Maribel articulated that UTPP wanted preservice teachers to:

Understand that life experiences affect the kind of teacher I am—how I see my kids, how I present to my kids, what curriculum I choose, what strategies I choose to use. The same is true of my students. Their life experiences come with them into the classroom, and it affects the way they engage in classrooms, the way they engage with the teacher or with their peers, how they understand curriculum, the language that they use in classrooms.

All of that emerges from who you are culturally in terms of your race, your ethnicity,

your gender, your sexual orientation, and your educational status. All of those things are who you are, and they influence who you become as a teacher.

Beyond reflecting on their identity and positionality, program materials suggested that UTPP wanted preservice teachers to learn techniques for involving families.

The final course in the 400 series, “Teaching and Learning in Urban Schools: Parent and Family Engagement,” was also the newest and took place during the spring semester of the novice year. The class emerged after a number of faculty reported teacher candidates were asking for ways to actively engage parents. Maribel emphasized that the class was not about parent involvement, back to school night, or open house. Rather, it was about:

Bringing parents into the school in really authentic ways that help them to support the academic success of their children. It’s about bringing in community partners like families in schools or any of the number of nonprofits or community organizations that work in school, how you build alliances with them, how they can become allies so that their work influences what goes on in your classroom, and your families have resources that had it not been for you connecting them, they would not have had before.

According to Maribel, the course helped candidates to understand that parents are true partners, and teachers have to think about how to engage them from the very beginning and their participation becomes essential. Furthermore, Maribel stated that UTPP faculty worked closely with one another to ensure continuity throughout the program.

Faculty. At UTPP, program faculty fell into two distinct categories, research and clinical. Both had experience teaching, but some had chosen research as a career path, whereas the methods instructors were practitioners. The life’s work of the clinical faculty was around

teaching, whereas the life's work of research faculty was about what it meant to be a good teacher. According to Maribel, the clinical and research faculty talked to one another so the methods instructors knew what the foundations instructors were not only doing, but also what the goals and purposes of those courses were and vice versa. Maribel said, "When you bring those two groups of people together around a curriculum, and you get the connections between theory and practice that new teachers need to explicitly see and understand in order for them to do good work." UTPP hoped that the close collaboration among faculty enriched the coursework experiences for preservice candidates.

Maribel also shared that UTPP faculty members were careful to model the kind of reflective practice that they tried to instantiate within their students. Every year, twice a year, faculty had a retreat and talked about what was going on in the lives of the teachers and the lives of the K-12 kids in the community that they needed to really be cognizant of. It was during these reflective retreats that program structure or course work changes may have emerged.

Field experience and support. From the start of the program, UTPP candidates were out in schools observing and participating, and then, gradually assumed more and more responsibility until, by the end of their student teaching, which was three quarters, they were assuming full responsibility for a classroom. The classrooms and guiding teachers were selected to carefully mirror the kinds of classrooms in which the candidates would eventually work. As Maribel recalled, "Candidates have access to a guiding teacher who has successfully met those challenges, and they have continued access to a field supervisor who is with them for two years during their student teaching and their first year of teaching." As participants indicated in their interviews, the mentor teachers were one of the most essential components of UTPP.

Maribel shared that UTPP also provided layers of personal support, which she believed differentiated the program from other Teacher Ed Programs, including the cohort design, weekly seminar meetings, and faculty mentoring.

To begin, candidates were organized into small cohorts of 15–25, according to their desired credential (i.e., elementary or secondary). The faculty advisor was kind of the hub of the program and of the team. During a weekly seminar, the advisor not only debriefed what happened during the student teaching experience, but also brought it back to all of the coursework. According to Maribel, they asked questions such as “What does it mean in terms of the kind of teacher you’ll become as social justice educator? What does that mean in terms of the connection between theory and practice?” Maribel asserted that faculty advisors were responsible for engaging candidates in the practice of deep reflection. Her hope was that when candidates left, they not only had the competencies to be a good teacher, but also had the confidence. UTPP materials indicated that candidates must really embrace these habits of mind—what it meant to be a teacher, more than just delivering a curriculum. In an effort to track the success of their alumni, UTPP administered an in-house alumni survey.

First-year teacher alumni survey. To learn more about the ways in which alumni embraced the ideals of the program, an alumni survey was administered during their first year out of the program (UTPP Program Handbook, 2014). The instrument asked alumni to rate their level of readiness as a beginning teacher using the following Likert scale: (4) *very well prepared*, (3) *well prepared*, (2) *adequately prepared*, (1) and *poorly prepared*. Survey items were based on six state Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) domains. Categories included:

- Making subject matter comprehensible to students
- Assessing student learning
- Engaging and supporting students in learning
- Planning instruction and designing learning experiences for students
- Creating and maintaining effective environments for student learning
- Developing a professional educator

It was beyond the scope of this study to analyze these results, but the existence of the instrument indicated that UTPP was making efforts to monitor their alumni once they left the program.

Program Challenges

Maribel shared that as the context of public education had changed, UTPP faced a number of challenges. With budget cuts, many of the students found themselves with no placement options in regular public schools, so UTPP had to rethink some of the locations in which they were letting candidates observe and teach. Furthermore, UTPP had to bring in some folks who could talk to the candidates about the challenges of working at a charter or startup school and how they might address these potential obstacles. In addition to assignment changes, UTPP had to adapt to changes in curriculum. Specifically, they made some modifications to the literacy methods course as districts begin the shift away from the scripted curriculum. Although UTPP was willing to make alterations, Maribel stated that the program remained dedicated to its mission and did not stray too far from its original goal of preparing teachers candidates with the commitment, capacity, and resilience to promote social justice. Uncovering the varied ways in which alumni were living out the mission of UTPP was the focus the first two research questions in this study, which will be further explored in the next section.

Conceptual Framework Revised

In the absence of a practice-based, user-friendly framework for analyzing socially just teaching in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Dover, 2009; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009), a conceptual framework rooted in the work of leading scholars in the literature was created at the onset of the study. As explained in Chapter 2, 10 characteristics of socially just teaching—five of which came from the work of Rahima Wade (2007)—were organized into three categories: (a) ecology, (b) curriculum, and (c) teaching and learning. Ecology contained three characteristics related to the life of the classroom including its feeling, appearance, and organization. The curriculum category contained four terms related to delivering content and instructional design. Lastly, the teaching and learning tenets framed three ways for thinking about knowledge and practice. Collectively, these 10 characteristics were used to guide the interviews and observations in this study.

Because it was important to address the lack of teacher voice in the literature (Milan, 2010), participants were asked for their feedback on the design of the conceptual framework. Throughout the study, the teachers ($n = 6$), principals ($n = 2$), and a UTPP staff member ($n = 1$) were asked to review and comment on the original 10 characteristics of socially just teaching compiled from the literature. Specifically, participants were asked, “Which three do you think are the most important and why? Would you eliminate any from the list? Would you add any to the list?” Because the conceptual framework was used to guide the coding of the interview and observation data, it was essential to revise the framework prior to the start of the analysis process. Therefore, participant feedback was compiled and evaluated, which resulted in a few significant revisions.

Interestingly, all participants commented on the necessity of the tool, and several stated that they had not seen socially just teaching summarized in such a comprehensive form. A few even asked for a copy of the framework for future reference. In addition, one teacher felt that the information would prove invaluable in the formation of a new teacher evaluation design at her site. Despite this positive feedback, the participants offered a few significant recommendations for improvement as well.

Although no participants recommended removing any of the tenets, several suggestions were made for additions or adaptations. After a careful analysis of the data, two distinct characteristics emerged as necessary additions to the framework. The first was “safe.” Gabriel articulated that “[It’s] hard to set a goal and achieve something when you don’t have that basic need—that first basic need—and safety is just the all-encompassing term.” Beyond feeling physically safe, three teachers referenced the importance of attending the emotional safety of students. As Nancy said, “I want a place where they feel safe and welcome.” Therefore, “safe” was added to reflect the comfortable feeling that teachers must create for all students.

In addition to safety, “equitable” was also to the framework. Three of the teachers spoke about the importance of fairness in the classroom. In addition, Jack felt that “every child has the same value and importance, and we want to make every effort, regardless of what those needs are, to figure them out.” As a result of these common data, “equitable” was added to reflect the importance of honoring the value of each and every student.

Finally, “student-centered” was expanded to include the importance of families and communities. As Angelica stated, “I really want them to value their background, where they come from, their families, the languages spoken and the neighborhood they grew up in.” In

addition to Angelica, the principals referenced the importance of involving families and understanding how the school fit into the larger context of the community. As a result, it was decided that the student-centered category should be broadened to reflect these components.

The infusion of teachers’ and supervisors’ opinions into the framework also led to a re-organization of the three categories: ecology, curriculum, and teaching and learning. Under the ecology heading, “safe” and “equitable” were added, and “experiential” was moved to the curriculum heading. “Rigorous” was moved from curriculum to teaching and learning. Finally, to reflect its applicability to teachers in the classroom, the framework was renamed, *A Conceptual Framework for Social Justice Practitioners*. The revised framework, including these changes, can be seen in Figure 2.

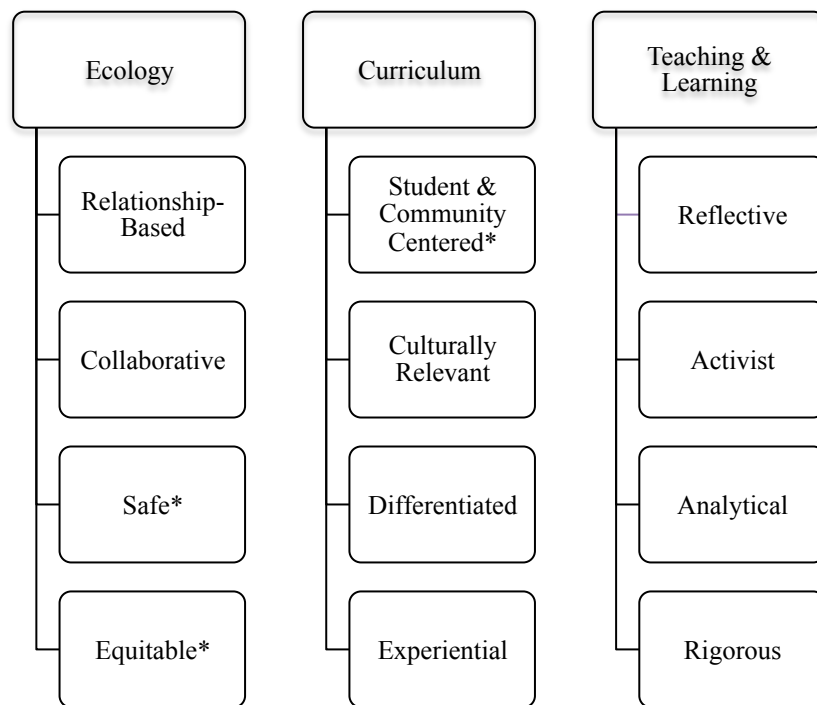


Figure 2. A conceptual framework for social justice practitioners

Note. Although arranged vertically, each characteristic carries equal weight. * Characteristic added at the suggestion of research participants.

The 12 characteristics identified in the revised framework were used to understand how teachers defined and implemented socially just teaching.

Defining and Implementing Social Justice

Before socially just teaching practices were observed, it was important to understand how alumni teachers defined and interpreted the term social justice. Therefore, during the pre-observation interview, each teacher was asked, “How would you define socially just teaching?” Building on these self-reported definitions of social justice, the second question sought to learn more about the teachers’ classroom practices. Specifically, the question asked, “How do alumni implement socially just teaching practices in their urban, elementary classrooms?” Through full-day classroom observations of the six participating alumni, I was able to move beyond the teachers’ interpretations of social justice and document how the six teachers brought social justice into their practice.

The next section will provide the results of these two questions by reporting on each teacher’s philosophy and pedagogy, including: (a) their definition of socially just teaching, (b) observed teaching style and strengths, (c) principal perceptions, and (d) areas for growth. The discussion will not only incorporate the participants’ thoughts about social justice, but also analyze the teachers’ practice through the lens of the conceptual framework. To provide insight on the progression of teaching experience, the following descriptions of the teachers will be arranged chronologically according to years of experience, beginning with the first-year teachers.

Nancy

Nancy, who graduated from UTPP in 2013, was in her first year as a first-grade teacher at Bright Hope Charter.

Definition of social justice. When asked to articulate her own definition of socially just teaching, Nancy equated social justice with fairness in her classroom:

I know that maybe a lot of these kids in particular have not had a lot of fairness in their lives so I want to make sure that I try to be fair with them and make sure my classroom is run in a fair way.

Teaching style and strengths. In my classroom observation, Nancy exhibited fairness in both her management and academic expectations for students. During a morning meeting, when a young boy was not sitting properly and causing a disturbance to others around him, Nancy calmly explained that he would be asked to take a “break” if he did not correct his actions, because it would not be fair to the other students who were doing the responsible thing. Through consistent use of management techniques for all students, such as positive praise, verbal reminders, nonverbal cues, and occasional time-outs, it was clear that running an equitable classroom was important to Nancy.

In only her first year of teaching, Nancy’s observation showed she excelled in establishing relationships with her students. A morning message, signed “love, Ms. Nancy,” welcomed the students as they entered the classroom. To greet one another, they did a song and dance circle. When one student arrived late, Nancy immediately greeted him by saying, “I am glad you made it.” Throughout the observation, she referred to her students as “friends, love, or sweetie pie,” handing out high fives, or offering positive praise. During recess, Nancy asked a student who became visibly upset during a vocabulary game to stay behind so she could speak with him. Privately, she told the young man that he should be proud of himself and instead of pouting next time, he should raise his hand and explain to her that someone may have been

playing unfairly. During writing later in the day, one young boy with special needs required some extra attention so Nancy bent down next to him, placed her arm around his shoulder and encouraged him through the use of scaffolding questions and prompts. Through her words and actions, it was clear that Nancy cared about and even enjoyed her students.

In addition to fostering caring relationships, Nancy engaged her students through numerous experiential learning activities. For example, when listening to a morning song about spring, students were asked to put on their thinking faces and place their thumb on their knee when they heard the phonics sounds they had been working on in class. Understanding that first graders need to get the wiggles out, Nancy used transitions as a time for playing a quick game or doing some basic stretches. When practicing their sound spelling cards for the day, several students clapped or tapped along to the rhythm of the sounds. And to learn about the parts of a flower during science, students cut and pasted the names of the parts to a three dimensional model they had created on the previous day. Throughout the entire day, Nancy's students were not only encouraged, but also expected to be actively involved in the learning tasks.

Finally, Nancy demonstrated high levels of rigor in her classroom and consistently held all students accountable for their learning and behavior. For example, during a writing lesson, she frontloaded the objective, reviewed a visual graphic organizer of craft moves with the students, and required them to make connections, discuss their predictions with a partner, and support their responses with reasons. In addition to academic rigor, Nancy set clear expectations about her standards for student behavior as well. She could often be heard proactively reminding the students of the procedures, explaining the reasons behind the rules, or asking the children to practice again if they failed to meet her standards. For instance, when returning to the room after

recess, Nancy asked the students, “Why is important to come in and sit at the carpet right away? Is it because Ms. Nancy is a pain?” To which the students giggled and then responded, “No, it’s because we have to learn.” Clearly, Nancy’s students were familiar with their roles and responsibilities in the classroom.

Principal perceptions. Anne, the school principal, further supported Nancy’s ability to effectively run an equitable classroom. Anne remarked, “[Nancy] has a kind of alertness where she’s just not going to let anything slip. She’s just very—she’s on it in a way that’s amazing.” Through Anne’s statement and my observation, Nancy’s definition of social justice aligned with her practice. Anne also saw tremendous rigor in her teaching style:

Nancy was amazingly strong with management but more with a specific sense of intensity that what we’re doing is really important. We all need to be focused. We’re doing serious work here. She was able to get them so on the edge of their seat for like the whole day in a way that I haven’t seen many people be able to do, certainly not in their first year. So that was just truly exceptional.

When presented with a very difficult child who lacked appropriate social skills, Anne said Nancy did not relent or expect anything less of him. As a result, the child was able to accomplish the same work as his or her peers. Beyond rigor, Anne praised Nancy’s ability to work collaboratively with fellow teachers as well as create situations for her students to work effectively with one another. Finally, Anne was impressed by Nancy’s ability to differentiate instruction, citing an example of pushing her exceptional writers to do above grade-level work. As with all beginning teachers, Anne believed Nancy was continually working on developing her implementation of socially just teaching practices.

Areas for growth. Along with most teachers in the study, I saw no explicit examples of activism in Nancy's classroom. Due to the limited scope of the observation, it is unfair to assume that Nancy made no efforts toward promoting activism. In fact, during her postinterview, Nancy reflected on this tenet and shared her personal goal of creating more experiential learning opportunities and infusing issues related to social justice into her lesson plans next year. Anne hoped that Nancy would also continue to reflect on how to promote independence among her students and facilitate a more student-centered environment:

She's just really conscious of the fact that she's always kind of pushing them, and I think she's trying to figure out, well, when should I just step back and kind of let them struggle and then gently guide them through the next step.

In summary, Nancy excelled at establishing caring relationships and holding her students accountable for their work and actions, but strived to embed more activism and hands-on learning experiences into her daily practice.

Beatriz

Like Nancy, Beatriz was also in her first year as a first-grade teacher at Bright Hope Charter.

Definition of socially just teaching. While articulating her definition of socially just teaching, Beatriz touched on the idea of fairness as well by defining social justice in terms of equity and ownership:

I know that students from certain communities are not afforded the same resources, so I wanted to be the person who could give as much as I can so that they can be on the same

playing field even though there are still a lot of discrepancies. I think it's important for kids to feel that the education is theirs--to have ownership.

Beatriz created a classroom environment that mirrored her definition.

Teaching style and strengths. In her first year in a first-grade classroom, Beatriz constructed a safe classroom space for her students and demonstrated a commitment to collaboration and differentiation. Of all the teachers I observed, Beatriz had the most challenging group of students due to their special needs, volatile tempers, and combative attitudes. Nevertheless, Beatriz did not waiver in her desire to build relationships with her students, and made the learning accessible to the wide variety of personalities in the classroom. The day started with a circle where the class sang, celebrated the day, and greeted one another with a high five. During that time, all children felt welcomed to the room, and Beatriz read the agenda on the board so the students knew exactly what to expect throughout the day. In addition, Beatriz reviewed the rules for the rug and reminded the students that their bodies and voices should be quiet. These well-defined expectations extended into Beatriz's academic lessons as well.

During a science lesson about photosynthesis, Beatriz first accessed the students' prior knowledge by asking, "Where do you get your food from?" Students were given time to talk to a partner and share their responses, which immediately engaged them in the lesson. Beatriz used a self-drawn visual aide to teach the students about the three things plants need to make their own food: sunlight, air, and water. This learning was reinforced with a short film clip and following the film, Beatriz asked the students to demonstrate their learning by using their bodies to show their leaves (arms) and reach for the air they need to grow (stretch). Finally, Beatriz assessed the students' understanding of the lesson objective by asking them to share and shout out the

important elements that plants need to grow. This well-executed 40 minute lesson was rigorous, culturally relevant, student centered, and reflective.

During writing, Beatriz provided varied levels of differentiation for students. The lesson began with a quick rereading of a story the class had written together the day before. Beatriz then stated the lesson objective, “Let’s make sure as writers we are storytelling. Today, I am going to show you how to write about what the characters are doing.” Beatriz then modeled how to do this by thinking aloud, asking the students for their advice, revoicing the students’ ideas, and cocreating part of the story. Next, the writers were sent back to their desks with the charge of adding detail to their personal narratives. During independent work time, struggling writers were encouraged to draw first, several students chose to use graphic organizers, and advanced writers were pushed to elaborate. While most students worked alone, Beatriz used this time to pull four children to the rug and show them how to add details about the characters in their story. This well-designed writing lesson showcased Beatriz’s ability to effectively differentiate instruction and meet the needs of varied abilities.

However, as the day progressed, Beatriz encountered more behavioral problems, which unfortunately demanded a lot of her time. On several occasions, students shouted over one another, refused to do work, had trouble keeping their hands to themselves, or had to be asked to leave the room. In the face of these difficult situations, Beatriz did not lose her calm or patience. Instead, Beatriz repeated her expectations and used a lot of call and response chants, chime sounds, and clapping patterns to attract the students’ attention. However, it was clear that classroom management problems created Beatriz’s greatest obstacle to implementing socially just teaching practices on a consistent basis.

Principal perceptions. Interestingly, Anne’s perceptions of Beatriz’s teaching matched almost identically with my observation findings. Anne, Bright Hope’s principal, clearly recognized Beatriz’s social justice commitment to her students, “I think she’s really patient and compassionate with the kids, and she really wants to get to know them individually and try and figure out what they need.” Through her instruction, Beatriz made great efforts to ensure that her students felt valued in the classroom. Anne also felt Beatriz’s strengths lay in building relationships with her students and differentiating instruction. Anne remarked, “I think [Beatriz] is really patient and compassionate with the kids, and she really wants to get to know them individually and try and figure out what they need.” Anne praised Beatriz for her commitment to her students, but also acknowledged a desire for her to hone in on her teaching style.

Areas for growth. If there was one area Anne felt Beatriz needed to grow in it was management:

This year she started off very strong and then just something got away from her. She had one or two kind of tricky kids, and I don’t know what else happened, but we were talking at the end of the year how she just kind of got off her game and lost a little bit of her confidence.

Beatriz was a highly reflective individual who identified the same area of need in her own practice. Anne had every confidence in Beatriz’s ability to think critically about her practice. Anne observed, “[Beatriz] is very, very reflective, not in a way where she was beating herself up but she’s always ready to say, I think I could have done that better and here’s how.” With this keen self-awareness and a renewed management plan, Anne believed Beatriz would achieve even greater levels of success in her second year.

Heather

Heather was in her first official year as a seventh-grade teacher at Bright Hope Charter, but had previously served as an after-school educator for a homeless youth program.

Definition of socially just teaching. Heather had an extensive definition of social justice that encompassed much of what was found in the conceptual framework. To Heather, socially just teaching meant a lot of different things including the connection you have with your students, creating a relevant curriculum, differentiating instruction, and having relationships with parents. Heather's definition was also rooted in the deep admiration she has for her students:

And I think that's what social justice really is, too: respecting them enough to give them the best education possible, the best curriculum I can give them, the time I put in-that effort and energy, and I just give them everything I have.

This reverence for her students was evident in Heather's teaching in a number of ways.

Teaching style and strengths. In her inaugural year as a seventh-grade teacher, Heather displayed a matured ability to hold high standards, create a student-centered environment, and implement project-based learning. Above any other teacher that I observed for this study, Heather exhibited rigorous expectations for both academics and behavior. For instance, during the morning meeting students were asked to discuss whether or not middle or high students should have to meet a grade-level requirement to participate in sports? Based on their positions, students moved into groups and had to "construct clear, sound argument with evidence." Two students were assigned to be judges, and a criteria chart was written on the board. Students would be judged on whether or not they: (a) had a clearly stated main point, (b) had two to three pieces of strong supporting evidence, (c) included vocabulary, and (d) used a clear speaking

voice. After 10 minutes of collaboration, the groups shared their positions and the judges deliberated. Finally, the student judges announced that Group C had won because they gave good examples and used correct vocabulary to construct their argument. This 30-minute lesson was only one of several throughout the day that had a clear objective, activated students' voices, encouraged collaboration, and included a method of assessment. Not only did I witness rigorous lesson plans in action, but I also saw Heather hold her students accountable for their actions throughout the day.

Heather's proactive approach to minimizing behavioral issues was evident in her consistent use of management techniques. Prior to each transition, independent work time, or group discussion, Heather clearly communicated what the students were supposed to be doing, what the activity should look like, and what to do if they finished early. For example, during reader's workshop she said, "Even if you are not finished, go ahead and close your notebook. You can catch up with your partner in a few minutes. I am going to read a poem and I want you to listen to how I read the line breaks." A chart containing notes was posted so students had a visual reminder of what they were supposed to listen for during the lesson. Before releasing the students to their desks to examine poems of their own, Heather instructed the class that they had a choice between reading independent reading books or poems, but everyone must be reading and taking thinking notes. Her final words were, "Any clarifying questions?" and when the students said no, she gave them one minute to move and get started. Again, this was only one example of the language and techniques Heather used to keep her students on the right track.

It is important to note that Heather also trusted her students to make decisions and hold themselves accountable for their behavior. For example, students were allowed to use the

restroom freely, take breaks outside, and eat a snack if needed. This freedom certainly does not conform to traditional classroom norms, but Heather knew her students and had faith in their ability to make the right choices for themselves. While I visited, I did witness students using these liberties, but they did not appear to be abusing the privilege. The relationships Heather established with her students enabled her to take some instructional risks in her first year.

Heather spoke passionately about her love for project-based learning and incorporated several creative ideas into her curriculum. On the day of my visit, the students prepared for their learning museum where they would showcase the work they were most proud of from the year to the other sixth- and seventh-grade students on campus. Collectively, the class had decided to share their dream home architect blueprints, Islamic manuscripts, ecosystem project boards, and cell models. Several of these projects were on display throughout the classroom, an obvious indication of Heather's commitment to creating experiential learning activities.

Principal perceptions. When asked about Heather's teaching style, Anne noted that Heather's approach was aligned closely to her ideals. "Heather's style is completely in sync with mine and with the vision of the school in a way that very few other teachers who have worked at this school are, and it's mostly because she distinguishes herself in terms of her willingness to really do what is—like an understanding by design approach." Clearly, the school environment supported Heather's matured philosophy of socially just teaching. Anne also praised her innovative approach to teaching:

She really does take on the notion of performance assessment—that it be something that is not just a school task but they are imagining a role that does exist in the real world and then developing a paper, poster, or whatever that would meet that.

Anne appreciated the authenticity in Heather's teaching in terms of trying to make things relevant for the students. In her second year, Heather hoped to incorporate more opportunities for her students to explore issues related to social justice.

Areas for growth. Although I did not observe any specific examples of activism in her teaching, Heather reflected repeatedly on her desire to guide her students toward challenging the status quo, analyzing real world problems, and advocating for issues that are important to them. Anne saw this advancement into activism as the next logical step in Heather's teaching pedagogy and was excited about the possibilities that lie ahead. Next, I will describe the practices of a teacher who had transitioned into his second year.

Gabriel

At the time of the study, Gabriel was in his second year of teaching fifth grade at Bright Hope Charter.

Definition of socially just teaching. Gabriel spoke of his evolving definition, and viewed social justice as a set of tiered ideas with the foundation rooted in holding high expectations for students:

I think at first socially just teaching was getting the most out of my kids in a way that they'll be productive to our communities starting with the classroom and then hopefully transferring out beyond into the world. I feel like now that the second year is wrapping up, to me socially just teaching is setting high expectations.

Gabriel communicated these high expectations in his classroom throughout the day.

Teaching style and strengths. Above all else, Gabriel routinely called on his students to analyze and explain their reasoning. On numerous occasions, he would push students to extend

their thinking, describe their answers, or reflect on their methodology. For example, during a read aloud, he stopped to ask, “How much time do you think has passed? What are some clues the authors give us?” At the conclusion of a math lesson, he asked the students, “What’s another method we could use?” And during one girl’s fluency read he asked, “How do you know something important is going to happen? What does the author say?” Anne spoke highly of Gabriel’s ability to question his students as well. “He really tries to think through what he’s trying to teach.” Besides being very intentional about his teaching, Gabriel triumphed in establishing meaningful relationships with his students.

Throughout my observation, I saw Gabriel connect with his students using personal stories or humor. Early in the morning, he asked one of the boys where he got his new haircut and jokingly asked if he would mind if he got the same cool mohawk. Later in the day, Gabriel called one of the student’s “Fibonacci’s long lost relative” after he successfully solved a complicated math pattern. And while one young lady was reading independently, he stopped to speak with her about her grandmother’s history as it related to the story. Though both his words and actions, Gabriel demonstrated an urgency to know more about his students.

Principal perceptions. Interestingly, Anne also spoke about Gabriel’s commitment to his students and evolving style as a social justice educator:

I see him really trying to connect with his kids. I see him having a lot of patience. I see him trying to—he plans. He’s not—he doesn’t wing it. He really tries to think through what he’s trying to teach . . . I think with him he’s still very much evolving. Like I don’t know that he has landed on a style yet actually. I think he’s in transition still.

When speaking about Gabriel, Anne complimented him on his dedication and desire to learn more about his students:

I sense a true commitment to our kids, and I would say what strikes me is that he's really good at—he doesn't get mad or angry or take it personally when there are annoying moments. He's much more likely to let them talk with him, sit down and talk with them, and he wants to figure out what's going on, which I think is a really nice approach rather than jumping to any conclusions about anything.

Though both his words and actions, Gabriel demonstrated interest in knowing more about his students. However, his day was not without its struggles.

Areas for growth. Gabriel expressed frustration over managing conflicts that arose between students. In fact, he cited these conflicts as the most significant obstacle to him truly implementing his desired teaching techniques, such as project-based and experiential learning.

With a solid foundation of respect for his students, both Gabriel and Anne hope he would be able to increase the levels of rigor and activism in his classroom. In his mind, Gabriel viewed activism as the next tier in his development as a teacher. “I feel like that's kind of the end goal. I feel like if I could do everything else right then I feel like we could take our work in here and take it to the next step, make it more meaningful.” As with most new teachers, Anne hoped that Gabriel would gain confidence and settle into his own style with each passing year in the classroom. In only his second year of teaching, Gabriel felt his philosophy of socially just teachings was under a constant state of refinement.

Angelica

Angelica had three years of teaching experience, at various grade levels, and at the time of the study she was a third-grade teacher at Excel Charter.

Definition of socially just teaching. Angelica articulated socially just teaching as a two-pronged approach:

I see socially just teaching as giving my students the skills to question and understand the world around them. I also see it as giving my students a chance to learn the material that other students get—so either giving them equal access to material or giving them the supports they need.

This emphasis on equity and analysis was evident in Angelica's classroom community.

Teaching style and strengths. During my observation of Angelica, I saw a student-centered classroom that valued each child's voice, interests, and abilities. To start the day, Angelica greeted each child at the door with a high five or hug. This caring connection was evident throughout the entire school day.

After entering the classroom, the students knew to immediately leave their backpacks at their seats and join their classmates and Cookie Brownie, the class guinea pig, on the rug. Because she was absent the day before, Angelica asked the students to share their reflections on how the day went and then allowed each child to talk about his or her plans for the weekend. During the community circle, it was evident that the students' thoughts and opinions mattered. This was also apparent during afternoon play practice in the auditorium. Although Angelica offered guidance and suggestions, the students were the decision makers when it came to set design, character interactions, and appropriate noise levels. After lunch, Angelica allowed her

students to vote on whether or not they wanted to take a weekly language arts test home for homework or do it in class. When the students voted to take it home, she accepted their vote and moved on in the agenda.

Angelica did a remarkable job of blending demanding content with experiential learning activities. During the course of the day, it was evident that developing students' academic vocabulary was a clear focus of Angelica's classroom. For their morning journal entry, students were required to incorporate the words of the week, cunning and investigate, into their stories about their weekend plans. Furthermore, Angelica engaged the students in academic vocabulary practice through the clever use of a game called password. Essentially, a random electronic name chooser selected a student to come to the front of the room, and the remaining students had to offer descriptive clues to get the child to guess the word. Angelica's high standards extended into math as she conducted a review of measurement, insisting the students demonstrate their thinking, check their work, and share their strategies. Through interactive lessons such as password to practice vocabulary or performing a play to boost reading skills, Angelica ensured that her students were having fun while mastering the content standards.

Principal perceptions. Angelica's principal, Jack, called her a teacher-leader who exhibited high levels of rigor, connected teaching to the community, and generated student interest in learning:

She also was really interested in having her students be creative and experience things, and that, I think, is becoming more and more part of our program too. Maybe it's what she's always wanted to do, but she's finding ways to introduce that sort of creativity and imagination and really drawing out from the students their ideas—that's happening more

and more. Definitely, she also has high expectations with student outcomes and certainly making as many connections as possible to students' lives and the community.

As her principal, Jack eloquently stated, “I think that students in her class feel a strong connection with her and that she knows them and understands them and is striving to reach them as individuals and not just in a group or whole class.”

Jack further substantiated Angelica’s abilities to implement socially just teaching practices. “Her style is just naturally student-centered. She’s finding ways to introduce creativity and imagination and really drawing out from the students’ ideas.” However, this did not mean that academic rigor was neglected. When speaking about Angelica’s approach to teaching, Jack commented, “She has high expectations with student outcomes and is certainly making as many connections as possible to students' lives and the community.” Angelica incorporated a number of authentic techniques to live out her student-centered approach to social justice.

Areas for growth. In her three years of teaching, Angelica had honed her craft and acknowledged that she was a more refined practitioner than she had been just three short years ago. Over time, she learned to become very intentional about the strategies she employed. As with all teachers, she would like to work on differentiating her instruction, but as Jack stated, “Differentiation is a difficult, difficult thing to do that not even veteran teachers have mastered.” Angelica had developed into a very organized teacher, with clear structure, routines, and a meticulous attention to detail. The final teacher, however, exhibited an entirely different teaching style.

Juan

Similar to Angelica, Juan was in his third year of teaching. Although he had taught multiple grade levels, Juan was a fifth-grade teacher when the research was conducted.

Definition of socially just teaching. Juan defined socially just teaching as putting what is best for his students before any other considerations. His definition, more than any other, echoed sounds of activism, especially when speaking about the culture of standards and accountability:

There are ways in which the Common Core standards are a great set of standards, and there are ways in which they are kind of going to that testing culture that going to perpetuate White privilege—and not that anyone is intending for it to be that way . . . I just think that these structures are so deep rooted that when you are in incredibly segregated community like I am—the structures that have segregated that community are going to keep them in the position they’re in-and that’s when I teach and just try to ask myself the question what is best for my students?

Juan centered his teaching on creating the best classroom experience for his students and that meant challenging “traditional” notions of schooling.

Teaching style and strengths. Juan was a self-declared unorganized fifth-grade teacher. For example, Juan’s classroom did not conform to customary standards with content-based bulletin boards, posted standards, graded student work, and learning charts. Rather, his classroom walls were an interactive learning web that students could manipulate to show the evolution of their learning. In addition, Juan wrote and created his own curriculum, much of which focused around culturally relevant topics that challenged students to think more critically

about the world. But what Juan lacked in structure or routine, he made up for in passion, creativity, and activism. During my observation of Juan, I saw an organic, student-centered environment that fostered analytical thinking and encouraged experiential learning.

Juan regularly incorporated his students' lived experiences and interests into his instruction. Believing that the textbooks did not adequately meet the needs of his students, Juan made the decision to create his entire curriculum. For example, on the day I observed, students revised a logo they had created for a neighborhood history hike they were planning for the community. To assist in their revisions, Juan had called on a friend who was a marketing director for a major firm, to give the students advice (via video) on their initial designs. Students then used the authentic feedback to redesign their logos in a more professional manner.

Additionally, through their community research, the students learned that grizzly bears had once inhabited their neighborhood. To capitalize on their excitement about this finding, Juan wrote a narrative about the origin of the grizzly bears on the California flag. Not only had Juan constructed the story, but he also had his dad do a voice-over so that the students could listen to the story, while they read along and responded to prompts on the computer. When the technology failed, Juan read the story together as a class and asked questions to check for comprehension. At the conclusion of the lesson, Juan asked the students to select a line from the story that they would like to interpret in a painting the following day, which generated a cry of cheers from the students. Clearly, the students appreciated Juan's inventive approach to teaching and learning.

Beyond teaching and learning, Juan was committed to ensuring that his students felt physically and emotionally safe in his classroom. Following lunch, students arranged themselves

in a family circle and two student leaders facilitated the meeting. The topic of the day was chosen based on a concern that had been placed in the student concern box. Essentially, one student did not like seeing other students in the class cry because it made her feel sad. Juan's only role in this meeting was to remind the students to construct a "conversation tower" that built on the ideas of others in the community. I was awed by how easily the student leaders guided the conversation, offered advice, and summarized the discussion. It was evident that the students were familiar with this routine and understood the importance of collectively working out their problems. Although Juan was committed to the development of the whole child, he was even more dedicated to promoting justice.

Of the six teachers I observed, Juan was the most advanced in infusing activism into his teaching. Juan's had a natural disposition to challenge the status quo on both a personal and professional level, and his teaching reflected this passion. In the short time that I was in his classroom, he challenged his students to celebrate their community, ask critical questions, and evaluate traditional norms. However, Juan was hesitant to label his teaching as activist and avoided any "politically radical talk" such as "class of 2027" or "getting out of the ghetto." Rather, he wanted his students to feel empowered to solve dilemmas and grow into beings that can manipulate their own environments. "I think sometimes in the quest for social justice teachers do a lot of telling." In an effort to raise awareness about the importance of emotional intelligence and the dangers of standardized testing, Juan used a video camera to document his own classroom:

These kids suffer, and I get emotional and angry about that, and I want to do something about that, and I want to have it be more than just my classroom. So I guess the other

component of a social justice is in the back of my mind are the dreams—to somehow have my classroom be a model for inspiring people to change.

In addition to using video as a tool to promote change, the class would sometimes watch a video of the lesson, reflect on it, and then try the process again. Essentially, Juan facilitated an authentic cycle of inquiry for his students.

Principal perceptions. Jack’s perception of Juan’s teaching verified his strong analytical thinking and progressive approach to teaching and learning:

He’s very passionate about what he does, and he's a very bright teacher, and he is a very creative teacher. I mean, having worked in schools for over 20 years, I'd say he's in that top tier of teachers who bring a lot of creativity and innovation and just, you know, analysis to his programs. He is always analyzing what he does, reflecting what he does, being creative, creating—he creates his program, and it's at a very sophisticated level for the kids, and it's really exciting for the kids and really advanced.

Juan’s definition of socially just teaching emerged in his innovative curriculum and creative classroom activities. Jack also described his teaching style as experiential, analytical, and rigorous. While Jack welcomed and embraced Juan’s unconventional style, he was clear about the fact that some school environments may not recognize or promote Juan’s innovative approach:

I think if he were asked to teach more inside the box or to use materials, more teacher's guides from cover to cover, or something like that or a particular presentation of a classroom environment or those kinds of things, that might not be the best fit for him, but

he's given a lot of opportunity here to be creative, and the outcomes have been really phenomenal.

While his unorthodox approach was celebrated, Juan admitted to feeling overwhelmed at times and openly shared his struggles with balancing his philosophy with the realities of schooling.

Areas for growth. Juan's more free-form approach to teaching and learning led to sacrifices in some content areas, placed demands on his personal time, and magnified his lack of organizational skills. Juan admitted that his classroom would never follow a typical, content-driven agenda and, at times, he found beauty in the lack of structure. Nonetheless, in the future, he hoped to find ways to infuse more structure to complement his learning activities, save time, and reinforce learning. To begin the next year, he hoped to “[try] to add in structures around how they work together and just general standards of work and what a work process is like—for next year we’re going to really start it from day one.” Although Juan desired more balance in his practice, he excelled in fostering students’ emotional intelligence and promoting justice.

In addition to reporting on the practices of the six teachers individually, it was important to collectively analyze the data, looking at the implementation of socially just teaching practicing across all teachers.

Frequency of Implementation of Socially Just Teaching Practices

Next, I examine the summative frequency of implementation through the lens of the revised conceptual framework presented earlier in the chapter. Critics of socially just teaching have argued that socially just classroom practices center around being nice with little attention paid to content and rigor in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, et al., 2009). To combat the critics and provide a more comprehensive understanding of socially just teaching in the

classroom, I used quantitative data to report on the implementation of the 12 socially just teaching characteristics that emerged from the modified framework. To learn more about the frequency of implementation, interview and observation data were coded to reveal the number of times the characteristics identified in the conceptual framework were either spoken about during interviews or observed in practice. The summative results of code use can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5

Summative Frequency of Code Use

Characteristic	Interviews	Observations	Total
Curriculum			
Differentiated	20	34	54
Student & Community Centered	33	57	90
Culturally Relevant	12	20	32
Experiential	22	40	62
Ecology			
Safe	36	19	55
Collaborative	23	29	53
Relationship-Based	17	33	50
Equitable	4	28	32
Teaching and Learning			
Reflective	32	37	69
Rigor: Academic	19	46	65
Rigor: Behavior	5	37	42
Activist	23	1	24
Analytical	11	45	56

During the pre- and postinterviews, the six participants most frequently described socially just teaching as (a) safe (b) student and family centered, and (c) rigorous. However the teachers spoke very little about (a) equity, (b) behavioral rigor, or (c) culturally relevant strategies. Because this study sought to learn about what alumni *do* after they leave UTPP, specifically

which characteristics were evident in the teachers' practice, the next section will analyze the classroom implementation of each characteristic.

Characteristics of Socially Just Teaching

In this section, I first review the definition of each characteristic, and then I provide specific examples of practices that were evident during the full-day classroom observations of the six alumni teachers. The 12 tenets are described in descending order according to the number of times the characteristic was observed, beginning with the most visible practice.

Student and family centered. Teaching practices that were student and family centered were the most frequently observed characteristic ($n = 57$) of socially just teaching in the classroom. Rooted in the work of Nieto and Bode (2008) and Wade (2007), for purposes of this dissertation, I defined student- and family-centered environment as “a classroom in which students and families feel valued and respected leads to students freely expressing ideas and becoming involved in issues of importance to them.”

Creating an authentic curriculum that involved the interests and opinions of students was central to the six participants' conceptions of social justice. For Angelica, this meant allowing her third-grade students to make collective decisions on a regular basis:

We do a lot of consensus decision-making in my class. So whether it's voting, whether it's having a community circle discussion about something, I like to make sure that everyone is a stakeholder in decisions that we make in the class. It could be as simple as having a circle about why we shouldn't hit others and having a real good discussion about that. It's just making sure that they know that they have a voice in everyday

interactions and everyday—their everyday existence in this classroom. That’s the very basic level, I think, of social justice that you can see daily.

Allowing students to have ownership over their learning was only one of several ways that teachers’ fostered a student-centered environment.

For Nancy, it was not just about allowing her first-grade students to exercise their voices, but it was about letting them know that their voices and contributions were valued. In Heather’s classroom, the seventh-grade students were responsible for creating their own rules. And Juan shared an example of allowing his fifth graders to complete freedom and control over an ecosystems project and was surprised by the students’ response to the disorder and pandemonium that ensued. When one group of students noticed that some children were going crazy and grabbing materials from the closet, they took control, reorganized the materials, and created a system for distributing supplies. Juan was amazed that this had all happened without his saying a word:

Kids don’t want chaos. So by putting them in total control and giving them time to experience the chaos in a way that they were responsible for, they developed their own system, their own structure.

As evidenced by this example, Juan was open to the controlled chaos that came with allowing students control over their learning.

In addition to student involvement, the six teachers addressed the critical role that parents, families, and communities play in their practice. Whether it was through regular communication with families, involving them in class projects, or creating a parent corner in the classroom, it was evident that the work of the six teachers extended beyond the four walls of their classroom.

A few of the teachers mentioned attending student parties and community events outside of the classroom. Angelica summarized it best when she said, “You really need to foster relationships with the families and the communities that you work in, and that’s something I definitely brought with me into UTPP.” Operating a student- and family-centered classroom, however, did not come at the expense of ignoring rigor.

Rigorous. Rigor was the second most commonly observed characteristic of socially just teaching in the participants’ classrooms. Rigorous instruction is when students are immersed in rigorous, standards-based academic work as they apply skills and knowledge to real-world issues. Teachers hold high expectations for both behavior and academics (Howard, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Wade, 2007). During the course of the study, it was evident that teachers held high academic expectations ($n = 46$) and high behavioral expectations ($n = 37$) for the students.

Academic rigor. Throughout the interviews, teachers expressed ideas about academic rigor including a strong belief in holding high expectations. In addition, a few teachers articulated concerns about the level of rigor in their classrooms. Juan and Angelica, who had been teaching the longest, were both very reflective about the rigor in their instruction. Angelica commented on the tension between challenging students and scaffolding their learning:

I think probably I struggle a little bit with rigor because I want things to be rigorous for my students but I also am afraid they aren’t going to be able to access it—access content or materials the way I want them to access them. So I do—there’s like a fine balance between scaffolding too much and then making sure that they can do things independently.

Beatriz and Nancy expressed sentiments about wanting to bump up the academic rigor in their classrooms in their second year of teaching. With one year under her belt, Beatriz felt better positioned to create a challenging, standards-driven curriculum:

I think for me the goal is making sure that my lessons match the standards and that I'm assessing to know whether or not they've met the standards. So I'm assessing them enough not just like teaching and then letting it go. So I think next year I can be more rigorous since I'll be more familiar with the curriculum—both Nancy and I. And we'll know which scaffolds are needed to get the students at a certain point.

While many of the teachers expressed worry during their interviews about the level of rigor in their classroom, it may have been due to their highly reflective nature.

In fact, rigorous academic instruction in which students were immersed in standards-based academic work was observed 46 times during my classroom visits. Feeling confined by the limitations of the available curriculum, Juan chose to develop his own resources to teach academic content standards:

I just got to a place where the only answer was to develop a curriculum so that you didn't have to make compromises, so that it wasn't piecemeal, so the kids were going on a journey and at the same time, I, as a teacher, was ensuring that that journey allowed them to acquire the skills that I think they need to have . . . I wanted to create a story for them to follow that was comprehensive and—this is a big thing—I wanted science and social science to be at the center.

Behavioral rigor. In addition to academic rigor, three of the participants discussed holding high expectations for their students when it comes to behavior as well. Heather spoke

about the need to teach her seventh-grade students responsibility, hold them accountable for their actions, and show them how to self-regulate their behavior:

I feel like for me my challenge is to be really clear and direct with them because naturally I'm more of like—well, I don't really care that much if you put your feet on the table but just being very clear in the way that I speak to them and being really rigid on how we act in the classroom.

On the other hand, Beatriz wished she were more consistent in holding true to her expectations of her students:

I think I would make my expectations known a little bit more clearly at the beginning of all of my lessons today and hold them accountable for them. So like if they're not doing it, let's try it again or let's figure something else out where I am able to make sure that they're engaged.

Although integrating rigor into their practice was a work in progress, the six teachers showed evidence of this ability, including infusing analytical methods.

Analytical. In addition to rigorous instruction, the six teachers consistently promoted analytical thinking, which means critiquing norms and assumptions, students and teachers learn to consider whose voices are absent, what perspectives are presented, and how to articulate their thinking (Freire, 2011; Wade, 2007). While the six teachers were analytical in their own planning and practice, they spoke very little about promoting analytical thinking in their students during the interviews. However, in practice, I observed over 45 examples of the teachers asking students to think critically, defend their responses, or consider multiple perspectives.

During his math lesson, Gabriel asked his students to identify a pattern in the numbers and to explain their thinking using more than one method. For a journal writing activity, Juan required his students to reflect on whether or not having total freedom was good thing and to support their thinking with reasons. Heather presented her students with a math problem and asked them to investigate whether she had solved it correctly or not. If not, the students had to identify where an error was made and how to correct the problem. While reading a story, Nancy asked her students to make inferences about the plot and support their thinking with evidence from the text. In all cases, the teachers were pushing the students to think deeply and promoted the acceptance of multiple responses. In addition to fostering rich analytical skills, alumni sought to create authentic, hands-on learning experiences.

Experiential. The six teachers made significant efforts to incorporate experiential learning opportunities ($n = 40$) into their daily instruction, meaning that “through active participation, students experience authentic concepts and ideas in engaging, hands-on ways. (Gay, 2000; Wade, 2007). Although the teachers did make some mention of experiential learning in the interviews, it was a key component of most classrooms. Rarely did I observe students sitting passively, listening to the teacher talk for extended periods of time. Instead, I saw classrooms where students were routinely talking, moving, doing, and playing. In the lower-grade classrooms, the teachers infused rhythm and music into literacy, hand motions into writing, megaphones into reading, art into science, and manipulatives in math. In the upper grade classrooms, students engaged in project-based learning activities such as the production and performance of a play, the creation of a community history walk, architectural blueprints, and 3-dimensional marble runs. While most teachers expressed a desire to infuse more real-world

problem-solving dilemmas into their work, it appeared that the student-centered nature of the classrooms I visited facilitated rich learning experiences for all students.

Reflective. In elementary classrooms where reflection is incorporated into the teaching and learning process, teachers and students participate in a continual cycle of dialogue and critical reflection aimed at confronting their own ideologies and improving their learning (Darder, 2002; Delpit, 1995). In both the interviews and in practice, the teachers emphasized the importance of reflection for themselves and their students. During the postobservation interviews, the teachers talked candidly about how the day went and appeared competent in their abilities to debrief what went well during a lesson, what didn't, and what they would need to change or reteach. When speaking about her practice, Angelica commented:

I constantly try and be reflective, and I want my students to also be reflective. I think it's also one of those traits that helps them now to understand how they learn as a student and what they need as a student but also will help them in the future as they grow as learners, as adults in life. I think a lot of people don't think students at this age can be reflective or can really think about how they're learning. But if you start teaching them and training them at a young age and really get them to understand what that means I think it can work at a third grade level.

Angelica demonstrated this philosophy when she asked her students to think about their play preparation. The students showed a thumb up or down based on whether or not they felt ready to perform the following week for their families. Several other teachers called upon their students to reflect on their behavior as well.

For instance, Heather asked her students to review what they needed to do when entering the classroom in the morning. Unprompted, Juan's students used a "silent coyote" hand signal to alert other students if the noise level was too loud. Gabriel's students reflected on their lunchtime behavior and were quite honest about their failure to follow the rules. While modeling the dance for the morning meeting, Nancy asked her students, "What did you notice about how I entered the circle?" Nancy, Gabriel, and Heather required their students to reflect on the purpose behind each routine or procedure. Reflection was also evident in academic activities.

Heather's students wrote about their proudest moment, hardest part of the year, best part of the year, and areas of improvement in an end-of-the-year reflection. Gabriel was in his second year of teaching and had made numerous changes to the marble run project based on reflections from the previous year. Juan combined reflection and collaboration when he asked his students to discuss the strengths of their community logos as well as identify something they would change. These are only a small sample of the reflection techniques the teachers employed to improve student learning.

When I reviewed the interview data, I found several similarly coded pieces about reflection: all teachers, while reflecting on their lessons for the day, were very critical of themselves. I found that they commented more on their shortcomings and gave themselves very little credit for the solid teaching that occurred. Juan felt that self-reflection was overwhelming as well. "Teachers don't get the room to be reflective or to introduce something new, and I think if this job was less stressful I think we would see a lot more innovation."

Differentiated. The six classrooms I visited had an array of students with diverse strengths, needs, abilities, which requires teachers to vary their instructional strategies. In the

classroom, differentiation means that teachers must recognize that multiple perspectives are informed by different values. Instruction must be catered to the values and needs of each student (Santamaria, 2009; Wade, 2007). The over 34 moments of differentiation that I observed in the teachers' classrooms were unexpected. Because, as Maribel mentioned during her interview, differentiation is a difficult skill to teach and one that UTPP did not emphasize. As Maribel shared during her interview:

We've struggled with differentiation, frankly, and I don't know that I have an answer for that. I think we understand it well. I think in practice it takes a level of sophistication to differentiate that I don't think our novices have when they're doing their student teaching. I think they're exposed to it, but you can see in their resident year that they really struggle with it. I don't know what we could do differently because I do think that's part of just maturing and you're developing as you're doing it, right? But I know the call is for teachers to go into class being able to differentiate instruction and differentiate assessment and what not. I think that our students could probably talk about it. Whether they're successful at it or not, I would probably say more not than so.

Despite Maribel's hesitation, the data revealed that UTPP teachers *were* successful in implementing differentiation in their early years of teaching. For example, in Heather's room, she pulled students to the rug to assist them in deconstructing a poem. In Angelica's room, she tiered her vocabulary word wall to make it accessible to her lower performing or special needs students. In Gabriel's class, students used independent reading books appropriate for their skills level. Juan gave his students freedom of choice over the content when it came to developing their community logo. Nancy and Beatriz, two of the first-year teachers, both worked with small

groups during writing, pushing the advanced writers to expand their thinking and scaffolding those who struggled.

Relationship-based. To be effective, socially just teaching must be relationship-based, defined as follows: teachers must be persistent in establishing authentic, caring relationships with their students (Howard, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999). Actions demonstrating caring and trusting relationships with students were seen 33 times during my observations. Because I observed late in the school year, much of the groundwork for establishing relationships had already been laid, so I anticipate that had I observed earlier in the school year, this number may have been much higher. Nevertheless, in all six classrooms, I observed a community circle or family meeting at some point in the school day. Although each operated differently and occurred at different times in the day, the six alumni felt it was important to spend time sharing stories, solving dilemmas, and establishing community. Three of the teachers greeted their students at the door with a handshake, hug, or smile while two others welcomed each student during the morning meeting. In addition to these activities, I saw teachers make personal connections with students throughout the day.

For example, Juan asked a student to remain in the classroom during recess so he could check in with her about a personal issue happening at home. During her fluency read, Gabriel asked a student if her Auntie's dog did the same things as the animal in the story. If possible, Angelica attended students' baptisms, birthdays, and first communion events. Heather captured it best when she said relationship-building was "about knowing my kids well enough that I know what their personal best is." These data were substantiated by both supervisors who felt that their

teachers excelled in developing relationships with students. Because trusting relationships were established, the alumni were able to encourage students to respectfully work together.

Collaborative. In a socially just classroom, collaborative instruction requires that students and teachers work with each other to solve problems, expand their knowledge, and create change (Freire, 2011; Wade, 2007). Collaboration was exhibited in two forms: collaboration between teachers as well as teamwork among students ($n = 29$). Both Anne and Jack, the charter school principals said collaboration was a core element of their schools' mission. More specifically, Jack stated:

Our teachers are not able to work here without being collaborative. It's an expectation that's set during the hiring process. They work together as a grade level, in particular, and to a lesser degree, but we're working on it, across the school, as well, so they really are not able to work in isolation.

I saw this collaboration in action during my visits to Excel and Bright Hope. For example, Angelica met with her partner teacher during lunch to outline lesson plans for the next week and prepare homework packets. And Juan sat down with his fifth-grade team to plan learning activities for science camp. These collaborative attitudes extended into the classroom as well.

Students in all six classrooms had opportunities to interact with one other throughout the day. In Heather's classroom, small teams met to plan presentations for the learning museum. Gabriel's students assisted one another to construct their marble runs. Juan allowed his students' to read and answer questions in partnership. And Angelica encouraged her students to work together to solve challenging mathematical problems. Across all content areas, I saw examples of students effectively collaborating to achieve a learning objective.

Although some teachers triumphed in running collaborative classrooms, others struggled with successfully implementing cooperative practices. Gabriel said a few difficult personalities made collaboration a difficult task:

It's really tough to work collaboratively, to work in partnerships, to work in groups where they could work with a diverse group of people. Right now they really could only work either with themselves or someone who is both a friend and that they can work responsibly with. I would hope that in the future I'd create an environment where you could work with anybody.

Gabriel was clearly committed to the theory of collaboration and intended to integrate it more regularly into his future practices. In addition to working together, the alumni teachers felt it was vital for their students to have equitable learning experiences.

Equitable. In all six classrooms, the teachers strove to be equitable in their practice, which demands that every child has the same value and importance in the classroom (Teacher and Principal Participants, 2014). The six alumni had vastly different ways of running their classrooms, but all strove to create fair and consistent environments that valued each child ($n = 28$). As UTPP's director stated, "I think that equitable participation and striving for that is important, and teaching and learning should be an equitable endeavor for everyone." The alumni lived out this program objective in a number of different ways. For example, Angelica's students asked if they could perform a play, and after cautioning them about the tremendous amount of dedication and work it would require, she allowed them to vote on the idea. In the end, the students voted yes, so Angelica framed her teaching around their desire. During reader's workshop, Heather visited each child, checked the child's work, and offered feedback. In this

way, each student knew that he or she would be accountable for the learning and his or her work was recognized. In addition to valuing students' voices and opinions, the teachers demonstrated equity in classroom management.

Treating the students fairly, while being sensitive to the needs of each child, was a central goal for the alumni. For instance, to minimize conflict and ensure equitable participation, Nancy created a schedule of who shared during the morning meeting. Beatriz excused students to line up for lunch only when they met the expectations for getting ready. When the class did not get back to work fast enough after a morning break, Heather warned that she would be shortening the afternoon break, and she followed through on this later in the day. The equitable philosophy employed by the teachers was also central to the mission of the schools in which they worked.

Jack said at Excel charter, "Equity is a hugely important issue for us, as well. In other words, we provide a program where all students are welcome and it meets the needs of all students." Equitable practices are easier to implement when the objective of the preparation program, school, and teachers are aligned.

Culturally relevant. In an effort to incorporate students' lives into the fabric of the classroom, culturally relevant teaching requires teachers to create a bridge between students' home and school lives by utilizing the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to inform the lessons, curriculum, and methodology (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The six alumni and their principals spoke repeatedly about the importance of infusing the students' lives into the fabric of their classroom. Examples of culturally relevant teaching were not observed as often as the other characteristics ($n = 20$), but this may be due to the fact that as Anne, Bright Hope's principal said, "Culturally relevant teaching is implicit in

what we do.” However, during my observations, I did see the culture of the students infused into lessons in a number of different ways. To end a math lesson on money saving patterns, Gabriel asked the students what they would do with the \$1,328 they had saved over the course of the year. With a great deal of excitement, the students shouted, “Buy an Xbox! Travel! Buy plane tickets! Go to Disneyland!” The poetry Heather used during her reading lesson consisted of works from writers reflecting the culture of the students in her classroom. These were just two examples of culturally relevant teaching that I witnessed, but several teachers shared strategies they employed early in the school year.

During the first week of school, Gabriel had his students introduce themselves to the class using bio bags filled with artifacts that reflected their family, culture, and interests. Gabriel used this information to collect data about his students, which he said he then used to plan his lessons throughout the year. Angelica made it a point to learn the names of her students’ parents and invited families to help cocreate a class cookbook as part of a writing lesson. As the culminating event, parents cooked the items on the menu and the families celebrated together. And finally, Beatriz’s first-grade students created a community social studies project to highlight the history and assets in their neighborhood. Maribel, UTPP’s director, was confident that UTPP prepared teachers to be culturally responsive in the classroom and that these examples highlighted the numerous ways teachers operationalized this theory in the classroom.

Although a supporter of integrating the students’ backgrounds into the life of the classroom, one teacher thought culturally relevant teaching should be handled with great respect and caution. Juan believed that culturally relevant teaching “[challenges] kids to be honest with

themselves about culture and their history in both all the best ways and all the worst ways because every culture has kind of—is multifaceted.”

Safe. In socially just classrooms, teachers must strive to create learning environments where students feel physically and emotionally safe in the classroom. Attention is paid to the development of the whole child through the promotion of emotional intelligence (Teacher and Principal Participants, 2014). Creating learning environments where students’ felt physically and emotionally safe was central to the participants’ philosophy of teaching. However, it was not observed as frequently ($n = 19$), and this may be due in part to the intangible nature of this tenet. For the six educators, teaching meant more than just relaying academic content; it was about fostering the development of the whole child. During his interview, Juan spoke about the importance of this component to his work:

And then we also have the emotional intelligence component where kids—I think they feel safe. We have this little box the kids made. If they want to call a circle they put a note in the box and then we read it and then we talk about it.

Several of the teachers talked about the importance of empowering the students with conflict resolution and socialization strategies to minimize verbal and physical altercations in the classroom. For Heather, teaching involved more than just academic content standards:

It also means teaching kids to be more independent, how to deal with conflicts among themselves, how to be social and in social relationships in and out of the classroom, and giving kids the tools that they need to be successful socially, too.

To accomplish this goal, Heather taught her students targeted problem-solving techniques,

breathing exercises, and appropriate communications skills to use in the classroom, on the yard, and at home.

Both Heather and Nancy wanted their students to know that they were there for them, no matter what. Heather had an open door policy that allowed her students to come to her anytime they needed to talk, and Nancy spoke of the importance of standing up for her students:

These kids can sometimes be a little feisty with each other—and I want them to know that they don't need to do that because I have their back. So I try to do that, especially with management.

For Gabriel, safety was also essential for cultivating students' voices in the classroom:

It's hard to set a goal and achieve something when you don't have that basic need—that first basic need—and safety is just the all-encompassing term. Safety that you could walk into the room and not feel like someone's going to pick on you or something. Or feeling safe to voice out a strong opinion.

Without the creation of a comfortable, trusting environment by the teacher, students will hesitate to speak, for fear of being teased or ridiculed. In Juan's classroom, the students took a front seat in creating a problem box, leading community circle meetings, and two even went as far as to create a counseling booth for fellow classmates to visit during recess.

Activist. The final characteristic of socially just teaching addressed in the study demands that “students and teachers need real opportunities to work for social justice in their lives and to make key choices about issues of concern to them” (Banks, 2003; Nieto & Bode, 2008). While examples of explicit activism where students and teachers were grappling with issues related to race, gender, or inequality were rarely observed ($n = 1$), it was a value that the teachers viewed

as central to their philosophies of social justice. All six teachers displayed dispositions toward activism and perhaps their progressive teaching styles were activist by nature. As Beatriz claimed, “I feel like the reason I want to teach is kind of like the mentality of an activist. Really advocating for the students and their voices.” For Angelica, it was clear that planting the seeds of activism in her third-grade students was a valued element of her teaching:

As far as activism in their community, that’s something I definitely try and promote, too. Like let’s start in our community and work our way out. We’ll read a whole story on how pollution is bad and how our rainforests are getting cut down. But let’s talk about how that affects our neighborhood first and then we can work our way out. So I definitely try and make it more place based and more community based in any of the activism that we talk about or try and act on in our class. It’s usually very localized because I want them to understand that we need to start where we are first.

Five of the teachers admitted to lacking in implementing activist ideals in the classroom, but saw it as a future step in their progression as social justice educators. As Gabriel said:

I feel like that’s kind of the end goal. I feel like if I could do everything else right then I feel like we could take our work in here and take it to the next step, make it more meaningful, and try to fix some of the issues that we see out there.

When reflecting on her practice, Heather articulated:

I feel like my students this year really could have benefited from more of this just in their relationships with each other and their views on people other than the people in their neighborhood and stuff like that. I think they would really benefit from being out in the community doing something that matters to them.

Both Heather and Gabriel felt confident that a more activist approach to teaching and learning would come with experience.

Unexpectedly, Juan took issue with the term activism, or at least the stereotypical beliefs that are often associated with the term:

My association with that word is I feel like a lot of teachers go into teaching with kind of an agenda that isn't about pedagogy. It's about what they want their students to think.

And I just think that is just so dangerous. Even if what you want your students to think is that Martin Luther King was an amazing person, I think even that is dangerous. Martin Luther King cheated on his wife, and Gandhi's children hated [their father]. Like how great a person can you be if your children hate you? Now those are two people I greatly admire, but I get to greatly admire them allowing myself to look at the whole truth of their being and incorporating that. Like to me when you're an activist, I feel like you slip into leaving out some of those details to paint a prettier narrative. And I think that's super dangerous.

Clearly, Juan was not afraid to challenge conventional thinking and passionately expressed his viewpoint about controversial topics. Therefore, it is important to examine the influence that the program had on developing the teachers' philosophy of social justice.

Influences of the Program

The final research question asked, "What influences of the program do alumni identify as contributing to their implementation of socially just classroom teaching practices?" To answer this question, teacher participants were asked to reflect on their experiences, UTPP documents

were summarized, and the former director of UTPP was interviewed. This section will begin with a summary of the influences of the program, arranged in order of the importance mentioned by teacher participants. Following that, challenges to implementation, both reported and observed, will be provided.

Components of the Program

During the preinterview, the alumni were asked about the greatest influences of the program and their responses related to the people or relationships formed, with little to no mention of specific courses, theories, or scholars. The interview data were coded and an outline of the three most frequently coded factors, including guiding teachers, faculty advisors, and cohort peers, are described below.

Guiding teachers. During the interviews, the six teacher participants all made reference to their mentor or guiding teacher as a significant contributor to their formation as a teacher. Several teachers noted that the ability to see the theory and philosophy they had developed in UTPP put into practice by experts influenced their early formation as an educator more than the program curriculum had. As Heather explained:

I think for me I did learn a lot from the readings and I did learn a lot from the professors that I had. But all of that aside, you don't learn how to teach unless you teach, unless you're kind of just thrown in there and you teach, you do it, you sit and talk to someone about it, and then you do it again.

In addition, Heather, Angelica, and Juan both spoke about the willingness of their mentor teachers to let them try whatever they wanted, without reserving judgment. Juan spoke very candidly of the lasting impact that one of his mentor's had on his perceptions about teaching:

A lot of times he would just stop his whole day to have a conversation with his kids. . . . he was like, I'm going to do what I think is best for my kids and I don't care what anyone else thinks. And I'm still trying to be like that. I'm still trying to not care what other people think when what they think gets in the way of what I know is best for my kids.

Not only did Juan's mentor enrich his student teaching experience, but he also had a big influence on his philosophy about social justice. On a daily basis, Juan used his experience with his guiding teacher as a reference for what socially just teaching could look like in the classroom.

About half of the teacher participants made reference to long-lasting relationships with their mentor teachers. They viewed their guiding teachers as continued resources that they could reach out to for advice or emotional support. When speaking about one of her guiding teachers, Angelica remarked:

I'm still in touch with her now, so it was a great relationship that we fostered during that time, too. She was very supportive. During the summer, she came and helped me organize my library. I felt really supported by her.

For all six participants, the positive relationships they developed with their mentor teachers and faculty advisors considerably influenced their early days as a teacher.

Faculty advisors. During their novice and resident years, UTPP students were under the guidance of a faculty advisor whose job it was to provide field support through classroom visits and observations, weekly mentoring seminars, and ongoing professional development. Second only to guiding teachers, the names of UTPP faculty advisors were routinely mentioned during four participant interviews as a significant influence on their practice. When faced with

challenging times during his second student teaching placement, Juan's faculty advisor advocated for him and ultimately saved him from a very difficult situation. "She still believed in me and she didn't make me feel bad about it. She didn't guilt me about it. She just supported me in growing from it."

Heather and Nancy both commented about the profound impact their faculty advisors had on their early formation as educators. In fact, Heather looked up to her two faculty advisors as role models:

I just really admire them as amazing women in general—just how they balance their personal lives with being really dedicated to their students and their residents and their novices. I just learned a ton from them about how to care for my own students.

Nancy was thankful for the emotional support and empathy that one of her advisors displayed. "I just appreciated that she was real, and she was another one to also remind us constantly of the sensitivity." In both situations, the authentic support of faculty advisors had a significant influence on early development of UTPP teachers.

Not only were the advisors credited as emotional supporters, but they also pushed the teachers to think critically about their practice. When speaking about her resident year advisor, Angelica recalled, "So she was really good at asking those questions to get me thinking about my practice." In other words, the faculty advisors held high expectations for the teachers and encouraged them to analyze their practice as it related to the growth and development of the students in their classrooms. In addition to the guidance of UTPP staff members, alumni of the program also had a positive effect on the teachers' practice.

Cohort members and UTPP alumni. Cohort peers and fellow UTPP alumni were the final group of people identified as a contributing influence to the participants' development as educators committed to social justice. At both charter schools, there were several UTPP alumni, and Gabriel elaborated on the importance of having this community of teachers on campus:

I feel comfortable in knowing that the people I work with have the same mission as I do I feel like that could be a roadblock a lot of times at schools, and I've never had that issue here because we all have the same beliefs. We all check in with each other and share strategies and ideas. And they're all strategies we've talked about and learned about through UTPP or through our cohorts.

The teachers' philosophies and classroom practices were clearly impacted by a network of like-minded individuals. While components of the program did have an impact on the teachers' pedagogy, a few key factors outside of the program emerged from the data as well.

Outside Influences

Beyond UTPP, the teachers' previous experiences, colleagues, and professional development, influenced their conceptions and implementation of socially just teaching practices.

Life experience. During the interviews, the six participants all alluded to the role that their life experiences played in the formation of their teaching philosophy and style. For example, Juan told me a story about being bullied as a kid and a memorable car ride he took with his mom when he was only nine years old. Although she was not a strict mom in many ways, Juan, said he would never forget her reaction when he jokingly impersonated a Jewish person. Outraged, she took her eyes off the road, turned around, and started screaming at him. At that moment, he knew there was a line he had crossed that had to do with respecting other people and by his emotional

retelling of the story, it was clear that moment profoundly impacted Juan's perception of social justice:

I hate to see the way White privilege hurts my children, and I see the way that the country's idolization of English hurts my children, and I say my children meaning my students. And I just want to do something about it. It hurts to see that happen.

Juan was not the only teacher who mentioned the important role that parents played in their formation.

Nancy's parents were both teachers and she spoke fondly of the knowledge she had gained from watching them teach. Specifically, her mom was the one who taught her to think about more than just delivering content:

She's like the whole person teacher. Why is it important to have a clean uniform? Why is it important to do this or that? She is kind of nitpicky, but very much teaching to help the whole person grow. So I feel like I want to do that.

Nancy's mom also taught her that teaching for social justice was not about being nice. Rather, she told her that she needed to be tough, hold high expectations, and communicate to her students the reasons for doing things. In my observation of Nancy, I witnessed her exhibiting these behaviors on a regular basis as she consistently explained to the students why they needed to follow directions, move safely, or speak respectfully to one another. It was quite evident, that Nancy embraced her mom's caring, yet rigorous philosophy about educating the whole child. In addition to familial influences, prior work experiences impacted the philosophy of two UTPP alumni.

Previous work experiences. Both Angelica and Heather spoke of the influence that previous work experience with children had on their approach to teaching. Prior to entering UTPP, Angelica taught and managed an after school reading program in Oakland, California, that taught her a lot about the needs of students and the importance of connecting to families:

One of the things I learned early on in my experience at Oakland is that you really need to foster relationships with the families and the communities that you work in, and that's something I definitely brought with me into UTPP especially when we had discussions about seeing certain family members do this or certain people bringing up how one mom doesn't care and things like that. It's always something that I've been very sensitive to.

Similarly, Heather credited her job with teaching her some very important lessons about children. Before UTPP, Heather volunteered with a mobile school program that serviced homeless youth. During that time, she learned about the importance of developing trusting relationships with students:

It's totally critical and that's something that I couldn't have learned through my teaching program. It's something I learned working at a learning center with kids who'd gone through homelessness and just being around middle schoolers every day, too. You realize that is absolutely critical for them to know that they can talk to you and that you have a mutual respect. They know that I have great respect for them as young people all the time, and that's how I treat them.

Her work with disenfranchised youth also opened Heather's eyes to the importance of student-centered learning:

The volunteer work that I did put me in a lot of different situations with a whole variety of kids, and it really put me into what kids need socially and emotionally, and that kids cannot learn if they aren't present. And that's also carried over a lot into my classroom, too. The way that I plan and the way that I think about my students is always what would they love and be totally engaged in.

Clearly, Heather's previous work laid the foundation for the perceptions and attitudes about social justice that she developed in UTPP. Beyond work experiences, the alumni spoke about the influence of fellow educators on their practice as well.

Peer teachers. Following UTPP, the alumni also found support from experienced colleagues working at their respective schools. Prior to having their own classrooms, both Nancy and Beatriz, served as assistant teachers at Bright Hope. The opportunity to work with experienced teachers greatly affected the strategies they employed in their first year of running their own classrooms. Nancy worked for a fifth-grade teacher who taught her a great deal about effectively managing a classroom:

I think the thing I learned most from her was making sure the kids know they're safe here, like I have your back, like I want everybody to be happy and learning, and she really made sure she covered all her bases with that. And I think it helps me prevent a lot of kids from like getting in fights with each other, from watching that from her.

Beatriz also relied on the backing of fellow teachers at Bright Hope to help her deal with the challenges she has faced in her first year:

I get a lot of support from the other teachers, from kindergarten teachers, second grade teachers. And so I feel like they've given me a lot of ideas that I can use in the classroom,

especially when I feel like I'm struggling a lot. I'll go to them and they'll have something that I can use or strategies to suggest.

Similarly, Heather depended on fellow teachers for personal and instructional support:

There are some really amazing teachers at this school, and I am always asking them questions or borrowing books or can I see this unit and stuff like that. So I collaborate a lot with other teachers, whether it's just like talking out an idea or actually borrowing or creating materials together.

Besides the guidance provided by fellow teachers, school-based training influenced the development of the alumni practitioners.

Professional development. Although mentioned far less frequently, professional development opportunities were cited as having some influence on the Bright Hope teachers' implementation of socially just teaching practices. For example, Gabriel attended a science institute over the summer, and Heather referenced an outside organization that provided ongoing training and modeling of reader's and writer's workshop. However, the Excel teachers did not specifically mention professional development as a factor in their teaching. Judging by its brief mention, professional development appeared to have only a limited influence on the teachers' as social justice educators.

While most teachers were able to find support in the implementation of socially just teaching practices, they faced a few obstacles along the way as well.

Challenges to Implementation

The alumni teachers faced a few common challenges when attempting to implement socially just teaching strategies in the classroom, including obstacles connected to management,

testing, and resources. This section describes these trials, both reported and observed, in order of significance.

Classroom Management

Issues related to classroom management, including student behavior, routines, and procedures, presented the greatest obstacle to the implementation of socially just teaching strategies, especially for the four teachers in their first or second year of teaching. In fact, Beatriz believed managing behavior was her greatest struggle during her first year of teaching. She found herself lacking a solid structure and consistent style, which hindered her ability to deliver effective instruction at times. During the observations, I saw several occasions where students were defiant, off task, or disruptive in ways that impeded the flow of instruction and caused ongoing frustration for Beatriz. With that said, I also witnessed Beatriz's efforts to review the rules, practice routines, and communicated expectations. Moving into her second year, Beatriz made management a central focus of her reflection:

I'm thinking about making sure that my expectations are set in the beginning and that my structures match the expectations, because if I don't have the structures in place then it's hard for them to follow the classroom routines and rules. And then it's hard for me to implement my plans.

Gabriel echoed Beatriz's struggles with classroom management and described his management style as a work in progress, "I think the biggest part of classroom management that I struggled with last year—and a little bit this year but not as much—is finding a way to get kids to feel accountable for doing what we do." When speaking about Gabriel, Anne (his principal) echoed his thoughts:

I think where he struggled a lot with management in his first year he's mastered some things this year, so I think he feels a little more confident. I think with him he's still very much evolving. I think he's in transition still.

The congruence between Gabriel and Anne's perceptions demonstrated Gabriel's ability to critically reflect on his growth. Heather was also able to speak candidly about her struggles with behavior issues. For Heather, her challenges revolved around the lack of drive and fiery attitudes displayed by some of her seventh-grade students:

I don't understand the lack of motivation. And they don't understand themselves yet in that way, and so I've been learning about the animal that is the seventh grader and just what's natural for this age, but also what's just not okay.

While the novice teachers floundered a bit in management, the two more veteran teachers did not view management as an obstacle.

Interestingly, Juan and Angelica, both in their third year of teaching, rarely spoke about issues of management. While I observed a few examples of students needing to be reprimanded or excused for disruptive or disrespectful behavior, it was not a focus of the classroom nor was it a source of angst for either teacher. Although discipline was not a significant factor for the two third-year teachers, both were concerned about the limitations and pressure that came with standardized testing.

Standardized Testing

The constraints associated with high-stakes standardized testing were identified as the second most common challenge to implementing socially just teaching practices. Because this research was conducted during a pilot-testing year, the scores from the exam would not be

reported and schools would not be held accountable for the results. Therefore, half of the teachers in the study had yet to experience the reality of state testing. Nonetheless, the three who were involved in previous years spoke about the challenges that came with high stakes exams.

In fact, Juan identified testing as the biggest obstacle to becoming the type of teacher he aspired to be:

It's that monster, and it's like hurting America big time, in my belief. It inhibits innovation. It takes away classroom time. It makes everybody crazy. It makes people leave teaching. It makes those allies you had disappear. It's destroying education.

Juan believed that testing forced stakeholders to prioritize teaching to the test over the more important work of character development. With an abundance of passion, Juan spoke eloquently about this ongoing dilemma:

It's really a conundrum because I think that the things we talk about as being important are the things that are important to parents. If I said, oh would you rather we have testing or emotional intelligence and character work, every parent is going to say character, but somehow that doesn't happen.

While Juan struggled to balance the tension between testing and socially just teaching, Angelica seemed to have found the right balance for her.

Early in her career, Angelica said that she struggled with navigating the constraints of testing. She would rush through standards, worry about time, and place undue pressure on herself. However, at the conclusion of her first year, she spent a lot of time reflecting on her practice and readjusted her approach the following year. Angelica decided:

I need to make sure I pace things out better for the next year. I make sure I can really check if the students really learned the content that they needed to learn. And if not I need to set a buffer time to reteach if I need to reteach. And making sure that I don't put too much pressure on them to get everything the first time.

Although Angelica had gained some perspective over the years, managing the tension between teaching for social justice and hitting the mark on standardized tests continued to weigh on her mind. In addition to testing, a lack of resources provided a challenge to teachers in their quest to implement socially just teaching practices.

School and Classroom Resources

The final category that inhibited the teachers' ability to implement their ideals was a lack of materials and time. Not having easy access to supplies made executing project-based learning and differentiation a difficult task. When entertaining the idea of math stations, Juan talked about the struggle to find the manipulatives or the time to plan and set up the activities. Often times, the six teachers felt forced to make choices about their priorities, and that meant choosing between content areas, learning activities, and personal development. For example, Juan felt pressure to teach the standards at the expense of adequately addressing social emotional issues that some students faced at home and school. Lastly, all teachers struggled with accomplishing their goals in the limited amount of time that they were given in a standard school day. Juan summed up it best when he said:

It's not a reasonable task that we're given . . . like these film directors (visiting the school that week to shoot a commercial) are going to be working a huge budget and a week of time to create a three-minute piece of film. And we're required to create like an original

production that lasts five hours every day, five days a week, with twenty-seven different personalities that have twenty-seven different needs. And I think at the end of the day it's just not a feasible and that impossibility just suffocates people.

As evidenced by the reported challenges, teaching for social justice was not without its difficulties. However, the six teachers found varied ways to define and operationalize the term in their urban elementary classrooms.

Conclusion

In an effort to answer the three primary research questions, this chapter presented a summary of the findings from the coded interviews, observations, and document review. The six participating teachers' definitions of socially just teaching, along with a description of their style, strengths, and principal perceptions were provided along with a summative report of the characteristics of socially just teaching. Additionally, the impact of both the program and outside influences as well as the challenges to implementation was discussed. In the next chapter, these data will be analyzed to reveal significant findings and themes. Additionally, recommendations and suggestions for future research will be outlined.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This qualitative case study sought to understand how alumni of one social justice–themed University Teacher Preparation Program (UTPP) defined and implemented socially just teaching practices in urban elementary classrooms. This research also sought to learn more about the influences of the program that alumni identified as contributing to their implementation of these classroom practices. To achieve this objective, six graduates participated in two interviews and were observed for a full day in the classroom. In addition, two principals and the UTPP program director were interviewed to further triangulate the data. The interview, observation, and program document data were coded and findings were reported in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I will address the critics, share the major and minor findings, make recommendations for practice, and suggest areas for future research.

Combatting the Critics

Findings from this study contradicted three of the most prominent critiques of teacher education for social justice. First, the knowledge critique argued that teacher education for social justice centers on kids feeling good with little attention paid to learning (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, et al., 2009). Not only did the teachers in this study talk about holding high expectations, but also rigorous instruction was one of the top tenets documented during classroom observations. In other words, knowledge and content were central to the philosophies and operations of the six alumni classrooms.

Second, the free speech critique maintained that teacher education programs that promote social justice curtail candidates' freedom to think and say whatever they wish (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, et al., 2009). However, during my interviews with the six alumni, I found the opposite to be true. Each teacher expressed his or her understandings, beliefs, and opinions, in very different manners. While the teachers did share some criticisms of the program, they praised UTPP for creating an environment that allowed them to explore their identity, examine their assumptions, and develop their interpretations of social justice within the context of their own lives. In other words, the alumni appreciated the exposure to multiple perspectives and felt empowered to voice their opinions. For example, during his interview Juan challenged two terms discussed in the program: "culturally relevant" and "activist." This explicit conversation—along with the varied definitions of social justice—would not have emerged if the program had curtailed the teachers' ability to speak freely.

Finally, the ambiguity critique argued that the lack of clarity around the term *teacher education for social justice* made it possible for multiple programs and institutions to lay claim to the term (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). While this study did not arrive at one common definition for socially just teaching, it is possible that the beauty of the term lies in its broadness. Villegas (2007) argued that social justice is "a broad approach to education that aims to have students reach high levels of learning and to prepare them for active participation in a democracy" (p. 372). If socially just teaching is about doing what is best for the students in your classroom, then it can be expected that definitions will differ because no two classrooms look the same. Rather than looking to narrowly define social justice, I argue that we should outline a broad framework that highlights and defines the practices that support this endeavor in the classroom.

Major Findings

Several significant findings emerged from this study including: (a) the creation of a practice-based, conceptual framework for socially teaching; (b) the value of preparing socially just educators; (c) the importance of selection in teacher preparation; (d) the significance of relationships in carrying out this work; and (e) a need to focus on the craft of teaching for social justice.

A Conceptual Framework for Social Justice Practitioners

In the absence of a practice-based, user-friendly framework for analyzing socially just teaching in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Dover, 2009; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009), a conceptual framework, rooted in the work of leading scholars in the literature, was created at the onset of the study. Because it was important to address the lack of teacher voice in the literature (Milan, 2010), participants were asked for their feedback on the design of the original conceptual framework. As a result of their feedback, a series of changes were made to the design, including the addition of two characteristics (equity and safety), a reorganization of the three central categories (ecology, curriculum, and teaching and learning), and a renaming of the framework to reflect its practitioner-friendly design. The data that led to these changes were described and presented in Chapter 4.

While it was important to identify each of the 12 tenets in theory, it was also essential to understand how each tenet could be operationalized in the classroom. Therefore, this study also sought to find practical examples of socially just teaching in elementary classrooms. The revised framework and attendant description of each tenet, along with observed examples from the classroom, are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Characteristics of Social Justice Education for Practitioners

Characteristic	Description	Classroom Examples
Relationship-based	Teachers must be persistent in establishing authentic, caring relationships with their students. (Howard, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999)	Teacher greets students with a high five/hug. Community meetings allow students to express their concerns, worries, or feelings.
Collaborative	Students and teachers work with each other to solve problems, expand their knowledge, and create change. (Freire, 2011; Wade, 2007)	Students work together to perform a play. Students assist classmates offering alternative methods for solving challenging problems.
Safe	Students feel physically and emotionally safe and a focus is placed on the development of the whole child including emotional intelligence. (Teacher & Principal Perceptions)	The day starts with a morning meeting to welcome and greet all students. Empower students with conflict resolution strategies.
Equitable	Every child has the same value and importance in the classroom. (Teacher & Principal Perceptions)	Teachers ensure that each child is heard. Lessons are delivered in a way that gives all students access to the content.
Student & community centered	A classroom environment in which students and families feel valued and respected leads to students freely expressing ideas and becoming involved in issues of importance to them. (Nieto & Bode, 2008; Wade, 2007)	Students co-create the classroom rules and make decisions about their learning. Parents and families are involved in the creation of a community cookbook.
Culturally relevant	Teachers create a bridge between students' home and school lives by utilizing the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to inform the lessons, curriculum, and methodology. (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002)	During reader's workshop, poetry reflecting the culture of the students is utilized. Students introduce themselves to the class using bio bags filled with important artifacts in their lives.
Differentiated	Teachers must recognize multiple perspectives are informed by different values. Instruction must be catered to the values and needs of each student. (Santamaria, 2009; Wade, 2007)	Scaffolding and tiering vocabulary and spelling instruction based on student need. Allowing the students choices for demonstrating their learning.
Experiential	Through active participation, students experience authentic concepts and ideas in engaging, hands-on ways. (Gay, 2000; Wade, 2007)	Students use their knowledge of geometry to create 3-D marble runs. Students create logos and receive feedback from a major marketing director via video.
Reflective	Teachers and students participate in a continual cycle of dialogue and critical reflection aimed at confronting their own ideologies and improving their learning. (Darder, 2002; Delpit, 1995)	Students are asked to reflect on their behavior at the conclusion of play practice. Teachers provided students with checklists to guide them in assessing their own learning.
Activist	Students and teachers need real opportunities to work for social justice in their lives and to make key choices about issues of concern to them. (Banks, 2003; Nieto & Bode, 2008)	Students organize a community history hike to promote the positivity in their community. Teachers advocate for and encourage student voices.

Table 6, continued

Analytical	By critiquing norms and assumptions, students and teachers learn to consider whose voices are absent, what perspectives are presented, and how to articulate their thinking. (Freire, 2011; Wade, 2007)	Students offer multiple ways to solve a challenging mathematical problem. Students read a short story about the history of the community and discuss its impact on their lives.
Rigorous	Students are immersed in rigorous, standards-based academic work as they apply skills and knowledge to real-world issues. Teachers hold high expectations for both behavior and academics. (Howard, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Wade, 2007)	Seventh-grade students write college application essays and receive feedback from a professor. Children are required to repeat or review behavioral expectations if they are not met.

The conceptual framework constructed during this study was significant for several reasons. First, it filled a void in the literature by tying the work of leading scholars together in one place. Second, it blended the work of leading scholars in the field with the voices of teachers in the classroom, creating a bridge between theory and practice. Third, the framework offered not only descriptions of socially just teaching, but also concrete examples of what it looked like in the classroom. Finally, the framework may, in the future, be adapted and used for a variety of educational purposes. For example, teachers could use the framework as a guide for lesson planning or reflection; principals could use it as a tool for classroom observations or evaluations; and teacher preparation programs could use the framework to teach candidates about what socially just teaching looks like in the classroom.

In addition to the creation of a new conceptual framework for socially just teaching in the classroom, this study revealed that teacher preparation for social justice is a worthwhile endeavor that can be qualitatively captured.

Teacher Preparation for Social Justice Matters

This study sought to learn more about the ways in which six alumni of one teacher preparation program defined and implemented socially just teaching practices. Nieto (2000) argued that what novices learn in their teacher preparation programs could have an enormous

impact on the attitudes and practices they bring with them to the schools where they work. This statement was further supported by the interview and observation data gathered in this study. Through classroom observations and interviews with their principals, it was evident that the six teachers regularly incorporated strategies that mirrored the definition of socially just teaching that was operationally defined at the onset of the study as a commitment to maintaining high expectations, honoring students' diverse backgrounds, implementing culturally relevant teaching practices, fostering caring relationships, and engaging in an action-based cycle of critical self-reflection that recognizes personal assumptions and biases (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll et al., 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). In this section, I examine the teachers' interpretations and implementation of socially just teaching practices, as well as the linkage between the teachers' preparation and their classroom practices.

Teachers' definitions of social justice. At the beginning of the study, the six participating alumni were asked to respond to the first research question, "How would you define socially just teaching?" These findings were shared in the previous chapter and are analyzed in this section to reveal the similarities and differences among the six definitions as well as their connection to the program. To begin, I will discuss the commonalities between the definitions.

Similarities. Although no two definitions were exactly the same, there were some parallels among the alumni responses. First, all six definitions were student-centered and focused on practices that directly impacted children such as forming positive relationships, promoting equity, making content accessible, and putting the needs of the children above anything else. In addition, the six definitions were multidimensional, using several characteristics, tiers, or

approaches to describe what socially just teaching looked like in the classroom. In other words, socially just teaching was viewed as a process rather than a formula.

Beyond the student-centered focus, three of the definitions explicitly communicated the importance of holding high expectations and challenging students to excel. Howard (2006) believed that educators committed to improving education must acknowledge the intellectual ability in all children and build their practice around high expectations for all students. The alumni embraced a similar philosophy and highlighted the importance of rigor in their classrooms.

In addition to promoting high expectations, several of the definitions promoted equity, using language such as “fairness” and “leveling the playing field,” and giving the students “a fair chance.” Inherent in this language were the teachers’ beliefs that their students were not afforded the same access to resources and opportunities. Instead, they believed that issues of prejudice, racism, classism, and sexism had adversely affected students’ lives. Through their definitions, it was apparent that the participating teachers had, on some level, thought critically about systems of oppression and injustice. Therefore, I can conclude that the teacher preparation program was effective in developing the teachers’ dispositions toward social justice. However, the six teachers were not always in agreement about what socially just teaching looked like in the classroom.

Differences. As evidenced by the definitions presented in Chapter 4, the six alumni interpreted socially just teaching in vastly different ways. To begin, the six definitions varied in length and level of sophistication. Interestingly, the first-year teachers had a more difficult time articulating their definitions and did not elaborate or support their ideas with specific examples. For instance, two of the first year teachers simply equated social justice with equity. However,

the teachers with more experience had developed more refined definitions and were able to articulate the complexity of the term, citing more specific examples. In fact, three of the teachers reflected on how their definitions had evolved or changed since entering the classroom. The experiences they had, the students they taught, and the communities in which they worked, had impacted their understanding of socially just teaching, which led to changes in their interpretation of the term. These findings support Nieto and Bode's (2008) assertion that socially just teaching is largely impacted by the context in which it is being operationalized.

While a few of the definitions did speak to the intricacies of social justice, only one overtly described the term using a more critical lens. In his third year, Juan talked about issues outside the classroom that affected students' educational experiences such as deeply rooted structures that segregate communities and perpetuate White privilege (Shields, 2009). Although only one teacher's definition exhibited an activist approach, perhaps this finding would change if I were to track the teachers' definitions over time.

Despite these differences in definitions, the six teachers described the term within the context of their current experiences; further supporting the important role that environment plays in socially just teaching. Because no two school or classroom atmospheres are identical, it is unfair to assume that for a teacher preparation program to be labeled successful, alumni must interpret social justice in same way. Rather, a program can be deemed effective when the graduates are able to apply theory to the context of a situation and the needs of children. In this case, the program was, in fact, successful in accomplishing this objective. To further examine the effectiveness of the program, it is important to examine the link between the alumni definitions and the program's goals and objectives.

Alignment with UTPP's definition. According to UTPP's website, social justice "recognizes the essential value of every student and encourages reflection and action that challenges discriminatory practices and social problems including racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia." Upon analysis of the six definitions, it was apparent that alumni and program were in alignment with only the first part of the definition.

The graduates' student-centered definitions recognized the value of each child and promoted practices that built on student interests, recognized the strengths of each child, and acknowledged their home culture. In addition, the teachers' descriptions spoke about the importance of creating equitable environments, establishing trusting relationships, and motivating students to achieve their best. The explanations were also reflective in nature, as the six teachers thought long and hard about their beliefs and how they translated into the classroom. While the graduates' definitions matched the first part of the program's definition, there was less mention of the more activist-oriented role detailed in the second half of the definition.

According to its website, UTPP wanted its alumni to encourage action that challenged a wide array of discriminatory practices present in education. Although there was some mention of addressing social problems such as classism, racism, and sexism, these issues were not a large percentage of the definitions. In fact, only the two third-year teachers overtly mentioned these elements in their responses. Angelica wanted her students to have the skills to "critically question the world and understand their context," while Juan wanted to "challenge the testing culture and eradicate structures that foster segregation and discrimination." Again, it appeared that first- and second-year alumni focused on the more practice-oriented explanations whereas the third-year teachers had made the transition toward more complex, critical definitions.

In summary, the six alumni definitions were only partially aligned with UTPP's philosophy. As a result, more must be done by UTPP to help preservice candidates think about socially just teaching through a more critical lens that incorporates action and activism. While it is apparent that UTPP can do more to strengthen preservice teachers' ability to engage in activism, the program *had* effectively prepared social justice educators to speak about their beliefs and ideologies because the six teacher participants were all able to articulate a working definition of social justice. More importantly, they were able to implement their vision of socially just teaching in the classroom.

Socially just teaching is not formulaic. In an effort to validate the teachers' self-reported definitions of socially just teaching, each teacher was observed for a full day to document the implementation of their philosophy in the classroom. Specifically, the second research question asked, "How do alumni implement socially just teaching practices in urban, elementary classrooms?" Chapter 4 considered the summative implementation of the 12 socially just teaching characteristics outlined in the revised conceptual framework that was reviewed earlier in this chapter. Data from the full-day classroom observations showed that teachers excelled at creating student- and family-centered environments, implementing rigorous instruction, and creating experiential learning activities.

Upon analyzing the coded data, there were also some notable patterns in implementation that emerged concerning teaching styles. A description of each participant's teaching style and strengths, their principal's perceptions, and reported areas of growth were provided in Chapter 4. Interestingly, the triangulated data all aligned. In other words, what I observed during my full-day observation matched closely with the principal's opinions of the teachers' practices, and was

further articulated by the alumni during his or her reflection. The triangulated data not only speak to the validity of the methods and expands the current body of self-reported research on teacher preparation program outcomes, but also highlights the teachers' abilities to accurately reflect on their practice.

Even though the six teachers emerged from the same teacher preparation program, they had vastly different styles. None of the classrooms looked, felt, or operated in the same exact way, yet each teacher operationalized socially just teaching practices in some form. In only their first years of teaching, the practitioners I observed understood the responsibility of fostering students' social, emotional, and academic intelligence. As shown by the data, each classroom felt physically and emotionally safe, students' voices were valued, children worked collaboratively, and content standards were taught. These data show there is no uniform approach to socially just teaching. Rather, the power is in the ability of teachers to differentiate their styles to complement the backgrounds, interests, and needs of their students. As with the interview data, the observation data supported the fact that UTPP adequately prepared the educators to implement socially teaching practices.

Beyond implementation, the teachers displayed positive attitudes toward teaching and were optimistic about their future as educators. Although they faced obstacles in their first years, the alumni were not worn ragged and ready to quit, as many new teachers are (Darling-Hammond, 2010). None of the six teachers expressed a desire to leave the profession. Rather, all seemed committed to their craft and to improving the educational experiences for the students that they served. For the most part, the teachers had the dispositions, tools, and support needed to negotiate challenges and remain committed to their beliefs and ideologies. Therefore, it can be

concluded that preparing teachers to be social justice educators is a worthwhile and effective endeavor and may provide them with the foundation and strength to mitigate the consequences of burnout for new teachers in the field. In addition to their experience in UTPP, it is also plausible that nonprogram factors such as positive school culture, personal characteristics of resilience and perseverance, and a variety of alternative topics not explored in this study contributed to the teachers' optimistic attitudes about their work.

In addition to finding the value in preparing teachers to work for social justice, this study highlighted the importance of relationship building and collaboration in education for social justice.

Relationship Building and Collaboration Are Critical to Socially Just Teaching

The final research question asked, “What influences of the program (UTPP) do alumni identify as contributing to their implementation of socially just teaching practices?” As shown in Chapter 4, participants credited their guiding teachers, faculty advisors, and fellow cohort members as being the most critical influences of the program. UTPP's structure allowed preservice candidates to develop meaningful relationships with several key individuals. The extended field experiences—lasting almost a full year across two student-teaching placements—enabled students to connect with and learn from their guiding teachers. Faculty advisors provided guidance through weekly seminar meetings and field support during both the novice and resident years of the program. Finally, UTPP's cohort model facilitated collaboration and networks of support amongst preservice teachers, which extended into their beginning years of teaching.

Valenzuela (1999) articulated the need for educators to develop authentic, caring relationships with students. Traditionally, this concept has been applied in the context of K–12

education. However, findings from this study highlighted the importance of establishing trusting relationships with adult learners as well. As mentioned, UTPP embraced this philosophy and put support mechanisms in place to assist candidates in their transition to the classroom. When the six beginning teachers faced struggles, it was often the individuals they had encountered during the program—not a book or theory—that helped them navigate a problem. Not a single teacher felt that he or she was working in isolation, a finding that suggests the need for all teacher preparation programs to evaluate the ways in which they foster caring, supportive relationships with their preservice candidates. Specifically, programs should learn from UTPP and give careful consideration to the guiding teacher selection process, faculty hiring, and candidate selection.

Intentional Selection of Candidates is a Matter of Social Justice

The conscious choice of selecting teachers with a commitment to working toward justice for *all* students is, in fact, the most socially just thing that can be done in education. UTPP's strict selection process sought candidates with dispositions toward social justice. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, UTPP's admission requirements included several academic benchmarks including minimum GPA standards, a review of undergraduate transcripts, and the submission of three letters of recommendation. Beyond these academic components, however, potential candidates were required to submit a three-to-five page written statement of purpose and participate in a group interview. In both the essay and the interview, potential candidates were required to elaborate on their understandings of justice and articulate their interest in the values of program.

Essentially, UTPP was very intentional about the types of individuals it selected as future teachers. More teacher preparation programs, districts, and schools must follow in the footsteps

of UTPP and think more critically about the types of individuals they are choosing or hiring as teachers. When educational leaders are more selective about the types of individuals they choose to place before children, institutions of learning are far more likely to inherit teachers with the ability to develop the craft of teaching for social justice.

Developing the Craft of Teaching for Social Justice

As demonstrated by the data presented in Chapter 4, the six teachers were, to varying degrees, successful in operationalizing socially just teaching practices in urban elementary classrooms. However, the practitioners did encounter some obstacles in their efforts to implement socially just teaching practices. Specifically, the teachers cited classroom management issues, a lack of resources, and the pressures of high-stakes testing as their greatest obstacles to implementation. While UTPP cannot immediately change the realities of limited resources or standardized testing, the program can better prepare prospective teachers to navigate these tensions by paying greater attention to what Haberman (2010) has called the craft of teaching:

What effective teachers demonstrate is neither theory nor research: It is craft knowledge learned through practice. Further, it is a craft knowledge that can be learned only by individuals who hold a particular ideology regarding the nature of child development, the nature of learning, and the role of schooling for all children and youth in a free society.
(p. 136)

In other words, teachers' dispositions and attitudes will determine their readiness to hone their craft in the classroom. As demonstrated by their definitions and classroom practices, the six teachers' ideologies were rooted in a belief that teaching for social justice was a moral imperative.

Haberman (2010) further argued that craft should be rooted in theory.

As demonstrated by its program handbook, website, and select course syllabi, UTPP was committed to exposing preservice teachers to a variety of theories of teaching and learning including the work of Dewey, Giroux, Freire, Moll, Ladson-Billings, and Valenzuela, to name a few. Although the teachers' did not cite these specific theorists often, they did reference several concepts and ideas that emerged from their work, including the importance of democratic schooling (Dewey, 1916), transformative education (Giroux, 2009), praxis (Freire, 2011) funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 2005), culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999). During my interviews and observations with the six alumni, it was evident that they attempted to root their practice in the theory they explored during their teacher preparation coursework.

Although the teachers felt that they were exposed to a variety of theories that expanded their thinking about teaching and learning, they were, at-times, ill-prepared to make these theories come to life within the context of their classrooms or how to use their knowledge to overcome obstacles. Most notably, the teachers wished they had learned more during the program about how to run their classrooms, navigate mandated testing, work with difficult students, manage their time, and cope with minimal resources. In sum, they needed to learn more about dealing with the complexities of the profession or the craft of teaching. Specific suggestions for program improvement are further explored in the recommendations section.

In addition to the major findings discussed in this section, the study yielded a set of minor findings that are worthy of discussion.

Minor Findings

Further analysis of the data revealed that educational leaders committed to providing equitable schooling opportunities for *all* children must also consider: (a) the significance of school culture on social justice pedagogy, (b) challenges to activist teaching, (c) the importance of critical reflection, and (d) the impact of teaching experience on philosophies of social justice. The following section will explore these issues, beginning with the importance of school culture.

The Significance of School Culture on Social Justice Pedagogy

In a 2011 study of beginning educators, Picower found that teachers had a desire to teach for social justice, but encountered obstacles including mandated curriculum and resistant colleagues. Picower (2011) further concluded that new teachers needed protection from hostile environments, practice in developing curriculum, and a community of like-minded people.

In contrast to Picower's (2011) research, the six participating teachers in this study worked in two charter schools that embraced and welcomed the graduates' varied approaches to socially just teaching. Both schools encouraged, if not required, their teachers to collaborate, create innovative curriculum, build student-centered classrooms, foster critical thinking, and work closely with families. In other words, the missions of both Excel and Bright Hope were aligned with the philosophy of UTPP. As a result, the teachers rarely encountered resistance from school leaders, parents, or colleagues when implementing socially just teaching practices.

These findings speak to the critical importance of school culture prevalent in the literature (Nieto, 2000). When a teacher's ideology or beliefs about social justice teacher are closely aligned with the goals and objectives of the school, socially just teaching pedagogy can flourish. Because the culture of the schools in this study largely mirrored the teachers' beliefs,

they did not experience resistance from school officials, colleagues, or parents. Instead, the teachers felt supported in their mission to engage in transformative practices such as writing their own curriculum or using alternative forms of assessment.

These findings have important implications for UTPP as well. The program must not only prepare its candidates to implement socially just teaching practices, but it must also educate potential teachers about selecting a school where their pedagogical philosophy and style will be welcomed and cultivated. If, however, these schools are limited in number, then UTPP might also need to expand its outreach to district and school leaders to help them understand the program's philosophy, demonstrate the impact of its alumni, and advocate for the hiring of their teacher candidates. In other words, if UTPP is preparing candidates to work in schools that currently do not exist, then they have a responsibility to their students to advocate for change. Essentially, UTPP must model the kind of activism they hope their graduates will enact one day.

Challenges to Activist Teaching

For the purposes of the study, activism was defined as two-pronged approach to teaching and learning. Teachers have a responsibility to (a) raise students' social consciousness inside the classroom and, (b) critically examine and questions systems of oppression outside of the classroom as well as advocate for educational reform.

Activism in the classroom. Social justice educators must hone students' critical literacy or ability to recognize or address inequities (North, 2009). As with findings from previous studies, the six teachers' in this study believed in the need for activism in the classroom, but struggled with integrating it into their practice on a regular basis (Cochran-Smith, Reagan et al., 2009; Montano et al., 2002). In their 2009 study of classroom teachers' practices, Cochran-Smith

and colleagues found that teachers seldom offered critiques of larger structures and arrangements of schooling. In other words, a critical, activist perspective was not detected in most of the participants' responses. This qualitative study yielded similar results. While the six teachers talked about the importance of fostering students' critical consciousness over 20 times during the course of their interviews, I witnessed students' engaging in these types of activities only once during my classroom visits. Because I was present for only a single day, it is unfair to assume that the teachers were not at all engaged in activist approaches to teaching and learning. Alternatively, the school environment may have presented an obstacle regularly implementing activist strategies. For example, in my experience as a public school teacher in the surrounding district, demands of daily schedules, limited resources, and mandated content requirements impeded my ability to find the time and resources needed to promote activism, which might have been the case with some of the research participants as well. Clearly, the root causes of this challenge warrant further research. However, in addition to the limited observation, all six teachers spoke about wanting to improve in this area so it clearly remained a facet of concern for program alumni.

Activism outside of the classroom. When probed about taking an activist stance to transform education outside of the classroom, only one teacher mentioned this as a goal. In Montano and colleagues' 2002 study of UTPP graduates, alumni were critical of UTPP's failure to provide a critical analysis of social justice and asserted that the program did not prepare them to promote activism outside of the classroom. Their study revealed that participants believed that UTPP lacked a clear a commitment to fostering and supporting teacher activism. Unfortunately, the limited examples of activism in this study signified that activism remains a crucial concern

for UTPP alumni. As a result, the program may need to re-examine its approach to teaching and promoting socially conscious practices both inside and outside of the classroom.

One way in which UTPP can improve in these efforts is by consistently and explicitly modeling examples of activism. For example, UTPP could use their platform as a research university to reach out to local school board members or district leaders and call on them to re-examine the use of scripted curriculum, high stakes testing, or distribution of resources. Furthermore, the program could involve candidates in these efforts, which would afford preservice teachers the opportunities to become immersed in activism much earlier in their careers. Through mutual participation in activist-oriented activities, it is possible that both the program and teachers could affect even greater change in the educational community.

Building Critically Reflective Practitioners

As mentioned earlier, all six teachers interviewed during the course of the study had the ability to accurately and critically reflect on their practice. More importantly, the teachers' perceptions of their practice aligned closely with their principal's perceptions and my observation. Clearly, the alumni understood how to analyze their own teaching and identify areas for improvement. However, the teachers were almost overly critical, choosing to focus more on their areas of need rather than their abilities or strengths. To improve teacher confidence levels, more attention needs to be paid to not only reflecting on the shortcomings of practice, but also celebrating successes and improvements. Although the teachers were able to think about and evaluate their practice, recommendations for linking reflection to action were made.

When asked about one way in which UTPP could better prepare practitioners to work in urban schools, one principal cited the need for candidates to engage in more intentional cycles of

critical reflection. In other words, she wished that preservice teachers had opportunities to backward plan a lesson, teach it, analyze varying levels of student work, examine original assumptions, and redesign the lesson. Anne believed, “[Once] you can do a cycle then you can do anything.” Furthermore, Angelica, a third-year alumni, also wished she had been given more opportunities during the program to more deeply reflect on her teaching. In fact, at the conclusion of our second interview, Angelica suggested that the one-page description of the 12 characteristics of socially just teaching along with the practical examples developed during this study could serve as a tool for teachers to more critically reflect on their work.

While UTPP can assist teachers in developing more intentional strategies for reflecting on the teaching and learning process, the program cannot control the influence of years of experience on teachers’ conceptions of social justice.

The Impact of Teaching Experience on Philosophies of Social Justice

It was evident in the teachers’ definitions of socially just teaching that the experienced teachers shared more refined understandings of the term. While the first year teachers provided brief definitions, the more seasoned teachers offered complex definitions that addressed the complexity of the term and included specific classroom examples. In fact, the second- and third-year teachers even spoke about their evolution of the term and credited previous classroom experiences as impacting their current definitions. In summary, with each passing year of experience, the teachers felt their understandings of social justice changed. These evolving descriptions support North’s (2009) assertion that social justice is unfinished in nature. Rather, it is an ongoing process that is often learned or mastered in stages.

The effect of experience on levels of sophistication was evident in practice as well. The more experienced teachers had greater success in implementing a wider array of socially just teaching practices in the classroom. For the most part, the second- and third-year teachers were more inclined to use a variety of the 12 tenets, whereas the new teachers were more likely to focus on only a few strategies throughout the course of the school day. Essentially, the data showed that teachers with more experience consistently implemented a range of socially just teaching strategies as compared to beginning teachers who employed some strategies, but were less successful in incorporating strategies such as differentiation, experiential learning, and analytical thinking. Therefore, it can be assumed that socially just teaching is a continual process of learning and the novice teachers will hone their pedagogy as they gain more classroom experience.

In addition to reviewing the major and minor findings, it is essential to think about their implications and make recommendations for change. In the next section, I make recommendations for change on the national, state, local, and ground levels.

Recommendations

Teacher Preparation Policy

In 2014, the US Department of Education launched an initiative entitled *Improving Teacher Preparation*. The initiative claimed that institutions were not adequately preparing preservice teachers and lacked the feedback needed to identify where program graduates go to teach, how long they stay, and how they perform in the classroom. Proposed regulations to improve the availability of information on teacher preparation and offer transparency into the

performance of teacher education programs included the creation of a feedback loop among programs, prospective teachers, employers, and the public.

To achieve this objective, several key indicators were outlined; this study addressed three of them, including: (a) evidence that the program produces candidates with content and pedagogical knowledge and quality clinical preparation, (b) teacher and employer feedback, and (c) employment outcomes. The data generated from the teacher interviews and classroom observations in this investigation serve as evidence of the candidates' abilities and pedagogical knowledge. Furthermore, the principal interviews yielded opportunities for employer feedback and the detailed description of the teachers' classroom practices provided some evidence of employment outcomes.

In addition, this study addressed three key provisions of the proposed regulations including customer satisfaction, program review, and employment outcomes. Again, this study allowed for teachers (the customers) to review their preparation experience, and the data collected during interviews and observations along with program documents were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the program. Because the primary methodology proposed in the president's initiative was quantitative, the current study could serve as a model for a qualitative supplement.

While this study may provide a model for qualitatively analyzing some of the indicators and provisions outlined by the initiative, it does not provide information about other indicators such as student outcomes, academic gains, retention rates, and performance levels. As a result, it is imperative that future studies address these issues to provide a more comprehensive report of

teacher preparation program outcomes. These suggestions will be further discussed in the recommendations for future research section at the conclusion of this chapter. In addition to informing teacher preparation policy, this study may have implications for university practices.

Teacher Preparation

While the findings from this study are not generalizable, they may have important implications for University Teacher Preparation Programs. First, replicating the study, including interviewing and observing program alumni as well as obtaining feedback from school principals, may provide other teacher preparation programs with valuable insight about their design. If preparation programs listen to the thoughts and opinions of teachers and principals in the field, they may learn more about the value of their coursework, the impact of the faculty, the struggles faced by beginning teachers, and the practices of their alumni. Furthermore, by observing alumni in the field, universities will be able to strengthen alumni data and report on the effects of their preparation efforts. By engaging in this research, universities may be better equipped to meet the demands of preservice candidates, thus improving the efficacy and effectiveness of their programs.

Cochran-Smith (2004) argued that for teacher education for social justice to move forward, the field must identify and analyze model programs that can serve as building blocks for other teacher preparation efforts with the goal of social justice. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), exemplary teacher education programs are ones that have:

1. A common, clear vision of good teaching that permeates all coursework and clinical experiences.

2. Well-defined standards of professional practice and performance that are used to guide and evaluate coursework and clinical work.
3. A strong core curriculum taught in the context of practice and grounded in theory.
4. Extended student-teaching experiences that are carefully chosen to support the ideals of the program.
5. Extensive use of case methods, teacher research, performance assessments, and portfolio evaluation that applies learning to real world problems of practice.
6. Explicit strategies to help students confront their own deep-seated beliefs and assumptions.
7. Strong relationships, common knowledge, and share beliefs among school and university faculty.

A replication of this investigation by teacher preparation programs might yield valuable information about the exemplary components identified above.

As a result of this study, I argue that UTPP successfully embedded all but two of these elements into the fabric of its program. UTPP had a clear vision of social justice that permeated all aspects of the program, set clear objectives for professional practice, grounded its coursework in theory, provided candidates with extended student-teaching placements, and employed strategies to help candidates examine their assumptions and ideologies. Although UTPP did foster strong relationships among university faculty and students, it must make greater efforts to reach out to those schools where students are most in need of exemplary practitioners committed to social justice. Furthermore, UTPP could more effectively incorporate case methods and teacher research that would allow preservice teachers to grapple with the real world problems of

practice or complexities of teaching. While UTPP may be able to grow in these two categories, its selection criteria can serve as a model for other programs.

Absent from Darling-Hammond's (2010) features of exemplary programs was a rigorous process for selecting candidates. In fact, I argue that this component is absolutely essential and should be added to the list. As I articulated earlier, teacher selection is a matter of social justice. Programs must pay greater attention to the types of individuals that are allowed to join the profession. To achieve this objective, UTPP required prospective candidates to articulate their dispositions toward social justice in a written statement of purpose, to collaborate with others in a group interview, and to elaborate on their experiences working in urban environments. This intentional process ensured that the program recruited the kinds of teachers that all students deserve. Teacher preparation programs looking to improve the quality of educators they produce should use UTPP's thoughtful selection criteria as a model for evaluating their admission requirements as well.

Although the structure of UTPP did contain most elements of exemplar programs, I would like to make a few recommendations for further strengthening the construction of the program.

UTPP

Throughout the course of the study, teachers identified several challenges to implementing socially just teaching practices, including struggles with classroom management, demands of testing, and balancing time. As a result, UTPP must think about how it can support teachers in managing these problems. I suggest that the program think more critically about

assisting preservice teachers in cultivating their craft, developing assessment literacy, addressing activism, and strengthening outreach efforts.

Cultivating the craft of teaching for social justice. Teaching is a complex endeavor that requires teachers to understand and do a variety of things, many simultaneously. As a result, teachers must learn to be able to address problems of practice such as concerns around establishing classroom discipline or managing resources as they arise (Darling-Hammond, 2010). To help teachers in preparing for these challenges, UTPP should consider including a course or series of workshops aimed at assisting teachers in dealing with the multiple responsibilities they will encounter in the profession. Specifically, candidates need a formal space to learn about varied approaches to setting up a classroom, establishing routines, following procedures, solving conflicts, working with colleagues, assigning homework, communicating with parents, and adhering to school and district policies. By including a course, lecture series, workshops, videotaped lessons, or assignments aimed at addressing the craft of teaching, the program could potentially minimize the obstacles teachers encounter in implementing effective socially just instruction.

Developing assessment literacy in preservice candidates. In addition to juggling the daily tasks of teaching, alumni participants expressed concern about balancing the reality of high stakes testing prevalent in public schools with their personal beliefs about assessment. With the recent implementation of the common core standards and the subsequent development of online testing instruments, standardized testing will likely remain a requirement of public education for years to come. To combat these unjust practices, UTPP must focus on developing a culturally relevant assessment literacy that will enable candidates to gather clear evidence of student

learning that they can then use to challenge the inadequate or often misleading results from high stakes testing (Sloan, 2010). According to Sloan (2010), assessment literacy requires teachers to obtain the skills to define clear learning goals, use a mix of assessment techniques, analyze data, provide effective feedback, craft appropriate instructional adaptations, and involve students in the assessment process. If UTPP can increase preservice candidates' knowledge of assessment techniques, beginning teachers may feel more empowered with strategies for monitoring student progress and less stressed about the pressures often associated with standardized testing.

Addressing activism in the classroom. UTPP must also acknowledge alumni struggles to effectively operationalize activism both inside and outside of the classroom. To help teachers understand what activism looks like inside the classroom, UTPP must draw on its network of veteran alumni or model teachers. These knowledgeable individuals could serve as guest speakers or mentors for beginning teachers. Perhaps the program needs to think about how to extend its support beyond the two years of the program by offering ongoing professional development opportunities for new teachers to help them reflect on their teaching and push them to think about ways to integrate activism—along with the other 11 tenets of socially just teaching—into their practice. The conceptual framework created in this study could serve as an excellent tool for engaging teachers in these conversations.

The program must also provide more explicit opportunities for alumni to engage in activism outside of the classroom. UTPP must model, through all facets of the program, methods for challenging the status quo and transforming education. Better yet, the program should create opportunities for the university faculty and staff to work collaboratively with students to promote

educational change. One way in which UTPP can demonstrate activism is through greater efforts to strengthen university-school partnerships.

Strengthening partnerships and expanding outreach. Creating the kinds of schools that *all* children deserve requires more than just an effective teacher in every classroom. While exemplary teachers are important, findings from this study also pointed to the significance of a school culture informed by the ideals of social justice. In his 2005 study, Duncan-Andrade articulated that school leaders benefitted from developing a better understanding of effective urban teachers' philosophies and practices and professional development opportunities to support the growth of all teachers. UTPP certainly has the faculty and knowledge to provide schools with these valuable learning opportunities and resources. Even more important, reaching out to schools and challenging their current thinking about teaching and learning would mean that UTPP is living out its own mission of advocating for educational change. In this way, the program would be modeling its own expectation of activism for candidates while educating leaders about the significance of socially just teaching. Again, the conceptual framework could serve as an excellent tool for engaging district and school leaders in these critical conversations.

District and School Leaders

School leaders may want to consider using the conceptual framework as a qualitative instrument for facilitating professional growth opportunities. For example, principals could conduct classroom observations and then meet with teachers to discuss their pedagogy, using the characteristics of socially just teaching as a frame for reflection and conversation. Better yet, school leaders could provide occasions for teachers to participate in peer observation. By witnessing socially just teaching in action and engaging in critical dialogue with their peers,

teachers may feel more adequately prepared to incorporate socially just teaching practices into their daily instruction.

As an educator, I found the profitability of the observation I conducted in this study to have a considerable impact on my own practice. Having the time to document the activities and strategies of the six alumni created an opportunity for me to reflect on my own practice. In fact, I adapted a few of the ideas or lessons and implemented them in my own classroom. Unfortunately, educators seldom have the chance to engage in these kind of authentic professional learning opportunities. However, if enlightened, principals and school leaders may also recognize the potential power of this type of authentic peer collaboration among teachers.

Alumni Teachers

This study revealed that guiding teachers, faculty advisors, and fellow alumni of the program had the greatest influence on the alumni teachers' implementation of socially just teaching practices. Therefore, I would recommend that new teachers seek out a mentor or peer partner to assist them in their implementation of socially just teaching practices. Having a person with whom new teachers can discuss challenges and celebrate successes is crucial in developing confidence as a beginning educator.

As they progress in their careers, alumni will become UTPP's most knowledgeable experts in how to translate socially just theory into practice. As a result, UTPP graduates must be willing to take on the responsibility of serving as guiding teachers for candidates. This will not only benefit the preservice teachers, but also will provide yet another opportunity for the alumni to reflect on their evolution as social justice educators.

Finally, I would encourage new teachers to be patient and to forgive themselves for the mistakes they will inevitably make along the way. Managing a classroom of 30 or more diverse children, while establishing caring relationships with students and families, and delivering rigorous content, is not an easy task. While it is important to critically reflect on one's practice and strive for growth, it is also important to step back and celebrate the small victories along the way. Those who truly aspire to be life-long educators must also realize that socially just teaching is never fully mastered (North, 2009). Rather, teachers can only aspire to continually evolve in providing their students with enriching educational experiences that will lead them down their own paths of discovery and advocacy.

Future Research

At the onset of the study, it was clear that more research was needed to learn about what happens to teachers after they leave social justice teacher preparation programs (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Dover, 2013). While this study did accomplish that objective, there are several other areas of research that must to be examined in order to combat the critics of socially just teaching and strengthen the case for this approach. North (2009) contended that more formalized professional development programs as well as the creation of evaluative tools are necessary for the realization of teacher education for democracy and social justice. For these reasons, future research possibilities include the following:

1. A longitudinal study following the practices of the six teachers involved in this study is needed to learn more about how the teachers' perceptions and implementation of socially just teaching practices may evolve over time.

2. To increase the sample size and increase the validity of the study, one cohort of graduates (approximately 15–20) could be interviewed and observed. Studying a larger sample size has the potential to yield greater understandings of what socially just teaching looks like in the classroom as well as to provide UTPP with more information about the impact of the program on their alumni.
3. To determine the impact of school context and culture, it would be valuable to replicate the study in a variety of contexts to examine the variables in which socially just teaching may either flounder or flourish. For example, it would be noteworthy to study graduates teaching at traditional public schools or do a comparative study of graduates from both a charter and public school.
4. To learn more about the preparation provided by UTPP, it would also be necessary to study graduates working at both the elementary and secondary levels.
5. This study did not address a glaring gap in current research: student outcomes. Future research must seek to connect socially just teaching practices to student achievement, success, or even perceptions. This research did not just shed light on the impact that socially just teaching practices have on children's achievement, but also provided valuable information to inform teacher preparation policy such as the President Obama's *Improving Teacher Preparation* initiative.
6. A major challenge in studying teacher preparation for social justice, Cochran-Smith (2004) said, is developing rich and sensitive outcome measures that take all aspects of successful teaching for social justice into account including principal evaluations, classroom pedagogy, and social activism. This study addressed principal perceptions

and classroom practices, but failed to closely explore the third issue, social activism. Future studies must explore teachers' attitudes and abilities around challenging the status quo as well as define best practices for teacher preparation programs to cultivate activist-minded practitioners.

Conclusion

What I did not anticipate when I set out to study the practices of six novice teachers was the profound impact that this work would have on my own practice. As I spoke with fellow educators, I began searching inside myself and critically reflecting on the ways in which I implemented socially just teaching practices in my fifth-grade classroom. Stepping into the classrooms of passionate young teachers and engaging in dialogue with veteran principals reenergized my spirit and deepened my passion and commitment to the challenging task of educating *all* students. Along the way, I was inspired by the teaching, awed by the passion, and grateful for the opportunity that so few educators have—the gift of time to dig into the literature, collaborate with colleagues, and pave my own path of professional development. As a result of this experience, I am confident I will move forward as a stronger advocate for socially just teaching, a more knowledgeable guiding teacher committed to communicating the craft of the profession, and a more vocal leader in celebrating and elevating the art of teaching.

APPENDIX A

UTPP LETTER OF SUPPORT

Dear Allison:

The leadership team met to discuss your proposal and we all agreed that it looks like a very worthwhile and interesting study. We are pleased to approve it and would be willing to send a recruitment email out on your behalf to the UTPP alumni (that meet your criteria, below). Please let us know if this is your intention and if so, when you would like to proceed (pending your IRB approval).

Best of luck with your study,
Karen

Sampling Criteria:

"I seek to recruit five UTPP alumni who meet the following criteria: (a) have finished UTPP within the last five years, (b) work at an area public or charter school, (c) teach in a elementary self-contained classroom, and (d) are willing to be interviewed and observed."

APPENDIX B

DISTRICT LETTER OF APPROVAL

Dear Researcher:

I am pleased to inform you that the proposed study 12225, “Social Justice and the Elementary Classroom: How Teachers Define and Implement Socially Just Teaching Practices in Urban Schools,” was approved by the Committee on External Research Review. Once we have verified that your proposal package is complete, including a signed statement of agreement (see attached) and IRB approval from your institution, our office will follow with a formal approval letter. You are free to proceed with data collection once you have received the formal approval letter.

Please be aware that this approval is valid for one year’s time at which point our office will follow up with the sponsoring institution to learn about the study’s progress and findings of interest to the district. You will have the opportunity then to renew approval of the proposal should additional time be required for data collection or if modifications to the original proposal are necessary.

In our effort to document burden on schools, please let our office know the names of the schools where you will be collecting the data. We understand that you may not have selected your final sample schools nor have gotten permission to collect data, so we will be patient. However, we will need to know as soon as you know. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or thoughts. Thanks.

Sincerely,

Katherine Hayes, Ph.D.

APPENDIX C

PRE-OBSERVATION TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTRODUCTION...

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! As you know, I am investigating how alumni of UTPP define and implement socially just teaching practices in urban elementary schools. Hopefully this will help UTPP learn more about the effects of the program on teachers working in the current context of public education.

Today I want to have a conversation about your perspective on socially just teaching. There are no right or wrong answers so please feel free to speak candidly about your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.

1. How would you define socially just teaching?

2. Is the idea of teaching for social justice important to you in your daily work? If so, why? If not, why not?

3. Can you give me some examples of how you use socially just strategies in your classroom?

Probe: How do you differentiate instruction? How do you organize your lessons? What activities do the students do throughout the day?

4. Who or what would you say has influenced your philosophy of socially just teaching?

Probe: What influence, if any, did your teacher preparation program have?

Probe: Have any significant individuals influenced your practice?

Probe: How has your practice been shaped by professional learning opportunities at your school site?

5. Have you encountered any challenges/obstacles in using socially just teaching practices in your classroom? If so, explain.

Probe: For example, school mandates, student needs, parent demands.

Probe: If not, why do you think you have been so successful?

6. What are your plans for the future? Will you continue to bring social justice into your work?

Debrief Statement: Thank you so much for your honesty today. I am really looking forward to visiting your classroom and observing your practice. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX D

POSTOBSERVATION TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(Immediately following the classroom observation)

INTRODUCTION...

Thank you for opening your classroom to me today! I enjoyed watching you interact with your students. I want to spend a little bit of time reflecting on what you did today and talking a bit more about your perceptions of socially just teaching.

1. What are your thoughts about your lessons today?

Probe: Did they work as expected?

Probe: Which do you think were most effective and why?

Probe: Is there anything you would change? If so, what?

Probe: Was this a typical day for you? Why or why not?

2. In your initial interview you defined socially just teaching practices as [read the definition]. How would you say you incorporated those practices into your lessons today?

3. Walk me through one of your lessons today.

Probe: How did you plan this lesson?

Probe: Was this a lesson you designed yourself?

Probe: How do you think you incorporated socially just teaching practices?

Probe: Why did you decide the strategies you used would be important?

(Do you happen to have a copy of that lesson that you could give/send me?)

4. These were some of the strategies I saw you using today [list the strategies]. Would you say that is accurate? Are there any that I missed?

5. I am going to show you the list of socially just teaching strategies that I have been using to guide this study and I want your input.

(Hand the teacher Table 2 and give the teacher time to read the descriptions)

Probe: Which three do you think are the most important and why?

Probe: Which three do you think are the least important and why?

Probe: Are there any of these that you would eliminate from the list? Why?

Probe: Are there any that you would add to the list? Why?

Probe: Now that you've seen this list, which strategies do you think you use?

Debrief: Thank you so much for your candidness and willingness to participate in my study. I look forward to sharing my findings with you. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX E

SUPERVISOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(The supervisor may be an assistant principal, coach, coordinator-an administrator who would be knowledgeable about the teacher)

Interview Protocol

EXPLAIN PROJECT...

As you know, [teacher names] are participating in a study that I am conducting to research how alumni of UTPP define and implement socially just teaching practices in urban elementary schools. Hopefully, this research will be used to improve the ways in which we prepare teachers to work in urban, elementary schools as well as lead to the creation of some concrete examples of socially just teaching in the current context of public education. Because I am only able to observe in their classrooms for a day, I am interested in your perceptions of their teaching as well.

1. What are your expectations do have of your teachers here at [school name] in terms of instructional design?

Probe: How would you describe the culture of this school for teachers?

2. One of UTPP's goals is for teachers to learn to teach for social justice. How do you define socially just teaching?

3. Let's talk specifically about [teacher] now. How would you describe his/her teaching style?

Probe: What do you think are some of his/her strengths? Weaknesses?

4. I am going to show you a list of the socially just teaching practices and their descriptions that I am using the guide this study. (Show them Table 2)

- a. Now that you have seen this list, which of these would you say are the top three strategies that you see [teacher] use on a regular basis? Can you give an example or two?
- b. Are there any that you would say [teacher] rarely uses?
- c. Are any practices missing from this list that you think are important?

5. Repeat questions 3 and 4 for each teacher at the school site.

Debrief Statement: Thank you so much for your time and allowing me to visit your school. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX F

UTPP STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTRODUCTION...

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I am conducting a qualitative study, examining how UTPP alumni define socially just teaching and how they translate the social justice theory they learned in UTPP into classroom practice. Today, I would like to learn a little bit more about UTPP's mission, goals, guiding principles, and coursework.

1. What makes UTPP different from traditional teacher preparation programs?

Probe: How does its mission compare to more traditional programs?

Probe: How is the coursework different?

2. How would you say UTPP has evolved in the last 10 years?

Probe: Have the requirements of the program changed?

3. What challenges does UTPP face in preparing educators for the current context of education?

Probe: Have you had any issues with hiring or job placement?

Probe: Has the test driven context of education affected the way teachers are prepared in the program?

4. Who would you say are the significant scholars or theories that teachers study in the program?

Probe: How do you decide which theories are promoted in the program?

5. I am going to show you the list of socially just teaching strategies that I have been using to guide this study and I want your input.

(Hand the staff member Table 2 and give the teacher time to read the descriptions)

Probe: Do you think all of these are addressed in UTPP?

Probe: Which three do you think are the most important and why?

Probe: Which three do you think are the least important and why?

Probe: Are there any of these that you would eliminate from the list? Why?

Probe: Are there any that you would add to the list? Why?

Probe: Now that you've seen this list, which strategies do you think alumni use most often?

Debrief: Thank you so much for your candidness and willingness to talk to me. I look forward to sharing my findings with you. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX G

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Location:	Participants:
Content Area:	Materials:
Start Time:	Length of Observation:

Key Word List (Tenets of SJ Teaching)

SC	Student Centered	CR	Culturally Relevant
COL	Collaborative	DIF	Differentiated
EX	Experiential	ACT	Activist
RIG	Rigorous	RB	Relationship Based
AN	Analytical	RE	Reflective

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity Field Notes</u>	<u>Tenets of SJ</u>

APPENDIX H

MEMBER CHECK LETTER

Dear _____,

I hope you are having a wonderful school year! Thank you again for agreeing to speak with me about the various ways you define and implement socially just teaching practices in your classroom. I really enjoyed our time together and was truly inspired by your work! I am reaching the final stages of my dissertation and will soon be able to share my findings with you.

Attached are two important documents:

1. A typed transcript of our two interviews. These may contain some spelling errors, or improperly spelled proper nouns that were unfamiliar to the transcriptionist. I apologize for these errors-but please trust that I know the proper spelling of the concepts and people we spoke about-and this will have no bearing on the content of our conversation.
2. A copy of the transcribed classroom observation.

If time permits, I ask that you read the transcripts and observation documents to verify that you approve the content. If there is anything you would like to delete or add, please let me know. I would also like to restate that everything you said is **completely anonymous**, and you will never be identified with any comments you made. However, if you still have concerns, you may contact me via email or phone.

If I do not hear from you, I will assume that you approve of the contents.

Many Thanks,

Allison Schildts
Doctoral Student
Loyola Marymount

APPENDIX I

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Dear Ms. Schildts,

Thank you for submitting your IRB application for your study titled *Social Justice in Teacher Education: How Elementary Teachers Translate Theory Into Practice*. All documents have been received and reviewed, and I am pleased to inform you that your study has been approved.

The effective date of your approval is **April 7, 2014 – April 6, 2015**. If you wish to continue your project beyond the effective period, you must submit a renewal application to the IRB prior to **March 1, 2015**. In addition, if there are any changes to your protocol, you are required to submit an addendum application.

For any further communication regarding your approved study, please reference your new protocol number: **LMU IRB 2014 SP 42**.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

Julie Paterson

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