An Inquiry Into Urban Schooling and the Social Justice Nexus: An Agency Case Study for Transformative Change

Eduardo E. Peña Jr.

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AN INQUIRY INTO URBAN SCHOOLING AND THE SOCIAL JUSTICE NEXUS: AN AGENCY CASE STUDY FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

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DEDICATION

¡Para mamá! This work is dedicated to you, Rosa Alicia Pallares Pacheco de Peña, who passed on October 21st, 2014. You’re a living document. Thank you for teaching me the immigrant mentality.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7
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AN INQUIRY INTO URBAN SCHOOLING AND THE SOCIAL JUSTICE NEXUS:
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ABSTRACT

In an era of accountability and censorship in public schooling, teaching for social
justice is a difficult proposition for K-5 teachers. This inquiry explored the pedagogical
principles of five elementary school teachers who navigate the rigors of standardization while
also providing an education with a social justice orientation. Using a critical lens, this study
was guided by the following questions: (1) how do elementary teachers approach topics of social justice in their curriculum? (2) what are the pedagogical considerations for teachers in urban schooling? and (3) what structures prohibit or provide proliferation for the integration of social justice in contemporary elementary education classrooms? Face-to-face interviews, focus groups, and teaching artifacts facilitated the data collection process. Data analysis revealed the following themes within the teachers’ narratives regarding their pedagogical approaches to teaching for social justice with young children: teachers provide equity of voice, build student/teacher rapport while maintaining community ties, plan for counternarrative curricula, and use the classroom and community as critical spaces for the open exchange of ideas. This study suggests that teachers can be catalysts for transformative change; however, teaching with social justice ideals in mind requires careful and well-planned-out pedagogies for circumventing the limitations set by districts for teaching in today’s diverse classrooms. This examination positions social justice education as a habit of disposition for teachers. It also has implications for potential systemic change for students of color, as it informs how elementary school teachers can take on this subject with a purpose of improving outcomes.

*Keywords*: social justice education, pedagogies, urban schooling, elementary
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Chapter 1

Introduction

From the Pledge of Allegiance, students throughout America recite the concept, “With liberty and justice for all” (Morris, 2002). Public education is a staple of the American fabric and a cornerstone institution for communities of color. The crusade for social justice is not a marvel of contemporary society. Pinpointing the genesis of social justice in many cases is an act of futility. For example, some cite the opposition to laissez-faire economics as the origin of, “Social Justice as a concept arose in the early 19th century during the Industrial Revolution and subsequent civil revolutions throughout Europe, which aimed to create more egalitarian societies and remedy capitalistic exploitation of human labor” (What is Social Justice?, n.d.). Still others cite the Catholic faith as a watershed moment in our understanding of social justice. According to theologians, the concept of modern social justice originated in Italy from the phrase guistzia sociale, “It was first used, to our knowledge, by the Jesuit philosopher Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio in 1843 in the debates over the beginnings of the Risorgimento’s effort to unify the Italian peninsula politically” (Fad-Admin, 2021). Regardless of origin, if historical record is an accurate rubric of progress, we have failed to evolve at a requisite speed.

At face value, the institution of education projects an ethos of meritocracy, equality, offers a level playing field, and operates as a mechanism for upward social mobility. For some constituents, educational endowment does indeed equate to social status and improved standards of living. However, this institution is not immune to systemic oppression. The landmark case of Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico is a prime example of institutionalized oppression (New Mexico Center On Law and Poverty, 2023). The courts
concluded that the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) did not adequately provide communities of color with a quality education, “the Yazzie-Martinez lawsuit against the State of New Mexico – the lawsuit that found the State's Public Education Department was gravely lacking in support for students who come from low-income families, who are Native American, English Language Learners and students with disabilities” (Leah, 2023). As a result, the legislative branch earmarked, “nearly $500 million this year, giving raises to all school employees, allocating $113 million toward school districts and charter schools that serve a disproportionate number of high-risk students, and funding a variety of other education-related programs” (Sanders, 2019). Arguably, the most famous educational court case in American history has been the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. In a unanimous nine to zero verdict, the Supreme Court justices ruled that the separate but equal doctrine was unconstitutional (Epstein & Walker, 2007, p. 636). With the appropriation of funding, some conservative pundits affirm that educational conditions have significantly improved since the class-action suit of 1954. However, a 2014 report on educational policy found that, “Schools remain segregated today because neighborhoods in which they are located are segregated. Raising achievement of low-income black children requires residential integration, from which school integration can follow. Education policy is housing policy” (Rothstein, 2014). Thus, this determination suggests that apartheid is no longer legitimized on the separate but equal doctrine but instead grounded on social economic status.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine what pedagogies for social justice are common to urban schooling in Central New Mexico. When invited to describe their educational philosophies and pedagogies, five elementary teachers identified constraints
and attributes that cultivate space for the implementation of an education with a social justice orientation. Examinations of social justice education are vast; however, few explore the pedagogical concept from an elementary lens. It is anticipated that this work will contribute to the literary canon by informing pedagogy, better prepare both in-service and pre-service teachers with requisite tools and provide concrete examples for what it means to teach social justice. The current state of affairs for urban schooling is addressed by providing study context and background information. This overview documents social movements that help explain the status quo. Thereafter, this chapter provides a problem statement, purpose of study, research questions, a brief introduction to research approach, and research assumptions. Concluding segments will address significance of study, essential terminology, and a brief chapter summary.

**Background and Context**

In the aftermath of the George Floyd slaying, the plight for social justice intensified; however, the movement against police brutality swiftly lost steam, “when the crowds went home after the 2020 uprisings, no national democratic organizations had been built to stop these rollbacks or to grow the movement *(The Aftermath of the Murder of George Floyd - Freedom Socialist Party, 2022b)*. Unfortunately, the southern subculture of violence far too often aligns with the vicious cycle of police brutality. According to this paradigm, the southern subculture of violence is a, “violent tradition may be one that in a wide range of situations condones lethal violence, or it may be a tradition that more indirectly raises the murder rate” (Gastil, 1971, p. 416). Congruent to the southern subculture of violence, police brutality is a perpetual pattern that plagues communities of color. Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, and Walter Scott are prime examples of this infamous cycle. Policing is a complex
issue, but one common denominator that remains is that the absence of a social justice education will not equate to systemic change.

With democracy in jeopardy, constituents fulfilled their civic duty of suffrage on the eve of the 2020 presidential election. The turbulent transition of power and the insurrection reminds global citizens that a quality education with a social justice orientation is the building block of democracy. A more progressive candidate currently occupies the executive; however, fragments of the pragmatic ideology perseverate. The attack on suffrage is an overt example of propaganda that is designed to undermine democracy, “following Donald Trump’s defeat in 2020, the myth of voter fraud and a stolen election quickly spread. By May of 2022, nearly 400 restrictive bills had been introduced in legislatures nationwide” (Cineas, 2022). Similar to race relations, voting has an infamous history in the American polity. The right to suffrage is regulated by the U.S. Constitution. Moreover, several amendments to the constitution protect voting rights – primarily the Fifteenth, Nineteenth, and Twenty-Sixth ensure that governmental powers do not infringe on the voting rights of U.S. citizens based on race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, religion, and other provisions (Epstein & Walker, 2007). Despite precedent from the Voting Rights Act of 1965, state legislatures continuously seek loopholes that suppress turnout, intimidate constituents, and ultimately alter election results, “Legislatures cannot ignore the constitutions to which they owe their very existence. They cannot act outside the law, without any checks and balances. Yet that is what the North Carolina legislators are asking the Supreme Court to give them” (Savitzky & Graunke, 2022). To this end, a social justice education maintains a pulse on current events and equips students to be the voice for transformative change.
Determining what knowledge is worthy of replication and who are the purveyors of knowledge is chief to the social justice debate. In recent history, progressive education has been demonized as a byproduct of Critical Race Theory (CRT). According to this diatribe, the academic framework that is CRT is designed to indoctrinate students with a liberal agenda, “it’s a subversive plan to indoctrinate young Americans to reject their country and its history” (Zurcher, 2021). To the contrary, CRT calls for an accurate examination of historical practice and institutionalized oppression, “Simply put, critical race theory states that U.S. social institutions (e.g., the criminal justice system, education system, labor market, housing market, and healthcare system) are laced with racism embedded in laws, regulations, rules, and procedures that lead to differential outcomes” (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). Jurisprudence is often a tool to further legitimize oppression and opposition to CRT is cyclical censorship, “state lawmakers and local school board officials – are simultaneously pushing to ban books from school and public libraries, primarily books by and about BIPOC, LGBTQ people, and other marginalized groups” (Aclu, 2023). Further deliberations concerning CRT are enumerated in Chapter 2 of this dissertation; however, understanding what information is deemed valuable and which individuals disseminate perspective is seminal to social justice education.

For the purpose of this study, the spoils of war doctrine determine which historical accounts are worthy of replication. According to Congress, “the term ‘spoils of war’ means enemy movable property lawfully captured, seized, confiscated, or found which has become United States property in accordance with the laws of war” (50 U.S. Code § 2204 - Definitions, n.d.). Intellectual property is under the scope of this doctrine. To this end, the social justice quandary is deeply entangled in the ontology of Manifest Destiny. Even though
the anchors for contemporary contention supersede origin, conceptualizing the genesis of history is vital to deconstructing contemporary pedagogy, content, and educational objectives. As a result of westward expansion, both the geographical and political landscape changed dramatically for the United States of America during the nineteenth century. For example, with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, sovereignty nearly doubled for the young nation. The Republic of Texas officially joined the union in 1845. In the aftermath of the Mexican American War, the U.S. and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (Manifest Destiny – Definition, Facts & Significance, 2010). Imperialism expanded as the U.S. annexed, “approximately 1.3 million square miles, an area 50 percent larger than the Louisiana Purchase” which includes parts of present-day California, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming (Gómez, 2008, p. 4). With the Goldrush of 1849, “California was a booming state with 300,000 residents. There was also a burst of city building. Overnight San Francisco became a bustling metropolis – it had 57,000 residents by 1860” (Henretta et al., 2002, p. 475).

Sociologists describe the push-pull factors of migration as, “push factors referred to dynamics within a country of origin that forced people to emigrate, such as war, famine, political oppression, or population pressures. Pull factors, by contrast, were those features of destination countries that attracted immigrants” (Giddens et al., 2005, p. 325). It is estimated that after the first wave of the Gold Rush, “200,000 Chinese came to the United States over the next three decades” (Henretta et al., 2002, p. 480). In addition to imperialistic expansion and migration patterns, the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 expanded educational access albeit at a reduced rate for African Americans. At one fell swoop, the original inhabitants of North America endured thewraths of both physical and cultural genocide. At the conclusion
of the Indian Wars in 1890, indigenous populations, “had been reduced to 5 percent or less of its preinvasion total, the weight of policy in the U.S. and Canada alike has been placed on assimilating – digesting might be a better word – the residue of survivors” (Churchill, 2004, p. 12). The geopolitical magnitude of these historical events gave rise to educational committees at a federal level.

With due process, it became overtly apparent that the American empire and its educational system would require uniformity. In 1884, the National Education Association (NEA) appointed the Committee of Ten to deconstruct school curriculum, “the impulse behind the Ten was an outgrowth of the industrial era desire for standardization and to create an authority to specify a curriculum. The politics of the Committee of Ten were distinctly conservative and elitist in orientation” (Evans, 2004, p. 7). In the contexts of American schooling, these early bureaucrats are cited for ordaining a traditional approach to education. At the Madison Conference, educators from the Committee of Ten were taxed with cultivating vertical articulation (Evans, 2004). A critical examination of educational philosophies and movements reveals parallels between contemporary teachers and educators of the 1880s. In an attempt to create synergy between the institution of academia and secondary learning, this commission gave birth to the notion of college readiness. For example, the mantra of college admission projected by the Committee of Ten aligns with the notion of college readiness elocuted by Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Accordingly, benchmarks, “are designed to ensure students are prepared for today’s entry-level careers, freshman-level college courses, and workforce training programs” (What Parents Should Know | Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2021).
In another ironic parallel, bureaucrats of the nineteenth century ensured that educational objectives facilitated laissez-faire economics, which is analogous to the association of neoliberalism and contemporary education. Profitable operation of the Industrial Revolution and its manufacturing economy required standardization and eradicated autonomy of curriculum. In fact, even progressives like Booker T. Washington supported a standardized education that further perpetuated laissez-faire economics, “founder of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1881, Washington advocated industrial education – manual and agricultural training. He preached the virtues of thrift, hard work, and property ownership. Washington’s industrial education program won generous support from northern philanthropists and businessmen” (Henretta et al., 2002, p. 535). Industrialization obligated the standardization of education and was a critical stakeholder in the development of uniformity.

At face value, members of the NEA projected a philosophy of inclusivity. Its objective was to modernize education through an emphasis on scientific inquiry and away from religious doctrine that dominated public education (Evans, 2004). Despite lofty goals, conservative orthodoxy permeated deliberations between classical pedagogy of social order and moderate recommendations for individualism. Nevertheless, convoluted discourse for curriculum development aligned with conservative ideologies, for example, the institution of higher education remained an exclusive fraternity of privilege. Moreover, the instrumentalities of education formalized institutionalized oppression, “the political and economic status quo is capable of self-preservation by controlling or stabilizing change through its institutions, principally education and law” (Saxe, 1991, p. 41).
In subsequent years, several other committees unified under the tutelage of the NEA. Analogous to other commissions of the time, the primary purpose of these committees was to reaffirm conformity in curriculum, reproduce social order in customs, and reinforce traditional pedagogy (Evans, 2004). Notwithstanding, progressives from other disciplines challenged the status quo. Harold Rugg is one prime example and trailblazer that questioned traditional methods. During the 1920s, the educational reformer published numerous works calling for an interdisciplinary approach. As part of an integrated, coherent program that would be more meaningful for students and less burdensome for teachers. Rugg also believed that the best way to engage students in social studies was to approach the material from a social-justice perspective, so he advocated focusing the curriculum on students’ investigations of social problems (Burton, 2015).

Teaching the sociopolitical implications of current events within the scope of curriculum was a purpose driven objective for progressives. In essence, curriculum specialists from other disciplines capsized the orthodox approach by arguing that rote instruction must move beyond memorization:

The old education, except as it conferred the tools of knowledge, was mainly devoted to filling the memory with facts. The new age is more in need of facts than the old; and of more facts; and it must find more effective methods of teaching them. But there are now other functions. Education is now to develop a type of wisdom that can grow only out of participation in the living experience of men, and never out of mere memorization of verbal statements of facts. (Bobbit, 1918)

Fortunately, as progressives challenged the status quo, the illusion of conformity became a figment of the imagination. Alternative perspectives and methodologies grounded in civic
engagement surfaced and traditional orthodoxy gave way to an era of modernism. From the onset, educators dedicated to social justice calibrated for social welfare in their development of curriculum. At the turn of the twentieth century, the educational debate intensified as one paradigm fostered nationalism and another advocated for civic engagement (Saxe, 1991).

The educational philosophies of the famous educator John Dewey are a stepping-stone for social justice education. In fact, many progressives towards civic-centered education often cite Dewey as the contemporary architect of social justice education. While pinpointing the exact origin of an education with a social justice orientation continues to be a highly contested topic of discourse. What remains evident is that the progressive movement spearheaded by Dewey significantly influenced the development of social justice education. According to Dewey (1897, as cited in Small, 2011), the institution of education is a double-edged sword, “one psychological and one sociological, and that neither can be subordinated to the other, or neglected, without evil results following” (p. 4). To this end, Dewey argued that education is a function of socialization. Although often revered, the works of Dewey are not above reproach. At the curricular table, dissent to the Deweyan approach is often grounded in the absence of race relations that reinforces colonialism. Notwithstanding, Lowery and Jenlink (2019) build an airtight argument in favor of Dewey as emancipatory education by suggesting that indigenous practice and feminism significantly contributed to Deweyan doctrine, “understanding this historical link is vital for reconstructing pragmatism within social justice education because it grounds the ideas in their long-standing relationship to emancipatory thought and action” (p. 64). In addition to Dewey, other educators of the era, such as Harold and Earl Rugg asserted that the educational debate was a function of teachers dictating philosophies. This process of micromanagement resulted in curricular chaos. In its
place, the Ruggs study proposition an educational nuance by arguing that teachers should be
given autonomy over resources, content, and method – an extremely progressive stance even
by contemporary standards. In fact, Earl Rugg, “would be accused of being a communist,
then criticized over his plan for a socialistic society” (Evans, 2004, p. 83).

Efficacy for a social justice education waned in the wake of the Great Depression and
remained sidelined until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Patriotism during World
War II, remnants of McCarthyism, and the Industrial Military Complex further perpetuated
conventional pedagogy. Like fashion, curricular design tends to be cyclical or at the mere
minimum in constant flux characterized by political movements of the era, “The field is
constantly changing, if not always in its underlying philosophical concerns, then in the field’s
ways of responding to concerns as they take on new shades of emphasis” (Flinders &
Thornton, 2017, p. xiii). Prior to the Cold War, educators engaged in healthy dialogue over
purpose, content, and design. An ideological conflict between capitalism and socialism
placed political states throughout the globe on eggshells (Henretta et al., 2002). On the verge
of nuclear disaster, educational reform returned to traditional methods in discipline and
purpose. Fundamentally, the Cold War ended the progressive era in education. In fact, “for
almost two decades after that event, hardly anyone questioned the need and urgency for
large-scale curriculum reforms” (Flinders & Thornton, 2017, p. xiii). Tension between the
two nuclear powers lasted a span of forty-five years. The competition for world domination
resulted in extensive government intervention over curriculum. In the aftermath of the
Sputnik launchings, “Congress moved to pass the National Defense Education Act on
September 2 – an unprecedented government intrusion into community schooling and
curriculum work” (Marshal et al., 2007, p. 42). As a result, the American educational system
launched a race to the top campaign by comparing academic achievement to that of other industrialized countries.

As a result of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the U.S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare Office of Education published a report titled *The Changing School Curriculum* in 1966. The publication enumerated a new direction away from the regurgitation of facts, “traditional history teachers have employed a chronological approach and students have been influenced by a flood of dates. New approaches, however, seek to develop a few historical events and epochs in depth” (Goodlad, 1966, p. 56). Engulfed with an unjust war in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal, the U.S. transitioned from a manufacturing economy to a service economy in the late 1970s. This liberation movement of the 1970s carved out space for academic freedom. Alternative paradigms existed prior to the 1970s; however, the era of liberation gave rise to the implementation of inquiry-based learning and social-centered approaches. The concept of inquiry is an ancient practice. Nonetheless, educators during the 1970s fashioned the new methodology of learning. The process of inquiry-based learning, “is distinguished from other approaches to learning by the particular features of the process involved, by the type of knowledge it employs, and by the specific attitudes and feelings upon which it is built and that it engenders” (Beyer, 1979, p. 17).

Media outlets frequently report educational shortcomings, for example, “today American students are falling far behind those in other nations. Why? Our schools are failing to prepare graduates for our increasingly competitive global economy. Improving our nation’s education system will be a major bipartisan challenge” (Levy, 2016). However, reports documenting failures is not a function of contemporary education. To the contrary,
rhetoric and knee-jerk reactions to academic achievement extend to the Sputnik launchings of 1957. In fact, the lack of American achievement in the core content areas is well documented by the neoliberal agenda. Despite the economic shift of the late 1970s, the trend of failing schools has remained frontline news for the past forty years. The Back-to-Basics movement of the 1970s reached its climax when the U.S. Department of Education published a piece titled *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* in 1983. According to this publication, the federal government enumerated calamities of the public education system. For example, as indicators of risk the document reported that, “Average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched” (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 11). During the 1980s, the Heritage Foundation spearheaded a conservative movement in education. The organization utilized the channels of media to skillfully solicit propaganda. For example, the neoconservative group published pamphlets, purchased airtime in both television and radio markets, and mailing lists to disseminate its rhetoric (White, 2021). The conservative movement capitalized on the sociopolitical movement of the 1980s to gain popularity and ultimately eliminated progressive ideologies from the educational equation.

The genealogy of social justice education is deeply entangled in politics, conforms to social movements of the time, and remains salient to equal access. The landmark case of 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* is a prime example (*The Oxford Guide to the Supreme Court of the United States*, 2005c). In more recent history, the most deleterious policy to social justice education has been the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This legislative piece fueled an era of accountability, surveillance, and standardization. For example, the policy mandates districts receiving federal funding to demonstrate Annual Yearly Progress
(AYP) via standardized testing. Under the guise of standardization, students are constantly subjected to rigorous testing. The educational policy also strains practitioners of education. According to this rubric, it’s an evaluative measure of effective teaching, “A key strategy for achieving this goal is accountability. The act holds states, schools, and districts accountable for student achievement” (Carlson Le Floch et al., 2007). As a result of globalization, the majority of states are forced to endorse neoliberalism. For example, Sage and Polychroniou (2016), in an exclusive interview with the famous political economist, Noam Chomsky, explain the perils of market-driven education by describing a paradigm shift:

Throughout most of the modern period, beginning with the era known as the Enlightenment, education was widely regarded as the most important asset for the building of a decent society. However, this value seems to have fallen out of favor in the contemporary period, perhaps as a reflection of the dominance of the neoliberal ideology, creating in the process a context where education has been increasingly reduced to the attainment of professional, specialized skills that cater to the needs of the business world. (Sage & Polychroniou, 2016).

Currently, public education is under the guise of Common Core State Standards (CSSS). The implications of this movement are twofold. First, it privatized public education for all intents and purposes. In effect, as presently constructed, contemporary education is an enterprise of neoliberalism. The funding of CCSS by technology mogul William “Bill” Henry Gates III is an overt example of educational enterprise. In 2017, Bill Gates announced that, “the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation would spend more than $1.7 billion over the next five years to pay for new initiatives in public education” (Strauss, 2021). Secondly, centralized education significantly mitigates the educational rights of states, districts, and communities.
Henceforth, educational malpractice becomes a function of standardized education. In the case of CCSS, education is strategically engineered to reproduce the interests of the elite and not that of communities. To this end and in my view, conglomerates institutionalize oppression as a mechanism of bureaucracy because the educational enterprise substantially reduces a culturally relevant curriculum, sterilizes the learning process, inhibits best practice, hinders the educational endowment of communities, and significantly mitigates the teaching of social justice.

Discourse grounded in social justice must encompass the works of marginalized groups. As a result of lived experience, it is my position that scholars of color are best situated to address issues afflicting communities of color. To this end, contextualizing social justice education should reflect the voices of scholars, such as Gloria Ladson-Billings. A haphazard examination does not suffice. For example, like clockwork, every February, schools throughout this great nation celebrate Black History Month. An authentic examination, celebration, and recognition of Black culture is essential to an egalitarian society. Nevertheless, it’s often a surface level practice that has not equated to transformative change. The educational attainment gap between Black students and their White counterparts suggests regression. According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute, “since Fall 2010, Black student enrollment has declined from 3.04 million to 2.38 million, a 22% decrease: Undergraduate enrollment declined from 2.67 million to 1.99 million, a 25 % decrease” (PNPI, 2022). Far too often, the archives of history bypass the powerful contributions of this marginalized group. Carter G. Woodson is one prime example of revisionist history. This trailblazer is known as the father of Black history; however, canned curriculums have sidelined the Woodson narrative. In 1926, Woodson founded Negro
History Week, which eventually evolved to Black History Month. “Woodson's devotion to showcasing the contributions of Black Americans bore fruit in 1926 when he launched Negro History Week in the second week of February…Woodson's concept was later expanded into Black History Month” (NAACP, 2023). The works of Woodson provide a counternarrative – testimonies that increased Black efficacy and enlightened the American public. Meagher (2021) deconstructs a piece authored by Woodson titled *The Mis-Education of the Negro* which was originally published in 1933. In this publication, Meagher (2021) argues that contemporary education is a function of the status quo and ultimately not a byproduct for serving the interests of the Black community:

> The purpose of miseducation is to maintain and reproduce a consensus that Black people are unfit to for self-governance, then political responses to miseducation face a peculiar problem. In the U.S. context, democratic representation shapes the model for political action, governance, and rule. But if miseducation is successful, then those who politically represent Black people are by definition to lead rather than serve their constituents, for the latter are presumed incapable of governance. (p. 350)

In sum, the historian and teacher, Dr. Woodson dedicated his career to empowering the Black community with a counternarrative that accurately reflects historical record.

Analogous to the Black experience, Latinx students have been marginalized, portrayed as inferior, and denied equal access. In the case of Mexican-American students, the plight for social justice extends to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. In the aftermath of the military conflict, the U.S. government had a Mexican problem in New Mexico. As a result, Congress adopted a policy that would, “deny statehood to a territory based on the unsatisfactory character of the population but suggests that this is connoted by insufficient
education, patriotism, or adherence to the law” (Gómez, 2008, p. 120). This policy of colonization ensured assimilation into dominant culture, a deluded application of the Spanish language, and distorted characterization of Mexican heritage. The district courts in southern California heard arguments in the Méndez v. Westminster School District case in 1947. Segregation merits for this case were not grounded in racial discrimination but rather on ethnicity and linguistics, “discrimination based on ancestry and supposed ‘language deficiency’ that denied their children their Fourteenth Amendment rights to equal protection under the law” (April 14, 1947: Mendez V. Westminster Court Ruling - Zinn Education Project, 2022). In dissenting opinion, the verdict was appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals; however, the upper court, “affirmed the decision, stating that Mexicans and other children were entitled to ‘the equal protection of the laws’, and that neither language nor race could be used as a reason to segregate them” (Acuña, 2007, p. 212). The Méndez case illustrates the Latinx struggle for equal access to educational resources and established precedent for the famous Brown case of 1954. At the grassroots level, “perhaps the biggest event surrounding Education was during the early Chicana/o movimientos in the 1960s. An estimated 10,000 Chicana/o students walked out of classes on March 3, 1968 in East Los Angeles to protest the unequal conditions of their education” (Urrieta, 2004). The high school walkouts are an overt example of agency, and contributions to the Chicano/a movement are vast. Nevertheless, history is often propagated from a patriarchal lens that far too often overshadows the epistemology of others. Along this vein, the Chicano/a movement is not immune to reproach. With an intersectional analysis, Blackwell (2011) eloquently documents systemic oppression that is deeply ingrained in machismo:
Like other women of color feminisms, Chicana feminism contributed to an understanding of the interlocking nature of oppressions, what has come to be known as intersectionality. Chicana feminists developed an analysis of oppression that theorized the ways in which gender oppression was determined by processes of racialization, economic class, and sexuality. This understanding was first articulated as the double or triple oppression of women (or quadruple oppression of lesbians of color), but soon enough the limits of this formulation were explored and activists started to name how these oppressions were intersecting and often simultaneous and mutually constitutive. (p. 208)

At the elementary level, social studies is considered core content, and history is a strand of this discipline (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2022). Thus, at the bare minimum, social studies should provide students with an accurate account of historical events, and an education with a social justice orientation must encompass the voice of marginalized groups. The documented background is not exhaustive of all historical channels; however, it provides context for the current state of affairs and clarifies the saliency of the social justice quandary.

**Problem Statement**

The vast majority of educators with a progressive lens would likely concur that civic engagement, social consciousness, and critical thinking are mechanisms for a quality social justice education (Loewen, 2018; hooks, 1994; Ayers et al., 1998). It can be argued that elementary schooling is the foundation of education. Regrettably, content grounded in social justice has historically been reserved for students beyond the elementary level (Picower, 2012). Adding insult to injury, the literary canon for social justice education is
overwhelmingly theoretical and little is known about social justice in elementary schooling. In an era of accountability, agents for social justice encounter an ethical paradox – remain silent as the status quo of oppression perseverates or proactively embrace a virtuous duty by contributing to the dearth of research.

Additionally, stakeholders at the curricular table often debate stages of development when approaching controversial topics. One paradigm affirms with a high degree of certainty that young students are unable to digest topics of social justice, “In their view, controversy is unsettling and requires a sophisticated reasoning ability, which young children do not possess” (McBee, 1995, p. 42). Conversely, educators at the grassroots level thoroughly comprehend the daily struggles of urban schooling. At this historical crossroad, we must honestly confront the elephant in the classroom by objectively answering the purpose of education. In 1884, the social Darwinists and evolutionary psychologist, Herbert Spencer authored a piece titled *What Knowledge is of most Worth*. Purpose and determining what information is worthy of replication continues to plague contemporary education. In fact, Spencer (1884) noted that in the aftermath of professional development, instructors are taxed in determining what knowledge is worthy of replication, “all under the guidance of mere custom, or liking, or prejudice; without ever considering the enormous importance of determining in some rational way what things are really most worth learning” (p. 11).

To a certain degree, media constitutes the fourth branch of government. Far too often, political pundits engage in collateral damage and attempt to control narratives with an ideological bias. Along this continuum, practitioners at the grassroots significantly influence classroom culture; however, students do not operate in social vacuums and are not afforded the privilege of insulation. Whether we address controversial topics or not, media outlets
saturate students with issues of social justice – ranging from substance abuse, domestic violence, the proliferation of firearms, immigration status, homelessness, climate change, and many other topics that are ripe for elementary examination. Thereby, if we fail to teach controversial topics and address issues of social justice in a meaningful manner, we are failing to provide a culturally relevant curriculum. If a social ill or phenomena occurs in society, it will likely have educational implications.

Structural violence as defined by Morris and Harris (2003) can be explicit and/or subliminal. Institutionalized discrimination is an overt example of oppressive structures. For marginalized communities, educational malpractice are pedagogies that prevent students from achieving their full potential. Fossey and DeMitchell (2022) define educational malpractice as negligence and a failure to perform professional duties, “They are expected to utilize a standard of care recognized by their profession as appropriate, based on the training received and the commonly held set of practices associated with the service rendered” (p. 4). As ordained, educational malpractice is grounds for civil suit, which is certainly a channel for justice. However, this discussion of oppressive structures that have been institutionalized is couched in the work of Valenzuela (1999). According to Valenzuela, traditional forms of schooling are subtractive in two ways. It minimizes how communities of color define what it means to be educated. Secondly, an adherence to standardized pedagogy and endorsement of assimilation instead of acculturation constitutes subtractive schooling. As a result of diluting culture, “A key consequence of these subtractive elements of schooling is the erosion of students social capital evident in the presence and absence of academically oriented networks” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 20). Subtractive schooling is a byproduct of deficit perspective. Moreover, a study on ethnic studies cites that communities of color benefit from
a curriculum that celebrates their histories as lived experience, “From exposure to Ethnic Studies curricula, students are better able to develop a language of critique and possibility; and students of color are far more likely to have access to their histories and a fuller humanity in the educational arena” (de los Ríos et al., 2015, p. 87). The state of New Mexico is not absolved from deficit education. To the contrary, Judge Sarah Singleton ruled in the Martínez/Yazzie v. State of New Mexico case that the:

State has failed to comply with state and federal laws regarding the education of students of color and ELL students, including the New Mexico Hispanic & Indian Education Act, and Bilingual Multicultural Education Act, which has resulted in an inadequate education system for New Mexican students. (University of New Mexico Factsheet, 2019).

Community cultural wealth is the dissenting opinion for capsizing deficit perspective, “one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US schools is deficit thinking. Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance” (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Instead of deficit, Yosso describes six forms of cultural capital common to communities of color.

Unfortunately, the banking concept as described by Freire (1970) is more commonly employed in urban schooling. According to this model, the teacher fails to synthesize lived experience which often results in a disconnect, “The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students” (Freire, 1970, p. 71). Furthermore, the banking concept is a top-down approach, whereby teachers are the sole purveyors of knowledge and students patiently wait for the dissemination of information
(Freire, 2000). For all intents and purposes, the banking model is educational malpractice - instead of deploying education as a conduit for transformative change, it reproduces the status quo of oppression. In order to offset the banking model, Freire introduces the problem posing concept to the educational equation. This collaborative approach to education emphasizes the co-construction of knowledge, “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire, 1970, p. 80). Instead of being an empty vessel that constantly receives information from the teacher, students are encouraged to think critically and explore sensible solutions. Ultimately, the pedagogy of problem posing is emancipatory education.

**Purpose of Study**

Social justice research at the elementary level is extremely limited. At one fell swoop, evidence from other levels of education suggests that an education with a social justice orientation promotes student engagement (Fisher & Fisher, 2020). To a certain extent, the scholarly cavities are a functioning purpose for this study. By describing how five elementary teachers implement social justice into their practice, the objective for this inquiry was to explore how social justice functions in urban schooling. In the absence of prescribed curriculums and / or professional development explicitly designed to address social justice, this investigation sought to understand how teachers navigate pedagogies for social justice during an era of limitations and standardization. A further purpose was to descriptively document mechanisms that either empower or subvert the proliferation of social justice in contemporary classrooms. Moreover, this inquiry sought to conceptualize social justice pedagogy by examining the efforts of elementary teachers that employ critical consciousness
as defined by Freire (1970) – a heightened level of social awareness requires due diligence in order to capsize hegemonic structures of oppression. According to the Brazilian philosopher, critical consciousness is the recognition of subjection, and more importantly enacting transformative change, “It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the transformation” (p. 127). In practice, the pedagogy of critical consciousness is emancipatory and honors the lived experiences of pupils. For the purposes of this study, an education with a social justice orientation encompassed pedagogical underpinnings, educational policy, instructional methods, curriculum, classroom discourse, and environmental print.

Paradoxes that determine what issues of social justice are integrated into curriculum and how teachers navigate the rigors of standardization were the centrifugal force of this qualitative study. This examination yielded data that is reflective of teacher ideology, lived experiences, the social justice nexus, and the apparatus of education. Nevertheless, this study examined classroom pedagogy and how teachers of elementary education teach topics of social justice. Current events and infamous atrocities of yesteryear illuminate the practical implications for this type of work. However, if teachers are to become conduits for transformative change, a more profound understanding of social justice education is essential. Development and successful integration of an education with a social justice orientation fosters peace and teaches students to become critical consumers of information, “Peace educators try to develop in their students a critical consciousness that challenges injustice and undemocratic policy-making structures promoted by large transnational corporations that have a development agenda based upon maximizing profit, destructive of human and natural communities” (Harris & Morrison, 2003, p. 75).
Research Questions

This study is centered on the following three questions:

1. How do elementary teachers approach topics of social justice in their curriculum?

2. How are elementary teachers conceptualizing social justice?

3. What are the pedagogical considerations for teachers in urban schooling?

4. What structures prohibit or provide proliferation for the integration of social justice in contemporary classrooms?

Research Approach

With approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of New Mexico, this case study investigated the lived experiences of five elementary teachers. These participants teach in urban settings and self-identify as agents for social justice. This case study employed methods common to qualitative research. As a social movement, social justice education is a marvel of society. Thereby, if a social ill affects society, it’ll likely implicate the educational system. To this end, the characteristics of case study methodology were well situated for this type of research. Face-to-face interviews, focus groups, and artifacts facilitated triangulation. Case study methodology is designed to generate rich description of complex settings and is bound to specific phenomena. As a result, analysis is not generative but rather exclusive to this case study and its participants. Interviews conducted in a semi-structured format were the primary source of data. Each participant provided two interviews that lasted an estimated duration of sixty minutes per session. Interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Data generated from the interviewing phase provided focus group context and contributed to overall findings. Analysis often necessitates a dichotomous interaction with
the data collection process. As a result, interpretation of data commence from the initial stages of the data collection process and member checking was employed during the second phase of face-to-face interviewing. I believe that initial coding ensures that researchers maintain a pulse on data and remain fluid to the interpretation process. This essential reflection yielded themes, revealed units for classification, and other categories pertinent to this study.

Assumptions

Assumptions operate in the absence of empirical evidence and are the catalyst for inquiry, “Assumptions are those ideas that you believe to be true but do not have evidence to support” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 10). As the project investigator, I entered this study with three assumptions. First, the dearth in the literary canon suggested that pedagogies for social justice at the elementary level were scarce. This premise is grounded on extensive teaching experience and a comprehensive review of literature. Secondly, in order to escape repercussions from administrators and avoid disgruntled parents, contemporary teachers either entirely discard controversial topics or teach issues of social justice at a surface level. This assumption is grounded on rhetoric often propagated by media outlets. For example, Fox News affirms that teachers are indoctrinating students with Critical Race Theory (CRT) and distain for American values by, “using a new weapon to cultivate a new army tasked with hating America. The weapon: critical race theory. The new army: America’s children” (Hermann, 2022). Legislative bodies from several states proposing bills in opposition to CRT further perpetuates propaganda. This anti-CRT movement was amplified when Governor Tate Reeves of Mississippi signed:
into law a bill described as a prohibition on CRT. Senate Bill 2113 prohibits teaching that any sex, race, ethnicity, religion or national origin is inherently superior or inferior in public schools. Mississippi became the 15th state to pass legislation limiting how teachers can discuss racism and sexism. (Rhoden, 2022).

Book bans and censorship is another factor that fuels controversy and often results in hesitation to teach issues of social justice. Recently, districts throughout the nation have been subjected to censorship, “This school year also saw the effects of new state laws that censor ideas and materials in public schools, an extension of the book banning movement initiated in 2021 by local citizens and advocacy groups” (PEN America, 2023). The third and final assumption is grounded in professional development. With a teaching tenure of 15 years in communities of color, I have never encountered a practitioner teaching CRT or attended professional development that is exclusively designed to address social justice. To the contrary, I have observed that the majority of elementary teachers are unable to enumerate tenets associated with CRT and are not equipped with requisite tools to teach social justice in a meaningful manner.

For the purpose of this study, it is inferred that case study participants were forthcoming in sharing lived experiences and pedagogies for the teaching of social justice. As a result of the political landscape, it is also assumed that this type of work can be viewed as controversial. Notwithstanding, it is inferred that the five case study participants are genuinely committed to transformative change, dedicated to teaching social justice, and understand that their experiences contribute to the field of knowledge.
Significance of Study

The relevance of this case study is important to social justice education for several reasons. In an era of standardization, pre-service and in-service teachers need tangible solutions for what it means to teach social justice at the elementary level. Practitioners of elementary education are worthy of instructional tools that embody social justice. To this end, social justice education needs comprehensive description of pedagogies seminal to this orientation. The significance of this research moves beyond a reflective narrative but also examines structures that either prohibit or proliferate social justice pedagogies in the classroom. In lieu of the political climate, many practitioners of elementary education value social justice; however, a through implementation remains a struggle. The pedagogical implications for this type of research could be the catalyst for transformative change. Studies that examine social justice from the elementary perspective are few. Unfortunately, the discipline of social justice both within the scope of research and classroom application has historically been reserved for students beyond elementary schooling, “these characteristics [should not] be reserved for high school and college-level education” (Robertson, 2008, p. 8). Notwithstanding, traditionalists suggest that elementary schooling should maintain neutrality and emphasize foundational skills, “Young students, the argument goes, should concentrate on committing these facts to memory and mastering basic skills in reading, writing, and numerical manipulations that are safely free of political agendas” (McBee, 1995, p. 42). Contrary to this viewpoint, on a daily occurrence, the reality remains in which elementary students encounter issues of social justice. Moreover, it teaches students to become critical consumers of information, “Controversial issue discussion in early grades can increase student engagement and provide an authentic and engaging springboard to relevant
 individual, community and societal issues” (Linowes et al., 2019, p. 35). If, it can be argued that elementary schooling is the foundational phase for enlightenment, it stands to reason that providing young learners with requisites skills to peacefully negotiate race relations is indeed a function of an education with a social justice education, “By the time they’re 5 and entering kindergarten, children begin to identify with an ethnic group to which they belong and are able to explore the range of differences within and between racial and ethnic groups” (Spiegler, 2016). At this historical intersection, we encounter an ethical paradox to further perpetuate pedagogies of the status quo or unpack salient pedagogies for the teaching of social justice.

Key Terminology

An education with a social justice orientation is saturated with complex concepts, frameworks, and verbiage. This list of terminology is not exhaustive of all social justice channels but instead represents terms frequently employed in the literary canon. More specifically, the following definitions provide context embedded in this examination:

**BIPOC:** An acronym employed to describe non-White individuals who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color. A united purpose grounded in lived experience and recognition that members of this community have historically endured oppression and marginalization (Garcia, 2020).

**Critical Pedagogy:** The idea of “critical pedagogy” was coined by Pablo Freire (1970) under the premise that education should be emancipatory by teaching students to become critical consumers of data. This paradigm challenges students to thoroughly synthesize power structures and relations of oppression that subjugate others.
**Elementary**: In this study, the term “elementary” is in reference to an educational system that specifically caters to students in kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades.

**LGBTQ**: An acronym that denotes people that are not straight and describes the spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identity as fluid. It also encompasses allies that affirm gender diversity (Renn, 2010).

**Oppression**: A condition that engulfs the spirit, soul, and physical well-being of the individual. Under the state of oppression, the individual is constantly subjected to both micro-aggressions and in other cases overt acts of discrimination. Furthermore, individuals with positions of power often fail to recognize their societal privilege, which further perpetuates oppression (Musolf, 2017).

**Pedagogy**: It is an educational practice employed by teachers to deliver instruction and content (Deemer, 2004; Maehr & Midgley, 1996)

**Practitioners**: The term “practitioner” in this study refers to a teacher conducting their practice within the elementary grade levels.

**Social Justice**: Agency that seeks transformative change, progress towards equality, and proactively challenges oppression. In the educational setting, it’s an ideological belief that the institution of education should cultivate a safe space that allows all stakeholders to thrive (Enns & Sinacore, 2005).

**Social Justice Education**: As an educational model, “social justice education” is an instructional approach designed to capstone inequalities, and moreover provide all stakeholders with equitable access (Wang, 2016).

**Standardization**: The term “standardization” is in reference to an educational epoch in which students and teachers are subjected to prescribed curriculums, rigorous testing,
constant surveillance and tracking, an era of benchmarks governed by Common Core State Standards, and policies under the guise of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

**Urban Schooling:** The term “urban schooling” refers to the concept that in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution the majority of students in America attend public schools located in the inner cities of diversity.

**Chapter Summary**

A study introduction is provided in this chapter. Teachers of elementary schooling encounter sizable challenges. In an era of accountability, the rigors of standardization are difficult to navigate. Moreover, teachers need concrete pedagogies for the teaching of social justice. As an institution, education has been a staple of the American fabric; however, it often reproduces hegemonic values that alienate communities of color. A brief examination of historical events provided context and rationale for this inquiry. This research highlights methods that elementary teachers can employ to improve the teaching of social justice. The purpose of this chapter was to provide an introductory overview of social justice, extensive background information, problem statement that illuminates pitfalls of social justice education, purpose of study, research questions, research approach, assumptions of study, rationale for the study, and key terminology. The entanglement between the statement problem, purpose of study, and research questions were the foundational pieces for this study. However, providing elementary teachers with concrete examples for social justice education made this study worthwhile. Examining the social justice and elementary education nexus remains ripe for further examination. The following chapter will enumerate a conceptual framework and a review of literature.
Chapter 2

Review of Foundational Literature

The dearth of social justice research, at the elementary level, is in part motivation for this examination. Dover (2009) cites pedagogical voids in a study that examined teaching for social justice for k-12 students and to explain that “the limited availability of large scale qualitative and quantitative research on ‘teaching for social justice’ as a cohesive practice” is evidence of scant research (p. 512). In this chapter, I provide a review of relevant literature and conceptual frameworks for the teaching of social justice. Teaching in an era of standardization encompasses multiple barriers. For example, teachers must learn to navigate canned curriculums, subject themselves to constant surveillance, and meet the rigors of accountability. In a case study of three teachers, Stillman (2011) documents the pressures of accountability, teacher preparation programs, and sovereignty over pedagogy:

Although the intention of specialized teacher education programs is to provide teachers with material and ideological tools they can apply in their own diverse classrooms, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and a growing emphasis on school accountability has led to greater federal, state, and district control over classroom instruction. (p. 137)

As a result of these systemic pressures, this dissertation examines how elementary teachers navigate the rigors of standardization. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how social justice operates in elementary schooling. With further implications for education, this inquiry sought to provide teachers with concrete pedagogies for the implementation of social justice. An investigation of pedagogy also allowed the researcher to
examine mechanisms that either enable or sabotage the deployment of social justice in urban schooling.

The review of literature for this project was a living document and continued throughout the project. This review of literature encompassed peer-reviewed articles and published works. Scholarly sources were accessed from ProQuest, ERIC, Google Scholar, Education Research Complete, and the American Educational Research Association. Specific platforms were explored to conduct a review of literature. For example, this inquiry examined publications in the following journals: Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, Journal of Education and Social Justice, and Educational Studies. Within the search engine, keywords or phrases seminal to social justice, urban schooling, and pedagogy facilitated this probe. Thereafter, the researcher assigned empirical value to sources of information and vetted references in accordance to the study’s objective.

Throughout this chapter, I attempt to highlight gaps in literature, discuss relevancy, synthesize important concepts, contextualize findings, and offer an interpretive summary. Given the ambiguity of social justice, this examination employed an interdisciplinary approach. I believe that multiple perspectives provide a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to teach social justice. As a result, multiple disciplines contribute to this review of literature. The conceptual frameworks for this study are informed from the following disciplines: history, political science, sociology, anthropology, and education. From these disciplines, I construct a review of literature to provide conceptual and empirical standards that align with social justice education.
Scope of Social Justice

A concise definition for social justice is likely an impossibility, “defining social justice in a way that makes it concrete, meaningful, and useful in the elementary classroom is a formidable challenge (Wade, 2004, p. 4). Capeheart and Milovanovic (2020) cite that many contextualize social justice from a paradigm of jurisprudence. However, the authors express caution for using the legal system to define social justice and view legislative conduits as problematic, “it often undermines grassroots mobilization by denying genuine expression of those in struggle, allowing legal constructions to represent otherwise complex issues” (Capeheart & Milovanovic, 2020, p. 239). Moreover, this piece of scholarship explains that social justice is a fluid encounter of lived experience:

Justice is not static, nor does it exist outside of human construction. Pets may appear to act justly (or in the case of some crankier sorts, unjustly) toward each other, but our judgment of this is based on our understanding of justice and not theirs. Justice is defined, sought, and attained through our social understandings and expressions.

(Capeheart & Milovanovic, 2020, p. 332)

Findings of social justice perception as illustrated in Chapter Four of this dissertation align with notions expounded by Capeheart and Milovanovic (2020). This piece of scholarship examines contributions of western philosophy, religiosity, feminist theory, and sociological developments.

The work of John Rawls is seminal to the contemporary construction of social justice. In 1971, Rawls published a piece titled A Theory of Justice. According to Rawls, social justice is a matter of two principles, institutional powers and social economic status. The first principle of institutional powers concerns political structures that infringe on civil liberties,
“each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others” (Rawls, 1971, p. 60). Social economic status must satisfy two conditions, “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all” (Rawls, 1971, p. 60). In addition to these two principles, Rawls coined the term primary social goods which align with institutional powers and economic conditions. Rawls (1971) explains that social goods constitute basic human rights, opportunities for economic prosperity, civil liberties, and prospects for positions of power as essential to an egalitarian society:

the basic structure of society distributes certain primary goods, that is, things that every rational man is presumed to want. These goods normally have a use whatever a person’s rational plan of life. For simplicity, assume that the chief primary goods at the disposition of society are rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth. (p. 62)

However, access to social primary goods is a function of power structures ensuring the fair distribution of resources. The doctrine of primary goods differentiates between social goods and natural goods. The former merits the distribution of communal goods. Conversely, natural goods refer to physical well-being and intellectual property. For Rawls, “justice of a social scheme depends essentially on how fundamental rights and duties are assigned and the economic opportunities and social conditions in the various sectors of society” (p. 7). The distributive property of justice associated with Rawls informed many disciplines – including social justice education.
On the other hand, the work of Young (1990) challenges the distributive property of justice by arguing that this form of justice is reductionists:

The reductionism I expose is modern political theory’s tendency to reduce political subjects to a unity and to value commonness or sameness over specificity and difference. I argue that instead of focusing on distribution, a conception of justice should begin with the concepts of domination and oppression. Such a shift brings out issues of decision making, division of labor, and culture that bear on social justice but are often ignored in philosophical discussions. (p. 3)

To reveal gaps in distributive justice, the author employs feminist and critical theory. Moving beyond the distribution of goods, social justice should empower marginalized people to challenge the status quo of domination and oppression. According to Young, oppression is a structural process that inhibits individuals from achieving their full potential. Herein, the following five faces of oppression are enumerated: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and lastly violence. Comparatively, domination reproduces prevailing culture, and institutions are complicit in the reproduction of hegemonic values, “Domination consists in institutional conditions which inhibit or prevent people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions” (Young, 1990, p. 38). Distributive justice fails to differentiate by assuming a monolithic culture that seeks a homogenous form of justice. Furthermore, this form of justice does not adequately measure for power structures within a patriarchal society. This watershed piece of literature is a paradigm shift for social justice and political theory.

In addition to distributive justice, Gewirtz (2006) expands on the work of both Rawls and Young by including recognitional and associational justice. Recognitional justice
examines the dichotomy between power structures frequently embedded in institutions and culture. The recognitional notion of justice is, “respect for people’s culture, ways of life and values is essential for their dignity, sense of worth and self-esteem” (Gewirtz, 2006, p. 74).

This anthropological conception extends to associational justice, which addresses institutional barriers that prohibit full participation in the decision-making process. Although, previous works contribute to the scope of social justice, theorizing elocuted by the author provides an analytical lens for social justice education. To this end, Gewirtz (2006) catalogs the following four criteria to evaluate social justice education: “looking at the multi-dimensional nature of justice; looking at the tensions between different dimensions of justice; being sensitive to the mediated nature of just practices; and being sensitive to differences in the contexts and levels within which justice is enacted” (p. 79). Moreover, social justice must calibrate for specificity and must move beyond the state of nirvana: unrealistic—or utopian—to imagine that we can pursue policies and practices that are ‘purely’ just. In practice, pursuing certain dimensions of social justice will inevitably mean neglecting, or sacrificing, others. Hence, any meaningful discussion of what counts as justice needs to engage with concrete, practical dilemmas and not merely abstract conceptualizations. (Gewirtz, 2006, p. 70)

Many disciplines have contributed to our understanding of social justice and pinpointing its origin further partitions the application thereof. The purpose for addressing the scope of social justice was to illustrate the fluidity, ambiguity, and dexterity of this concept.

**Conceptual Frameworks**

The conceptual formulation for this study was grounded in a critical examination of social justice education and a review of literature. Overarching themes central to each
conceptual framework is discussed in this chapter. This analysis of literature explains how frameworks have been applied in previous works. Furthermore, this critique will provide rationale for the selected frameworks and document the literature nexus to the topic of inquiry. Figure 1 (See Figure 1. Conceptual frameworks that inform social justice education) is not hierarchical or linear, but instead employed to demonstrate foundational works that are interconnected and relational in a cyclical manner. The literary canon was scrutinized with a critical lens; however, the conceptual frameworks of critical theory, critical pedagogy, social justice education, pedagogies anchored in culture, role of the teacher, critical race theory (CRT), forms of resistance, community cultural wealth, funds of knowledge, and deficit perspective provide insight and inform the topic of inquiry.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual frameworks that inform social justice education*
Critical Theory

Critical theory is the chassis of this study. Challenging the status quo of oppression is a central function of this framework, “Critical theory refuses to identify freedom with any institutional arrangement or fixed system of thought. It questions the hidden assumptions and purposes of competing theories and existing forms of practice” (Bronner, 2017, p. 2). It provides a better understanding of inequalities and educational outcomes as mechanisms of hegemony, “Critical theory is a powerful analytic frame for understanding educational disparities and injustice as functions of power, domination, and exploitation” (Strunk & Locke, 2019, p. 71). Moreover, concepts of social justice are deeply entangled in critical theory. Bradley-Levine and Carr (2015) conduct an ethnographic study to evaluate after-school programming at Catholic diocese. The authors explain that concepts of justice are embedded in the critical theory framework, “research utilizing critical theory must attend to opportunities to reduce inequality. It also requires a sense of responsibility on the part of the researcher to join with the researched to inform and alter current situations” (Bradley-Levine & Carr, 2015, p. 31).

Emanating from the works of Karl Marx, critical theory came to prominence during the industrial revolution when German philosophers founded an institute named The Frankfurt School (Bronner, 2017). In addition to capitalism, this thinktank critiqued epistemology deeply embedded in scientific methods. Jennings and Lynn (2005) explain alternative ways of knowing as seminal to theorizing:

generated a strong set of critiques arguing that social phenomenon could not be understood solely through the use of scientific methods. This was an important
challenge because the use of scientific methods in analyzing social phenomenon was widely thought to be scientific, objective and value-free. (p. 16)

As a result, critical theory departed from traditional methods for understanding and instead emphasized an investigative lens to critique systemic oppression. However, this framework is not exclusive of power structures, but instead seeks to understand how power is legitimized, who are the purveyors of knowledge, and the cost benefit ratio of privilege, “critical theory is not simply a critique of social structures it is an analysis of power relations that asks questions regarding: what constitutes power; who holds power; and in what ways power utilized to benefit those already in power” (Jennings & Lynn, 2005, p. 16).

Max Horkheimer is cited as a founding framer of critical theory and credited for spearheading a movement of consciousness. This movement of consciousness rejects conformity to hegemonic values. According to Horkheimer, dominant culture cheats the individual for developing their own identity, “At stake is the substance of subjectivity and autonomy: The well and ability of the individual to resist external forces intent upon determining the meaning and experience of life” (Bonner, 2017, p. 77). The end goal for deconstructing oppression is to produce a more egalitarian society that’s inclusive of all identities. However, the institution of education is a paradox. On one hand, it offers enlightenment, emancipation, empowerment, and possibilities for upward social mobility. On the other hand, it’s saturated with subliminal oppression. Strunk and Locke (2019) describe motives of the hidden curriculum as a vicious cycle:

the hidden curriculum results in social reproduction. As a result of their own education in white supremacist cisgender patriarchy, students go on to impose those same values and ideologies on others. The ideological and social systems currently in
place, and which are oppressive, become reproduced in each new class of students unless they are radically interrupted. (p. 75)

Hidden agendas with subliminal messaging are many; however, I would argue that prescribed curriculums are not covert forms of oppression but instead overt attempts to indoctrinate and assimilate. This conceptual framework is chief for research addressing issues of equity in education. Many approaches for challenging the status quo employ critical theory, for example, this piece addresses critical pedagogy which is rooted in paradigms associated with critical theory.

**Critical Pedagogy**

An examination of social justice education must pay homage to critical pedagogy. The origins of critical pedagogy can be traced to critical theory. Numerous scholars have contributed to this field of knowledge, such as W.E.B DuBois, John Dewey, and Carter G. Woodson (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). However, social justice research is commonly grounded in the work of Pablo Freire and the famous publication titled *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. As a framework, critical theory questions institutional arrangements and ways of knowing (Bronner, 2017). In contrast, critical pedagogy suggests that the banking method often leads to alienation that dehumanizes pupils which hinders self-actualization and ultimately mitigates transformative change (Freire, 1970). Critical pedagogy and its banking method is seminal to this study in deconstructing canned curriculum, standardization, and oppressive pedagogies. Moreover, this framework is applicable to this inquiry because it examines the role of the teacher and their pedagogical underpinnings.

According to the banking method, the practitioner is the sole purveyor of knowledge and students comply with rote memorization. The pedagogy of banking is defined as, “an act
of depositing, in which the students are the depositories, and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). Traditional schooling that controls narratives is rejected by critical pedagogy. The aim of this conceptual framework is to interrupt traditional schooling that subdues students into submission. Critical pedagogy is an educational philosophy for teaching. The framework contests that schools operate to reproduce hegemonic interests (Benedict et al., 2015). This philosophy implores teachers and students to become critical consumers of data by questioning the current state of affairs. Transformative change is the end game of critical pedagogy.

As an agent for social change, Freire operated as a Marxist; for example, he interchangeably linked inequalities to laissez-faire economics. The ontology of humanity is addressed in the first chapter of his famous book. Freire (1970) challenges capitalism by highlighting the economic system of individualism which prohibits humanization, “oppressors do not perceive their monopoly on having more as a privilege which dehumanizes others and themselves. They cannot see that, in the egoistic pursuit of having as a possessing class, they suffocate in their own possessions” (Freire, 1970, p. 59). This social economic analysis of class warfare is yet another parallel between Freire and the works of Marx. Tenets of critical theory and classical Marxism inform the power dynamics embedded in education and levels of consciousness.

Attempting to mobilize constituents, Freire initially emphasized adult literacy as an instrument for liberation; however, emancipation from the hegemony requires a critical examination of the educational system. Challenging the hierarchy of social order within education and establishing an equitable educational system is chief to fighting
institutionalized oppression. The Brazilian historian, educator, and philosopher was once incarcerated and exiled for his progressive left-leaning ideologies. Instead of class warfare, the status quo of oppression is replicated, and mass produced when the oppressor fails to recognize its privilege and thus further perpetuates oppression and in other cases engages in deliberate pedagogies to subjugate students outside the dominant group “those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons – not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized. It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves” (Freire, 1970, p. 55). If critical thinking is to become a staple of an education with a social justice orientation, then Freire’s four levels of social consciousness must be examined.

In his piece, Freire (1970) propositions the following four levels of social consciousness: magical consciousness, naïve consciousness, critical consciousness, and political consciousness. Additionally, it embeds pedagogical concepts in its examination of oppression. Magical consciousness transpires when constituents are unaware of their oppression and accept the status quo as destiny without grievance. Individuals at the naïve level of consciousness recognize that there are power structures in place, which ensure that certain results are replicated; however, the individual is not empowered to be the catalyst for transformative change. Within this conceptual chassis, dialogue does not simply reflect classroom discourse but also to the human condition. Freire affirms that humans, by design, are social creatures that fail to thrive in the absence of human interaction. In other words, learning is a social dialogical process. According to generative themes, the intricacies of our existence are interconnected, “epochal units are not closed periods of time, static compartment within which people are confined. Were this the case, a fundamental condition
of history – its continuity would disappear. On the contrary, epochal units interrelate” (Freire, 1970, p. 101). With the purpose of resisting powers of oppression, critical consciousness is heightened as individuals critically codify their realities. This conscientization is a watershed moment of great awakening. Consequently, this form of agency is a pedagogical concept known as praxis. For substantive change, a united struggle is required, and this catalyst for societal transformation must move beyond an exchange of ideas. This experience is not a haphazard endeavor. In fact, the pedagogical concept of Easter Experience is not for the faint of heart, “those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly. This conversion is so radical as not to allow of ambiguous behavior” (Freire, 1970, p. 60). Political consciousness and liberation are achieved when constituents use the instrumentalities and channels of politics to levy social change.

The work of Freire is not above reproach. For example, hooks (1994) illuminates sexists blind spots associated with critical pedagogy:

There has never been a moment when reading Freire that I have not remained aware of not only the sexism of the language but the way he (like other progressive Third World political leaders, intellectuals, critical thinkers such as Fanon, Memmi, etc.) constructs a phallocentric paradigm of liberation-wherein freedom and the experience of patriarchal manhood are always linked as though they are one and the same. (p. 47)

In addition to misogyny, some educators argue that critical pedagogy exaggerates class warfare and does not adequately address other forms of oppression and fails to examine race relations (Kincheloe, 2008). Analysis from this conceptual framework is often vague, “Under Freire’s paradigm, it is unclear who the oppressed are, even more ambiguous who the oppressors are, and it is inferred throughout that an innocent third category of enlightened
human exists” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 20). Lastly, critical pedagogy is often situated as a practice; however, it is seldom applied to elementary schooling. Further research that can be applied to the elementary classroom will be essential to transformative change.

**Social Justice Education**

Exploring how elementary teachers in urban schooling are employing pedagogies for social justice required an examination of social justice education. Descriptions documented in this section were filtered through a lens grounded in social justice education. In recent history, notions for the teaching of social justice are grounds for consternation. A media outlet reporting that practitioners of social justice are provoking rage is one prime example, “using emotional persuasion tactics to trigger children attending thousands of public schools to become angry about social justice causes” (Grossman, 2023). However, objections to progressive education and the teaching of social justice issues are not a new phenomenon, “Despite some of the current confusion and tensions, there is a long history in the United States of educators who foreground social justice issues in their work and who argue passionately for their centrality to schooling in a democratic society” (Hytten & Bettez, 2011, p. 8).

The idea of a neutral curriculum is a misconception that fuels the educational debate. In recent years, states throughout the union have passed legislative bills ordaining what teachers can and cannot teach, “vague wording of the clause in question is clearly meant to prohibit teachers from discussing white privilege, the idea that society does not punish white people for their skin color in the way that it punishes Black or Brown people” (Kamara, 2021). The author further explains that neutrality for many topics is not feasible as there, “is a clear right and wrong – education about slavery, for example, must inevitably draw
attention to the atrocities that enslaved people were subjected to. There is no neutral way to
discuss the torture and anguish that an enslaved person faced” (Kamara, 2021). Neutrality in
curriculum is a strategic tactic that’s frequently deployed to resist progressive education.
Under the pretense of civil liberties ordained in the First Amendment, conservatives during
the Back-to-Basics movement of the 1980s, employed a sleight of hand to justify neutrality
in curriculum. Arons (1984) describes the myth of neutrality in schooling:

The civil-liberties initiative is now in the hands of those who recognize that the
fundamental human freedoms of expression, belief, and conscience are inextricably
linked to freedom of choice in schooling. The irony of this new phase in the struggle
for educational liberty is this: Just as value-neutral schooling is a myth that
sidetracked the effort to secure educational freedom, so too are many of the current
schemes for securing family choice in education myths and misrepresentations.

Thereby, education cannot be apolitical. To the contrary, divorcing ideology from pedagogy
is an impossibility. Neutrality and silence by default are political statements, “If you, as a
teacher, engage your students in critical thinking, you are engaging in a political act. If you
teach them rote memorization, you are also engaging in a political act” (Peacefieldhistory,
2022).

Loewen (2018) provides a stark reality of profit margins over an accurate portrayal of
historical accounts. To this end, publishing companies must make textbooks palatable for
both ends of the political spectrum, “not a single left-wing or right-wing American history
textbook has ever appeared from a mainstream publisher. Neither has a textbook
emphasizing African American, Latino, labor, or feminist history as the entry point to
deconstructing curriculum must be situated historically and provide context of the geopolitical landscape. The authors provide a reconceptualist paradigm for understanding curriculum as a symbolic representation that, “refers to those institutional and discursive practices, structures, images, and experiences that can be identified and analyzed in various ways, i.e. political, racially, autobiographically, phenomenologically, theologically, internationally, and in terms of gender and deconstruction” (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 16). This conceptual framework is congruent with progressive education and views curriculum as an ideological mechanism to capsize oppression. At a micro-level, a geopolitical framework for social justice education is both utilitarian and frustrating as it does not adequately address methods or strategies to navigate standardization. It is evident that education is a part of the political zoo and teaching is indeed a political act. As a system, the institution of education has an agenda; however, we must move beyond theorizing and provide pedagogical solutions for the grassroots.

Ayers et al., (2009) published a book titled *Handbook of Social Justice in Education*. The authors explain that social justice education is composed of three foundational principles. Equity is the first principle which demands equal access for all, “the demand that what the most privileged and enlightened are able to provide their children must be the standard for what is made available to all children” (Ayers et al., 2009, p. xiv). The second principle is activism. An education with a social justice orientation incorporates agency and teaches students to become active consumers of information. Social literacy is the third principle. This principle emphasizes unity and nurturing identities, “nourishing awareness of our own identities and our connection with others” (Ayers et al., 2009, p. xiv). Principles
enumerated by Ayers and company inform what it means to teach social justice in urban schooling.

In 2009, Sensoy and DiAngelo authored a piece titled “Developing Social Justice Literacy: An Open Letter to Our Faculty Colleagues” to explain that justice must authentically recognize inequalities associated with privilege and oppression. This recognition acknowledges that the institution of education is littered with inequalities. The institution of academia is not immune to systemic oppression, “While universities, like all other social institutions, reflect the historical and existing unequal distribution of resources and power, there are added ‘dangers’ with the university: the ‘stay below the radar’ advice often given to pre-tenure faculty” is an example of institutionalized oppression (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009, p. 346). Similar to Ayers and company, Sensoy and DiAngelo also offer three foundational tenets for social justice education. Awareness of systemic oppression is the first tenet. The authors provide a clear delineation between discrimination, bias, prejudices, bigotry, and the wraths of oppression, “In contrast, oppression occurs when prejudice is backed by social and institutional power. Oppression involves institutional control, ideological domination, and the imposition of the dominant group’s culture on the target group” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009, p. 345). The second tenet is recognizing power dynamics embedded in prevailing culture, “Believing that dominant group members are more qualified for and deserving of their positions” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009, p. 348). Consistent reflection among practitioners is the third tenet; however, teachers must reflect purposefully in order to interrupt pedagogies that perpetuate disparities.

Democratic education, education for social justice, and community service learning is addressed in an article authored by Rahima C. Wade. According to Wade (2001), these three
practices are deeply entangled in social justice education. Moreover, the author explains that textbooks and traditional methods cannot adequately calibrate for an education with a social justice orientation:

No textbook provides the direction needed to co-create a meaningful social action project with one’s students. Such endeavors are of necessity born of students’ and teachers’ passion, curiosity, and questioning. In addition, many projects arise out of classroom life or community need. Teaching social action involves taking advantage of ‘teachable moments’ and finding ways to connect school and community issues with the academic curriculum. Most teachers have not been trained to think or act in these ways. (Wade, 2001, p. 27)

To this end, the plight for social justice does not endorse or promote a specific ideology. Instead, for the purpose of capsizing oppression, the teaching of social justice fosters the development of analytical skills. Wade (2001) suggests that the function of a teacher with a social justice orientation is to “help students analyze the issues, brainstorm options, and make choices as to what actions they would like to take” (p. 26). This democratic approach for education does not alleviate power dynamics or absolve teachers from their authority; however, it does provide equity of voice for all stakeholders, “while teachers are still the voice of authority in many ways, they also choose to share power with students as they take some ownership of their learning and class structure” (Wade, 2001, p. 25). A pedagogy for student empowerment incorporates student voice and views members of the community as equal stakeholders.

In subsequent work, Wade (2007) explored the function of social justice in the elementary setting. Study participants for this qualitative project ranged in teaching
experience, age, and grade level assignment. Twenty-three of forty teacher participants taught in an urban setting, thirteen of forty teachers worked in suburban communities, and the remaining four taught in a rural setting. Twenty of forty participants taught in the kindergarten to third grade-level, sixteen teacher participants taught at the upper elementary level, and four out of forty self-identified as K-6 instructors. Face-to-face interviewing, focus groups, and surveys facilitated the data collection methods for this study. All forms of interviewing were conducted in a semi-structured format. While surveying information encompassed demographics such as ethnicity, gender, age, years of practice, teaching assignments, and lived experience in the plight for social justice.

Case study methodology facilitated vivid description of teaching experiences and pedagogies that promote social justice. Narratives that document daily struggles of teachers employing a social justice orientation is a prime example. In a conflict of interest between mandated curriculum and culturally relevant content, Amy, a case study participant questioned best practice, “Where’s the balance between mandating stuff that you know is good practice and giving opportunities for child-centered learning and for the kinds of things that come out of the needs of the community” (Wade, 2007, p. 36). In addition to Amy, other teacher participants cite standardization as an obstacle for the infusion of social justice. Notwithstanding, creative practitioners dedicated to the struggle adapt standardized curriculum to teach social justice. For example, Molly, a second-grade teacher, uses issues of power and oppression to address standards of colonization. Seminal to this work, Wade (2007) conveys the following seven characteristics of a social justice education: student-centered, collaborative, experiential, intellectual, critical, multicultural, and activist.
A learning environment that is student-centered cultivates a forum for the open exchange of ideas when, “students feel valued and respected, they will be more likely to share their ideas and concerns openly and collaborate on issues of importance to them” (Wade, 2007, p. 8). The characteristic of a collaborative foundation is grounded in the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978). In this piece of scholarship, Wade documents the function of social interaction and the sociocultural exchange encompassing the learning process. Experiential education champions an action endowment centered on lived experience, “learning is an active and constructive process through which we develop meaning based on our personal experience and our reflections on life” (Wade, 2007, p. 10). Experiential education as the third characteristic of social justice education provides opportunities for concrete application that segregates theory from practice, “students need to be actively involved with others in the school and community, not only learning about injustice but also working together to create further social justice” (Wade, 2007, p. 10). Intellectual rigor is seminal to social justice education. Wade explains that a quality social justice education fosters critical thinking that extends to all content areas. At one fell swoop, critical education provides an analytical lens to synthesize inequalities - students occupying a critical lens are better equipped to challenge the status quo of oppression and work towards an egalitarian society. An education with a multicultural perspective is a function of social justice education. To this end, Wade highlights how cultural context and lived experiences significantly influence our understanding of the world. As a result, multicultural education as a mechanism of social justice, “is concerned with a conscious and consistent focus on including the history and perspectives of all people, including those with different ethnicities, physical abilities, religious beliefs, genders, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic situations” (Wade, 2007, p. 10).
Activism is the last characteristic enumerated by Wade. Along this vein, students are encouraged to develop a profound ethos to the plight for social justice, “Taking action allows students to move from a position of powerlessness to one of possibility” (Wade, 2007, p. 14). The work of Wade (2007) concludes that an education with a social justice orientation teaches students to become critical consumers of information, “The mission of social justice education is to develop informed and active citizens and the practice of social justice work is one of the best means for reaching this goal” (p. 89).

Teachers employing pedagogies for social justice understand that there are many variables influencing development. Zygmunt et al., (2016) provide an ecological framework that addresses both direct and indirect influences. Community schooling, social networks, and homelife are examples of direct influences that affect student development. Comparatively, issues of social justice and policies are indirect influences that contribute to child development. This environmental framework agrees that students do not develop in social vacuums – teachers with a social justice orientation are conscientious of contextual influences. According to Zygmunt et al., (2016), teacher preparation programs are failing teacher candidates and disciples of these future teachers. To remedy this vicious cycle, the authors triangulate content knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Given that this study is designed to explore pedagogies for social justice, I have elected to forgo conversations grounded in content knowledge, and instead highlight dispositions as enumerated by the authors. Zygmunt et al., (2016) address the disposition debate in the introduction to the book titled *Transforming Teacher Education for Social Justice*:

While some allege the improbability of coursework and teacher development activities as a mechanism through which to instill in candidates the requisite
dispositions toward working with ethnically and economically diverse populations of students, others believe in an intentional constructivist approach to preparing teachers for real life in real schools. (p. 2)

Notwithstanding, the authors call for community engagement and situated learning, “Clinical experience and community engagement, combined with integrated content including readings, discussions, videos, and activities, challenge candidates to think about issues in ways that have not before occurred to them” (Zygmunt et al., 2016, p. 31). This work is primarily aimed at pre-service teachers, which leaves a pedagogical vacuum for those already in practice. Teachers with a social justice orientation consistently evaluate their pedagogical underpinnings – part of this reflective process is equity of voice in determining which perspective is being silenced and which are amplified. To this end, the authors promote synthesizing learning as a reflective practice that transforms “the experience of learning from community members and becoming involved in community activities, as well as through interactions and relationships with children and families” (Zygmunt et al., 2016, p. 74). For the authors, skills constitute pedagogies; however, I contest, those skills are inherently different than pedagogies. To me, the former is an ability to deliver effective instruction and the latter is an ideological function that either advances or hinders the development of students.

Working with children from culturally diverse backgrounds is a sentiment echoed by Lisa Delpit. In 1995, Delpit authored a book titled Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom to explain how cultural assumptions and stereotypes often lead to ineffective instruction. This piece attributes academic outcomes to power dynamics and systemic structures of oppression. According to the author, communities outside the bell
curve of dominant culture are frequently viewed as inconsequential. As a result, Delpit (1995) coins the culture of power paradigm to disseminate miscommunication and silenced dialogue. The culture of power yields codes of power that determines which knowledge is worthy of replication and what discourse is muted. However, the author eloquently explains that students of color enter the institution of education with linguistic knowledge. Instruction in communities of color should encompass academic language and welcome other ways of knowing, “Classroom learning should be structured so that not only are these children able to acquire the verbal patterns they lack, but they are also able to strengthen their proficiencies” (Delpit, 1995, p. 57). Equipping students with linguistic tools is chief to a social justice education; however, this work must address requisite pedagogies essential to transformative change. Problem posing and critical thinking are also seminal principles essential to social justice education. The following section addresses problem posing as a function of critical pedagogy.

Empirical works that explicitly examine social justice at the elementary level are few. Notwithstanding, Picower (2012) published a salient piece for elementary schooling titled “Using Their Words: Six Elements of Social Justice Curriculum Design for the Elementary Classroom.” This article outlines the following six elements: self-love and knowledge, respect for others, issues of social justice, social movements and social change, awareness raising, and social action. Navigating the rigors of standardization is a difficult proposition for both veteran and inexperienced teachers. Research indicates that teachers have limited autonomy over curriculum, “because of testing, standards, and mandated curriculum, individual teachers often have little say over how they organize their time in the classroom” (Picower, 2012, p. 13). Moreover, the author suggests that an education with a social justice
orientation must move beyond multicultural education. Picower’s (2012) iteration alludes to sequential overload:

The elements are not mutually exclusive and need not all be included in every individual unit. Unlike Bank’s (1999) approaches to multicultural curriculum reform, which moves from no integration of multicultural approaches to total integration, the elements in this paper do not move from a lower level of social justice to a higher level. All of the elements presented here are of import; they build upon each other sequentially, and all should be addressed throughout the year. (p.3)

According to Picower (2012), the sequential approach is designed to avoid pitfalls common to elementary schooling, such as teaching “heroes and holidays” as enumerated by Lee et al., (1998). Therefore, Picower’s framework encourages teachers to critically examine inequalities embedded in standardized curriculum and offers a sequential process for curriculum design.

The element of self-love and knowledge emphasizes identity and heritage. As a result, Picower (2012) encourages teachers to include activities that honor heritage. Poems like *De Donde Soy/Where I’m From* are prime examples of activities that foster identity. Respect for others as the second tenet encourages students to unpack stereotypes and provides opportunities for a cultural exchange. The idea is to cultivate a respectful climate that embraces diversity. After establishing the first two elements, Picower encourages teachers to addresses issues of social justice. At the third stage, “students learn about the history of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, religious intolerance and how these forms of oppression have affected different communities” (Picower, 2012, p. 4). After addressing issues of social injustice, students are able to examine social movements and social change at
the fourth stage. Unity and strength in numbers is the purpose for addressing social movements. Awareness raising is the fifth stage of development. At this stage, students present findings, “Teachers provide opportunities for students to teach other about the issues they have learned about” (Picower, 2012, p. 5). Social action advocates agency and is the last element addressed in this piece. The following table (See Table 1. *Picower’s (2012) six sequential elements for elementary social justice*) outlines a curricular design for elementary schooling.
Table 1

*Picower’s (2012) six sequential elements for elementary social justice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Six Elements of Social Justice Curriculum Design for Elementary Education</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. Self-love and Knowledge:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Teachers provide students opportunities to learn who they are and where they come from.</td>
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<td>- Students study different aspects of their identities and the histories associated with it.</td>
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<td>- Negative stereotypes about student identities are deconstructed.</td>
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<td>- Classroom activities include: Where I’m From poems (Christensen, 2000), self-portraits that include skin tone identification, name poems, family interviews, grandparent guest speakers, cultural ABC books.</td>
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<td><strong>2. Respect for Others:</strong></td>
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<td>- Teachers provide students opportunities to share knowledge about their own cultural background with their classmates.</td>
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<td>- A climate of respect for diversity through students’ learning to listen with kindness and empathy to the experiences of their peers is created.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Students deconstruct stereotypes about their peers’ identities.</td>
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<td>- Classroom activities include: Sharing cultural ABC books, diverse family structures (including LGBTQ families), field trips to cultural museums, guest speakers from children’s families and cultural centers.</td>
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<td><strong>3. Issues of Social Injustice:</strong></td>
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<td>- Teachers move from “celebrating diversity” to an exploration of how diversity can be experienced as oppression that has differently impacted various groups of people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Students learn about the history of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, religious intolerance and how these forms of oppression have impacted different communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Teachers make links between the historical roots of oppression and the impact it has on lived experiences and material conditions of people today.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Classroom content can include: Native American genocide, slavery, the Holocaust, anti-immigration policies and sentiment, media (mis) representations, issues that face their own communities such as gentrification or police brutality.</td>
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<td><strong>4. Social Movements and Social Change:</strong></td>
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<td>- Teachers share examples of movements of iconic and everyday people standing together to address the issues of social injustice they learned about in Element Three.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Teachers help students understand that working together, ordinary people have united to create change.</td>
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<td>- Classroom content can include: Abolitionism, civil rights movement, the L.A. janitors’ strikes, various labor movements, 1968 and 2006 Chicano student walkouts.</td>
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<td><strong>5. Awareness Raising:</strong></td>
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<td>- Teachers provide opportunities for students to teach others about the issues they have learned about.</td>
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<td>- Classroom activities include: Newsletters, public service announcements, letter writing campaigns, creating documentaries, blogging.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6. Social Action:</strong></td>
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<td>- Teachers provide opportunities to take action on issues that affect students and their communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Students identify issues they feel passionate about and learn the skills of creating change firsthand.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Classroom activities include: Letter writing campaigns, petitions, linking with local grassroots organizations, campaigns, speaking at public meetings, attending and/or organizing protests.</td>
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In this piece, Picower (2012) shifts social justice from a theoretical perspective to a practical application; however, participation structures are vague. We need concrete examples of pedagogical underpinnings. A vertical articulation of elements would also augment this presentation as it infers that teachers have flexibility in pedagogy. Instead of a top-down approach that is teacher-centered, a bottom-up approach would likely yield a culturally relevant curriculum.

**Pedagogies Anchored in Culture**

When attending to social justice education, the conceptual frameworks of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) provide insight for what it means to teach in an urban setting. This section addresses culture as a pedagogical conduit for a better understanding of social justice education. These frameworks build on each other with a purpose of making classrooms more equitable; however, this discussion of pedagogies grounded in culture is not chronological. Pedagogies for social justice often encompass elements of culture and calibrate for an assortment of lived experience.

The educational concept that is culturally responsive first appeared in the work of Courtney B. Cazden and Ellen L. Legget (1976). In the aftermath of the *Lau v. Nichols* case of 1974, educators spearheaded a discussion to remedy bilingual education (US Department of Education, (ED), 2020). Cazden and Legget (1976) declared that education should, “be more responsive to cultural differences among children. Specifically, school systems are asked to consider cognitive and affective aspects of how different children learn so that appropriate teaching styles and learning environments can be provided that will maximize their educational achievement” (p. 3). Notions for an education that is culturally responsive
was significantly influenced by the multicultural educational movement of the late 1960s. At the curricular table, the objective of multicultural education is to integrate an anthropological approach that calibrates for student culture and reflects the interests of the community.

At face value, teaching that is culturally responsive is often associated with culturally relevant pedagogy. Notwithstanding, Gay (2002) differentiates culturally responsive pedagogy from culturally relevant pedagogy by enumerating the following five pedagogical tenets: 1.) developing a cultural diversity knowledge base, 2.) designing culturally relevant curricula, 3.) demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community, 4.) cross-cultural communications, and lastly 5.) cultural congruity in classroom instruction.

According to Gay (2002), “Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). This scholarship draws from the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) in a piece titled “But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.” For example, the second tenet that addresses designing a culturally responsive curriculum does not only acknowledge assets and curricular deficiencies, but instead is explicit in addressing issues of social justice that foster critical thinking in accordance to Ladson-Billings (1995):

Culturally relevant teaching does not imply that it is enough for students to choose academic excellence and remain culturally grounded if those skills and abilities represent only an individual achievement. Beyond those individual characteristics of academic achievement and cultural competence, students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique social norms. (p.162)
Concurring with this notion of social consciousness, Gay (2002) explains that this form of awareness must encompass topics of social justice, “There are several recurrent trends in how formal school curricula deal with ethnic diversity that culturally responsive teachers need to correct. Among them are avoiding controversial issues such as racism, historical atrocities, powerlessness, and hegemony” (p.108). Demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community as outlined by Gay (2002), aligns with the concept expressed by Ladson-Billings (1995) for fostering learning environments grounded in care and academic success, “culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to students’ academic needs, not merely make them ‘feel good’. The trick of culturally relevant teaching is to get students to ‘choose’ academic excellence” (p. 160). In this manner, teaching that is culturally responsive is similar to culturally relevant pedagogy; however, Gay (2002) orients the tenet of cross-cultural communications towards pedagogical underpinnings or foundations. Teachers must carefully examine dialogical patterns of discourse and communication style in order to ensure cultural alignment, “differences in ethnic communication styles have many implications for culturally responsive teaching. Understanding them is necessary to avoid violating the cultural values of ethnically diverse students in instructional communications” (Gay, 2002, p. 112). Zygmunt and Clark (2015) eloquently entangles and yet segregates culturally relevant pedagogy from teaching that is culturally responsive:

- instruction that is culturally relevant and responsive promotes academic success for children through connecting both the content of teaching and the methods or pedagogy of teaching to children’s lived experience in order to build a bridge between the home/community discourse and instruction within the school. (p. 24)
Moving beyond the exponential overlap between frameworks, the panacea for social justice education is not a case of conceptual scarcity but instead a pedagogical deficit to anchor transformative change.


- requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence.
- Culturally sustaining pedagogy, then, has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. That is, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. (p. 95)

A multicultural education that is sustainable must move beyond “heroes and holidays” (Lee et al., 2002). Far too often, an acknowledgement of culture is a surface level practice. In my own experience as a teacher, far too often an acknowledgement of culture is a surface level practice. For example, an event to celebrate Chinese New Year or Día de los Muertos without meaningful examination is not a sustainable pedagogy that genuinely honors student culture. To the contrary, Paris (2012) offers strategies for pedagogies of acculturation and in
a pluralistic society. Frameworks of culture inform my analysis of social justice education in relation to pedagogical underpinnings.

**Role of the Teacher**

The role of the teacher is seminal to an education with a social justice orientation. A pedagogical examination of disposition must be addressed in order to deconstruct practice. In the foreword to *Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education*, Julie Landsman (2014) explains that transformative change is not necessarily a question of theory but a matter of practice, “We have a chance to be instrumental in bringing about true equity beyond anything we could have imagined while sitting in teacher preparation classes full of abstraction and jargon” (Gorski & Pothini, 2014, p. xv). Thus, classrooms and grassroots teaching are platforms for substantive change. Teachers should thoroughly understand and come to the full realization that teaching is a political act. As Richard Shall writes in the preface for *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom’, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire, 1970, p. 34)

To this end, a teacher with a social justice orientation understands that an apolitical education does not exist. Perceptions for a non-partisan education fails to examine mechanisms of oppression and further perpetuates the status quo. Silence, by default is a political declaration that aligns with being complicit, “neutrality teaches students to remain silent and complacent
when they are faced with a disagreement. How can we expect students to become innovative critical thinkers or successful communicators if silence is their only means to approach differences and difficulties?” (Ferlazzo, 2021).

Sinha (2016) contextualizes the role of the teacher in a piece titled “Teaching as a Political Act: The Role of Critical Pedagogical Practices and Curriculum.” Within the sovereignty of India, the author examines student-teacher relations and the dissemination of dominant culture. Sinha (2016) views instruction as a pedagogical vehicle for the development of critical thinking. In addition to teacher functionality, this article contextualizes the educational landscape and its methods as an ideological microcosm of rhetoric that has been institutionalized, “The act and philosophy of teaching are contextual processes and are driven by the situations, cultural backgrounds and sociopolitical factors regulating the institutions” (Sinha, 2016, p. 309). Therefore, circumstantial curriculum and pedagogies are often the result of institutionalized oppression which unfortunately is a systemic ill that implicates society as a whole. Ayers (1998) seconds the notion of institutionalized norms in the foreword of Teaching for Social Justice: A Democracy and Education by maintaining a pulse on best practice and calibrating for the sociopolitical conditions of the learning community:

Teaching for social justice demands a dialectical stance: one eye firmly fixed on the students - Who are they? What are their hopes, dreams, and aspirations? Their passions and commitments? What skills, abilities, and capacities does each one brings to the classroom? – and the other eye looking unblinkingly at the concentric circles of context – historical flow, cultural surround, economic reality. (Ayers et al., 1998, p. xvii)
Teaching for social justice acknowledges lived experience, synthesizes the function of schooling, and provides an education grounded in culture. This orientation moves beyond theoretical frameworks but instead seeks to unpack social constructs and pedagogical underpinnings.

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) authored a prominent piece titled *The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools*. Although situated at the high school level, this work describes how teachers employ literacy skills to reject systemic oppression. In one example, the authors incorporated contemporary text to deconstruct the implications of colonization embedded in classical literature. This form of literacy provides students with opportunities to analyze hegemonic powers and teaches critical consumption of data, “the ultimate goal of a proletariat education is to help make students more critical consumers of all information that they encounter in their daily lives and to give them the skills to become more capable producers of counter-information” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 53). An action-oriented project is another pedagogical example of agency. To this end, students published magazines to promote critical literacy skills. This publication included articles that increased efficacy, artwork illustrating school conditions, interviews with local politicians that were conducted by students, articles documenting personal narratives, poetry, and other topics of social justice. In effect, classroom pedagogy becomes the transmission of substantive change – the art of critical pedagogy is not exclusively reserved to classroom practice. The implementation of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is another example of agency that far exceeds schooling. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) demonstrate how teachers can employ YPAR to circumvent the institution of education in fostering community ties. Critical literacy
is chief to the development of social justice; however, this research is yet another example of agency excluding elementary students.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an interdisciplinary evaluation of power dynamics, an approach for validating the lived realities that communities of color experience, and analytical tool to deconstruct racism. As a nation, the United States of America has an infamous history with race relations. Unpacking CRT requires an examination of other pivotal principals. A neutral stance or refusal to entertain discourse grounded in the negotiation of race often results in a colorblind philosophy. A colorblind philosophy reproduces racism; however, the principle is primarily reserved for Whites who can, “choose whether to be conscious of their racial identity or to ignore it and regard themselves as simply human beings without a race” (Johnson, 2006, p. 26). The pedagogy of color blindness allocates ample space for subtle, subliminal, and systematic oppression. Racial inequalities in contemporary contexts operates in the darkness of obscurity. Bonilla-Silva (2006) explains concealed racism as a function for maintaining the status quo, “color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-civil rights era. And the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare” (p. 15). Embedded in colorblind ideology is an arsenal of oppression. According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), the colorblind ideology is contingent on four central frames: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. However, abstract liberalism is the most important as it is the building block of the new subliminal form of racism. Abstract liberalism is a form of reverse psychology that frames, “race-related issues in the language of liberalism, whites can appear reasonable and
even moral, while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with de facto inequality” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 70). On the other hand, the other three frames of oppression are important to the educational setting. Naturalization implies that segregation is a natural phenomenon in the racial hierarchy. For example, residential segregation is poignant for communities of color; nevertheless, a conservative ideology asserts that ethnic groups strategically elect to isolate themselves from their White counterparts, “blacks, Latinos, and other subordinate groups live in separate social spheres from whites. This is highly visible to social observers in terms of the separation of racial and ethnic groups across space” (Krivo et al., 2009, p. 1765). Thereby, Whites justify residential segregation as a function of economic status. Cultural racism is utilized to justify the social standing of minorities, as evidenced in statements such as, “Mexicans do not put much emphasis on education” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 71). Lastly, minimization claims that racism is no longer a significant factor for the marginalization of minorities and a condition of ancient history.

As a conceptual framework, the CRT movement started in the 1970s; however, its foundation is deeply entangled in the separate but equal doctrine. When the high court addressed arguments in the Brown v. Board of Education case of 1954, concurring opinion from the US Supreme Court determined that the separate but equal doctrine was indeed unconstitutional (Epstein & Walker, 2007). Common law relies on legal precedent during subsequent deliberation of cases, and proper conceptualization of CRT requires historical context. As a result of common law, the precedent of oppression that was the separate but equal doctrine lasted nearly sixty years. The lower courts legitimized the separate but equal doctrine of segregation and maintained the status quo of apartheid. Even though, the merits of the Plessy v. Ferguson case do not explicitly mention education – its implications are
salient to *Brown v. Board of Education* and CRT. In 1892, Homer Plessy engaged in civil disobedience by refusing to sit in a segregated trolley. Plessy’s rebellion violated Jim Crow and Louisiana state law. Attorneys for Plessy argued that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment granted Plessy the constitutional right to equal access of facilities. Notwithstanding, the Supreme Court ruled in a seven to one verdict that racial segregation did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment. This infamous case further perpetuated the slippery slope of discrimination into other sectors of society beyond public transportation and legalized segregation in education for decades to come (Epstein & Walker, 2007).

Disenfranchised with jurisprudence, legal scholars in conjunction with other civil right activists coined and conceptualized CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Former law professor from New York University School of Law, Derrick Bell is cited as the founding framer of CRT; thereby, the conceptual framework has its roots in Critical Legal Studies (CLS). In the aftermath of the civil rights movement, legislation attempted to protect constitutional liberties and minimize oppression for all marginalized groups. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is a prime example of legislation designed to protect the liberties of minorities (Henretta et al., 2002). Although conditions improved, oppression mutated to a function of institutionalized discrimination. According to scholars of CLS, power structures utilize the instrumentalities of the legal process to maintain the status quo. The power disparities between the have and have-nots embedded in jurisprudence gave rise to CLS. In opposition to CLS, advocates of CRT argued that the legal system was too laborious. For example, in the aftermath of the 1954 verdict, evidence of desegregation did not become apparent until President Lyndon B. Johnson and the Justice Department enforced the *Brown* verdict. Finally, “by 1972 the percentage of black schoolchildren in southern and border states...
attending school with whites increased to more than 90 percent” (Epstein & Walker, 2007, p. 642). In addition to the sluggish pace of jurisprudence, proponents of CRT critiqued CLS for not addressing the complexities of race in its analysis. Delgado and Stefancic (1998) describe CRT as a movement spearheaded by advocates of social justice; however, the application of this framework is relevant to many issues implicating education.

Educational CRT is noted in the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). The authors cite limitations in the multicultural paradigm. According to this paradigm, movements for social justice dwindle and fail to achieve objectives for transformative change. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) describe this fading effect as an entanglement with the political zoo:

the current multicultural paradigm functions in a manner similar to civil rights law. Instead of creating radically new paradigms that ensure justice, multicultural reforms are routinely ‘sucked back into the system’ and just as traditional civil rights law is based on a foundation of human rights, the current multicultural paradigm is mired in liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current order. Thus, critical race theory in education, like its antecedent in legal scholarship, is a radical critique of both the status quo and the purported reforms. (p. 62)

The inability to yield sensible solutions is a critique of CRT. As a framework, it functions as an appraisal for the current state of affairs and deconstructs but fails to provide pedagogical direction. At face value, limitations of the multicultural paradigm might project a disparaging sentiment; however, it is intended to address intersectionality and to ensure that CRT does not attempt, “to be everything to everyone and consequently becomes nothing for anyone, allowing the status quo to prevail” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62). Intersectionality
has become a common denominator in the literary canon of CRT. The concept of intersectionality recognizes that lived experience overlaps and intersects with sociological markers for race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, customs, norms, traditions, culture, and other identities. Understanding that intersectionality objects to concepts of essentialism is seminal to the CRT framework. Ladson-Billings (2013) explains in chapter 3 of the *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education* that eurocentrism assumes that people operate in a monolithic approach, “Essentialism is a belief that all people perceived to be in a single group think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways. Such thinking leads to considerable misunderstanding and stereotyping” (Lynn & Dixson, 2013, p. 40).

During its initial wave, CRT primarily examined race relations from a binary narrative of Black and White. This pedagogy failed to acknowledge the struggles of other marginalized groups. Kimberlé W. Crenshaw is perhaps the most influential pioneer in the development of intersectionality. In a Washington Post article, Crenshaw explains the need for intersectionality and how multiple forms of inequality fosters oppression. According to Crenshaw, the intersectionality concept of CRT was an, “attempt to make feminism, anti-racist activism, and anti-discrimination law do what I thought they should – highlight the multiple avenues through which racial and gender oppression were experienced so that the problems would be easier to discuss and understand” (Crenshaw, 2015). In many instances, multiple dimensions of oppression victimize citizens. For example, an African American that identifies with being both female and lesbian, experiences at the minimum, three layers of oppression. Being Black in America is the overt and first layer of oppression in this example. Institutionalized discrimination endured by female identity is subliminal but an omnipresent obstacle of the glass ceiling effect, “The metaphor for a glass ceiling was initially used to
represent the blocked promotional opportunities for women in the corporate hierarchy” (Espinosa & Ferreira, 2022, p. 37). Lastly, being a member of the LGBTQ community encompasses societal repercussions. Thus, a simple Black and White analysis does not adequately address layers of oppression.

Solórzano et al., (2000) document microaggressions as a concealed yet abrasive form of oppression that may or may not be intentional, “Microaggressions are subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 60). This qualitative study provided marginalized students with a platform to reveal narratives of systemic oppression. To analyze microaggressions, the researchers collected data from thirty-four students from three different institutions. Researchers employed CRT to measure the racial climate of academia and to determine how institutions of learning influence microaggressions. According to findings, a positive counterspace facilitates a forum to challenge deficit perspective, and moreover cultivates a space that allows communities of color to thrive, “counter-spaces serve as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained” (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70). In addition to counterspace, results suggest that microaggressions are subliminal forms for masking institutionalized discrimination. The plight for educational access has been laborious, and at face value might appear to be equal; however, an examination of microaggressions within academia reveals a different reality, “The experiences of these students demonstrates that even at high levels of accomplishment (i.e., at elite undergraduate universities), where educational conditions might on the surface appear to be equal, inequality and discrimination still exist-albeit in more subtle and hidden forms” (Solórzano et
al., 2000, p. 71). The work of Solórzano and company is yet another piece of scholarship that omits elementary schooling; however, it is an empirical study that marries CRT to education. Moreover, it employs focus groups as a data collection tool. For the purpose of my study, focus groups provided teacher participants with a counterspace to share narratives that implicate pedagogy.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) cite the work of W.E.B DuBois to document intersectionality. The great sociologists were not concerned with the biological implications of race, but instead with the sociopolitical consequences associated with race relations. In a reflective narrative, DuBois (1940) explains that race and racism is a lived experience:

My discussions of the concept of race, and the white and colored worlds are not to be regarded as digressions from the history of my life; rather my autobiography is a digressive illustration and exemplification of what race has meant in the world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is for this reason that I have named and tried to make this book an autobiography of race rather than merely a personal reminiscence, with the idea that peculiar racial situation and problems could best be explained in the life story of one who has lived them. (p. 221)

As a result of this lived experience, DuBois expressed intersectionality as double consciousness, “the African American ‘ever feels his two-ness-an American, A Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings’” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 50-51).

Chief to this work is understanding that race as a classification often explains inequalities of the educational system.

Within the scope of education, the authors enumerate three tenets central to understanding the nexus between race and property. Race as a major factor for explaining
inequalities in America is the first tenet. Proprietary ownership is the second tenet – this nation is grounded on the notion of property rights. Lastly, “the intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequality” (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995, p. 48). The application of CRT to the educational setting provides opportunities to examine institutionalized oppression and better understand disparities. Moreover, CRT in the field of education allocates equity of voice, an opportunity to share lived experience, and a forum for cultural exchange. Ladson-Billings (2013) explains the function of counternarratives as a storytelling art form, “narratives have been shared in every culture as a means of entertainment, education, and cultural preservation and to instill moral values. The very discipline we call history is about the cultural narrative that cultures, nations, and societies tell” (p. 41). Narratives are seminal to this examination of social justice pedagogy.

Forms of Resistance

Solórzano and Bernal (2001) critique social conditions and explain that oppositional students demonstrate the following four types of behaviors: reactionary behavior, self-defeating resistance, conformist resistance, and transformational resistance. These authors further describe differentiation of behaviors as fluid and often motivated by issues of social justice:

The distinction between the four behaviors is not static or rigid, and neither are these behaviors inclusive of all types of oppositional behavior. In addition, the quadrants should not be seen as discrete and static entities, but rather, within each quadrant is a range of a student’s critique of social oppression and motivation for social justice. (p. 317)
This model of oppositional behaviors includes resiliency – an ability to succeed in lieu of institutionalized oppression. According to Solórzano and Bernal (2001), reactionary behavior is a knee jerk reaction that is void of critique. When individuals are unable to articulate oppression or justify resistance, students are engaging in reactionary behavior. Self-defeating resistance is the second form of oppositional behavior. This type of behavior encompasses a low degree of criticism but is not transformational as it reproduces the status quo and is destructive to oneself. The third type of oppositional behavior is conformists’ resistance. Students synthesize institutionalized oppression and demonstrate social consciousness; however, they often blame themselves and their culture for social outcomes. Moreover, they elect to use the channels of oppression to seek social justice, which seldom results in substantive change. Transformational resistance is the fourth type of oppositional behavior, “motivated by a sense of social justice. With a deeper level of understanding and a social justice orientation, transformational resistance offers the greatest possibility for social change” (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 319). The following figure (See Figure 2. Defining the concept of resistance authored by Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) is a diagram originally published by Solórzano and Bernal (2001) to demonstrate the intersection between a critique of social conditions and student interest in the plight for social justice.
These forms of resistance are seminal to an examination of social justice education. Teachers at the elementary level often struggle to understand disruptive behavior, and a better understanding of opposition might ameliorate schooling issues.

**Community Cultural Wealth**

In 2005, Tara Yosso authored a piece titled “Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth” to move the CRT discussion away from critique and deconstruction to instead analyze assets of marginalized communities. Concerned with equal access, oppression, and the dissemination of oppressive pedagogies, Yosso (2005) employs principals of CRT to construct an educational framework that
challenges inequalities. Ultimately, CRT attempts to capsize colorblind narratives, disrupt cycles of oppression, and provoke a paradigm shift away from deficit doctrine. Yosso conceptualizes educational CRT as, “a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses” (p. 74). Moreover, it invites teachers to capitalize on community cultural wealth – a similar pedagogy central to background knowledge. Historically, communities of color have been denied positions of power within academia and theorizing has been relegated as a function of Whiteness. As a result, Yosso commences the piece by addressing the transmission of knowledge and value laden pedagogies that minimize communities of color.

As a framework, community cultural wealth employed the underpinnings of CRT to showcase cultural deficiencies in the educational setting. A schooling examination that provides a social justice nexus should calibrate for the following five tenets of CRT: transdisciplinary perspective, centrality of experiential knowledge, commitment to social justice, challenging dominant ideology, and intercentricity of race and racism. In previous sections, I attempt to conceptualize social justice as a fluid endeavor that requires multiple layers of analysis. As a result of this dexterity, the transdisciplinary perspective of this framework gives CRT a fluid approach that is not restricted to the rigmarole procedures of one particular lens, thus scholars of CRT can employ methodologies from multiple arenas. Centrality of Experiential Knowledge honors non-traditional data collection tools that are frequently rejected by academia, such as, oral histories, cuentos (storytelling), testimonios, proverbs, photovoice, and personal narratives. Committing to social justice mandates grassroots transformation and mobilization of communities. Agency challenges the hegemony of dominant culture by questioning the legitimacy of objectivity in scholarship,
which too often is projected from a position of privilege. Intercentricity of race and racism addresses layers and dimensions associated with oppression.

In addition to the five tenets, Yosso (2005) chronicles the following six forms of cultural capital to inform the educational application of CRT: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. Teachers should support student endowment by utilizing cultural wealth as an asset to transcend obstacles and achieve academic success. For example, in lieu of institutionalized oppression, communities of color consistently display aspirational capital – an ability to maintain hope and yield to the possibilities of emancipation. Overcoming generational outcomes without tangible means for achievement is a demonstration of aspirational capital. Practitioners that subscribe to a social justice orientation value linguistic capital, “the idea that Students of Color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Cuentos (storytelling) and proverbios (proverbs) in the Spanish language are prime examples of linguistic capital; however, the English language continuously sidelines bilingual education. Familial capital includes biological family and extended communities that foster togetherness. It’s a healthy bond that shares nurturing responsibility in the development of meaningful relationships. The strength in numbers kinship provides support on many levels. Social capital is a network of social ties that allocate both tangible resources and emotional support. Guidance and assurance that prevent alienation constitutes social networks in communities of color.

**Funds of Knowledge in Community and Classrooms**

Since its inception, funds of knowledge has emphasized teachers becoming students of their pupils; however, this educational concept for honoring household capital emanates
from the works of Moll et al., (1992) and Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992). The work of Moll et al., (1992) informs teacher pedagogy and should be viewed as transformative:

The primary purpose of this work is to develop innovations in teaching that draw upon the knowledge and skills found in local households. Our claim is that by capitalizing on household and other community resources, we can organize classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools. (p. 132)

For communities of color, the transmission of values is often a function of a sociocultural encounter. Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) contribute to the literary canon by documenting a non-monetary exchange as a mechanism for transmitting understanding, “social exchange between households, clusters of households, and kinship networks not only continues to provide individuals access to historic funds of knowledge, but also provides them the cultural matrix for incorporating new understandings and relationships” (p. 329). This concept does not only provide cultural context but should be employed as an asset that is exchanged as a form of capital.

The later watershed work of González et al., (2005) is chief to the original conceptualization of funds of knowledge. In this study, *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms* (2005), teachers acted as ethnographers become students of their pupils. Open ended interviews, observations, and historical accounts facilitated the data collection process. Findings demonstrate that household knowledge is a pedagogical conduit for classroom practice. Additionally, a more profound understanding of culture was gained from community networks which capsizes deficit perspectives, “given the pervasiveness of deficit orientations to urban schooling,
faculty recognize the need to provide students with the tools to constructively come to terms with what it means to complete a practicum in an urban school” (González et al., 2005, p. 224). Notwithstanding, the authors cite that substantive change is unknown as some teachers alter perspectives of a particular stereotype but continue to internalize perceived deficits. According to this piece of literature, communities of color are equipped with funds of knowledge that should be viewed as robust resources essential to the learning process.

Theoretically, teacher preparation programs throughout the nation teach prospective teachers to calibrate for background knowledge. During practicum, fortunate educators are exposed to the educational theory that is funds of knowledge as an instructional strategy that analyzes background knowledge and builds on cultural capital by providing learning communities with a culturally relevant curriculum in the classroom. Analogous to funds of knowledge, community cultural wealth recognizes that communities of color enter the institution of education with an array of cultural capital. As with any framework, community cultural wealth has limitations. Empirical works that showcase pedagogies in relation to elementary schooling are few. Secondly, it projects the family as an undeniable asset. A mixed method study of postsecondary students cites a noteworthy discovery, “Students not only described their ‘parents’ as academic supporters, but also described the pressure of making parents proud” (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017, p. 68). Familial capital is unquestionably an asset of many marginalized students; however, it also fails to acknowledge the lived realities that many students encounter. It’s impossible to quantify how many students enter classrooms daily as victims of domestic violence and other forms of abuse. All things being equal, community cultural wealth is the antithesis of deficit thinking.
**Deficit Perspective**

A system that fails to acculturate students and instead demands rapid assimilation produces subtractive schooling. Valenzuela (1999) published a piece that addresses negligent pedagogies. For communities of color, educational settings that do not calibrate for linguistic capital, funds of knowledge, provide authentic *cariño* (care), meaningful student-teacher relationships, and a culturally meaningful curriculum offer a subtractive experience that significantly hinders the sociopolitical and academic advancement of learning communities. The author explains that students are not resistant to education but to schooling that, “does not typically provide, namely, trusting, respectful relations between students and the adults who are there to teach and guide them. They further demand an inclusive curriculum responsive to their cultural identity” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 253). Inevitably, the absence of a culturally meaningful curriculum results in academic failure. Subtractive environments that institutionalize oppression are synonymous with the deficit perspective. The achievement gap for communities of color is documented and monitored for academic performance and behavior. For both Black and Latinx students, “once a child is labeled a delinquent, he is stigmatized as a criminal and is likely to be considered untrustworthy by teachers” (Giddens et al., 2005, p. 177). In the case of behavior, it frequently facilitates the school-to-prison pipeline for communities of color. Unfortunately, as in the case of mass incarceration, Black communities bear the burden of systematic dysfunction. Even though, it’s estimated that Black students comprise of 16.9% of the U.S. student body, “the current 33.4% suspension rate of Black students is two to five times more than White peers” (Pane & Rocco, 2014, p. 5). Resistance from communities of color is not a function of criminality but a challenge against deficit perspective. The notion of caring is a rudimentary premise of humanity.
Analogous to all students, communities of color share a desire to be treated with respect, love, and dignity. Students subjected to subtractive schooling often resist deficit education by engaging “in random acts of rebellion, posture, and pose, mentally absent themselves, physically absent themselves, or attend and participate in only those classes that interest them” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 100). Contrary to deficit, findings in the Valenzuela examination demonstrate that communities of color do indeed value education but resist oppressive schooling that subjugates.

Deficit perspectives are a common pedagogy of contemporary education. It is an ideology of oppression that marginalizes learning communities. However, the systematic application thereof is a subliminal practice that extends beyond the institution of education. In fact, the ideology of deficit is, “a mechanism for socializing citizens to comply with a host of oppressions, from colonization to enslavement, educational inequalities to unjust housing practices. In the most basic terms, deficit ideology can be understood as sort of blame the victim mentality” (Gorski, 2011, p. 4). Blame shifting keeps the discriminatory nature subliminal and allows the ideology to thrive. Instead of a critical examination of pedagogies in urban schooling, many educators conclude that academic failures are the result of cultural values.

Casual determinations fail to synthesize the complexities of institutionalized oppression. The employment of deficit is a form of gaslighting, “to manipulate popular consciousness in order to deflect attention from the systemic conditions and sociopolitical context that underlie or exacerbate inequalities, such as systemic racism or economic injustice” (Gorski, 2011, p. 6). Additionally, power differentials grounded in privilege cultivate space for the systemic application of deficit. Notions associated with the
achievement gap are deeply entangled with a dogmatic viewpoint of the deficit model. Frequently, teachers disaggregate educational data as a source of enlightenment and a symbol of social economic status. As a system, education complies with a socioeconomic rationale to explain achievement gaps. To the contrary, Ladson-Billings (2007) deconstructs the culture of poverty paradigm that far too often is projected by teachers in urban schooling. With an anthropological approach, the article explains that economic status is not culture, “poverty is not a culture. It is a condition produced by the economic, social, and political arrangements of a society” (Ladson-Billings, 2007, p. 320). In the case of deficit, the rationale for marginalization transitions to an anthropological phenomenon that’s often subliminal.

Unfortunately, the uneven distribution of power between ideologues from deficit perspective and communities of color offers little aspiration for closing the achievement gap. According to this viewpoint, academic failures are the byproduct of a scarcity mindset, “the student who fails in school does so because of his / her internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, adherents allege, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior” (Valencia, 2010, p. 6-7). Along this continuum, Valencia (2010) documents how deficit thinkers fail to acknowledge institutionalized arrangements that further perpetuate stratification:

Given the parsimonious nature of deficit thinking, it is not unexpected that advocates of the model fail to look for external attributions of an individual student’s school failure. They hold exculpatory how schools are organized to thwart learning. In addition, inequalities in the political economy of education and oppressive macropolicies and practices in education are ignored in understanding school failure. Large-scale school reform is complex and highly demanding. As such, deficit thinkers
avoid systemic approaches to school reform and focus on this simple kind of solution.

(p. 9)

Fortunately, frameworks such as community cultural wealth and funds of knowledge vehemently reject deficit perspective, while embracing the lived experiences of marginalized groups.

As expressed in the previous chapter, the state of New Mexico is not immune to deficit education. Arellano (2023) recently published a piece titled “Action Is Not Activism: Moving Martinez/Yazzie V. State Forward” to address the aftermath of the landmark court case. This piece of scholarship provides a scope and sequence of events. For example, the Martinez plaintiffs filed a complaint against the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) in April of 2014 by “alleging that economically disadvantaged and English Language Learner students were being denied their right to an education under the New Mexico Constitution” (Arellano, 2023, p. 461). In subsequent months, plaintiffs in the case of Yazzie followed suit. Eventually in 2015, the court consolidated both cases, and by June of 2017, the court started to hear arguments. The presiding judge, Sarah Singleton, read the courts decision on July 20th, 2018. Herein, the court determined that the educational system failed to provide students with a sufficient education which violated the state’s constitution and hindered due process under the equal protection clause. Arellano (2023) questions requisite time to remedy the failing system and what constitutes as sufficient education. Opposition to meeting the court order cites economic pitfalls of the pandemic:

The state is currently going to court stating it has complied with the court's orders.

Not only has the state not complied, but also, with the current economic shortfalls
brought on by the coronavirus pandemic, the financial remedies implemented are in danger of falling by the wayside. (Roybal, 2020)

However, the court decision declares that insufficient funding is not a legal defense. Making matters worse, “Dr. Joe Suina, a professor from Cochiti Pueblo, opened by stating that public schools have been the enemy of Native American students” (Roybal, 2020). This sentiment echoes notions espoused by Churchill (2004) to document an infamous history of assimilation policies that forced indigenous families to transfer their children:

Legislators followed up in 1893 by putting teeth into their earlier decree, authorizing the BIA to withhold rations, clothing and other annuities from Indian parents or guardians who refuse or neglect to send and keep their children of proper school age in school (p. 16-17).

In the case of Martinez/Yazzie, the court ordered “defendants to take steps by April 15, 2019, to ensure that schools had adequate resources to provide” students with a sufficient education that is commensurate with college and career readiness (Arellano, 2023, p. 454). However, Arellano (2023) explains that in the past five years educational outcomes have not changed. Data from NMPED reports that student proficiency in English Language Arts and Math have not improved. Thereby, the author propositions a remedy of accountability:

The solution is a more prescriptive remedy. As the Court continues to exercise remedial jurisdiction over the parties and review their respective filings, it should be prepared to order the defendants to create a comprehensive plan for how they will provide a constitutionally sufficient education to at-risk students in New Mexico. This is the remedy most likely to deliver consistent, measurable progress. Creating a comprehensive plan will satisfy the plaintiffs’ and community members' demands for
accountability while providing the defendants a way out from under the jurisdiction of the Court. (Arellano, 2023, p. 455)

Notwithstanding, compliance will likely require a concrete definition for the concept that is sufficient education. According to Arellano (2023), the court should not micromanage programming or earmark funding; however, it should order both the executive and legislative branches to design specific policies that outline administrative oversight of the original decision. If the past five years are any indication of progress, court action is not agency but instead antidotal. Although I concur with Arellano’s analysis of delayed progress, more accountability for teachers at the grassroots will likely do little to ameliorate outcomes in communities of color.

Similar to critiques of CLS, advocates of CRT often cite that the legal system procrastinates substantive change (Delgado & Stefanic, 1998). At face value, this certainly appears to be the case in Martinez/Yazzie. Jurisprudence moving at a snail pace was also evident in the Brown v Board of Education case of 1954, “segregated education remained a fact of life in the American South well into the 1960s” (Epstein & Walker, 2007, p. 641). In response to the courts of public opinion, a local newspaper published an article stating that Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham released a 53-page document that, “outlines progress since she took office in 2019 and sets goals to recruit a diverse educator workforce and assure equity for each student group named in the lawsuit” (Navajo Times, 2022). Teachers that are ethnically and racially diverse is a promising remedy. However, data indicates that White women have been the dominate identity for decades, “Teachers in public elementary and secondary schools in 1993-94 were made up of 73 percent women and 87 percent white non-Hispanics” (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). This staggering figure has
not significantly changed in 30 years, as of 2018, nearly 80 percent of teachers in the U.S. are White, “eight-in-ten U.S. public school teachers (79%) identified as non-Hispanic White during the 2017-18 school year” (Pew Research Center, 2021). Thus, sufficient education cannot afford racial benevolence or wait generations for a more diverse workforce.

Chapter Summary

The literary canon of social justice is expansive; however, the aim of this chapter was to unpack literature salient to social justice education. To better understand how elementary teachers provide an education with a social justice orientation, this project required a review of literature, an examination of conceptual frameworks, and a critique of empirical works. In a broader scope, a majority of social justice literature engulfs theoretical formulations and lacks concrete examples of pedagogical underpinnings. Discourse grounded in social justice is vast and breaches multiple disciplines. This trend in social justice literature primarily addresses the why and need for this orientation but fails to adequately document pedagogies for elementary education. In conclusion, teaching for social justice must move beyond a theoretical lens and provide teachers with specific examples that transform communities. The subsequent chapter describes research methodology, data collection tools, and analysis.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The main purpose of this case study was to explore how elementary teachers enact social justice. As a result of standardization, teaching for social justice in elementary schooling requires navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). Sleeter and Flores-Carmona (2017) explains how ideological rhetoric is employed to solicit consent:

content standards are generally promulgated as consensus documents that represent agreement over what is most worth teaching and knowing within a discipline. However, presenting them this way may well hide ideological selections of knowledge that they embody and how particular conceptions about knowledge grow out of particular social locations. Asking epistemological questions concerning what counts as knowledge, according to what criteria, and who gets to decide, is complex.

(p. 53)

I believe that a better understanding of pedagogies for social justice will allow elementary educators to progress from a theoretical perspective to an informed practice. By default, social justice is a societal phenomenon. Thereby, qualitative design organically aligns with an inquiry encompassing social justice. This piece of scholarship sought to address the following three research questions:

(1.) How do elementary teachers approach topics of social justice in their curriculum? How are elementary teachers conceptualizing social justice?

(2.) What are the pedagogical considerations for teachers in urban schooling?

(3.) What structures prohibit or provide proliferation for the integration of social justice in contemporary classrooms?
In addition to the deployment of pedagogies, this inquiry sought to understand how teachers contextualize social justice. Findings shall contribute to the broader scope of social justice education; however, with further implications for elementary teachers, the urban schooling and social justice nexus illustrates praxis as teachers of elementary education adhere to the rigors of standardization while teaching issues of social justice. This chapter unpacks research design by addressing rationale for qualitative research, case study rationale, context of study, purposeful sampling, methods, data collection process, analysis, and ethical considerations.

**Rationale for Qualitative Design**

Qualitative research has an extensive history and foundation in multiple disciplines. Merriam (2009) explains that qualitative research is designed to examine lived experience, “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). Contemporary studies that employ qualitative design can trace its genealogy to sociology. The principal architect of modern social science, Max Weber rejected traditional methods of research in the application of human subjects. Giddens et al., (2005) affirm that deductive logic is a function of human experience:

According to Weber, it is misleading to imagine that we can study people using the same procedures that are applied to investigate the physical world. Humans are thinking, reasoning beings; we attach meaning and significance to most of what we do, and any discipline that deals with human behavior must acknowledge this. (p.16)

In subsequent years, German philosophers coined the term *Verstehen* which translates to interpret. As a result of this term, “German sociologists Max Weber and Georg Simmel
advocated *Verstehen* as a mode of sociological research in which an outside observer systematically gathers information on a particular phenomenon from the perspective of insiders” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 6). To a certain extent, qualitative research is an ambiguous endeavor. However, its fluidity and dexterity concurrently cater to the data collection process, “The qualitative paradigm is extremely diverse methodologically and theoretically. Additionally, qualitative research projects often follow malleable designs in which the methodology is revised in accord with new learning acquired as the research unfolds” (Leavy, 2017, p. 124). The meaning making process is deeply entangled in qualitative design and social justice education. In addition to the meaning making process, qualitative research calibrates for lived experiences, “researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 6). This research approach generates robust data and yields to the possibilities inherent to equity of voice, “Qualitative research is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 38). Qualitative design typically projects one of two paradigms – critical or interpretivists / constructivists. For all intents and purposes, interpretation is a function of constructivism. This piece of scholarship encompassed both. In accordance to philosophical viewpoints, Lapan et al., (2012) describe how the critical paradigm operates:

Research grounded in critical theory draws on many of the same assumptions as the interpretive view, which acknowledges that reality is constructed through the meaning individuals give to a particular phenomenon. The important difference is that critical theorists focus on the ways power is embedded in the structure of society and
As a result, this critical paradigm of qualitative design neatly aligns with an examination of social justice. Fundamentally, as we proceed through the human experience, we seek to negotiate meaning for the world around us. In a constructivist approach, qualitative research seeks to uncover nuances and complexities of cultural phenomenon. According to the constructivist paradigm, it is an interpretive, “philosophical belief system that developed in disciplinary contexts and examines how people engage in processes of constructing and reconstructing meanings through daily interactions” (Leavy, 2017, p. 262). Constructivism and the interpretive paradigm are deeply entangled. From an interpretive paradigm, in addition to descriptive analysis, this qualitative study sought to provide space for elaboration, “A case study is interpretive if the report adds explanation in addition to description, for example, explaining why the program is implemented in a particular way” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 266). The interpretation phases are essential to the integration of social justice education and a profound examination of pedagogy. Instead of employing a reductionists approach that dilutes, “complex phenomena into their most basic parts”, the purpose of qualitative research is to examine the marvels of society by providing a holistic understanding (MSEd, 2020). Most importantly, researchers of qualitative design, “are interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular time and in a particular context” (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). Comparatively, quantitative research is centered on generalizability, analytics, and constructing irrefutable evidence and, “used in explanatory research investigating casual relationships, associations, and correlations” (Leavy, 2017, p. 87). To this end, it is my contention that quantitative methods would not yield rich data
required to describe the intricacies of pedagogy. Moreover, given the critical framework of social justice, “Qualitative research from the critical theoretical view uses interpretive frameworks but also reveals ways that power is embedded in social contexts” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 3). The epistemology of knowledge is the rationale for selecting qualitative methodology. A qualitative product provides a descriptive presentation of phenomena by carefully selecting methodology and data collection tools deemed most resourceful. Vivid description that is credible and contributes to a field of knowledge is the aim of qualitative design.

**Rationale for Case Study**

Although different characteristics and iterations of case study methodology are prevalent in qualitative design, all such forms seek to generate vivid descriptions and if well-organized tools are deployed, the methodology typically yields a wealth of data. The disciplinary diversity of case study is comprehensive as it, “is employed across disciplines, including education, health care, social work, history, sociology, management studies, and organizational studies” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 49). This approach to research provides, “an investigative approach used to thoroughly describe complex phenomena, such as recent events, important issues, or programs, in ways that unearth new and deeper understanding of these phenomena” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 243). In accordance to this criteria, a more comprehensive understanding of social justice pedagogies will likely ameliorate educational outcomes in urban settings. Given the limited knowledge about social justice at the elementary level, a descriptive examination was ripe for examination. Due to the complexity in research problem, I firmly believe that case study methodology was best situated to answer research questions, “case study offers a means of investigating complex
social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). Under the umbrella of case study methodology, several iterations exist, for example, single case studies examine phenomenon at one specific site. Other iterations of case study research are longitudinal. An inquiry of individual cases constitutes a collective examination of cases – an iteration frequently known as multiple case studies. This iteration of research, “involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases and can be distinguished from the single case study that may have subunits or subcases embedded within” (Merriam, 1998, p. 40). As a collective examination, this descriptive case study sought to provide pedagogical insight for the teaching of elementary social justice. As a genre of case study methodology, collective case studies provide an in-depth examination that conveys multiple perspectives of social phenomenon, “An important reason for doing the multicase study is to examine how the program or phenomenon performs in different environments” (Stake, 2006, p. 23). Its objective is to generate profound insight, and in the case of social justice in elementary schooling, its purpose is to inform pedagogy. Stake (1995) explains the case study rationale by addressing intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case studies. Intrinsic motivation is the driven purpose of the former, “it is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest” (Stake, 1995, p. 136). The purpose of instrumental is to contribute to the body of knowledge and to provide a secondary function in facilitating our understanding of phenomenon. With a hybrid approach, Stake (1995) describes characteristics of collective case study:
With even less intrinsic interest in one particular case, a researcher may jointly study a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition. I call this collective case study. It is instrumental study extended to several cases. Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar, redundancy and variety each important. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases. (p. 137)

This type of research is bound to concise boundaries that include site, time frame, and specificity. The bounding system for this study included teacher participants, their pedagogical underpinnings, and teaching artifacts. Interviews, focus groups, and teaching artifacts were the data collection tools that yielded thick description of what it means to teach social justice.

**Context for Case Study**

Education as a conduit for upward social mobility remains viable for many Americans; nevertheless, this mechanism of enlightenment appears clogged for many New Mexicans. According to a recent study, “New Mexico currently sits low on the list at No. 42. The low number of high-school diploma holders in New Mexico is one of the main factors that brought the state’s ranking down” (Davis, 2023). Surrounded by conservative strongholds to the east and west, New Mexico is geographically sandwiched between two Republican states in the southwestern part of the United States. For this case study, central New Mexico provides geographical context. Case study participants teach at different sites within an urban setting. Teacher participants from different sites was purposeful and
preferred in order to provide multiple contexts for the application of social justice. Details concerning specificity of each site is addressed in the following chapter. All teacher participants teach at a Title I school and are there by subject to the rigors of standardization. Background, lived experience, teaching assignment, site context, and coded themes are compared between case studies. During the 2022-2023 school year, many sites throughout New Mexico shifted to an extended school year – adding 10 days of instruction to the school calendar under the Extended Learning Time Program or 25 days for the K-5 Plus Program. As a result of the Yazzie/Martínez v. State of New Mexico landmark case, the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) authored a philosophy of equity:

> The PED believes in all students’ ability to succeed, regardless of race, ethnicity, disability status, or socioeconomic status. The PED believes in the strength of New Mexico’s diverse communities and in the inherent value of our multilingualism, resilience, creativity, culture, and compassion for one another. Much of the work at the PED is around ensuring all students receive a culturally and linguistically responsive education that meets their social, emotional, and academic needs. (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2022)

This collective case study is situated in a metropolitan area that is densely populated and is reflective of urban schooling. Recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers in this region is a revolving door.

**Purposeful Sampling**

Quality informants is seminal to a collective case study and an examination of social justice education. Sampling is the process for selecting study participants. Thereafter, researchers must categorize elements or characteristics of the larger population in order to
filter a sample size. Eventually, investigators arrive at a study sample which, “is the number of individual cases that you ultimately draw and from which / whom you generate data” (Leavy, 2017, p.76). Purposeful sampling is a common procedure of qualitative research and frequently employed for case study methodology. This strategic approach is engineered to yield a wealth of data as it, “lends more strength in case study research because data sources, participants, or cases are selected by how much can be learned from them” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 253). Variations of purposeful sampling are available to researchers. For example, researchers might homogenously select participants in order to generate quality data. On the other hand, during deliberations for pinpointing research site, investigators might resort to a typical research sample. Regardless of variation, a judgement in the selection of study participants and research site is characterized by the preponderance of empirical data, “The logic for purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 186).

Participants of this case study were selected from multiple sites through the instrumentality of snowball sampling (Mertens, 2010). As a variation of purposeful sampling, snowball sampling recruits study participants from a community network that can inform phenomenon, “Snowball sampling is used to help the researcher find out who has the information that is important to the study” (Mertens, 2010, p. 322). Unlike random sampling, snowballing does not calibrate for probability. This subjective approach, “follows out the chains of sociometric relations in the community. In many respects, this sampling technique is like that of a good reporter who tracks down leads from one person to another” (Denzin, 2006, p. 118). Members of this dissertation committee facilitated snowball sampling by
nominating case study participants. Under their tutelage, this case study employed snowball sampling to recruit teacher participants. A purposeful sampling of this setting provides for a distribution of participants from various sites within the metropolitan area. This form of purposeful sampling excavated informed participants that shed light on the social justice phenomenon.

Prior to the recruitment campaign, the researcher submitted and defended a dissertation proposal. To this end, members of this dissertation committee granted permission for next steps. Thereafter, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of New Mexico was obtained (See Appendix A. Approval from review board to conduct ethical research). The population of this case study are practitioners of elementary education that teach in an urban setting. For the context of this study, urban schooling was identified as a Title I School. In accordance with Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, schools labeled as economically disadvantaged are eligible to receive federal funding under Title I:

- Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies for children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.)

This educational policy further perpetuated standardization and for all intents and purposes reauthorized the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. All things being educational policy, purposeful sampling consisted of three steps. According to Stake (2006), the selection process for case study informants is threefold. Researchers must first determine relevancy,
“is the case relevant to the quintain?” (p. 23). Secondly, does the case provide diversity in perspective. And, lastly, does the case, “provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts?” (Stake, 2006, p. 23). The filtration system enumerated by Stake and committee nomination generated informed participants. Notwithstanding, case study participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- practitioner teaches at a Title I school that’s situated in an urban setting
- teacher participant currently operates in elementary schooling
- at least five years of teaching experience
- self-identifies as a critical pedagogue or projects an ethos for social justice

Even though all case study participants are practitioners of elementary education, differences for habits of disposition were revealed. The low sample size of elementary teachers dedicated to social justice provides justification for snowball sampling. By using the nomination process of snowball sampling, I contacted eight prospects via email with a recruitment letter (See Appendix B. Email recruitment, opportunity to participate in research). Five of eight prospects agreed to participate in the study. Thereafter, an interview timeline was drafted, which commenced the data collection process. A collective case study of five teacher participants yielded robust data that allowed for cross-case analysis. All case study participants have extensive teaching experience that occupy different roles in elementary schooling. Table 2 (See Table 2. Demographics of teacher participants with a social justice orientation) provides demographic information for teacher participants. Herein, pseudonyms are employed for all localities, participants, and data sources.
Table 2

Demographics of teacher participants with a social justice orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Autumn Hayes</th>
<th>Dolores Rivas</th>
<th>Selena Tapia</th>
<th>Santiago Salazar</th>
<th>Abby Stein</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Mexican-American</td>
<td>Hispanic – northern Chicano</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Virginia / North Carolina</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>South Texas</td>
<td>Northern New Mexico</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching assignment</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>Resource Coach</td>
<td>Reading Interventionist</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Art Literacy &amp; Bilingual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection Tools

The fluidity of data collection tools available to case study methodology is an undeniable asset. This dexterity lends to rich description, in-depth analysis, and a better understanding of phenomenon. However, researchers must carefully select methods that elicit quality data. This dissertation employed the data collection methods of face-to-face interviewing, focus groups, and artifacts. Diversity in data collection tools organically provides space for triangulation. Open-ended questionnaires in a semi-structured format
facilitated both one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Exemplars for the teaching of social justice facilitated the collection of artifacts. Collected artifacts included lesson plans, student exemplars related to social justice practice, and electronic copies of teaching materials. The data collection process commenced in February of 2023 and concluded in mid-May of 2023.

**Face-to-Face Interviewing**

The interview production is the, “ultimate flirtation with life. It remains, and rightfully so, the basic source of sociological data. It will be complemented by other methods, but never replaced. What is needed is a fuller understanding of the peculiarities surrounding its use” (Denzin, 2006, p. 188-189). If rapport has been established, interviewing is perhaps the most accurate method in the data collection process. Although it’s a small platform, it allocates equity of voice by allowing participants to share their lived experience. Most qualitative studies infuse some form of interviewing. The objective of interviewing is, “to elicit extensive and descriptive narratives from participants related to particular experiences and issues rather than one-word or brief responses” (Johnson, 2017, p. 73). To measure participant perception, the data collection method of interviewing is critical to equity of voice. As a tool, it has the tendency of extrapolating beliefs, ideology, and positionality, even though the method should not harvest discomfort and must adhere to minimal harm. In the case of social justice, “public and socially desirable attitudes have to be probed” (Denzin, 2006, p. 185). As a result, researchers must carefully design questionnaires that are neutrally inclusive. To this end, question types must avoid inflammatory language and / or leading questions that solicit specific answers. Extended personal interviews were conducted at a neutral site that was ideal and accommodating to case study participants. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Prior to coding data, member checking was
implemented, and participants were given opportunities to check for accuracy and correct misconceptions that surfaced during transcription. Thereby, member checking provided another layer of triangulation. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format and consisted of numerous questions that addressed social justice (See Appendix C. *Question types for face-to-face interview number one*). The first phase of interviewing was designed to measure background knowledge, document lived experience, better understand how social justice is contextualized, generate context for their site of operation, teaching philosophies, calibrate for social justice orientation, and probed pedagogical underpinnings. Case study participants were provided an electronic copy of the questionnaire one week in advance.

This phase of interviewing revealed data seminal to phase two of the interviewing process. The second phase of face-to-face interviewing provided space for member checking, the sharing of teaching artifacts, unpacked pedagogical underpinnings, and yielded a better understanding for the development of social justice lessons. Similar to the first phase of interviewing, teacher participants received an electronic copy of the second set of questions one week in advance (See Appendix D. *Question types for face-to-face interview number two*). This manual facilitated the second phase of face-to-face interviewing; however, the researcher did not display complete fidelity to scripted questions. Interviewing remained an organic conversation grounded in social justice, which generated a wealth of data beyond anticipated script. The rationale for selecting semi-structured interviews was for the purpose of excavating rich data and asking follow-up questions when appropriate. This interviewing format made, “use of a flexible interview guide composed of open-ended questions but that also allows for the interviewer to ask related follow-up questions not on the guide” (Johnson,
A significant amount of data was collected from focus group interviews. This data collection method was advantageous for two reasons. First, in a concise format, the data collection tool generated a wealth of data from multiple perspectives. Secondly, it accommodated scheduling for informants and was far more efficient than face-to-face interviewing, “Focus groups are used when researchers want to gather many perspectives at once, and they can be helpful when there is less time available to schedule individual interviews” (Leavy, 2017, p. 73). Due to the social context of this data collection tool, focus groups were far more organic and much less intimidating than face-to-face interviewing. Moreover, focus groups provide malleable discourse and researchers can deviate from script in order to collect rich data, “this method is socially oriented, studying participants in an atmosphere that is often more natural and relaxed than a one-on-one interview. As with other types of interviews, the format allowed the facilitator the flexibility to explore often-unanticipated issues” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 195). Having a forum for the open exchange of ideas provided all teacher participants with a safe platform. To this end, focus group interviews facilitated healthy discourse, “when researchers want to encourage debate and discussion across participants related to particular issues and experience” (Johnson, 2017, p. 73). For this study, teacher participants were homogenously grouped due to their disposition for social justice.

As a research tool, scholars from multiple disciplines have contributed to the development of focus groups. According to Ansay et al., (2004), the origin of the method is a proprietary property of marketing research. However, its application increased in popularity
during the 1990s when the, “current popularity of focus groups in the social sciences appears to stem from their adaptability, as they are linked to interviewing, participant observation, and survey research” (Ansay et al., 2004, p. 310). Even though the study emphasized the risky behaviors of military dependent adolescents, the findings, in support of community building champion a collective efficacy, “our research suggests that the use of focus groups can contribute further to the field of evaluation by involving other stakeholders” (Ansay et al., 2004, p. 315). This piece of scholarship is seminal to focus groups because it demonstrates the power of communication, yields a deeper understanding of phenomena, and provides multiple stakeholders with equity of voice.

All focus group sessions were audio recorded and transcribed. Similar to face-to-face interviewing, focus groups were scheduled at a neutral site that was convenient for all teacher participants. This social justice project encompassed two focus group sessions that yielded a wealth of data. The data collection method augmented other research tools and facilitated triangulation. Notwithstanding, the application thereof requires strategic planning and dexterity for directing discourse. Probing participants for additional information frequently encouraged meaningful dialogue. As an interview guide, focus groups followed a semi-structured format and open-ended questions provided space for the sharing of perspective (See Appendix E. Interview questions for focus group number one). Prior to conducting focus groups, teacher participants were provided with a carbon copy of the questionnaire one week in advance via electronic mail.

The first focus group interview consisted of elementary teachers that self-identify as practitioners of social justice. Teacher participants were encouraged to share lived experience, perspective, and pedagogy. At this stage, data from two face-to-face interviews
provided context for the drafting of the aforementioned questionnaire. Prior to facilitating the first round of focus groups, the researcher thoroughly interacted with previously collected data for three reasons. First, to discover overarching trends between phase one and phase two of face-to-face interviewing. Centralizing focus group dialogue was the second reason for early analysis. Lastly, this often-interactive process, with data, facilitated member checking during the first session of focus group interviewing. In the aftermath, the researcher was able to draft open-ended questions that elicited thick descriptions for the second session of focus group interviewing. Round two of focus groups followed the same procedures. Prior to organizing the second focus group, the researcher thoroughly analyzed data with a purpose of member checking and addressing gaps in the data collection. Once again, this data collection tool allowed teacher participants to clarify, amend, and expand on notions from previous methods. Urban schooling, pedagogy, and institutional control guided this last round of focus groups (See Appendix F. Interview questions for focus group number two). This second session of focus group interviewing was also hosted at a neutral site that was convenient for all participants. The objective was to host a candid conversation grounded in social justice pedagogy.

This forum for the open exchange of ideas should significantly contribute to our understanding of social justice in urban schooling. The enclave of social justice at the elementary level is small; however, data collected from focus groups could feasibly ameliorate education for two reasons. Providing elementary teachers with concrete pedagogies for the teaching of social justice is first and foremost. Secondly, the homogeneous nature of focus groups provides practitioners of social justice with a sense of
community, which could spearhead collective agency. In summation, focus groups encompassed courageous conversations that emphasized the implementation of social justice.

**Artifacts**

The third source of data that contributed to this study was teaching artifacts. Teacher participants shared their self-selected artifact and provided a layer of analysis by explaining the function of their artifact and its pedagogical meaning, “researchers might collect textual documents and visual images to provide insight on their topic and setting. These can be identified and gathered within participant observation or even suggested and provided by participants within focus groups and interviews” (Johnson, 2017, p. 112). As a result, artifact sharing transpired during the second phase of face-to-face interviewing. For the majority of case study participants, teaching artifacts consisted of classroom assignments that the teacher participant created. In other cases, the participant shared materials that supplemented a social justice orientation. Evidence of teaching artifacts are presented in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

Artifacts provide a lens into the past. As an academic discipline, history is the systemic examination of epochs. However, in accordance to the spoils of war doctrine, the victor determines which historical accounts are worthy of replication. Along that continuum, hegemonic powers have the ability to silence, marginalize, and / or totally eradicate alternative perspective. A critical examination of antiquity reveals countless examples of revisionist history. For decades, researchers have relied on artifacts as a data collection tool. In fact, there is a genre of case study methodology named case history, “the tracing of a person, group, or institution’s past – is sometimes part of a case study” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 244). Artifacts supplement historical data and often provide perspective of phenomenon. For
example, with the prospect of providing a holistic perspective, memorabilia from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s might align with newspaper articles.

Artifacts are typically defined as objects that represent a previous era. Similar to detective work, researchers are looking for clues to solve a puzzle. Thereby, cases are never closed because new revelations are always being discovered. Providing counterevidence to a mainstream narrative is a second and even more meaningful function of artifacts for marginalized communities. This tool is of significant preponderance to social justice as hegemonic powers have silenced alternative perspective. The implementation of artifacts as a qualitative method must delineate between primary and secondary sources, “Primary sources are documents or artifacts created during the time period under investigation. Secondary sources are interpretation of history – what historians produce” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 150). Original sources of information, such as newspaper print from the Chicano/a movement are prime examples of primary sources. Comparatively, existing knowledge that has been filtered constitutes secondary sources of information. In the arena of education, textbooks and prescribed curriculums are overt examples of secondary sources.

Participants of this case study used both primary and secondary sources of information to anchor their pedagogies for the teaching of social justice. Exemplars of student work and lesson plans created by teacher participants are overt examples of primary sources. Conversely, canned curriculum and textbooks constitute secondary sources of information. Analysis in the absence of case study participants is subjective and vulnerable to human error in interpretation; however, for the purpose of this study, teacher participants analyzed artifacts by assigning meaning to presented works. This analyzing technique empowers participants, provides empirical evidence of social justice at the grassroots level,
functions as a form of member checking, and significantly mitigates bias. As a data collection tool, artifacts might also allocate space for funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth (González et al., 2005; Yosso, 2005).

Data Analysis

Researchers employing case study methodology must concurrently analyze data at the preliminary stage and maintain a pulse throughout the data collection process. According to Merriam and Grenier (2019), analysis and data collection share a dichotomous interaction, “data analysis is simultaneous with data collection. That is, one begins analyzing data with the first interview, the first observation, the first document / artifact accessed in the study” (p. 15). Qualitative researchers should interpret data from the initial stages. Often this interactive reflection yields early themes and reveals units of analysis. In order for data to inform decision, the collected information must equate to results. The process of transformation is known as analysis. During analysis, the end goal is to make sense of data and ultimately inform the decision-making process. However, units of analysis are contingent on study design, research questions, and methods. In the aftermath, analysis reveals classification of themes and other categories relevant to the study, “This process is referred to as coding. Coding involves the classification of elements in text data into categories that are related to the study topic and are useful in analysis” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 98). Throughout the coding process categories were refined into manageable domains and into threads that cut across datasets. Eventually, I was able to reduce data – spreading out sources of information for analysis. Diverse segments of data provided opportunities for comparison in a cross-case analysis. This maturation process is intended for critical reflection and opportunities to identify what’s happening in datasets. In a 2019 lecture, Dr. Tryphenia Peele-Eady explained
steps for analyzing data. Peele-Eady (2019) described analysis as a back-and-fourth process that encompasses order, chaos, and new order. According to Peel-Eady (2019), the objective is abstraction and interpretation.

LeCompte (2000) utilizes the analogy of puzzle building to deconstruct the process for analyzing qualitative data. The author encourages researchers to adhere to objectivity and avoid partialities, investigators cannot selectively eliminate components of data that do not resonate with predetermined notions. Analysis is a steppingstone for interpretation; however, researchers must first determine how data is organized and then synchronize data to provide a holistic portrayal of phenomenon. Thereafter, interpretation can transpire. The nuance and ambiguous nature of qualitative data requires structure in order to facilitate analysis. According to LeCompte, structure is constructed in the following five stages: tidying-up, finding items, creating stable sets of items, creating patterns, and assembling structures. Tidying up data is an essential process of organization. Finding items is, for all intents and purposes, to aid in the identification of specific units of analysis. The researcher must sort data for frequency, omission, and declaration. In the aftermath of identifying units of analysis, “researchers must organize them into groups or categories by comparing and contrasting items” (LeCompte, 2000, p. 148). The purpose of creating stable sets of items is unifying similar units. Creating authentic patterns in data requires the deconstruction and reassembly of data. Structures can be assembled with a purpose of explaining the topic of inquiry. In order to produce valid findings, “analysis also must yield results that are meaningful to the people for whom they are intended and described in language they understand” (LeCompte, 2000, p. 152). If results make sense to the target population, “Researchers then feel comfortable with the goodness of their analytic strategies and the
credibility and utility of their efforts” (LeCompte, 2000, p. 154). Analysis can transpire at different stages and levels within a study; however, researchers must develop an analytical plan that best serves the topic of inquiry, research questions, methods, and moreover the participants it implicates.

**Step-by-Step Analysis for this Study**

In a hierarchical approach, Creswell (2014) enumerates the following six steps for analysis: (1.) organizing and preparing data, (2.) examining all data, (3.) commencing the coding process, (4.) employ coding to generate description, (5.) describe how themes will be represented, and finally (6.) interpretation of qualitative research. For steps 1 and 2, this study organized collected data with a purpose of describing context, teacher participant, and perception of social justice. Thereafter, I read and re-read data with an open coding system, which aligns with step 3 of the coding process. Along this vein, each case study participant was analyzed individually in accordance with face-to-face interviewing and focus groups. For teaching artifacts, both the researcher and teacher participant assigned meaning to documents. Deductive coding provided another layer of analysis, which is congruent with step 4 of Creswell’s linear approach. After themes emerge, I employed step 5 by providing vivid description of categories in a qualitative narrative. This narrative conveyed findings in a transparent format. To disseminate findings, I elected to use tables and figures to present concise data. Lastly, step 6 encompassed interpretation, which will be reserved for Chapter Four of this dissertation. Validation of potential outcomes were vast and contingent on this step-by-step analysis.
Open Coding

The initial stage of analysis is known as open coding. It is extremely fluid and liberal in its application as it is subject to change at other stages of the coding process. Within qualitative design, open coding is the first form of analysis; however, this tentative procedure should transpire at all phases of the data collection process. Allowing researchers to explore analysis from the onset contributes to meaningful interpretation. Therefore, maintaining a pulse on data throughout the data collection process was vital to open coding. Immersion from the onset reminds researchers of the master plan, “It is easy to lose sight of the big picture through the daily grind of data collection and then data preparation. To get back to the heart of your data, immerse yourself in it” (Leavy, 2017, p. 150). For chunks of data, open coding assigned tentative labels to data which underwent more in-depth analysis. Open coding at the initial stages also facilitated the organization of data. This inductive approach organically allowed for themes to emerge. Coding for major categories of information in the initial stages was the primary function of open coding. With a hybrid approach, this project employed both inductive and deductive coding.

Inductive Coding

Coding data in some instances can be a messy proposition. Allowing codes to unearth directly from data is an inductive process that facilitates the tidying up of data. Inductive coding is a form of open coding. By design, qualitative research is an inductive process, “even if researchers are incorporating deductive processes into analysis, the primary focus of qualitative research is inductive, which allows for the emergence of themes from participants’ beliefs and experiences” (Johnson, 2017, p. 122-123). After the data collection process, researchers must suppress preconceived notions about data. Instead, inductive
coding should allow themes to emerge naturally. Allowing characteristics in data to surface is the primary function of inductive coding. This ground up approach fragments data into manageable sections, which allowed for the assignment of codes, “The inductive approach involves the reduction of information that has been collected by organizing it with the help of a coding scheme into significant patterns and themes” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 233). However, this was a laborious process that required a back-and-forth interaction with data. During inductive coding, the researcher analyzed raw data with a purpose of discovering themes. This data-driven analysis contributed to theoretical understanding of social justice education. Both focus groups and face-to-face interviewing were open ended forums that were tentatively designed to go with the dialogical flow of discourse. For this project, inductive coding provided fluid analysis. To a certain degree, this project is a function of both inductive and deductive analysis. As a result of my lived experience and academic training, I have a deductive lens for deconstructing society; however, it’s important to mitigate preconceived notions. In the following section, I describe how data was inductively coded.

**Color Coding for Indexing Data**

From the onset, I read and re-read transcripts. A careful examination of data perseverated throughout this dissertation project. During the first wave for indexing data, I highlighted interesting and relevant phrases. Although I had a deductive understanding of social justice, I allowed themes to organically emerge from an inductive bottom-up approach. At this initial stage of coding, I was loosely interpreting data by reading transcripts line-by-line. Chunks of data that were relevant to my research questions were labeled with a symbol for further analysis. Thereafter, I organized color-coded phrases into categories. Codes that
conveyed similar concepts were grouped together until categories made sense. Further analysis required me to cognitively wrestle with themes that emerged. Herein, I was able to find patterns for chunks of data that cut across data sets, which allowed for thematic analysis. According to Lapan et al., (2012) thematic analysis “is a form of interpretation that requires the researcher to engage in an iterative process of critical thinking, questioning, and categorizing” (p. 129). Table 3 (See Table 3. *Color-coding concepts by phrases to construct themes, teacher narratives, and findings*) illustrates relevant phrases that yielded categories and allowed themes to surface inductively. With careful reflection I was able to reduce themes and pinpoint concepts that were most relevant to my study. After several rounds of indexing data, I was able to construct a narrative and a set of findings.
### Table 3

**Color-coding concepts by phrases to construct themes, teacher narratives, and findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Research Question with Concept Symbol</th>
<th>Examples of Relevant Phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equity of voice</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>“I like that you're not pressured to this timeline of, like, if it takes three weeks or if it takes nine weeks to ensure that you're getting equity of voice is kind of to get depth instead of a mile wide, you want to get deep.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Building Rapport and Community Ties</strong></td>
<td>@</td>
<td>As long as we maintain that level of respect and rapport for each other, that we're gonna learn a whole lot. And that, and it's a safe room. My room is always a safe room. And I'm a safe human that they can share and talk to and I'll do the same for them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counternarrative curriculum</strong></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>“Whether or not teachers wanna do scripted curriculum or not in elementary school, I feel like it's very micromanaged and monitored.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical spaces for student presentation</strong></td>
<td>=</td>
<td>“So it's like, do you want to write a song and present it? Do you want to write a poem? And like giving students options within a structure on how they want to present something.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Deductive Coding**

With a top-down approach, researchers of qualitative design often resort to deductive coding. Deductive reasoning is informed from theoretical frameworks and empirical works that influence researchers and provide insight into analysis. Due to expertise, it’s likely that researchers already have a predetermined inclination for collected data. Instead of data-driven analysis, deductive coding employs a theory-driven approach. According to this form of analysis, “theory determines data, in the sense that hypotheses and assumptions are articulated within the background or context of theory, which is then tested in confrontation with the so-called empirical world - that is, raw data” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 233).

Building on previous works is a prime example of deductive reasoning. For example, researchers frequently use existing codes from previous works to deductively analyze data. This study did not employ guidelines from other codebooks or piggyback earlier studies; however, theoretical frameworks, a comprehensive review of literature, and positionality always yields a degree of deductive reasoning. To a certain extent, deductive coding is analysis that seeks to support intuition; nonetheless, researchers must be cognizant of turning points during analysis. In some cases, data can capsize preconceived notions and render new understanding of phenomenon.

**Triangulation**

Analyzing data for credibility from multiple anchors is known as triangulation as this process, “involves checking information that has been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data” (Mertens, 2010, p. 258).

Thereby, in order to achieve triangulation, researchers must employ a variety of data collection methods. This process of triangulation as expressed throughout this chapter
contributes to trustworthiness. Triangulation for this collective case study was deliberate. Data from all phases of face-to-face interviewing, focus groups, and teaching artifacts was contrasted, which facilitated member checking and cross-case analysis.

**Ethical Considerations**

In 1978, the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research authored the Belmont Report to provide guidelines and draw attention to ethical research. Summarizing ethical considerations, the historic report is cited for, “establishing principles that have served as a foundation for ethical conduct and research. Concepts such as informed consent, respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, for example, were part of this report’s recommendations” (Delgado, 2015, p. 152). Prior to selecting participants, the researcher calibrated for ethical concerns of beneficence, respect, and justice. Weighing the cost benefit ratio for generating quality data while minimizing risk factors is the principle of beneficence. Respect is a function of treating participants with dignity and honoring their humanity. The third principle of justice is, “defined as the process of ensuring that the people who participate in the research benefit from the research” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 27).

This dissertation followed guidelines ordained by the IRB at the University of New Mexico. After obtaining IRB approval, case study participants were provided with requisite information concerning the scope and sequence of this study. Sufficient processing time was allocated prior to obtaining signed consent from teacher participants (See Appendix G. *Informed consent for participation in case study*). In all such cases, participants were allowed to discontinue participation at any stage without fear of intimidation or any other form of
repercussion. The following measures of anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy protection were enacted:

- Sites and participants were assigned pseudonyms
- Audio recording of face-to-face interviewing and focus groups were immediately transcribed in order to protect personal identity
- Recordings were stored in the researcher’s personal computer that is encrypted with two passwords
- Exemplars of artifacts and other data collection documents were stored in a filing cabinet under lock and key
- Labels disclosing identifiable information were immediately removed from documents and / or artifacts to ensure confidentiality
- All teacher participant data will be destroyed one year after the publication of this dissertation

Member checking was deployed throughout the data collection process to ensure accuracy and transparency. Lastly, as a part of conducting ethical research, I maintained certification with the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program throughout the study’s duration (See Appendix H. CITI certificate of doctoral student conducting this dissertation project).

**Transferability**

For all intents and purposes, transferability is a synonym for generalizability, which is synonymous with external validity in quantitative research – a concept that, “centers on whether we have generalized to populations beyond those that are supported by our test” (Leavy, 2017, p. 114). In the courts of public opinion, research portrays a collective
representation. However, this study is not generalizable to other educational contexts or settings. To the contrary, findings of this collective case study are exclusive to this inquiry. Notwithstanding, this examination of social justice does indeed offer a degree of transferability. For example, findings might reveal pedagogical pieces that may be applicable to other settings. Additionally, vivid description of pedagogies might lend themselves to conveyable information. The application of multiple sites and cases could also extend transferability. Consumers of this dissertation are responsible for judgements of transferability, but none are implied.

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

Qualitative design is uniquely situated to document the human experience and social justice pedagogies. Extensive engagement with teacher participants, exhaustive time disaggregating data, and member checking forged trustworthiness. This significant investment established rapport and enhanced credibility. According to Creswell (2014), it is beneficial to spend, “prolonged time in the field. In this way, the researcher develops an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and can convey detail about the site and the people that lends credibility to the narrative account” (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). Throughout the study, I remained reflective of positionality and cognizant of preconceived notions. To this end, I honestly calibrated for how my ideology, lived experience, and cultural background influence my filtered assumptions for viewing the world. Remaining transparent with participants in purpose and interpretation also fortified trust. Lastly, as an anchor, triangulation from multiple sources of data contributed to trustworthiness.
Positionality

Researchers must constantly reflect on their positionality and balance their etic / emic dichotomy in order to maintain objectivity, “researchers have the responsibility to thoroughly examine the risks and benefits of conducting the research and their own positionality, given the unique relationship that develops between the participants and the researcher as a data collection instrument” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 12). A careful reflection is not limited to biases, prejudices, and conflicts of interests, but must also calibrate for internalized experiences that manifest in practice and cultivate subjectivity. Thereby, in this section I shall briefly address the epistemology of my lived experiences. Prior to entering the institution of education, I had zero command of the English language and endured the wraths of poverty. Regardless of economic hardship, the small two-bedroom apartment remains gentle on my mind – filled with aromas of warm tortillas and proverbs. As a result of these lived experiences, the English Language Learner was constantly channeled towards the trades. Exacerbating my schooling experience, I attended monolingual schools that emphasized dominant culture. Thereby, I found myself in a state of alienation as poetically expressed by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales in 1967:

Lost in a world of confusion, caught up in the whirl of a gringo society, confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes, suppressed by manipulation, and destroyed by modern society. My fathers have lost the economic battle and won the struggle of cultural survival. And now! I must choose between the paradox of victory of the spirit, despite physical hunger, or to exist in the grasp of American social neurosis, sterilization of the soul and a full stomach. (1991)
Currently, I’m a doctoral student at The University of New Mexico and teach Physical Education at the elementary level; however, prior to entering the arena of fitness, a decade of both monolingual and bilingual instruction was delivered in communities of color. To date, I’ve been a practitioner of elementary education for fifteen years. I’m a heterosexual male that identifies as Mexican American, enjoys the privileges of middle-class status, and is deeply entangled in the institution of education.

An affinity for the social sciences was developed during my formative years. In fact, I recall fond memories of my mother purchasing a text for me at the bookfair titled Thank You, *Jackie Robinson* by Barbara Cohen (1974) – an exact copy that I still maintain as an heirloom. After reading about overt acts of discrimination endured by the famous baseball player, I instantaneously developed a passion for the social sciences and started to examine the historical implications of race relations. Eventually, I earned an undergraduate degree in Political Science. This social science foundation fortified my understanding of systemic oppression and grounded my ideology on the political spectrum. As a result of this academic training, I often deconstruct institutions, systems, and social phenomena by employing conflict theory - a sociological paradigm that moves beyond the distribution of resources but instead examines, “the organization of society, the behavior of people and groups, it explains why structures take the forms that they do at various historical times as well as in local situations” (Collins, 1990, p. 70). In short, it’s important to understand that conflict theory is a mechanism employed to analyze social constructs, nurtures discernment, and is perhaps the building block of critical thinking.
Chapter Summary

The aim of this study was to examine pedagogical consideration for the teaching of social justice. Research questions are exploratory and sought to describe the lived experiences of teacher participants. Consequently, this inquiry employed case study methodology to yield vivid description. This chapter explained qualitative design, case study methodology, data collection tools, and outlined data analysis. Additionally, I addressed case study context and its bounding system. Snowball sampling informs recruitment procedures and provides demographics of the teacher participants. Factors that may influence analysis, such as positionality and coding are also rationalized. The following chapter addresses case study findings.
Chapter 4

Findings

In an era of standardization, the purpose of this case study was to explore how elementary teachers circumvent systemic barriers that prohibit the proliferation of social justice education. I believe that a better understanding of this phenomenon would inform pedagogy and improve the outlook for urban schooling. In the subsequent section, I discuss how teachers circumvent standardization and bureaucratic obstacles in order to provide students with a social justice education. Empirical works that address institutionalized oppression within the scope of education are vast (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Kelly & Varghese, 2018, Rivers, 2020, Kumashiro, 2000; hooks, 2015). Challenging systemic structures of oppression is paramount to social justice; however, this piece of scholarship is concerned with providing elementary teachers with concrete pedagogies for the teaching of social justice. I also look at assets that carve out space for the enactment of social justice. For example, data in this case study suggests that non-traditional roles, such as pullout teachers have more sovereignty over pedagogy and autonomy over curriculum.

Sites with supportive administrators is an asset that provides space for the deployment of social justice. Flexible scheduling of instructional blocks is yet another luxury that can be viewed as an asset. Notwithstanding, there are systemic structures that significantly mitigate the advancement of marginalized communities. Harris and Morrison (2003) employ the concept of structural violence to explain institutionalized oppression:

Violence can imply more than a direct, physical confrontation. It is expressed not only on battlefields but also through circumstances that limit life, civil rights, health, personal freedom, and self-fulfillment. This type of violence, referred to as structural
violence, occurs when wealth and power exploit or oppress others, and standards of justice are not upheld. (p. 12)

Turning to the curricular table, in a subjective determination, purveyors of power establish what counts as knowledge and what information is worthy of replication (Spencer, 1884). Unfortunately, traditional school resources and methods for knowing seldom align with the interests of the community. The role of the teacher is seminal to leveraging community cultural wealth for both pedagogy and to the development of curriculum. Teacher participants in this case study displayed specific pedagogies that guide their social justice orientation. Examples that best characterize each theme have been selected.

For the data I collected in this study, I provide a cross-case analysis. This analysis reports findings conveyed in different phases of the data collection process. Additionally, I share personal reflections to illuminate findings and to validate my personal lived experience since case studies do not operate in social vacuums. Herein, the themes that emerged from the data collection process provide clarity to me because of my lived experience as a former marginalized elementary school student and later, as a minoritized male teacher working in communities of color. This cross-case analysis addresses the following interrelated but separate themes: amplifies equity of voice as a reflective practice of inclusivity, building rapport and community ties, planning for a counternarrative curriculum, and classroom and community as critical spaces for the open exchange of ideas. To examine the research questions embedded in this inquiry, this chapter will now focus on the cross-case analysis of themes and categories that emerged from the five case studies. Due to their lived experience, each teacher participant conceptualized social justice in a unique way. As I discuss how teachers in my study described social justice, I attempt to introduce each case study

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participant and share vignettes to augment analysis. Commentary from different phases of interviewing address teaching philosophies, demographics, lived experience, and pedagogical underpinnings.

Teacher Profiles

The purpose of this section is to introduce each teacher participant to provide contextual information about their ideas and philosophies. Also, this information can provide cursory knowledge about their pedagogical approaches to issues related to social justice for elementary students. For marginalized students, I designed this study hoping to identify strategies to improve conditions in urban schooling. As a child attending schools in urban settings, my family’s socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and lived experience qualified me as a “marginalized” student. In this study, I was able to draw on recollections of personal experiences that I attribute to social justice. For example, I recall that in the aftermath of divorce, my mother and I were forced to live in subsidized housing. The low-income housing community was located in the borderlands of El Paso, Texas. This neighborhood was predominately composed of Mexican Americans; however, a few Black families resided in the adjacent neighborhood. Throughout this phase of life, I recall my Black and Latinx friends meeting on the community basketball court for countless hours of hooping. We all attended the same elementary school where the majority of staff were White women that did not live in or near our neighborhood. In general, memories of this schooling experience were not favorable to us as students of color. After years of graduate studies, it now seems evident that many teachers at this site projected an ethos of “savior” – from their positionality of charity, they were probably saving “savage” children from the subculture of poverty and
failure. McIntyre (1997) in her study of perceived privilege and whiteness coined the concept of preservice teachers as White Knights:

whites acting like white knights—was particularly salient in the participants' discussions about teaching ‘inner city students.’ As ‘white knights’ dressed in teachers' clothing, the participants enter their classrooms complete with a history of white dominance, privilege, and advantage. They also have high expectations of themselves as teachers, and this combination results in a skewed version of what constitutes multicultural education. The participants' difficulty with understanding the interrelatedness of education and whiteness resulted in the participants viewing inner city minority students as passive recipients of white teachers' goodwill. (p. 123)

As a form of benevolence, many White teachers in urban schooling may exhibit dispositions that further marginalize communities of color. For example, an ethos that projects deficit perspective, such as having low expectations and minimizing lived experience in many cases, can result in a pedagogical disconnect. But, not all teachers necessarily fit into this interpretation.

**Memory:** I met Mrs. Chester in the fifth grade. Yes, she was a White woman in her early sixties, but this teacher seemed to use her privilege and operated in good faith for the betterment of the community. For example, on two different occasions, Mrs. Chester conducted home visits to ensure my educational endowment by maintaining a pulse on my academic progress or, in my case, the lack thereof. During this time, my mother was cleaning houses under the table, and I was having difficulties adjusting to my father’s absence. Moreover, Mrs. Chester frequently joined our athletic endeavors at the neighborhood court. Throughout my schooling, I have had the opportunity of
encountering a handful of teachers that provided meaningful counsel; however, that experience has been the outlier. To the contrary, many of my teachers have had the characteristics of McIntyre’s White Knights who often reproduce dominant culture and the status quo.

A ubiquitous definition for social justice has been evasive and likely an impossibility. Gerwitz (2006) describes the multi-dimensional nature of justice which is context dependent:

Attention to the specificity of local contexts should also remind us that judgements about what counts as justice in education cannot be divorced from judgements about what is possible. Because in the real world principles do not translate precisely into practice, just practices can only ever meet with partial degrees of success. So in evaluating justice practices, judgements about what counts as success need to be made in the light of considerations about the particular justice conflicts, the mediation of justice, and the contexts and levels of enactment which impinge on the practices being evaluated. (p. 79)

To this end, teacher participants in this case study displayed specific characteristics that guide the social justice orientation. Case study profiles reveal guiding principles that exemplify what it means to teach social justice. In part, teacher profiles address research question number two: What are the pedagogical considerations for teachers in urban schooling?

Autumn Hayes is a White teacher in her early 40s who was born in North Carolina but grew up in Virginia. As a young person, in the case of Autumn, blatant racism was common decorum of southern hospitality, “my dad’s side, super racists, like overtly racists, nigger jokes at family parties.” Moreover, Autumn witnessed the wrath of segregation, “the
Black people lived over here, the White people lived over there. There were no Latinos at all in Virginia and North Carolina in this region. I remember when the first Mexican restaurant opened, when I was in 8th grade.” As a result of geographical apartheid, schooling for both Black and White students was a stark reality of the racial divide.

Autumn has extensive teaching experience in both middle and elementary schooling; however, due to bureaucratic barriers she currently teaches K-5 Physical Education in a Spanish / English bilingual school that is centrally located within a historic area of Albuquerque. When asked to describe how she identifies within her educational space, she provided a statement of positionality, “I am the dominant being in the educational space as a White woman. I mean, that’s what most teachers are, it’s almost 80% of teachers today are White women.” Autumn describes characterizations of social justice as a process for recognizing, “that things are not just and fair in the world, on hundreds and thousands of levels. Right? So social justice is actively engaging in the world in different ways to try to create a more balanced equitable society.” Furthermore, when asked to describe the concept of social justice, Autumn addresses power structures that systematically mitigate equal access in the following excerpt:

Eduardo: How would you define social justice? I'm just speaking in general terms, not social justice education, but just the concept of social justice.

Autumn: I think that social justice is just based on the idea that someone recognizes that there's not equity, that there is hierarchy, that there's privileges in society and things not equal. And so social justice is, you know, the movement or philosophy to like create balance and fairness in society,
which doesn't mean that things are equal, but providing access to things across the board. Like, I don't think private schools should exist.

Autumn articulates what she views as an uneven distribution of power as evidence of oppression. Her tenures with Americorps and Peace Corps are examples of her commitment to grassroots teaching. With credentials in Anthropology and African Studies, she developed an affinity for bilingual education and indigenous languages. In fact, she learned Spanish while working with indigenous populations in Guatemala, and eventually migrated to New Mexico when she discovered that bilingualism is protected by the state’s Constitution.

Autumn has extensive teaching experience in both middle and elementary schooling; however, due to bureaucratic barriers she currently teaches Physical Education.

Abby Stein is an art literacy teacher who is originally from New Jersey. When asked to describe their hometown, she chronicled a racial divide of rural communities, “the towns around us were the type of towns that Black families just couldn’t move into at the time or any people of color because they’d be pushed out.” With 35 years of teaching experience in barrio bilingual schools, Abby developed an affinity for social justice at an early age. She states, “when I was a young person, I was involved in a socialist youth movement. It was called Habonim Dror, and it was modeled after the Kibbutz movement in Israel.” During her tenure in Israel, Abby worked on issues of social justice and developed a profound understanding of community. For example, as a member of this progressive movement, she describes being able to, “see a different model of living that was based on the idea of everybody having something meaningful to offer to a community.” Abby credits a quality teacher preparation program for influencing the development of her educational philosophy.

While at the University of Massachusetts and under the tutelage of Sonia Nieto, a scholar
who was frequently cited in Abby’s program as a champion for multicultural education and bilingual education, Abby developed a comprehensive understanding of multicultural education and the political implications for the institution of education. In addition to teacher preparation, Abby acknowledges the institution of family and heritage for honing her social justice orientation:

I also feel like my early education was my family had come from Europe and they had fled Eastern Europe as Jewish people with the Pogroms, which were like racial attacks, genocide, basically, in Ukraine and Russia and Romania. And I was very close to my grandfather. And that was a part of my growing up, was hearing those stories and kind of all the trauma that came with it.

Moreover, Abby explains how generational trauma often affects the current state of affairs and informs identity. For example, when asked to describe an event that inspired a progressive lens, she shared the following excerpt:

Eduardo: If you could share an event that mobilized your social justice orientation, that mobilized agency or increased social consciousness, maybe there was a watershed moment that galvanized social justice.

Abby: Issues of safety and questioning identity and where do you belong and where do you feel safe and what is identity? So, the question of what is identity and how our identity shapes informs us and even epigenetics the idea of those experiences from your grandparents live inside of your actual genetic DNA. I feel like even though I didn't experience it, it's very much a part of my awareness of others and why I'm in teaching.
Analogous to Abby and Autumn, my perception of social justice is significantly informed from lived experience and academia. For example, as a function of sport, coaches and players often inferred that Black players were superior athletes but performed poorly academically. Lived experience in sport has demonstrated that inferencing is, at the bare minimum, a byproduct of racial bias and at a worse-case scenario, a function of subliminal discrimination. During our face-to-face conversations, I frequently wondered how effective teacher preparation programs were in providing pre-service teachers with a quality social science education? Teacher pedagogy is the scope of my study, not teacher preparation programs; however, data in the cases of Autumn and Abby suggests that they have a strong command of the geo-political landscape which in part is attributed to course work.

**Dolores Rivas** is originally from southern New Mexico and self-identifies as a Hispanic woman in her mid-30s. At the time of the study, Dolores was a national-board certified transitional coach for an extended school year within a small Hispanic heritage language elementary school near the city’s main historical plaza. Her teaching assignment offered students one-hour of enrichment per instructional day. In addition to this role, Dolores had extensive teaching experience in the kindergarten setting. A passion for teaching was fostered during her formative years of adolescence, “I remember my choir teacher in particular, she knew I wanted to become an educator later on, and I had her pretty much my whole high school career and so she started to like, give me duties as a teacher.” Dolores also expressed an affinity for music and ties to the Catholic faith. In fact, she developed musical talents as a member of her church choir. With the prospect of becoming a music teacher, she initially enrolled in a music program designed for prospective teachers, however, she earned a degree in elementary education.
In the case of Dolores, religiosity informed the conceptualization of social justice. Perkins (1992) examined the function of religiosity in the construct of social justice. According to the author, “results from these data from students in England and the United States specifically suggest that in both countries a strong religious commitment among students generally heightens one’s humanitarian concern and reduces racial prejudice” (Perkins, 1992, p. 357). For Dolores, perceptions of social justice are deeply entangled in faith. When asked to define social justice, she stated the following:

> It's funny because I don't think I really learned this term social justice until college, in my church, actually, because part of progressive Catholic thinking was rooted in social justice. So probably more like being able to be aware of social problems, social issues, social struggles, of all people, or people also on different spectrums. Right? People that are disadvantaged or are oppressed and being able to almost, like, do something about it in a sense, whether that's bring awareness to the problem, whether that's become an activist, whether it's to seek out, or whether that's just to contribute to fixing the problem in some way.

In addition to faith, Dolores explains that her father also honed social consciousness by addressing current events and encouraging household members to explore their historical heritage. While indexing data on Dolores, I was able to make a personal connection to religiosity and family. As institutions, religion and the family significantly contribute to the meaning making process.

**Memory:** Similar to Dolores, faith and family fortified my perception of social justice. For example, in the aftermath of the 1992 Rodney King riots, I recall a sermon that explicitly denounced police brutality. Moreover, fireside chats with my
mother frequently entailed the negotiation of race at transborder lands between the
United States and Mexico. According to my mother, Chicanos with a badge felt
inclined to showoff for their White counterparts by subjugating Mexicans at border
crossings. Like the educational system, both the institution of religion and the
institution of the family have far-reaching influence.

Selena Tapia has taught at multiple sites that primarily serve students of color. With
a teaching tenure of 16 years, she earned an undergraduate degree in Journalism and a
master’s degree in Elementary Education. Currently, she’s a reading interventionist at a Title
I school. Geographically, this site is situated near a homeless shelter. In addition to housing,
this facility provides members of the community with access to optometrists and clothing,
“they support the homeless population. So, they’ll take them to get eye doctors. They’ll take
them to get clothes.” Originally from south Texas, Selena self-identifies as a 45-year-old
woman with strong ties to Mexican American culture. As a result of growing up in this
region, Mexican heritage and the Spanish language provided cultural capital. Yosso (2005)
explains that “cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather
it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are valued” (Yosso, 2005, p. 76).

From a young age, she developed a profound understanding of the educational
landscape. In the case of Selena, both parents have a legacy of dedication to the institution of
education. For example, at a major university, Selena’s father served as the Vice President of
Student Affairs. Comparatively, Selena’s mother advocated for parents and served as a
family liaison. Similar to Dolores, it is safe to suggest that members of the family also
informed the conceptualization of social justice. When asked to address social movements
and the ideological spectrum, Selena shared the following excerpt:

Selena: We're very, very, very lefties and very conscientious of our community and
of supporting each other. And we come from that idea that we are not on
this earth as an individual human that we belong in a community. And we
embrace that and we practice that and we live that kind of philosophy.
Social services. I lived in Canada for a few years and the socialized system
there and actually living and using it was a beautiful thing to see and how
beautiful it works. So, we're very, very, very lefties and we're very happy
that way.

Eduardo: All right. And then, I guess that question also lends itself like, what events,
social events or like social movements have influenced your social justice
orientation?

Selena: So, I think it starts just way back when with our immigrant population, the
migrants population and all of that. My dad grew up with, so my father's
mother, my grandmother, was illiterate. So, she was the most brilliant human
being but could never read or write. So, she signed her name with an X and
my dad hitchhiked to school every day from his little, tiny, he came from an
even smaller town and would hitchhike about an hour to Kingsville for
university.

International experience that provides a global perspective aligns with Abby and Autumn.
For example, Abby has international experience in Israel, Autumn completed a teaching
tenure in Guatemala, and Selena lived in Canada.
Santiago Salazar is a 45-year-old male teacher who grew up in northern New Mexico. Currently, he’s a Special Education teacher that serves students in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades. The elementary site where Santiago teaches has a student enrollment north of 200 students. Enrollment historically fluctuates as result of transient families that far too often endure the wraths of homelessness; however, Santiago stated that in the aftermath of the pandemic student enrollment has significantly declined. This school is situated along the banks of the Rio Grande River in a historic part of Albuquerque. According to Santiago, members of this community express strong ties to the motherland of Spain and land grants from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. As a result of colonization, several prominent families of this region identify as either Spanish or Hispanic.

In the case of Santiago, he self-identified as Hispanic but also communicated a connection to the Chicano/a movement. He officially entered the arena of education via alternative licensure. With 11 years of practice, Santiago earned a bachelor’s degree in University Studies. He also completed an associate’s program in Early Childhood Education and has a background in multicultural education. As a youth, due to the rural locality of his household, Santiago attended schools in predominantly White communities. Notwithstanding, the family instilled a profound passion for the Spanish language. In the following transcript, when asked to describe teaching approach, Santiago described differentiated instruction grounded in social movements:

Eduardo: Can you define or describe your teaching style, and then how do you view yourself in the educational space?

Santiago: So, Eduardo, I think my teaching style has changed over time. It's taking more of a progressive approach. I've utilized more differentiation strategies,
especially in the past two years. After this pandemic, students need ways to understand, a better comprehension of events. The whole George Floyd killing, students lost loved ones from covid, witnessing parents fight. We need to connect to the students, to help them with issues.

Eduardo: As a teacher, as a practitioner of elementary education, can you share a little bit more about your teaching philosophy?

Santiago: Yes! My teaching philosophy is to educate as much as I can and bring a more solidified, find clearer understanding about the world and everything that is in it, without making any bias or any partiality.

In addition to teaching style and philosophy, Santiago described a classroom community of communication, “bringing an ambience of fairness into the classroom, I think, presents an open line of communication without any hindrance. This allows us to learn, learn about each other, to better understand who we are, together we grow.”

In the subsequent section, I discuss themes that emerged from cross-case analysis. The purpose of this segment is to document how teacher participants employ pedagogies for the teaching of social justice. This comparison analysis addresses methods for circumventing barriers that prohibit the proliferation of social justice. In addition to pedagogies for navigating standardization, I examine assets that carve out space for the enactment of social justice. Cases that epitomize each theme are revealed in what follows. Like the previous section, personal reflections contribute to analysis.

**Amplifies Equity of Voice as a Reflective Practice of Inclusivity**

As I analyzed data, I discovered guiding principles that were situationally based. The philosophical underpinnings of these teacher participants seemed to align with equity of
voice. This theme is both an ideological and pedagogical practice. As a pedagogical underpinning, equity of voice is best exemplified through inclusivity. Central to this theme is understanding how teachers broach issues of social justice, which in part addresses research question number one: How do elementary teachers approach topics of social justice in their curriculum? Amplifying equity of voice fosters an efficacious community by situating students at the curricular table. Pedagogies that amplify equity of voice cultivate an ethos of belonging. In my early interactions with Dolores, she described inclusivity as a conduit for amplifying equity of voice:

Dolores: I think the main thing is being able to have that time, that space, that everybody has value in what they say or what they contribute. I think that's the main thing. And then I think that's just a major part of an equitable environment, whether that's the workplace, whether it's a classroom, and it should start in the classroom as a model as a model that kids can grow from to take with them outside of the school.

Interview data in the case of Santiago is also indicative of inclusivity. In the process of unpacking the conceptualization of social justice, he addressed concepts that align with equity of voice. For example, he vehemently champions full inclusion of students with learning disabilities and the least restrictive environment. Santiago also emphasizes an inquiry phase for discovering the unique talents of every student. Interrupting the pedagogical cycle of inequality and instead cultivating inclusive spaces is conveyed by Santiago:

Santiago: Well, I think teaching social justice begins with bringing an ambience of fairness into the classroom. I think if the students recognize that there's no impartiality or there's no partiality or biasness on part of the teacher, I think
they can become open to new ideologies, and they can be receptive and absorb new ideas that is being presented in the classroom. It's like an open line of communication without any hindrance.

An education that is receptive of all ideals suggests that equity of voice is a reflective practice of inclusivity. Eliminating inequitable pedagogies that obstruct alternative perspective is a step towards systemic change. Canned curriculums and standardized pedagogies in conjunction significantly hinder other ways of knowing, especially for students with learning disabilities. Mills et al., (2016) explain how equity of voice and alternative perspective are a function of social justice education. Moreover, the authors document an infamous history of discrimination aimed at students with disabilities which aligns with sentiments of inclusion as expressed by Santiago:

Mainstream schools have a long history of not serving particular groups of young people well. Students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds are disproportionately represented in the lower bands of achievement and attendance data and in the upper bands of data on exclusion, suspension and ‘special needs’. (Mills et al., 2016, p. 102)

During focus group interviews, teachers were asked to address prescribed curriculums, notions of fidelity to district programming, and teaching controversial topics. Selena expressed the need for real talk from the onset, “I think it's appropriate for all school age children to be talked to in a very real way, because once they get out into that world, that world is not forgiving.” Thereafter, Autumn explained that social justice is the foundation of her practice and what reflective practice means to human existence, “If you're not a reflective person in your relationships in the world, you're probably not going to be a reflective person
in your relationships. So, I think there's like a bigger spiritual thing that needs to be going on.” The following focus group excerpt pertains to equity of voice as a reflective practice:

Dolores: You have to start with yourself first in order to have that outwardness of what you believe in or what's right. You have to start here [heart] because you cannot transform outside, and then in, it has to be inside out. There's a lot of things that go with that, but yeah, the reflective process is super important. I agree with you.

Selena: How do you do that with people that don't innately do that with themselves? You know?

Autumn: You either got it or you don't. How do you teach that? And that's either, in your soul. Yeah! It's like you either are comfortable being uncomfortable and growing and you're on a human like you're looking to evolve throughout your life, or you're just not.

Pedagogies for equity of voice as a mechanism of inclusivity were epitomized in the practice of Selena. In her classes, student candidates for reading intervention are typically labeled as struggling readers; however, via focus and motivation, Selena increases student confidence for reading and love for literature. For example, she described a participation structure that honors achievement, “I'm an interventionist, so I have all the struggling readers but when they come you should see them. Not one of them looks at themselves as a struggling reader. They don't consider themselves struggling readers at all because they're celebrated.” In addition to celebrating achievement, Selena’s lessons provided authentic activities that embody equity of voice. The pedagogical underpinnings of Selena suggest that amplifying equity of voice yields a platform where students develop a sense of belonging. For example,
as a collective, students read a book authored by Sierra and Haff (2020) titled *Becoming Kid Quixote*. With an inspiring memoir, the text tells a story of a Mexican American girl named Sarah. To claim her identity, Sarah uses the arts to address issues of social justice. Figure 3 (See Figure 3. Third-grade student, Alondra, “Organizing obstacles” shared by Selena) coincides with the theme of obstacles noted in this publication.

**Figure 3**

*Third-grade student, Alondra, “Organizing obstacles” shared by Selena.*
Webbing ideas facilitates the organization of concepts, topics, and even details. The general purpose of this graphic organizer is to aid in the writing process. In this example, the student documents issues of social justice and provides a platform to document lived experience. Mourning the death of a parent at any age is difficult, but grief is intensified when students are demanded to demonstrate academic rigor. The student example conveys complex issues seminal to social justice. In addition to the mourning process, the student example likely indicates student conflict as evident of subtopic number three. Teaching students how to negotiate conflict through peaceful means should be a staple of social justice education.

Books, such as *Becoming Kid Quixote: A True Story of Belonging in America* may yield to the possibilities of inclusivity. The literary canon frequently employed in urban schooling does not align with Latinx students or other marginalized groups. As a result, canned curriculums and prescribed literature fail to bridge inclusivity. To augment analysis, Selena provides context for the above web:

So, she [Alondra] came to intervention class at a kindergarten level. She knew her letters and sounds, but could not blend a CVC [consonant, vowel, consonant] word. So, she had never found a book that she liked. She has always called herself a non-reader. She hates reading, from her mouth, and she never, just doesn't have a good kind of feeling or outlook about reading in general. So, this is the first book, *Becoming Kid Quixote*, that she has actually read in her life. She's in fifth grade again, so it's kind of startling. And in this book, she loves it so much because she can read almost every single word. It is at a third-grade level reading, Lexile reading. So, she can read the book, but more importantly, she sees herself in this book, and that's what she loves so much. It's the first time that that's happened to her. Even though
books that have been read aloud to her have been books that she should have been able to see herself in, she wasn't able to make that connection until she herself was reading the words and connecting to that book.

Artifact data suggests that equity of voice aligns with an inclusive pedagogy, which carves out space for topics of social justice. Pedagogies of inclusivity are concerned with making content accessible to all students, especially those that are far too often marginalized. This notion of inclusivity draws on the work of Freire (1970), hooks (1994), Giroux (2011), and other scholars from the critical pedagogy paradigm. However, Tuitt et al., (2016) conveyed the following five forms of inclusive pedagogy to capsize oppressive pedagogies in academia: faculty-student interaction, sharing power, dialogical professor-student interaction, activation of student voice, and utilization of lived experience. Central to inclusive pedagogy is challenging the status quo that excludes marginalized students. In the case of Alondra, her reading intervention teacher activated student voice and demonstrated inclusive pedagogy, “by having a voice, students can bring into the classroom the world as they have experienced it” (Tuitt et al., 2016, p. 15).

As a part of the writing process, Selena instructed students to draft a writing sample that addressed obstacles noted in *Becoming Kid Quixote* and personal barriers. The following figure is a piece authored by the same student, Alondra (See Figure 4. *Writing process provided Alondra a platform to unpack obstacles*). This example aligns with the utilization of personal narratives, “the underlying assumption is that one’s own experience is central to understanding and developing knowledge” (Tuitt et al., 2016, p. 15).
In accordance to this artifact, the student demonstrates a profound understanding of obstacles and makes cultural connections to the story’s protagonist. Inclusivity is a powerful pedagogy
that mobilizes equity of voice. During the interviewing phase, I was able to make a personal connection to the pedagogical underpinnings shared by Selena.

**Memory:** Equity of voice and this concept of inclusivity is a contributing reason and motivation for this inquiry. A desire to give back emerged during my formative years of high school. Throughout my academic career, I have had the privilege of sound counsel as it pertains to life and academic endeavors. For example, I have fond memories of Mr. Suárez. Originally from Chile, this high school teacher migrated to the United States in the aftermath of the Pinochet regime. As a result of lived experience, he thoroughly understood the immigrant mentality as a function of the daily grind. In lieu of obstacles, Mr. Suárez successfully earned a teaching degree and displayed pedagogies for social justice. By way of instructional illustration, in his World History course, we watched documentaries that addressed the atrocities of the Chilien dictator. To conclude this historical lesson, Mr. Suárez, in front of the entire class removed his shirt and showcased electrical burns executed by officers of the secret police. Mr. Suárez bared physical scars not able to be expressed by words. This mini lesson highlighted the dangers of fascism and provided a counternarrative that is seldom witnessed in traditional textbooks.

Like Selena, the Chilean history teacher frequently embedded culturally relevant literature. I recall that to teach us about the concept of diaspora, we read a novel authored by Francisco Jiménez (1997) titled *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child.* The story portrays the migration cycle as a circuit. As a result of the harvest crop, migrant families frequently move from one crop field to another. As a Latino and son of an immigrant, I was able to personally connect to narratives of economic hardship and back-
breaking work. To fund a household, my mother sold Mexican blankets, boots, candy, and other products manufactured on the other side of the Rio Grande. On a monthly basis, my mother and I would complete a circuit between Albuquerque, New Mexico and Chihuahua, Mexico. Similar to crop workers, this circuit was a function for economic survival. For me, this type of literature allocated equity of voice and sense of belonging.

The theme for amplifying equity of voice was also evident in the pedagogical underpinnings of Santiago as evidenced in student advocacy and instructional practice. Throughout the data collection process, he championed equity of voice and student advocacy. Rejecting punitive punishment is an overt example of student advocacy. For example, in the following transcript, Santiago shared a narrative that documents the school-to-prison pipeline:

**Eduardo:** Where does social justice fit in within special education? How does it affect students in special education? Can you share some details?

**Santiago:** The principal and teacher calling the cops for a kid not lining up and talking back is messed up. He’s a knucklehead and often needs redirection but Armando always listens to me. He has boundaries that we established together, a mutual respect, he’s been on my case load for three years now, and has yet to be disrespectful to me, but yet they, principals and teachers call the police on him. For what? Not lining up? Talking back? I don’t understand crime.

Discipline tactics described in this excerpt align with the concept of being ‘scared straight.’ Fortunately, in this example, the student wasn’t arrested; however, the child endured the wrath of the administration’s psychological warfare against him. Along this continuum,
Santiago explained how language and ethnicity function in targeting vulnerable populations, “he’s **Mexicano** and his mom only speaks Spanish and doesn’t know her rights, but my students are protected by federal law, they have IEPs against this kind of stuff, and the principal getting all mad for calling the union.” In the case of Santiago, disparities aimed at students with special needs fortifies his social justice orientation.

Moreover, the Special Education teacher seemed to thoroughly comprehend the school-to-prison pipeline and the implications associated with punitive punishment. According to Pane and Rocco (2014), students with disabilities are prime candidates for the school-to-prison pipeline and are disproportionately forced to seek alternative schooling, “Youth with disabilities attend alternative education programs in much higher proportions than their nondisabled peers” (p. 8). Moreover, Lalas and Strikwerda (2021) cite data from the National Council on Disabilities to document inequalities in public education by reporting that, “students with intellectual disabilities are among those groups most likely to be segregated, with only 16.6% of these students spending most of their day in general education” (p. 113).

Equity of voice as a function of student advocacy appears to align with the pedagogical underpinnings of Selena and Santiago. For example, they both seem to challenge the status quo and vehemently protect students from systemic structures of oppression. In the case of Selena, overcoming bureaucratic barriers to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of her students is an overt example of student advocacy which amplifies equity of voice. For example, as a result of student advocacy, the site administrator attempted to silence Selena when a student was being hurt beyond graphic description, “we had a meeting with my principal and police officers because one of my students was being hurt, and my principal
said, well, that was a meeting to shut a crazy teacher up.” Unfortunately, advocating for students in urban schooling often leads to repercussions; however, jeopardizing student well-being does not align with the pedagogical underpinnings of Selena.

Comparatively, insulating students from the school-to-prison pipeline as depicted by Santiago is also a prime example of student advocacy which safeguards equity of voice. However, data in the case of Santiago also indicates that issues of social justice organically surface (See Figure 5. Javier, special education student synthesizing issues of social justice shared by Santiago). The standardized approach employed in contemporary education affirms that elementary students lack complex skills required to tackle controversial topics (McBee, 1995). To the contrary, the following exemplar is evidence of an elementary student synthesizing complex topics of social justice.
When asked to analyze this artifact, Santiago demonstrated facial expressions of profound empathy as he stated that “this is the one that touched me the most. He puts others first, 
worried about mom, family, but still yet comes to school eager to learn.” The first sentence in this exemplar is an overt example of family conflict and perhaps domestic violence. Thus, we cannot automatically assign family as an asset, “the results of this study indicate that students perceive their family as both a challenge and source of support, which implies that families are complex systems that both support and provide conflict for students” (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017, p. 71). Furthermore, the second sentence of this example illustrates social economic status. As expressed by this student, topics of social justice, “erupt at home between spouses, siblings, or parents and their children over belongings, clothes, money, discipline, child care, chores, competition for attention, and a host of other issues” (McBee, 1995, p. 158). In lieu of learning disabilities, proper scaffolds allocate equity of voice and covey pedagogies of inclusivity.

**Memory:** As a bilingual teacher, it has been my experience that Latinx students occupy critical thinking skills and are able to deconstruct hypocrisy. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I spearheaded a Social Studies Afterschool club to develop social consciousness, hone critical thinking skills, and provide elementary students with a space that honored identity. To elicit funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; González et al., 2005), I employed an inquiry chart which is similar to a KWL chart. The purpose of this graphic organizer was to measure background knowledge and to provide students with a relevant curriculum. In my observations, the students who attended my weekly sessions communicated profound understanding of social justice which appears to align with evidence shared by both Selena and Santiago. Several students of my social studies club were concerned with homelessness and transient families using the school site as an overnight campsite. As a result, we read Fly Away
Home by Eve Bunting (1991) and authored letters addressed to the school principal.

Other students of this elementary club conveyed concern over Trump’s wall and their immigration status. As a result, we explored the Bracero Program that exploited Mexican labor during the 1940s and Operation Wetback – an executive order that resulted in massive apprehensions and deportations.

Thereby, pedagogies of inclusivity are reflective of students’ interests, provides equity of voice, and evidence suggests that elementary students are indeed able to make sense of complex topics seminal to social justice. Park et al., (2022) document preschool narratives and teacher pedagogy at a Montessori site where a social justice curriculum is employed. According to the authors, “findings indicate that teachers’ critical consciousness and commitments, social justice-infused school culture, and elements of Montessori education and curriculum influenced their implementation of CRP (culturally relevant pedagogy) and diversification of existing curricula” (Park et al., 2022, p. 2).

**Building Rapport and Community Ties**

Evidence in this case study suggests that building rapport and community ties is best mobilized through funds of knowledge (Vélez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992; Moll et al., 1992; González et al., 2005), affirmation, and lived experience. This pedagogy for building rapport is often the byproduct for establishing community ties. As a pedagogical underpinning, this theme of rapport views the community as an asset (Yosso, 2005). Data in the case of Abby conveyed lived experience and funds of knowledge. For example, as a curriculum designer, Abby has been significantly influenced by experts in the field of linguistics, such as Jim Cummins and Stephen Krashen. During the interviewing process, she shared her educational background, “my master’s in ESL [English as a Second Language] was the most important
principles that I got from like Cummins and Krashen. It resonated so much for me. It’s like, always building on what the students know.”

As a result, Abby uses students lived experience as a conduit for building rapport with members of the learning community, “the idea of using students’ experiences to make learning relevant and meaningful to the students’ lives. So that principle has always just been the key motivating principle in my teaching.” Furthermore, to circumvent the rigors of standardization that’s often associated with canned curriculums, Abby designs curriculum that is reflective of lived experience. In 35 years of teaching, Abby has never repeated the same curriculum twice. She explained the process for the development of curriculum in the following manner:

When you find the core of who the kids are, where they are emotionally, what their experiencing, and then you build upon that, and then you create a framework where you're connecting to it, building connections. To other people in the class, the people in the community, the people in the world, and seeing how their story is a part of a bigger story and how they can have impact on the world efficacy in the world, that they're not just passive beings, they are a part of something bigger than themselves.

Augmenting analysis, Abby described the meaning making process as a constructivist exchange (Vygotsky, 1978). This sociocultural exchange allows learners to co-construct meaning. In an article, Damsa and Ludvigsen (2016) document the power of collaboration and shared knowledge. Findings suggest that activities organized for co-construction enhance meaning, “the dialogical creation of meaning-making, which converge on the ideas of shared understanding being considered beneficial for meaning-making and learning” (Damsa and Ludvigsen, 2016, p. 14).
In addition to the constructivist approach, pedagogies for the teaching of social justice should embrace lived experience. Data in the case of Abby also suggests that teaching for lived experience is often a luxury afforded to teachers who are not subjected to the rigors of standardization. Teacher dialogue in the following narrative describes consequences of standardization:

I invited teachers to come. The kids wrote the most intimate stories you've spent eight weeks. I said, come to the classroom. Yeah! And hear what your students have to say. Oh, I already know them. I'm with them all day. I said, you don't know them because they're telling you things that you've never heard.

To a certain degree, the shared narrative addresses question number three of this inquiry: What structures prohibit or provide proliferation for the integration of social justice in contemporary classrooms? Building rapport is a pedagogy that transpires at the grassroots level. Data implies that meaningful investment is essential to community ties. Figure 6 (See Figure 6. Unit planning for lived experience shared by Abby) is a teaching artifact for the development of social justice curriculum.
Figure 6

Unit planning for lived experience shared by Abby
This planning book documents an interconnected cycle for teasing out concepts relevant to lived experience. As a function of data analysis, Abby explained the scope and sequence for the development of curriculum in the following exchange:

Eduardo: I've never seen the artistic combination of the free-flowing plan. It was kind of circular, can you walk me through this process?

Abby: Yeah, everything's circular. So, I usually just start with lots of that. And I spend months sometimes just thinking. Like I'll just start gathering all my ideas and putting ideas and visual images. These are large conceptual ideas. With the notion of a circular connection, Abby described the artistic flow as a fluid and lengthy process that requires commitment. This webbing interconnected method for planning eventually cycles to lived experience as the centrifugal force.

In addition to lived experience, Abby anchored curriculum in funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1992; González, 2005). Accordingly, the desired outcome is to cultivate spaces where students view themselves in content. Funds of knowledge makes a social justice curriculum relevant and is the catalyst for building rapport. As a result, Abby calibrates for lived experience by employing funds of knowledge, “the idea of using students’ experiences to make learning relevant and meaningful to the students lives. So, that principle has always just been the key motivating principle in my teaching. Build upon the students’ funds of knowledge.”

Activities that offer opportunities to activate funds of knowledge extends to other members of the community. The following figure (See Figure 7. Art literacy and funds of knowledge in elementary schooling shared by Abby) is a student exemplar that exemplifies funds of knowledge.
Doubling down on this powerful pedagogy, Abby affirms, “that’s one example of the student here. But I got so much of that from them. I could probably find you 40, 50 examples that are
on that wall.” Providing students with a social justice curriculum is a laborious process that requires a pledge to transformative change. Funds of knowledge and lived experience are of germane importance to the development of curriculum. In the case of Abby, this site appears to provide pullout teachers more flexibility and autonomy over curriculum. An education with a social justice orientation is commensurate of both lived experience and funds of knowledge as mechanisms for building rapport.

**Memory:** As a young student, academically, I performed decently; however, I failed to thrive, not because I was deficient in a specific skill but because the absence of lived experience resulted in a disconnect. Nostalgia was achieved when Abby presented curricular mapping and lessons that incorporated art. Despite limited art skills, the art classroom was a place that encouraged risk-taking and allowed me to project myself in the world without right or wrong answers. While teaching concepts of symmetry, I felt alive when the pullout teacher encouraged the implementation of popsicle sticks to create models. As a capstone project, I presented a wooden kit car that my mother and I created. This roadster model represented my lived realities. Memories of my father are few; however, I recall warm memories of working on automobiles with him. Analogous to Abby, my art teacher carved out space for lived experience that made learning meaningful.

Lived experience is layered and complex. It encompasses more than identity politics, “Social interactions and relationships among and between individual students, groups of students, and teachers are lived through a multitude of identity dimensions, such as ethnicity, culture, race, class, socioeconomic status, gender, ability, nationality, sexual orientation, and age”
(Sheets & Hollins, 1999, p. 157). For many, experiences both positive and negative likely affect academic success and influence future events.

Dolores viewed lived experience as a social justice framework for deconstructing a process of introspection, “that contribute to our traumas or even our privileges that we have. And sometimes we have to look at that first before we can look at it. We have to look at it from inside first before addressing it outward.” From this philosophical anchor, Dolores designs curriculum to validate reality. Validating experience to circumvent standardization is a pedagogical underpinning that emerged in the case of Dolores, “so, if I'm in the classroom and I said something that's not very like I'm using vocabulary that's not academic or use a slang term, don't dismiss what I'm saying, because the validity of what I'm saying is still relevant.” Affirming other ways of knowing is chief to building rapport. As a participation structure, Dolores described affirmation as a pedagogy for validation stating, “you validate, you affirm then you go from there to make sure that your kids feel that they're included in your classroom room just because they don't speak the way you do.” A haphazard reference to culture does not adequately account for lived experience. Curricular disconnects occur at the peril of marginalized students when lessons seldom reflect student backgrounds. To alleviate this danger, Dolores shared the following artifact (See Figure 8. *Venn diagram for teaching heritage shared by Dolores*) that helped students identify their heritage and family celebrations.
According to Dolores, students will understand that family units are all different and celebrations inform heritage. During member checking, Dolores provided further analysis, for example, she documented the scope and sequence of this unit that is designed to honor identity through heritage and celebrations. The essential question for this unit was, “What makes your family special?” To this end, on the graphic organizer, students shared family values that overlapped. Additionally, students honed identity and explored family traditions.
that contribute to their heritage. Prior to the Venn-diagram, Dolores explained that anticipatory lessons address vocabulary, such as heritage and celebration.

This transitional coach has extensive teaching experience at the kindergarten level and has witnessed the wraths of accountability. During a focus group interview, teachers were asked to address the significance of social justice in urban schooling. To this end, Dolores described time constraints that often result in a whimsical approach:

I didn't have any kind of box curriculums or anything like that I just got thrown into a kindergarten classroom and I just went for it. Right? Good teaching is good teaching in the sense of like I had time to explore because I didn't have anything scripted out. Right? And then now it's kind of like teachers do themselves a disservice because they just grab a book and go. Right? They don't have time to plan, they don't have time to sit down and be purposeful about what they're doing.

As an institutional barrier, the appropriation of time addresses question number three of this inquiry: What structures prohibit or provide proliferation for the integration of social justice in contemporary classrooms? According to this transcript, Dolores described an educational period that earmarked professional discretion. During face-to-face interviewing, Dolores explained that time constraints hinder student development, implicate canned curriculums, and reinforces standardization. The following transcript further addresses structures that either mobilize or hinder the implementation of an education with a social justice orientation:

Eduardo: You mentioned, like, the prescribed curriculums. Also, the standards. How fluid, I guess, or open are the standards for you to implement social justice? The schedule? What things have made it easier or more difficult to teach social justice or to provide your students with a social justice orientation?
Maybe you're not calling it social justice, but you're teaching something on fairness or whatever the concept might be. So, think of any obstacles that you may have seen or have encountered or things that have actually allowed for the proliferation of social justice.

Dolores: We're giving them room to grow. We're not going to fail them. Just know this is part of the process. Time to grow at their pace. Right? Looking at not oppressing them because they're language learners. Right? Giving them that opportunity, giving them that space to be able to do so. And where I feel like we don't really have that here because of prescribed curriculums or because of prescribed not prescribed, but assumptions that we make or that our system only allows for us to work within. There's a lot of confines with time. Right? We have to move them on and then that's it. And we can only test them on certain things according to a level that we assume. But there's a lot that goes into that too. Like, who came up with those levels? Was it a diverse culture of people or a diverse group of people that made those? Or is it coming from a wealthy, privileged system?

To circumvent confines of standardization, Dolores employs non-traditional pedagogies and content that incorporated lived experience. Validation of student identity and content that honors lived experience are concrete pedagogies for navigating standardization. This examination is not one of linguistics, but I feel that for some, these two terms are interchangeable. However, it is my understanding that affirmation acknowledges an acceptance of lived reality. Comparatively, validation does not necessarily imply concurrence
but instead disseminates support as an ally. Regardless of syntax, validation as an ally and affirmation as acknowledgement align with concrete pedagogies for teaching social justice.

**Memory:** While unpacking identity politics, I struggled to assimilate into New Mexican culture. I was often reprimanded for my Mexican American identity. In fact, I recall teachers telling me that I was not Mexican but instead Spanish. When I attempted to explain that my mother migrated to America as a young adult from Mexico, some people, even those with Spanish surnames, would ask if my mother entered the country illegally. As a result, I often felt that the racial hierarchy in New Mexico placed a greater preponderance on Spanish blood and viewed Mexican heritage as inferior. Later in life, literature authored by Laura E. Gómez (2007) in the text titled *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* provided rationale for the social construct in New Mexico. Despite my light pigment and fairly decent command of English, I wasn’t White enough for prevailing culture, and failure to renounce my “Mexicanness” excluded me from Spanish lineage. All things being colonization, I certainly felt a racial divide and struggled to navigate the institution of education until I met Dr. Rasheed. She was a retired physicist that worked at the national labs. Originally from India, Dr. Rasheed acknowledged my identity and lived experience. For example, in her Geometry class she explained that zero concept and the base ten system originated in present day Mexico.

Data in the case of Santiago is also indicative of community ties and rapport. The theme of building rapport is essential to the Special Education setting. As a result of learning disabilities associated with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), Santiago emphasizes the importance of building rapport, “you can’t expect growth academically if one cannot show
interest or understand a student’s background, daily struggles, or much less nurture a climate of trust.” During a focus group interview, teacher participants were asked to share a participation structure that fosters social justice and Santiago described a daily routine:

Santiago: A strategy that I use in my classroom to develop student teacher relations is just having those daily check ins. How are you doing? How did it go last night? Did you do your homework? Did you sleep well? Just the basic I'm a simple kind of guy, so I ask basic. I'm cut and dry. So, I just ask them, how are you doing? And there are times that kids do tell me, no, it wasn't that well. So, then we go, I have an EA, so she helps me to take care of the rest of the class, so I can take a student or two out for five minutes and just delve on that situation, well, let's try this, or let's try that, and we're there to make their days brighter.

Dolores: I think for me, it's always been about not always, probably more recently, but is validating where they come from. Like not making sure to not invalidate the things they say or the things they contribute. Validating their age culture, validating their home culture. Right! Because, especially when it comes to the way we speak, that's always been a big one for me. I noticed when I first started as a teacher, I was still a little ghetto. I came from westside, the southwest.

This daily pedagogy as described by Santiago aligns with the work of Wade (2007). According to the social studies scholar, “Social justice is about the day-to-day ways that we relate to our students, how to give them a voice in their learning, and our efforts to treat them
according to their needs and abilities” (Wade, 2007, p. 6). For Santiago, establishing rapport is the building block of social justice education.

**Planning for a Counternarrative Curriculum**

Autumn uses counternarratives as prime examples of social justice in her curriculum. Beyond a critical lens, a social justice orientation must provide sensible solutions. Autumn demonstrated characteristics for challenging the status quo and deconstructing mechanisms of oppression; however, she circumvents standardization through the development of curriculum. For Autumn, a social justice curriculum is a sensible solution to navigating the rigors of standardization. In the process of discussing educational policies, she explains that sensible solutions are the byproduct of a grassroots movement:

> Solutions don't come from the top, they come from the bottom. And so anytime that, you know, we live in these systems that are triangles. So anytime there's a decision that's made from the power-mongers and the money hoarders, it doesn't trickle down to improve education.

Therefore, there’s a system in place that ensures dominant culture is reproduced. In the case of Autumn, standardized curriculum is an instrument for maintaining the status quo. As a form of member checking, I asked Autumn to provide more insight on equity of voice and she stated the following:

> Eduardo: So, one of the themes that came across from my analysis is this notion of equity of voice. And maybe you can piggyback on what that means or how you’re seeing that play out in elementary schools. That concept of equity of voice, is it there? Is it not there?
Autumn: No, it's not there. Yeah, I'd say it's not even remotely there. I think that all we can do as teachers is to try and create an equity of voice culture in our classroom settings. But the system does not give us an equity of voice. It's very top down. Even in a school where a principal is humble and kind, she still has mandates coming down on her that she, an agenda that she has to push and what teachers' opinions are. And whether or not teachers wanna do scripted curriculum or not in elementary school, I feel like it's very micromanaged and monitored and things are not, there's no equity of voice when it comes to decisions. It's like teachers can't do anything. They have to do what people tell them to do. And they're fear, they fear what repercussions if they don't do that.

The development of a social justice curriculum is a pedagogy for alternative perspective. For communities of color, canned curriculums often produce alienation and document a distorted perception of historical accounts. Traditional curriculums do not project communities of color as an asset, adequately differentiate for marginalized students, or challenge mainstream narratives. In my view, this is a cookie-cutter approach that homogenizes communities.

According to Autumn, a curriculum that provides a counternarrative is relevant and a living document that reflects current events. Figure 9 (See Figure 9. Students using a graphic organizer authored by Autumn to digest a unit on anti-racism) is an artifact of counternarrative curriculum shared by Autumn.
Figure 9

Students using a graphic organizer authored by Autumn to digest a unit on anti-racism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>EJEMPLOS</strong></th>
<th><strong>ANTI RACISTA</strong></th>
<th><strong>POCO RACISTA</strong></th>
<th><strong>RACISTA</strong></th>
<th><strong>SUPER RACISTA</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hay mascotas y equipos de deportes en los EEUU nombrados: Braves, Indians, Redskins.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Una joven, Darniella Frazier, grabó a Derek Chauvin con su rodilla en el cuello de George Floyd y entregó el video a las autoridades y lo publicó en el internet.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>La mayoría de la comunidad blanca no envía a sus hijos a la escuela con uniformes de color rosa.</td>
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The graphic organizer develops vocabulary and a more profound understanding of terms seminal to a unit grounded in anti-racism. Moreover, as a form of data analysis, Autumn expressed the following:

I think something that I have always loved doing as a teacher is seeing what's going on in the world and adapting my curriculum so that the things that we're learning and doing and talking about are relatable to not only the kids' experiences, well, the kids' experiences combined with what's going on in the world.

Curriculum with a social justice orientation fosters critical thinking and creates opportunities for the meaning making process, “they need to be able to make meaning and understand and put words to their lived experience so they can connect with it so that they can make the world a better place.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schooling was primarily a function of technology. The pandemic devastated industries and unprecedented casualties resulted from the coronavirus. Transmission of the disease modified lifestyles, habits of disposition, and social dynamics. Civil unrest reached a pinnacle when millions united to protest the death of George Floyd. This teaching artifact is evidence of a counternarrative seldom encountered in canned curriculums. Additionally, it maintains a pulse on current events. By explaining the scope and sequence of this graphic organizer, Autumn contributes to data analysis. This lesson commences with a conversation grounded in stereotypes. At this stage, students unpack what it means to be prejudiced. Thereafter, Autumn addresses race relations by explaining that racism is on a spectrum. Racism is not a simple binary, “if they understand that like racism is not Black and White KKK, or you're either in the KKK or you're not racist.”
As a capstone project, students were required to create visuals documenting the wrath of racism. Figure 10 (See Figure 10. *Students creating visual aids to document symbols of racism shared by Autumn*) is a student exemplar of racist symbolism.

**Figure 10**

*Students creating visual aids to document symbols of racism shared by Autumn*

Contributing to data analysis, Autumn assigns meaning for this infamous landmark by explaining that, “Edmund Pettus Bridge is named after a KKK lord and it's still that's the bridge that they marched across in Selma. It's called the Edmund Pettus Bridge. They've never changed the name of it.” For communities of color, symbolism and optics matter. To a certain extent, Autumn’s lived experience is reason and motivation for counternarrative. When asked to describe her schooling experience, Autumn depicted a disconnect by sharing,
“I look back at my education, I’m like, I don’t know, there’s a few teachers I remember and like, some of their cool lessons, but in general it was pretty shitty.” In fact, Autumn expressed that these lackluster and less than favorable experiences galvanized her teaching philosophy, “I would say my philosophy is based on teaching in the opposite way that I was taught.”

Post pandemic, some progress has been made, for example, the Washington football team changed its name from Redskins to the Commanders. Unfortunately, our nation remains littered with landmarks that disseminate racism. Confederate monuments in the south are overt examples of explicit racism. The state of New Mexico is not immune to symbolism that is racist. Schools named after the murderous Juan de Oñate are another prime example of insensitive symbolism. A social justice curriculum must remind constituents that the violent conquistador, “ordered the murder of over 800 indigenous people in 1599” (Dafoe, 2020).

**Memory:** *Parallels between Autumn and I are several. As a result of standardization, both Autumn and I found a niche in Physical Education. We both construct curriculum with a purpose of providing a counternarrative. I recall that as a 5th grade bilingual teacher, I taught at a site with a large Mexican American demographic. Students at this school primarily identified as Chicano/a. Thereby, I created a comprehensive unit that addressed the Chicano movement. The unit addressed the four horsemen: César Chávez, Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales, José Angel Gutiérrez, and Reies López Tijerina. Students interviewed parents, read literature authored by Chicano/a poets, studied art from that era, created a community mural to represent their heritage, and presented projects in a roundtable discussion. To circumvent benchmarks ordained by Common Core State Standards (CCSS), this unit was anchored in literacy and social studies.*
Expository text from this era adequately addressed Lexile levels and writing samples conveyed a strong application of conventions. Moreover, standards for the discipline of social studies aligned with the examination of social movements. This unit was engaging and relevant to students; however, creating this curriculum with underpinnings for social justice was subject to scrutiny. Herein, one particular parent noticed a picture of Che Guevara, and filed a complaint stating that I was teaching communism. Ironically, I still own this piece of art which is currently posted in my work office. Figure 11 (See Figure 11. Environmental print from my practice that sparked a red scare) displays leaders of the counternarrative.

**Figure 11**

*Environmental print from my practice that sparked a red scare*
As a pedagogical method for circumventing standardization, Abby also constructs curriculum that provides a counternarrative. With an environmental interconnected approach, Abby articulated a passion of curriculum design, “my absolute love is developing curriculum. And right now, the question I have in my classroom is, how do we deepen our connections between animals, plants and animals, people, animals, and plants to help us restore our world.” For Abby, the desired outcome of curriculum development is a connection beyond the grassroots. For example, in my early interactions with Abby, she articulated building rapport as a function for constructing connective curriculum:

You find the core of who the kids are, where they are emotionally, what their experiencing, and then you build upon that, and then you create a framework where you're connecting to its, building connections. To other people in the class, the people in the community, the people in the world, and seeing how their story is a part of a bigger story and how they can have impact on the world, efficacy in the world, that they're not just passive beings, they are a part of something bigger than themselves.

In addition to building rapport, Abby acknowledges a systemic quandary associated with canned curriculums. As a result, she vehemently expressed the requirement of relevancy. Along this vein, she explains that post-pandemic students feel alienated from the state of nature, “after going through COVID, it's like they came back with such a disconnect, and even before that, but a disconnect, like, they're all on their phones, and they're all in their chat rooms, and they're all with the technology.” To this end, students of the art literary teacher examined a book titled *This Very Tree* (2021) by Sean Rubin. Figure 12 (See Figure 12. *Interconnected literature that teaches community and resilience shared by Abby*) is a nonfiction book about a tree that survived the 9/11 attacks.
Abby provides further analysis with the following metaphor, “the survivor trees are sent all over the world to communities suffering from recent tragedies. These trees, like their parent, continue to stand as symbols of resilience.” After reading the book, students were asked to synthesize the essential question: What are some of the feelings that this tree had?” In subsequent lessons, students constructed themes of renewal, hope, and strength.

At a more profound level, a connection to other living organisms allows students to digest other topics salient to social justice. A counternarrative curriculum does not only
address social movements but is encompassing of all issues affecting carbon footprint. Abby alludes to environmental justice in the following excerpt:

I always used to think of my social justice work as more about looking at movements, not heroes, but people role models and people of color who were doing things that were significant in the world. But I kind of feel right now with all the alienation, it's like getting kids to be aware of each other, aware of the environment, aware of the plants and animals, aware of their community, aware of the impact of the river, aware of their place, in this world and how every action we do impacts our environment.

During our focus groups, this notion of environmental justice is also echoed by Autumn, “I am not the world's best teacher, but I understand social justice concepts, and it's like oh, we're talking about volcanoes. Why don't we talk about where volcanoes are? What volcanoes have done to communities?”

Commentary concerning curriculum reflected research question number three: What structures prohibit or provide proliferation for the integration of social justice in contemporary classrooms? Consequently, Abby explained privileges of being a pullout teacher, “there's strengths of being in a pullout program and limitations. And one of the strengths is that I have more flexibility over my curriculum. Like, no one is saying to me, you have to do the state mandates.” On the other hand, she expressed systemic constraints that inhibit continuity:

It's a pullout, and so in 45 minutes, I'm not really able to transform the room. For every single group's needs, there's a little more conformity because I can't change out materials every hour. So, it's just within 45 minutes in a week,
you can only accomplish so much. Right! So, the way I try with it is I try to extend the project so that we can go deeper.

Thus, data in the case of Abby suggests that pullout teachers have more autonomy over curriculum design; however, this does not imply that other teachers cannot benefit from counternarrative.

Along this continuum of counternarrative and systemic barriers, Abby provides an airtight argument against standardization and specifically in opposition to the science of reading movement:

I think that science of reading business is really a strange agenda for the union. Like when I looked this week at the National AFT Magazine and they showed teachers who are like, I've been teaching for 30 years and I just learned about the science of reading. And now I will say that everything I've done for the past 30 years is wrong. Oh, wow! Like I'm reading things. The New York Times had an article this week just saying the science of reading is the answer. Union saying it. Everybody. And like we all know that when you teach kids and you teach from their own funds of knowledge and you develop curriculum that's socially responsive to their needs and you get student engagement, you can develop literate human beings and how to put all of our eggs in the basket of LETRS and the science of reading overnight that's so clear. And so we're culturally void of connection to kids and their lived experiences. I don't know if I'm answering the question, but to me, that's a social justice issue now. Like why is everyone drinking the Kool-Aid when we know that's not how all students learn? And no higher-level thinking is being considered for minority marginalized communities.
In sum, counternarrative is both an ideology that challenges the status quo and pedagogical underpinning for navigating standardization. Although planning for social justice is a laborious process that requires a profound commitment to transformative change, counternarrative is relevant to students, maintains a pulse on current events, fosters critical thinking, and provides opportunities for the meaning making process. Moreover, data in the case of Abby and Autumn suggests that counternarrative is an alternative perspective that canned curriculums often fail to adequately address.

**Classroom and Community as Critical Spaces for the Open Exchange of Ideas**

A platform that allows students to exchange knowledge capsizes the banking concept (Freire, 1970). In accordance to banking education, teachers determine what knowledge is worthy of replication and students are empty vessels which, “turns them into ‘containers’, into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). This model of education has little regard for funds of knowledge or lived experience. Students are expected to be passive consumers that are void of critical thinking. To the contrary, critical spaces for the open exchange of ideas allocates a platform where students can openly disseminate knowledge. Moreover, it values the epistemology of students as credible sources of information. Principles that align with this educational currency are grounded in a constructivist approach (Ben-Ari, 2001) and the sociocultural exchange (Vygotsky, 1978). The work of Hamer et al., (2008) is congruent with forums that appropriate spaces for the open exchange of information. The authors explain that students contributing to the field of knowledge, “is a pedagogy that encourages students to contribute to the learning of others and to value the contributions of others”
(Hamer et al., 2008, p. 194). As a pedagogical underpinning, critical spaces are not exclusively reserved for schools but extends to community forums.

Data in the case of Autumn exemplifies both classroom and community as critical spaces for the dissemination of student knowledge. This pedagogical underpinning is likely the byproduct of her schooling experience, “again, remember I had a crappy education.” In fact, these lackluster and less than favorable experiences galvanized Autumn’s teaching philosophy, “I would say my philosophy is based on teaching in the opposite way that I was taught.” Instead of employing traditional methods common to standardized education, Autumn resorts to a kinesthetic approach that, “is very hands on, movement, action, groups, touching, feeling, smelling, designing projects, like, that’s the way that I teach, you know, like I’m one of those people.” In addition to the kinesthetic approach, she described a pedagogy that allows students to share knowledge:

Autumn: If I walk into a classroom and you could hear a pin drop, that is not a healthy classroom. I mean there's a time and place. Right? But like, at Franklin, I would do six to eight weeks units of study. Like, we did one on Indigenous Resistance, and we watched a documentary movie, and we did. Projects, and they wrote papers and had to do short answer questions and rotations and posters and presentations.

Evidence in the case of Autumn suggests that she offered students a curriculum with a counternarrative, engaging assignments, and platforms for the dissemination of knowledge. Active participation and teaching students to take responsibility for their educational endowment is the antithesis of the banking concept (Freire, 1970). Moreover, during a focus group, case study participants discussed the importance of social justice in elementary
schooling. To this end, Autumn described the classroom as a critical space for the open exchange of ideas, “they're getting up and they're writing on the board and they're writing on this and they're doing project presentations and writing a poem about it. You know, and it's just engaging and it's real.”

Another example that embodies classroom practice as a forum for the open exchange of ideas is an integrated arts program. When asked to describe the educational climate of her school, Autumn documented a paradigm shift which in part addresses question number three of this project: What structures prohibit or provide proliferation for the integration of social justice in contemporary classrooms? Unfortunately, due to her progressive lens, Autumn has endured a set of repercussions. For example, in opposition to standardized testing, Autumn shared a narrative that resulted in reprimands:

Because I have a big mouth and organized people, when they started doing the what was it, the standardized test, the PARCC test, I found out from a bunch of teachers that all the parent had to do was sign off. So, my whole fifth grade class, except for two kids, didn't take the test that first year it came out. I do shit like that, like subversive.

In contrast, Autumn is currently at a site where the school principal appears to support her positionality and even endorses critical spaces where students can publicly express their knowledge. Principals that support and endorse the social justice orientation should be viewed as allies and assets that carve out space for the implementation of counternarrative. Notwithstanding, other teacher participants expressed umbrage to administrative oversight. For example, as a result of student advocacy, the site administrator attempted to silence Selena when a student was being abused, and Santiago was reprimanded for protecting
students from the school-to-prison pipeline. Thereby, data suggests that administrative 
support for social justice education appears to be an anomaly. All things being equal, the 
following excerpt alludes to both a supportive administrator and performance-based 
programming that is a function of classrooms operating as critical spaces for the 
dissemination of student knowledge:

She's a very different principal. She's very cool and humble and connects with 
families and looks people in the eye and eats with the EA’s and just very 
different than any principal. She doesn't power trip. She cancels meetings all 
the time. She's just awesome. So, I would say we have a lot of cool stuff going 
on. Like, we have our integrated arts program that I help organize here. So, 
we have a lot of community events and presentations. We have a dance class. 
We have two PE. teachers. The other teacher teaches dance, and she has, like, 
a disco ball because we have this integrated arts program. So, it's a very cool 
school. In general, I'd say it's like, a little notch up from the other schools.

A social justice orientation often welcomes unintended consequences and possible 
harassment. My teaching tenure is not immune to repercussions. Notwithstanding, as Dr. 
Martin Luther King Jr. expressed, “The time is always right to do what is right” (Anderson, 
n.d.).

Memory: During my second year of practice, I vividly remember a student named 
Ramon. This particular school year, I was teaching a group of 3rd and 4th grade 
students in a bilingual classroom. Ramon was a 3rd grade student that demonstrated 
tremendous work ethic, consistently displayed an affinity for education, and showcased 
a beautiful smile; however, the student struggled to negotiate transitions. For example,
between visiting the library and returning to the classroom, Ramon demonstrated inappropriate behaviors that often-entailed sexual misconduct. After several interventions with district personnel and a welfare check from Child Youth Families Department, the school principal ordered firefighters to scare Ramon with threats of arrest as a result of experiencing a medical emergency. Unfortunately, the student endured a seizure during our literacy block, and I immediately called 911 for assistance. However, due to a punitive policy, the site administrator believed that Ramon had staged the event and made the executive decision to employ tactics from the school of scared straight. In a kneejerk reaction, I vehemently interjected during the diatribe by challenging their motives. As a result of student advocacy, I was subjected to constant surveillance under the premise of walkthroughs.

Critical spaces must move beyond schools and connect students to the community. The purpose of social justice education is to ultimately cultivate a more egalitarian society. When addressing holistic education, Autumn connected community and student knowledge in the following excerpt:

Eduardo: If you can maybe piggyback off of that a little bit, you kind of just mentioned one of the ties that you're building with your connection up in Santa Fe and how you go about that, how essential that is to providing a holistic education that has a social justice orientation.

Autumn: One of their spring final projects was they had to write like a social justice book and they got, the class got to choose the theme. And then they all like got in groups and drew a book. And then we would go out into the community, and they would put a copy of the, they would each do a page, a
front and back, and it would be part of the story. And then we put it together as a book, and then we'd go around and walk and give it to like the *llantería*, you know, the tire shop. We'd go give it to the *panadería* [bakery]. You know and give the copy of the book all over the community. Library, we get three copies of the library.

Providing students with a platform to disseminate, articulate, and perform their expertise is a concrete pedagogy elementary teachers can employ into their practice. It offsets the banking concept (Freire, 1970), provides an authentic platform for the epistemology of student knowledge, and allows community stakeholders to co-construct meaning.

In the case of Santiago, data suggests that critical spaces are a pedagogical staple of his classroom practice. The special education teacher explained that Black history and the celebration of Black accomplishment should not be relegated to the shortest month of the year, “we make a bad example, a mistake of Black history by confining it to February, we need to, should celebrate Black culture all the time.” Artifacts in the case of Santiago do indeed reflect Black History Month; however, this is the byproduct of the data collection process. Herein, the majority of artifacts for this study were primarily collected in March and April of 2023 which happens to coincide with the conclusion of Black History Month. Figure 13 (See Figure 13. *Special education student, Asani, preparing a writing sample shared by Santiago*) is an outline authored by a Black fourth-grade student that receives services for both reading and writing. As a function of data analysis, Santiago provided context for the following artifact by explaining that Asani is a Congolese refugee that speaks Swahili and lives with extended family. Unfortunately, the student’s mother passed away a few years ago and it’s believed that her father is incarcerated.
In lieu of hardships, the student demonstrated coherent application of the writing process, “they actually work on an outline, and then I then edit and revise the rough draft. They’ll recorrect it and will write it on the final form. And this is what this young female
student had to say on the topic.” Further deliberations revealed that Asani is also passionate about environmental justice:

Santiago: She told us about dirty water, unclean to drink, how hard it is to get [clean water] in her home country, she really really cares about recycling. Asani and the other students help me empty recycling bins every Friday, we go to all the classrooms and we get the bins, she always volunteers.

In addition to the writing process, students in this setting are frequently required to share their findings via presentation.

Sander et al., (2002) describe several benefits associated with expositions. For example, the authors explain that presentations are a platform that yields to the epistemology of student knowledge, galvanizes focus and motivation, results in self-sufficiency, and teaches collaboration, “They [presentations] promote the sharing of information and enthusiasm amongst peers. They encourage autonomy and independent learning. They provide opportunities for the development of team skills and listening skills” (Sander et al., 2002, p. 78). Along this continuum, Santiago explains that students in special education often struggle to articulate in written format. In fact, all eleven students from his case load have accommodations for reading and writing. Presentations in the case of Santiago also suggests that critical spaces for the open exchange of ideas are a function of agency:

Santiago: we cannot text or just send emojis, they need to write, we need to teach them how to defend oneself, but they also, we need to teach them to speak and practice for full inclusion.
All things being equal, the following figure (See Figure 14. Asani, fourth-grade student, presenting visual aid for round table discussion shared by Santiago) is a presentation that hones public speaking.

**Figure 14**

Asani, fourth-grade student, presenting visual aid for round table discussion shared by Santiago

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I Have a Dream

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a compassionate and loving Civil Rights leader who fought tirelessly for human rights equality. He had a dream that everything could be equal, all people can be equal.

In all states, blacks and whites should be equal to be together. He gave up his seat to a white woman because that was the rule. They had to follow the rules because that’s why he had to give up his seat to a white person. They had to be true. All people should have the same amount of freedom that some people had the same freedom. They had to follow the rules and if they didn’t, they would be in big, big trouble. They should be fair and equal and equal.
For students in special education, presentations are a platform for the dissemination of knowledge. Moreover, public speaking aligns with benchmarks ordained by Common Core State Standards, “report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace” (English Language Arts Standards, Speaking & Listening Grade 4 | Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). During the data collection process, Santiago provided artifact analysis. Here, he explained the scope and sequence of a writing program designed for students in special education. According to Santiago, students first address headings and subheadings. Thereafter, students are instructed to tackle elements associated with the writing process. In this example, the assignment required student research, writing conventions, and moreover the presentation of findings. As evidenced in the works of Asani, presentations polish communication skills, ignites creativity, and often leads to social consciousness. Classrooms as critical spaces for the open exchange of ideas should be viewed as a concrete pedagogy for the teaching of social justice. Although case study data did not reveal themes of leadership, I believe that forums and opportunities for public speaking creates space for the next generation of leaders.

Chapter Summary

In closing, all teacher participants in my study conceptualized social justice in a distinctive manner. A concise definition for the discipline has been evasive. Nonetheless, teacher profiles described guiding principles salient to social justice education. This orientation is likely the byproduct of lived experience – perception is a lived reality. As a result of their social justice orientation, teachers have endured institutionalized oppression and have learned to circumvent systemic structures. Teachers must recognize inherent risks
associated with the social justice orientation. For example, some teachers speak to repercussion associated with challenging the status quo. On the other hand, others reported an endorsement from administration; principals who genuinely support the plight of social justice education seem to be outliers. Evidence suggests that curricular design might be the nexus between theory and pedagogy. Findings also allude to validation, funds of knowledge, lived experience, cultivating an ethos of belonging, and valuing the epistemology of students. In all such cases, teachers have successfully found niches that allocate space for the implementation of social justice. Autonomy over content development is viewed as a luxury afforded to non-traditional teachers. Regardless of teaching assignment, the above themes appear to ameliorate social justice education. This chapter explained how elementary teachers use transformative pedagogy to navigate standardization.
Chapter 5

Discussion

For contemporary education, the nexus between social justice and urban schooling is a pressing challenge. When examining educational outcomes in communities of color, explanations for academic performance are often couched in deficit or socioeconomic status. Garcia and Weiss (2017) employ income inequality to document disparities between economically disadvantaged students and counterparts with a higher social economic status. Although educational attainment remains a channel for upward social mobility, teachers cannot control markets or the earning potential of parents. Thus, the quandary for elementary schooling is navigating standardization and roadblocks that prevent the proliferation of social justice. My lived experience as an urban elementary teacher informed this dissertation.

Teaching for social justice in an era of standardization is a difficult proposition. An extensive tenure in the arena of education was the prelude for this examination. In lieu of a social justice orientation, some teachers, similar to myself, might be uncertain of next steps. At a visceral level, we understand what social justice is not and theoretical frameworks help us unpack systemic structures of oppression. Notwithstanding, educators with a progressive lens often have best intentions and might express desires for transformative change but lack concrete pedagogies. As a result, this study examined how elementary teachers implement social justice. The purpose of this descriptive inquiry was to explore the pedagogical underpinnings of teachers with a social justice orientation. Table 4 (See Table 4. Pedagogical underpinnings for elementary schooling: A comparison between the social justice orientation and expectations for standardized schooling) provides a comparative lens of guiding principles that inform what it means to teach social justice.
### Table 4

**Pedagogical underpinnings for elementary schooling: A comparison between the social justice orientation and expectations for standardized schooling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Justice Orientation</th>
<th>Standardized Schooling Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amplifies equity of voice as a reflective practice of inclusivity: environment</td>
<td>Instructor is the sole purveyor of knowledge – similar to the banking concept (Freire, 1970)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultivates an ethos of belonging and student advocacy;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building rapport and community ties: lived experience, mobilizing funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992);</td>
<td>In accordance to analytics, the teacher justifies deficit perspective (Valenzuela, 1999), views community as lacking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for a counternarrative curriculum: sensible solution, alternative perspective,</td>
<td>Teachers with a traditional framework primarily teach from a prescribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fosters critical thinking;</td>
<td>curriculum and demonstrates fidelity to standardization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom and community as critical spaces for the open exchange of ideas: students</td>
<td>Without hesitation reproduces dominant culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>publicly share knowledge, values the epistemology of students (Yosso, 2005),</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students can articulate, disseminate, and perform their knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With further implications for elementary schooling, the aim of this study was to provide elementary teachers with concrete pedagogies for the teaching of social justice. This study fulfilled an empirical gap within the educational literature. While interpreting data on pedagogies, personal vignettes contributed to data analysis. As previously expressed, case studies do not operate in social vacuums and are not an isolated phenomenon. Thereby, personal narratives provide context and documented pedagogies make sense to me because of my lived experience. In this chapter, I summarize the significance of this research, implications of findings, and my vision for social justice education as a recommendation.

**Summary of Study**

A profound passion for social justice education and a desire to ameliorate educational outcomes in communities of color galvanized this study. This examination sought to better understand how elementary teachers enact social justice. In an era of accountability, how are teachers with a social justice orientation navigating standardization and overcoming bureaucratic barriers. A deep dive into the literary canon revealed a paradox – literature for social justice education is overwhelmingly theoretical and fails to provide practitioners with concrete pedagogies. Moreover, a review of literature reveals a scholarly cavity for elementary social justice. Studies that examine social justice at the elementary level are scant. I frequently deconstruct institutions such as the educational system by using conceptual frameworks that align with a critical lens; however, such frameworks seldom reconstruct or lead to sensible solutions. Theoretical works formulate underpinnings, but the absence of concrete pedagogies likely contributes to the conceptual ambiguity for social justice education. Empirical works that specifically address pedagogies for the teaching of social justice makes teaching in an era of standardization even more laborious. To alleviate
this conundrum, the purpose of this study was to provide elementary teachers with sensible solutions that are organized as concrete pedagogies. Some constituents, including teachers often perceive that elementary students are too young to address issues of social justice, “many teachers hold a misperception of children’s capacity to understand race and racism, researchers argue that children consciously and subconsciously develop racial knowledge through socialization as early as three years of age” (Park et al., 2022, p.1).

My study employed case study methodology to address the misalignment between theoretical research and concrete pedagogies. Qualitative design yielded rich data and vivid description of pedagogy. There are copious conceptualizations for the discipline of social justice. As a result, a descriptive case study approach was deemed most effective. Findings are not generalizable, but instead offer a collection of lived experience and elementary pedagogies. In order to generate vivid description, interview questions were scaffolded and purposefully overlapped which inductively allowed themes to emerge. This examination was bound to urban schooling, five teacher participants, and their practice. Each teacher participant fulfilled a different role within elementary schooling and occupied a teaching tenure of 11 years or more of experience.

The data collection process lasted a duration of eight weeks. Coding commenced from the initial stages which allowed me to maintain a pulse on data. Early analysis of each case study participant yielded themes that cut across chunks of data. From indexing data, four central themes emerged that connected teacher participants. Data did not reveal a ubiquitous definition for social justice; notwithstanding, case study participants enumerated guiding principles as pedagogical underpinnings. Conceptualization of social justice varied as it relates to lived experience. The narrative of social justice continuously evolves and
conceptualizing how teacher participants define the discipline has been a fluid endeavor. Inequity is a virus that plagues society and if a social ill affects society, it’ll likely implicate the institution of education. Thereby, teachers with a social justice orientation are encouraged to carefully synthesize best practice. Project data suggest that we need to continuously evaluate and redefine what it means to teach for social justice.

Implications of Findings

From this study, many memories, students, and colleagues, intersected with these case study participants. I have a hunch that guiding principles for social justice amplified equity of voice as a reflective practice of inclusivity. For example, student comfort and sense of belonging facilitated community cultural wealth as described by Yosso (2005). Selena employing culturally relevant literature such as *Becoming Kid Quixote: A True Story of Belonging in America* allowed struggling readers in reading intervention to demonstrate familial capital. This communal form of capital allows students in communities of color to leverage their lived experience. Resistance capital is about collective agency as displayed by Santiago. The teacher participant shared a narrative that described implications associated with the school-to-prison pipeline; however, student resistance is often a byproduct of historical legacy. Historical record is empirical evidence of resistance capital. The high school walkouts of 1968 during the Chicano/a movement are a prime example of resistance capital, “transformative resistant capital includes cultural knowledge of the structures of racism and motivation to transform such oppressive structures” (Yosso, 2005, p. 81).

Throughout the study, the teacher participants expressed a profound understanding of what constitutes as social justice and work tirelessly to provide students with a quality education. I call this work, the labor of love. With further implications for collective agency,
data suggests that these teacher participants genuinely value community, which aligns with building rapport and establishing community ties. All case study participants are highly qualified teachers that hold extensive teaching experience and academic credentials. In all such cases, teacher participants elect to work in communities of color and to provide students in urban settings with a social justice education. A profound ethos for their community is evidenced when three of the five case study participants either currently have or have had their offspring attend schools where they work. Instead of sending their kids to more affluent schools equipped with more resources, these teachers are walking the talk. This pedagogy is concrete evidence of commitment. Far too often, teachers project a social justice orientation, champion communities of color in their philosophical statements, and elocute concern for urban schooling but select environments with more reputable metrics for their biological children. To the contrary, teacher participants of this study are willing to invest in their teaching community by ensuring that their practice is congruent to their pedagogical underpinnings. Teacher participants view the community as an asset and demonstrate a commitment to transformative change. Real-world application for building rapport of is what Freire (1970) calls praxis – a cyclical process where action is embedded in theory and reflection.

For me, counternarrative is the most powerful and bullet-proof theme. It’s a sensible solution and concrete pedagogy that’s applicable to any grade-level and teaching assignment. Whether one is teaching a pullout course or operates in a traditional role, counternarrative is fluid and offers marginalized communities with alternative perspective. It’s dexterity counters microaggressions encountered by communities of color, capsizes mainstream narratives, situates students in a place to deconstruct and reconstruct their lived realities.
Counternarrative fosters opportunities to develop critical voices and hone critical thinking. This theme equips students with requisite tools to undue official discourse, knowledge, and how to unpack systems of oppression. When carefully constructed, counternarrative is a bullet-proof pedagogy for the implementation of curriculum grounded in social justice. However, teachers with a social justice orientation must learn to use the tools of standardization to justify counternarrative. This is best achieved through benchmarks. Along this vein, teachers are encouraged to create units that teach topics of social justice by anchoring lessons in prescribed standards. Knowing how to defend and articulate justification significantly alleviates repercussion associated with standardization.

The classroom and community as critical spaces for the open exchange of ideas is about communication. To address controversial topics, this theme is about language acquisition and analytical skills. A forum that allows for the epistemology of student knowledge also teaches students to defend positionality. As a member of LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens), Eleuterio Escobar, a civil rights activist that fought for the educational Rights of Mexican American students in Texas believed that an illiterate person could not articulate their perspective, could not defend their nation, neighborhood, or themselves (Muñoz, 2007). To this end, critical spaces are platforms that allow students to refine the acquisition of language skills and disseminate knowledge. Cummins (1999) differentiates and clarifies Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). This discrepancy merits a better understanding of communication:

- Distinct is not the same as saying that they are separate or acquired in different ways.
- Developmentally they are not necessarily separate; all children acquire their
conceptual foundation (knowledge of the world) through conversational interactions in the home. Similarly, discussion about conceptual issues is an important, and in many situations essential, way of deepening our understanding of concepts and developing critical literacy. (Cummins, 1999, p. 4)

Accordingly, conversational fluency and academic language must be distinguished with variables of proficiency with native language, age, and support systems. Along this continuum, a forum for the open exchange of ideas is scaffolded and situationally based. These support systems hone listening skills, key gestures, notes body language, and pitch which makes conveyed information comprehensible.

Chapter two of this dissertation addresses conceptual frameworks and a review of literature. This chapter provides justification for an interdisciplinary approach. A critical lens operated as the chassis of this study (Bronner, 2017; Jennings & Lynn, 2005, and Freire, 1970). According to these frameworks, conflict between the enterprise of education and marginalized communities is inevitable. As an institution, standardized education is a systemic reproduction of dominant culture which ensures hegemonic values (hooks, 1994). By default, regardless of ideology, teaching is a political act and silence on issues of social justice is a form of compliance (Sinha, 2016; Ayers, 1998). In accordance to this premise, teachers with a social justice orientation elect to engage in civil disobedience and enact transformative pedagogies, “educators, at all levels, must create teaching and learning experiences that allow for the development of a critical consciousness and take a pedagogical stance to advocate for justice and equity in order to challenge and reverse the perpetuated injustices” (Park, 2022, p. 9). To this end, I discuss study implications with a critical lens.
This examination of social justice education was facilitated by the following three research questions:

1. How do elementary teachers approach topics of social justice in their curriculum? How are elementary teachers conceptualizing social justice?
2. What are the pedagogical considerations for teachers in urban schooling?
3. What structures prohibit or provide proliferation for the integration of social justice in contemporary classrooms?

Each research question is discussed as it pertains to themes that emerged from the data collection process. This examination of social justice education has implications for elementary pedagogy, curriculum design, the teacher’s role in navigating bureaucratic barriers, in-service teachers, and teacher preparation programs.

**Theme One Implications: Amplifies Equity of Voice as a Reflective Practice of Inclusivity**

Equity of voice as a concept is often couched as cachet. Praxis education as defined by Freire (1970) is a process of reflection, theory, and action, “world and action are intimately interdependent, But action is human only when it is not dichotomized from reflection” (p. 53). Along this vein, equity of voice cannot be weaponized as a slogan of progressive education. To the contrary, equity of voice is about service and action as evident of case study data. For example, Selena’s relentless pursuit of justice to ensure the welfare of students is not a contractual obligation but instead a pedagogical underpinning of the social justice orientation. In the case of Selena, silence was not an option and did not align with her understanding of student advocacy. Dolores eloquently explained that transformative reflection is an introspective process that needs to be internalized before its expressed is also an overt example of being a reflective practitioner, “we have to look at it from inside first.
before addressing it outward. Right! That's a big part of the transformation model, too, is that you have to start with your own transformation, and then you do it outwardly.” Santiago challenging ideologies associated with zero tolerance is another case of reflective practice that ensures inclusivity. Mallet (2016) documents the genealogy of zero tolerance by explaining that the policy emanated from the war on drugs during the 1980s but in schools the philosophy mandates “the application of severe predetermined consequences for unsafe or unacceptable student behaviors” (p. 21).

Anyone who has an extensive tenure in urban schooling understands that students enter the institution of education with a myriad of needs and lived encounters with issues of social justice. As a hobby, I love to tinker on cars. This profound passion has a childhood genesis. My father and I would work on broken vehicles – I mostly watched from the periphery. I have no professional training or mechanical expertise; however, I’m really good at taking things apart. To a certain degree, this is a form of deconstruction. My lived experience with automobiles has taught me that sometimes things don’t operate as they should in accordance to the owner’s manual. In most cases, it’s my error but in other situations it’s the byproduct of faulty parts. Analogous to automotives, teachers cannot account for every variable. Low octane fuel may hinder throttle response. In the same manner, classroom teachers unfortunately have little influence over the legislative branch and educational policies.

Notwithstanding, we have significant influence and power in cultivating an egalitarian classroom. Rather than overemphasize systemic structures of oppression, educators at the grassroots can create environments that reflect equity of voice. This theme has taught me that equity is about meeting student needs. As a system, education is often
reactionary. Instead of being passive practitioners, preemptive pedagogies are recommended. Evidence from all five teacher participants suggests that they provide supportive environments. In this light, teachers with a social justice orientation seldom want to teach for a dysfunctional system. Perhaps this explains why teachers seek asylum in non-traditional roles, like me, in Physical Education and others from this study. Transformative change isn’t an overnight phenomenon and often encompasses more obstacles. However, longitudinally, a commitment to equity could be the catalyst for systemic change. Similar to the vehicle metaphor, the educational system and its students will fuel transformative change when equity supports the needs of students. Equity of voice as a participation structure proliferates the integration of social justice which helped to answer question number three of this project: What structures prohibit or provide proliferation for the integration of social justice in contemporary classrooms?

**Theme Two Implications: Building Rapport and Community Ties**

Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic are vast. While social distancing, we learned that building rapport and community ties are difficult to maintain. Distance learning was paramount to public health; however, I fundamentally believe that learning is best achieved through a sociocultural exchange (Vygotsky, 1978). Regardless of format, these teacher participants employed lived experience, funds of knowledge, and validation to building rapport with students and other members of the community. This theme in part answered question number two: What are the pedagogical considerations for teachers in urban schooling?

The case study participants drew from their teaching tenure and lived realities as practitioners of urban schooling. Their experiences galvanized guiding principles and
fortified their social justice orientation. Narratives attest to how they navigate standardization and employ pedagogies that interrupt the status quo of standardized education. For example, Autumn shared a student narrative of building rapport grounded in lived experienced:

Autumn: I remember one girl, Priscilla, she wrote all about equality among women and men and she spoke directly to the fact that her mom has been in an abusive relationship with her father for many years. And, oh yeah, you know, when you give kids student voice, they are able to connect like their lives and lived experiences with what you're trying to learn. So, it actually sticks and it's like really powerful. So, I feel like if I don't hear my students voice and I don't see them and like know them, then I'm not actually teaching them.

Comparatively, the art literacy teacher champions funds of knowledge as a pedagogical method for building rapport. According to Abby, social justice education should “always build on what the students know. And they didn't use the term funds of knowledge, but it was always the idea of using student experiences to make learning relevant and meaningful to the students.” Moreover, funds of knowledge affirm the epistemology of student knowledge as expressed by Dolores, “You're validating all the different places that they come from, whether that's you're validating that their home ways of understanding. Is just as valid as another person's home.”

Nurturing community is a constructive pedagogy for communities of color. By creating household ties as philosophized by funds of knowledge students and other stakeholders are more likely to fully participate in schooling. In recent years, the state of New Mexico adopted community schools as a movement that provides holistic education, “Community schools are a whole child, comprehensive strategy to transform schools into
places where educators, local community members, families, and students work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development” (Bossarte, n.d.). At face value, community schools seem inclusive; however, it has been my experience that many schools operate as silos. Effective of the 2022-2023 school year, there are 91 community schools throughout the state. To this end, I currently teach at a community school. Herein, parents are not allowed entry, neighboring organizations must complete endless bureaucratic paperwork to implement programming, and teachers continue to conduct conferences and other meetings in the absence of face-to-face interaction. This antidotal observation is also echoed by Selena in the following excerpt:

Eduardo: Can you describe the overall cultural climate at this site? Like, what values does a learning environment project? And how does the school acknowledge heritage?

Selena: I'm going to give you the truth here. Our school wants to, really badly, but we don't. I think we say that we value our parents and our community. But when it comes down to it, we're not making the choices and decisions that are welcoming people into our school. So even for me, like the simple, the parents that want to walk their children in and don't want to drive them in, there's an opportunity for them to do that. And it becomes a fight between part of our staff that wants them to go in a certain way. And there is no leeway. And nope, you cannot park over here. So, it's like kind of nitpicking, really silly little things that then put the barriers on. So, then the families get upset. They don't want to come back over something really kind
of minor and basic. They say that they want to embrace the Hispanic community down here.

Seldom does the system yield to progressive ideology. Therefore, it is incumbent on teachers to unite beyond labor unions that far too often engage in concessions at the peril of teachers. Thereby, it is the professional duty of teachers to nurture community and unite with other like-minded teachers. It all starts with a courageous conversation. In sum, philosophically I believe that education is an enterprise of the community and should resemble the interests of the collective. An educational system that does not genuinely embrace members of the community is an institutionalized barrier that prohibits the implementation of social justice which addresses research question number three of this dissertation.

**Theme Three Implications: Planning for a Counternarrative Curriculum**

As previously indicated, the dearth of social justice research for elementary schooling is evident. Theoretical formulations are numerous, and the quandary for social justice education isn’t a case of conceptual frameworks but one of limited pedagogies. The ability to deconstruct mechanisms of oppression and challenge the status quo certainly have a function; however, the field of social justice education needs sensible solutions. As a result, the purpose of my study was to move beyond power structures and contribute to pedagogical underpinnings. Content that provides a counternarrative is a concrete pedagogy for circumventing standardization and should be viewed as a sensible solution. The counternarrative theme in part addresses research questions one and two of this project.

Content with counternarratives interrupt traditional methods for knowing. Textbooks, canned curriculum, and pedagogies that align with the reproduction of hegemonic values are prime examples of standardized education. As a result of laissez-faire economics, public
education is no longer an enterprise of communities but instead the proprietary property of conglomerates, “The largest publishing company in the U.S. is Pearson Education, with a revenue of $4.751 billion” (Mazur, 2023). To capsize canned curriculum, teacher participants designed content with a purpose of honoring the perspective of marginalized communities that far too often are silenced. A unit that addresses anti-racism as authored by Autumn is a prime example of counternarrative. Along this continuum, Autumn explained that programming in her practice does not replicate the traditional literary canon, “We're not reading Shakespeare. We're not reading translated. We're not reading the literature… we're learning about Bolivia. We're learning about indigenous rebellion in Bolivia. We're learning about Chiapas.”

The counternarrative theme also fosters critical thinking as evident of curriculum design authored by Abby. Teachers with a social justice orientation often overemphasize social movements and historical figures – both definitely constitute counternarrative. However, Abby explains how literature can be deployed to cover a range of social justice topics:

Abby: Right, now there are the most fabulous children's books out there dealing with everything now. It's a dream as a teacher to have the kind of books we have now about water keepers and Native Americans and every African American experiences Asian American experiences. Biographies. LGBTQ families. So, we have the best texts out there and then you have like this movement that's afraid of those texts but as educators in New Mexico we still have access to those texts. So, literature is such a good way to engage in those conversations.
The development of curriculum is certainly a pedagogy for circumventing standardization but programming with a counternarrative ultimately should foster critical thinking and teaching students to become critical consumers of information is chief to an education with a social justice orientation. Counternarrative can also be contextualized as a classroom pedagogy. hooks (2003) authored a piece titled *Teaching Community* to illustrate personal narratives for navigating institutionalized oppression. The author makes a compelling argument by situating classrooms as conduits for transformative change, “students in the progressive classroom were learning how to think critically. They were learning to open their minds. And the more they expanded their critical consciousness the less likely they were to support ideologies of domination (hooks, 2003, p. 8). According to hooks, classrooms are perhaps the most powerful platform to launch counternarratives.

*Theme Four Implications: Classroom and Community as Critical Spaces for the Open Exchange of Ideas*

Teachers cannot be the sole purveyors of knowledge. Opportunities for the dissemination of knowledge was an inductive theme that emerged from indexing data. Platforms for the epistemology of student knowledge is the antithesis of banking education (Freire, 1970). Communication is chief to the human experience and for what it means to be an engaged constituent. A quantitative study conducted by Herbein et al., (2018) concluded that even young students benefit from public speaking. Furthermore, the authors explain that “the capability to communicate competently is essential for personal contentment, academic achievement, and professional career success” (Herbein et al., 2018, p. 158). What’s more, multiple disciplines ordain communication skills. For example, Pugalee (2001) cites communication skills as essential to number sense, “when students are given the opportunity
to communicate about math they engage thinking skills and processes that are crucial in
developing math literacy” (p. 296). Forums for the open exchange of ideas allow students to
practice listening and public speaking. Students enter these critical spaces that allocate a
presentation arena prepared to articulate their funds of knowledge, lived experience, and
expertise. As a result of presentations, students conduct research which is another requisite
skill for becoming a critical consumer of information. Additionally, students often display
visuals to augment presentations as evident of artifacts shared by Autumn and Santiago. The
theme of classroom and community as critical spaces for the open exchange of ideas helped
answer research question number one: How do elementary teachers approach topics of social
justice in their curriculum?

Presenting to an entire audience is not always feasible due to time constraints and in
other situations students may experience discomfort with public speaking. Roundtable
discussions as evidenced in the pedagogical underpinnings of Santiago allows student to
practice public speaking while alleviating stress from whole group discussions. This critical
space provides students an opportunity to voice their ideas. To a certain degree, the scope
and sequence of whole group presentations are still facilitated by teachers; nonetheless,
roundtable discussions cultivate a more organic conversation that allow audience members to
participate. Roundtable discussions as critical spaces for sharing knowledge still require
structure to guide conversation. For example, the conversation objective and discussion topic
should be clearly defined. This participation structure helps students stay on topic and avoids
unnecessary tangents.

Thematic units have been a staple of my practice. Units of study often conclude with
roundtable discussions. In this format, students are allowed to present their expertise to
several groups, and audience members are given writing prompts which provide presenters with feedback and activates listening skills. Nevertheless, roundtable discussions still need guidance and coaching. For the past five years, I have been a practitioner of Physical Education. To this end, students in fifth grade are required to address body systems. In order to address this standard, students are heterogeneously grouped, and each collaborative cohort presents findings on a specific body system to younger students in a roundtable discussion format. Physical Education is perhaps the most kinesthetic discipline, as a result, roundtable discussions also encompass “picture walks” and students are instructed to perform a locomotor skill such as skipping to rotate to a different presentation every eight to ten minutes. This pedagogy allows students to express movement, learn about different body systems, and interact with new presenters. Student communication organized in a roundtable format is essential for time management, which is an issue that addresses research question number three: What structures prohibit or provide proliferation for the integration of social justice in contemporary classrooms? As a pullout teacher, I get 45 minutes with each cohort of students twice a week. Therefore, time constraints significantly affect continuity and hinders the full integration of critical spaces; however, roundtable discussions are a sensible solution that allow students to disseminate knowledge. In sum, roundtable discussions empower students to take responsibility for their learning, hone communication skills, provides students with a platform, and is engaging for all stakeholders.

**Recommendation for Teacher Preparation Programs**

The institution of academia champions social justice and often postulates concepts of social justice in their vision statements. However, for teacher preparation programs, social justice must move from philosophical declarations and become a living document that
adequately prepares pre-service candidates with requisite tools to teach in communities of color. Three of the five teacher participants said that their teacher preparation programs did not thoroughly address issues of social justice. For example, interview data in the case of Autumn revealed a less than favorable experience, “I guess, three teachers that I thought were awesome, and the rest of them, it was just kind of like checking a box.” Along this vein, our discussions grounded in court verdicts in holding the educational system accountable for educational malpractice, Santiago said the following on teacher preparation:

   Eduardo: I guess my follow up question is, do you think teacher preparation programs are also or should be held responsible for providing this type of coursework to pre-service teachers?

   Santiago: Yeah, definitely! I think any person who wants to be a teacher needs to have that benefit of learning of what social justice is. Even in their first years of college. They need to be prepared, and I think we need to do a better work at that in the college level. You don't have to wait to get your bachelor's degree to learn what social justice is. Start with your first year, your basics. I think there needs to be more courses on social justice and equity for these rookie teachers, these youngsters that are coming.

   Contributing to this analysis of teacher preparation programs, Dolores cannot pinpoint coursework that specifically addressed social justice, “Teacher prep program feel like I got a little bit of everything. I have my dual license in general and special ed, so I think that influenced it, but I can't think, of coursework, in particular.”

   These teacher narratives should be alarming to teacher preparation programs in how they are preparing pre-service teachers to teach in diverse settings and how they are
equipping teacher candidates with concrete pedagogies for the teaching of social justice. As a sensible recommendation, this study offers embedding assignments that encompass social justice into coursework. Picower (2012) authored a book titled *Practice What You Teach: Social Justice Education in the Classroom and the Streets* to address institutionalized barriers. In this piece, the author provides the following four tactics of survival: safe spaces for the exchange of pedagogies, camouflaging social justice via integration, critical consciousness, and an open declaration of the social justice orientation. For me, a safe space allows teachers to engage in courageous conversations without fear of repercussions from administrators. In this platform, teachers are able to share pedagogies, resources, and unite in the struggle. Camouflaging operates in a subversive manner by sabotaging canned curriculums and embedding counternarrative. Herein, teachers negotiate the official discourse of school but, “camouflaged their social justice pedagogy within their classrooms by using tactics such as integrating it with the mandated curriculum or substituting alternative materials” (Picower, 2012, p. 55). Critical consciousness as a survival tactic equips members of the social justice movement with requisite tools to navigate oppression. Instead of operating in obscurity, teachers deploying the fourth tactic openly reject standardization; however, this declaration is often subject to reprimands.

During my teaching tenure, I have had the opportunity to mentor pre-service and newbie teachers. Inexperienced teachers often feel overwhelmed and unprepared for the wrath of standardization. Thereby, they often succumb to canned curriculum. In other situations, they might camouflage their social justice orientation and before too long are subconsciously projecting deficit. To avoid pedagogical calamities, I encourage inexperienced and tenured teachers to use the official discourse of schooling to negotiate
curriculum. By balancing official discourse and guiding principles for social justice education, teachers will have a pedagogical anchor to circumvent the rigors of standardization. In addition to official discourse, teacher preparation programs should reevaluate coursework. A recent study of pre-service teachers and the plight for social justice revealed unpreparedness and fear of reprisal, “a range of feelings, from anxiety, unpreparedness, and fear, to confidence about integrating the SJS into their future teaching in socio-politically situated schools (Davis & Jeffery, 2021, p. 9). As a doctoral student, I taught a social studies methodology course which required pre-service teachers to design a social studies unit that was grounded in social justice. The purpose of this assignment was to equip future teachers with a unit of study that conveyed social justice prior to entering the arena of education. Figure 15 (Social justice in social studies methods course, teacher preparation program) is a syllabus snapshot of this capstone project that embeds social justice.
Figure 15

Social justice in social studies methods course, teacher preparation program

Social Studies Unit (25%): May 4th to May 15th

The objective of this assignment is to develop curriculum that is both culturally relevant and teaches social justice in the social studies milieu. Throughout the semester we will carefully examine issues seminal to social justice via current events. Of the four core content areas, the discipline of social studies is best situated to teach social justice. However, contemporary curriculums in the arena of social studies and literacy are either poorly constructed to address issues of social justice in communities of color and/ or teach lessons of inequality at a surface level. For this reason, members of this learning community will engineer one social justice unit that organically segues social studies instruction. Possibilities are vast; however, if assistance in selecting a topic of interest is needed please do not hesitate to ask clarifying questions in advance of this assignment. Further information and details concerning this capstone assignment will be provided in proceeding weeks. In the interim, entertain the following considerations:

✓ What social justice topic(s) will this unit teach?
✓ Does this unit align with themes ordained by the National Council for the Social Studies? Does this matter?
✓ What about the New Mexico State Standards for the Social Studies?
✓ What grade level do I intend to teach? For the purpose of this unit, pinpoint at least two grade-levels.
✓ What are the implications of a cultural relevant curriculum?
✓ Which value system is disseminated during instruction?
✓ What is the function of technology in this unit?
✓ How do I calibrate for accommodations and modifications (IEPs)?
✓ Does the unit adequately address English Language Learners?
✓ Which tools will this unit require? (e.g. maps, globes, compass,

At the conclusion of this course, you will be submitting a comprehensive unit that connects social justice to the discipline of social studies. Final products will require the creation of a Google Classroom.

In TASC: Standard 4, Standard 7, Standard 6, and Standard 8
Preemptive Pedagogy for In-Service Teachers

Social justice education is often reactionary, a response to a movement, injustice, or event. To the contrary, instead of reactionary, this visionary recommendation is what I call preemptive pedagogy. I started this project with a question: How can social justice become a staple of elementary schooling? This recommendation validates and hopefully inspires teachers to persevere in light of bureaucratic barriers. Systemic oppression should not be minimized or discarded. Research that addresses systemic structures is plentiful (Hytten & Bettez, 2011; hooks, 1994; Vincent, 2003). However, most of this work examines the systemic organization of education. This scholarship is salient and significantly contributes to our understanding of social justice. Notwithstanding, my work invites teachers to transform their practice. I contend that pedagogies for social justice would improve schooling conditions for communities of color and other marginalized students. With 15 years of practice, I often ask students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders the following questions: What is the purpose of education? What would you like to learn? How can we improve as teachers? Ironically, many respond with an opportunity to thrive and engaging lessons that mean something. My entire teaching tenure has been in communities of color; however, I cannot speak for all groups. Instead, I can only express what Yosso (2005) calls aspirational capital and yield to the desires of urban schooling. My efforts were originally aimed at marginalized students, but this recommendation informs in-service teachers.

This examination of social justice education was inspired by my teaching experience in elementary schooling. Teaching in an era of standardization led me to the full realization encountered by many teachers, the implementation of social justice is a difficult proposition. Canned curriculums, systemic structures that prohibit the proliferation of social justice, and
the lack of concrete pedagogies for circumventing standardization is taxing, leads to a state of alienation, teachers seeking asylum in non-traditional roles, such as becoming pullout teachers, and in some cases leaving the field all together. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act in theory replaced the infamous NCLB act of 2001; however, the new piece of legislation did not alleviate standardization. To the contrary, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the legislative branch reauthorized the educational policy which, “brought even greater challenges to states in terms of complying with the federal law…re-establishing school accountability requirements and suggesting how states could improve their educational systems” (Walsh et al., 2022). For the foreseeable future, it’s safe to infer that the rigors of standardization will persist. Making matters worse, traditional avenues like professional development at the district level and teacher preparation programs will likely do little to remedy the plight for social justice. Nonetheless, this study offers professional discretion as a recommendation to aid and justify the teaching of social justice.

As a result of teaching assignment, these five case study participants have more autonomy over curriculum and pedagogical sovereignty. Applying for such positions is not a sensible solution or necessarily recommended despite dexterity over content and pedagogy. This diaspora of teachers would further exacerbate shortages. Instead of seeking alternative positions within the educational landscape, I offer teacher discretion as a form of agency. Teachers at the grassroots must resist the top-down approach from administrators, district personnel that mandate standardization, state bureaucrats, federal entities, and other sources that are disconnected from the community. We must remind hegemonic powers, that we the teachers are licensed practitioners. Swinging the pedagogical pendulum towards teacher discretion carves out space for the implementation of social justice. At face value, resistance
might appear cavalier; however, trailblazers are needed for transformative change. Believe it or not, teacher discretion levied through the proper channels is a powerful pedagogy.

**Memory:** The memory bank reminds me how powerful teacher discretion is. At a previous site, I was a member of IC (Instructional Council), where a certain faction of teachers, school principal, and a few parents were trying to dismantle bilingual education. The debate predated other administrators and perseverated for years. Bilingual teachers cited the work of Thomas and Collier (1997) and opposition projected deficit grounded in data driven instruction. Diatribes concluded when bilingual teachers in a subversive manner bypassed the union and invited counsel from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Herein, the student advocates, I presume attorneys, informed the governing body that is IC that bilingual students under the equal protection clause were entitled to bilingual education.

Instantaneously, the bilingual debate ceased. It’s been ten years since I left that school; however, to the best of my knowledge it’s one of few schools in the area that still has a dual language program. It’s cliché to state, “teachers know their students best” but in most cases this is certainly a fact of urban schooling. The point of sharing this narrative is to illuminate teacher discretion as a form of agency.

Teachers have an obligation to determine what’s in the best interest of students. This concept is not nuanced. In fact, Sweeny (1981) documents the lack of professional discretion as reason for teacher burnout. The rigors of standardization intensified post NCLB and have for all intents and purposes irradicated teacher discretion. Professional discretion is a common practice in many disciplines. Ponnert and Svensson (2016) address the implications of standardization in human services:
By highlighting the role of professionals within a field influenced by organisational demands and market endeavour, this article contributes to the understanding of increased standardisation as a way to reduce uncertainty and enhance legitimacy for human service organisations, but at the expense of traditional professional discretion. (p. 586)

Elementary teachers have credentials and valuable experience that at the bare minimum grants latitude to determine what’s in the best interest of students. Discretion aligns with autonomy over content and mobilizes best practice. Professional discretion is what Spencer (1884) sought to determine in a piece titled “What Knowledge is of Most Worth?”

Ensuring that all students receive what is needed for academic success is the centrifugal force of teacher discretion. To some, delegating judgement is a subjective practice that, “enables teachers to selectively manipulate students’ test scores by ‘bumping up’ certain students over key grade cutoffs” (Diamond & Persson, 2017, p. 1). This premise assumes that other anchors of data are not valid, which reinforces standardization. Notwithstanding, if this premise of subjectivity is correct, quantitative measures are also subject to manipulation. On the other hand, mismanagement of discretion is always a possibility. For example, teachers justifying oppressive pedagogies under the guise of discretion is a slippery slope.

**Memory:** As a middle school student, I experienced oppressive discretion. Students in 8th grade were required to take Physical Science, and I recall being reprimanded for writing in cursive and for using ink to draw diagrams. When I attempted to explain that it was an erasable pen, I received a one game suspension from the school’s basketball team. Apparently, ink calligraphy challenged teacher discretion.
In sum, the educational system needs to operate in good faith and yield to professional discretion. Pedagogical discretion without hindrance or with limited objection would significantly advance social justice; however, it’s incumbent on teachers to pushback. We cannot camouflage discretion as expressed by Picower (2012) we must be preemptive in the quest for social justice.

**Limitations**

The interpretivist nature of qualitative design is a limitation of this case study. Interpretation and analysis were conducted by a doctoral student that applied a critical lens. Merriam (2002) documents subjectivity:

> The human instrument has shortcomings and biases that might have an impact on the study. Rather than trying to eliminate these biases or ‘subjectivities,’ it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data. (p. 5)

Nonetheless, analysis for this qualitative case study followed the scope and sequence enumerated by Creswell (2014). Although the researcher’s lived experience played a vital role in this study and interpretation is subject to positionality, triangulation of data increases validity.

The implementation of snowball sampling is another limitation. Selection of case study participants was intentional and sample size is small. Thereby, generalizability cannot be inferred. As a concept, social justice education has various principles that guide pedagogical underpinnings and should be viewed as a fluid experience. To conceptualize social justice in elementary schooling, this study employed an interdisciplinary approach. Guiding principles shared by teacher participants contributes to the conceptualization of
social justice education. Nevertheless, there are other frameworks that might further inform the discipline. To unpack eurocentrism and systems of domination that emerged as a result of colonization, Quijano (2000) coined coloniality of power as a theoretical framework. The work of the Peruvian sociologist might provide more pedagogical clarity.

Data collection tools was another limitation of this study. Although I was able to collect a wealth of data which aligns with the purpose of case study methodology, “Case study research is used to describe complex phenomena and how people interact with them. Case studies often generate thick, rich description of educational and social programs” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 243). This inquiry into elementary schooling yielded rich descriptive data necessary for qualitative design. Vivid description enables readers to determine if study findings are relevant to other contexts. All things being equal, other methods such as field observation might provide a different perspective and another anchor for triangulation. Unfortunately, research design and scheduling were not suitable for this dissertation project.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Public education should be an enterprise of the community and should not be the proprietary property of neoliberalism. The political economy is not the catalyst of this piece; however, corporations have for all intents and purposes privatized public education. Regardless of ideology, I believe that the majority of constituents would likely agree that a quality education benefits the collective. Public welfare is the building block of an education with a social justice orientation. With that understanding, if a social issue plagues society, it’ll likely have implications for the educational system. In theory, a system that is designed to emancipate should interrupt this vicious cycle or at the bare minimum object to the reproduction of oppressive pedagogies. To create a more egalitarian society, teachers must
boldly confront ideologies of domination with transformative pedagogies. This concept should commence from the onset and should be a staple of elementary schooling. Kicking the proverbial can up the academic ladder has done little to transform society. At this juncture, we’re simply engaging in collateral damage by delaying the deployment of social justice. Exposing students to concepts of social justice is not exclusively reserved for older students.

The dissertation process left me wondering how marginalized students benefit from a social justice curriculum. This study emphasized pedagogy and reflected teacher perspective; however, student voice from the elementary level would further inform what it means to teach social justice. Case study participants periodically shared anecdotal narratives from students describing the cost benefit ratio of an education with a social justice orientation. This inquiry was not designed to address student input. As a result, I yield to possibilities of conducting future research that encompasses student perspective. Empirical works that encapsulate elementary students and social justice is also limited. Concrete examples that describe student outlook would likely implicate teacher pedagogy. Future case studies of this type are needed to improve urban schooling. At the elementary level, study findings suggest that standardization mitigates the dissemination of social justice. As such, this study provides pedagogies for circumventing the rigors of standardization and guiding principles that conceptualize the social justice orientation.

In closing, the plight for social justice is in the struggle. There is victory and value in the struggle. Lessons of resiliency are embedded in the immigrant mentality. As a youth, I struggled to make sense of my lived reality. In fact, to a lesser degree, the struggle to disaggregate perspective perseverates. However, I now have a greater understanding of lived experience as a marginalized student, teacher, and researcher. I am optimistic that the closing
Memory: By the time that I was 10 years of age, I was already thinking critically about race relations and social economic status. Standards of living significantly changed when my parents divorced. I recall that post-divorce, my sister, mother, and I were forced to relocate into project housing. This subsidized housing complex, which remains a facility for low-income families was named after the famous baseball player, Jackie Robinson. Warm memories of this neighborhood ruminate. For example, I remember the neighborhood cholos (members of the Mexican American community that are willing to defend and protect neighborhood territory from outside influence) showing a young brother love, teaching me to defend myself, and instilling pride for heritage. Notwithstanding, this was also the first time that I witnessed gun violence and substance abuse. I recall drive-by shootings conducted by rival gangs and community members sniffing paint to numb the pain of barrio life. This housing development is located on the westside of El Paso, Texas – near the Franklin Mountains. As kids we would play basketball past twilight as we waited for the neighborhood light pole to reflect its shine on the goal. From the basketball court, we had a beautiful view that overshadowed the Rio Grande River and Interstate-10. Just south of these landmarks, we also had a vivid view of stratification. With the naked eye, one could see cardboard huts in Juarez, Mexico. Although I struggled to make sense of my social status, I recall sentiments of privilege embedded in American poverty. In a distorted understanding of conditions, I was grateful for calling the Jackie Robinson Memorial Apartments home, where at least I had running water,
adequate food, a structural facility to sleep, and many other amenities that paled in comparison to my counterparts from the other side of the border.

In the aftermath of fifth grade, my mother and I migrated to Albuquerque, New Mexico for what was perceived as a better opportunity to achieve upward social mobility. Despite limited English proficiency, my mother displayed a talent for survival and navigated institutionalized barriers. She was able to find employment and stable housing in a middle-class community that contrasted conditions in El Paso. However, I quickly realized a racial divide and ethnic hierarchy that permeated central New Mexico. Rapidly, I discovered that citizens of this region objected to all things being Mexican and were even hesitant to communicate in the Spanish language. This epoch of life was confusing because many of these constituents also occupied Spanish surnames and demonstrated ethnic characteristics similar to mine; however, I perceived that Mexican was viewed as dirty and inferior. As a result of the racial hierarchy, I was often castigated as a problem student and channeled towards the trades during middle school. For example, as a result of being hyperactive, I was frequently assigned trash duty and detention. This consequence was the opposite of what was needed in my case. Herein, the prescribed remedy would have been opportunities to express knowledge, a kinesthetic approach that valued movement, and affirmation of lived experience. To the contrary, we were required to quietly sit in neatly organized rows and patiently listen to diatribes. Even though I tried to assimilate and adhere to New Mexican standards, I recall subliminal discrimination aimed at my mother. For example, at Parent Teacher Conferences I remember staff treating my mother as a second-class citizen due to her field of employment which
was cleaning dwellings for the affluent. Along this vein, I also remember teachers shaming bilingual students for their ESL status – including teachers with Spanish surnames that were likely ESL themselves. In lieu of the struggle, I also recall a few teachers that genuinely displayed care. Students of any level internalize and know which teachers sincerely care at a visceral level. Mrs. McGregor, the Health and Wellness teacher at my high school, who was originally from Ireland channeled my energy towards academic success and demanded a high degree of rigor. With frequent check-ins, Mrs. McGregor pulled me aside to ensure that I had basic needs met and encouraged participation in extracurricular activities. In fact, after a game, she once wrote me a congratulatory letter that reminded me that academics were equally important. Figure 16 (Mrs. McGregor showing authentic care and reinforcing hard work) is a note authored by my Health and Wellness teacher. Memories of Mrs. McGregor remind me that there is value in the struggle.
The arena of sport is often conceptualized as a case of meritocracy, where the cream rises to the top, iron sharpens iron, competition yields winning effort, and a level playing field determines the victor. However, as I entered high school, I discovered that meritocracy was a fallacy disguised in sport. For example, there was a high school player that received extensive playing time over more talented Black players.
because his father provided financial contributions to the athletic department. At face value, this disparity is grounded in social economic status; however, racism also fueled apartheid. Unfortunately, I vividly recall coaches using racial epithets directed at Black athletes. Coaches believing that Black quarterbacks or point guards were incapable of processing information quickly and could not be trusted to lead teams to the promise land is a prime example of systemic oppression. The purpose for closing with these memoirs is to highlight institutionalized discrimination that far too often is subliminal and far more detrimental to communities of color. Marginalized students often seek refuge in an educational system that preaches enlightenment only to discover hidden agendas concealed in pedagogy. Challenges are a fundamental aspect of life, but educational malpractice as described by Fossey and DeMitchell (2022) often modify academic outcomes and in some cases alter trajectories. All things being equal, victory is in the struggle. Instead of relishing and finding comfort from insulation, communities of color that value the struggle demonstrate resiliency, fortify mental fortitude, get off the canvas when they experience setbacks, and relentlessly challenge the status quo.
Appendices

Appendix A

Approval from Review Board to Conduct Ethnical Research

Date: 01/27/2023
Principal Investigator: Leila Flores-Duenas
Protocol Number: 2211024139
Protocol Title: An Inquiry Into Urban Schooling and the Social Justice Nexus: An Agency Case Study for Transformative Change
Submission Type: Initial

Committee Action: APPROVAL
Approval Date: 01/24/2023
Expiration Date: 01/23/2024
Review Type: Minimal Risk
Risk Level: Minimal Risk
Project Status: Active - Open to Enrollment

The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board has granted approval for the above referenced protocol. This approval is based on an acceptable risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks to participants have been minimized. This project is not covered by UNM’s Federalwide Assurance (FWA) and will not receive federal funding.
Appendix B

Email Recruitment, Opportunity to Participate in Research

Email Recruitment

Subject Line: Opportunity to Participate in Research

Dear Prospective Participant,

I am conducting a research study about social justice in elementary schooling. You are receiving this email because faculty at The University of New Mexico identified you as a practitioner of social justice. The purpose of this research study is to better understand how elementary teachers teach topics of social justice. If you agree to participate, this study will involve two face-to-face interviews, two focus group sessions, and the sharing of teaching artifacts. Risks associated with this project are minimal and common to the teaching profession. Although zero compensation will be afforded from your participation, a possible benefit could be a community tie with other practitioners that occupy a social justice orientation. You do not have to be in this study, your decision to be in any study is totally voluntary. If you feel you understand the study and would like to participate, please respond to this correspondence via email as soon as possible. If you have questions prior to participating, please contact:

- penae@unm.edu

Thank you for your time,

Eduardo E. Peña Jr.
PhD Candidate

Principal Investigator: Leila Flores-Dueñas

Study Title: An Inquiry Into Urban Schooling and the Social Justice Nexus: An Agency Case Study for Transformative Change
IRB #: 2211024139
Appendix C

Question Types for Face-to-Face Interview Number One

Interview Questions: Face-to-Face Interview # 1

1.) Tell me about your background? Where did you grow-up? Share your educational experiences.

2.) As a child, can you provide details of your social economic status? Describe schools that you attended. What were the demographics? Describe the part of town that you grew-up in.

3.) What social events influenced your political ideology? What was the political ideology of your family?

4.) What inspired you to become an educator? Why did you enter the profession?

5.) As an elementary teacher, can you share your teaching philosophy?

6.) How would you define your teaching style? How do you view yourself in the educational space?

7.) What course work in your teacher preparation program most influenced your practice? Which educational theories most align with your work?

8.) During your teaching tenure, what changes have you witnessed? Describe your teacher timeline (e.g. trends, early perceptions, current disposition, etc.)

9.) How would you define social justice? What events or influences inspired a social justice orientation? Were there any social movements that inspired your political ideology?

10.) What are some obstacles or barriers you encounter in providing students with a social justice education? How has standardization affected your work as a teacher? (e.g. NCLB, prescribed curriculums)

11.) How does professional development at your site support an education with a social
12.) Describe the overall cultural climate of your school. What values does the learning environment project? How does the school acknowledge heritage? Does the campus reflect the student’s background? If so, in what ways?

13.) How does the school mission address issues of equity?

14.) What does teaching social justice mean?

15.) Describe your relationship with students? How does the school celebrate culture?

How does the school interact with the community?
Appendix D

Question Types for Face-to-Face Interview Number Two

Interview Questions: Face-to-Face Interview # 2

Member checking from previous interview.

1.) Share a teaching artifact (lesson plan, environmental print, student exemplar) that is used to teach social justice. What is the meaning of this artifact? How do you employ this into your practice? Describe the desired outcomes from using this artifact.

2.) In your practice, how does prescribed curriculum interact with social justice? Does mainstream curriculum reflect community values? What topics or issues are missing in prescribed curriculum?

3.) Share your thoughts on data driven instruction?

4.) How has standardization impacted the implementation of social justice? Share your thoughts on some of the following educational policies: NCLB, CCSS, Title I, and Race-to-the Top.

5.) Describe how you enact social justice into your practice. Should teachers teach controversial topics? Explain your reasoning.

6.) How do you construct lesson plans for the teaching of social justice? Explain the process.

7.) Do you collaborate with other teachers in planning for the teaching of social justice?

8.) Describe your relationship with other members of the learning community. What is the reaction of colleagues, administrators, and parents in relation to the implementation of social justice?

9.) How do you select teaching materials? (e.g. environmental print, text, media, etc.)

10.) What lessons / units / activities/ events best exemplify social justice. Share what pedagogies mobilize focus and motivation for students.
11.) What are some activities that make social justice meaningful and fun for students? Provide examples. Share your reflections.

12.) How do the activities reflect the student’s background? Do you feel that lessons acknowledge heritage?

13.) How would you describe the relationship between social justice and daily protocol at your site? Does this differ in your classroom, or does it align with the scope and sequence of the entire school? Explain how social justice encounters daily procedures.

14.) What strategies or techniques do you employ to increase social consciousness? How do you teach critical thinking skills?

15.) What are some obstacles or barriers that hinder social justice in your classroom? What are the most difficult part(s) of enacting social justice into the classroom?

16.) Do students talk about issues impacting the community? If so, provide details.
Appendix E

Interview Questions for Focus Group Number One

Focus Group Questions: Interview # 1

Introduction: Round-the-Horn (name, teaching position, site, years of practice)

1.) Share a participation structure / routine that you have used to produce equity in your practice. Please bring an artifact that contextualizes social justice education and be ready to share its meaning.

2.) Share an activity or strategy or project that helps you develop student-teacher relations (rapport). How do students know that you care about them?

3.) What strategies are needed by both in-service and pre-service teachers to create a socially just environment? How would you infuse topics of social justice into the classroom? What is the role of controversial topics in elementary schooling?

4.) Describe a routine that would help rookie teachers establish a culture of care.

5.) What is the teacher’s role in the development of curriculum? How influential are teachers in the development of standardized curriculum? Does the system calibrate for teacher input?

6.) What are some misconceptions associated with social justice?

7.) In the context of elementary schooling, what is it like to undertake this social justice orientation.

8.) Recommendations to ameliorate social justice at the elementary level. What pedagogies / strategies are a staple or essential to social justice education?
9.) Share your reflections on teacher preparation programs as it pertains to social justice education. Do you believe pre-service teachers are adequately prepared both in theory and practice to effectively address issues of urban schooling?

10.) What anchors or assets have allowed you to leverage pedagogies for social justice? Secondly, what obstacles have you encountered / endured as a result of your pedagogical underpinning / ideology/ social justice orientation?
Appendix F

Interview Questions for Focus Group Number Two

Focus Group Questions: Interview #2

Member checking.

1.) In learning, how important is social justice? Why? Please provide some examples.

2.) What comes to mind when you hear the terms race and racism? How does your site negotiate race? How do teachers react to conversations about race relations?

3.) If an irate parent or other member of the learning community complained about your social justice orientation and the implementation of social justice pedagogies, how would you handle that encounter?

4.) List three pedagogies that teachers can employ to create a more just world.

5.) What pedagogies do you employ to foster critical thinking and social consciousness? How do you calibrate for marginalized communities?

6.) How would you define privilege? Explain power dynamics in the school setting. Provide details.

7.) As a teacher, tell us about a time you witnessed or experienced power differentials. Describe microaggressions of the educational system. How do they trigger students?

8.) Describe a situation where you overheard teachers project stereotypes about students. Provide vivid details.

9.) Explain the link between bilingualism and social justice? What is the role of Spanish in the development of a social justice orientation?

10.) Share an “aha” moment from this exercise. Also, what needs further examination? Describe an educational system that is ideal.

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Appendix G

Informed Consent for Participation in Case Study

An Inquiry Into Urban Schooling and the Social Justice Nexus: An Agency Case Study for Transformative Change

Informed Consent

Eduardo Enrique Peña Jr. from the College of Education is conducting a research project with support from Dr. Leila Flores-Dueñas from the Teacher Education Educational Leadership and Policy (TEELP) program at The University of New Mexico. The purpose of the research is to examine the teaching of social justice in elementary schooling. You are being asked to participate because you teach social justice at the elementary level and can provide in-depth information for what it means to be a pedagogue for social justice.

Your participation will involve two face-to-face interviews, two focus group sessions, and the sharing of teaching artifacts. The interviewing process should take about 60 minutes to complete. Focus groups should also take about 60 minutes to complete. Interviewing and focus groups will be organized in a semi-structured format and will include questions such as the following: How would you define social justice? What events or influences inspired a social justice orientation? The sharing of teaching artifacts will take about 30 minutes to complete.

Your involvement in the research is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. There are no names or identifying information associated with your responses. All identifiable information (e.g., name) will be immediately removed from collected data. Pseudonyms will be assigned to all sources of data. There are no known risks in this research, but some individuals may experience discomfort or loss of privacy when answering pedagogical questions concerning social justice. All sources of data will be destroyed one year after ending the research project.

The findings from this project will provide information on social justice pedagogy and provide elementary teachers with concrete examples for the implementation of social justice. It’s with great optimism that this knowledge will better prepare teachers to tackle issues of justice in classrooms. If published, results will be presented in summary form only and will use pseudonyms to describe participants.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please feel free to call Dr. Leila Flores-Dueñas at (505) 688-0839. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or about what you should do in case of any harm to you, or if you want to obtain information or offer input, please contact the UNM Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (505) 277-2644 or irb.unm.edu.

By returning this form with the requested information below you are agreeing to participate in the above-described research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Adult Participant</th>
<th>Signature of Adult Participant</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name of Research Team Member</th>
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Appendix H

CITI Certificate of Doctoral Student Conducting this Dissertation Project

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- Name: Eduardo Peña (ID: 6464627)
- Institution Affiliation: University of New Mexico, Main Campus (ID: 2796)
- Institution Email: penaa@unm.edu
- Institution Unit: College of Education
- Phone: 

- Curriculum Group: Main Campus Researchers
- Course Learner Group: Same as Curriculum Group
- Stage: Stage 1 - Basic Course

- Record ID: 40419285
- Completion Date: 10-Oct-2022
- Expiration Date: 09-Oct-2025
- Minimum Passing: 80
- Reported Score*: 93

**REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY**

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<tr>
<td>FERPA for Researchers (ID: 17410)</td>
<td>09-Oct-2022</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)</td>
<td>05-Oct-2022</td>
<td>5/6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)</td>
<td>05-Oct-2022</td>
<td>4/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)</td>
<td>09-Oct-2022</td>
<td>5/6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)</td>
<td>09-Oct-2022</td>
<td>5/6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)</td>
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<td>4/6</td>
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<td>Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research (ID: 14928)</td>
<td>10-Oct-2022</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records-Based Research (ID: 5)</td>
<td>10-Oct-2022</td>
<td>4/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetic Research in Human Populations (ID: 6)</td>
<td>10-Oct-2022</td>
<td>4/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDA-Regulated Research (ID: 12)</td>
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<td>5/6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research and HIPAA Privacy Protections (ID: 14)</td>
<td>10-Oct-2022</td>
<td>4/6</td>
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For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid independent learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify?k301919e-0c-7a87-4055-b315-7bc6d5ed51-40419285

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888-529-5829
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org
## Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

**Completion Report - Part 2 of 2**

**Coursework Transcript**

**NOTE:** Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Eduardo Peña (ID: 6464627)
- **Institution Affiliation:** University of New Mexico, Main Campus (ID: 2796)
- **Institution Email:** penae@unm.edu
- **Institution Unit:** College of Education
- **Phone:**

- **Curriculum Group:** Main Campus Researchers
- **Course Learner Group:** Same as Curriculum Group
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 40419285
- **Report Date:** 10-Oct-2022
- **Current Score:** 94

### Required, Elective, and Supplemental Modules

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<tr>
<td>Genetic Research in Human Populations (ID: 6)</td>
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<td>4/5 (100%)</td>
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<td>Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 524)</td>
<td>05-Oct-2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)</td>
<td>09-Oct-2022</td>
<td>4/5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDA-Regulated Research (ID: 12)</td>
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<td>Research and HIPAA Privacy Protections (ID: 14)</td>
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<td>Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research (ID: 14928)</td>
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<td>Cultural Competence in Research (ID: 15166)</td>
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For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

**Verify at:** [www.citiprogram.org/verify?lk333919a0c-7a87-4095-8315-7f8f9d6afdf1-40419285](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify?lk333919a0c-7a87-4095-8315-7f8f9d6afdf1-40419285)

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888-529-9929
Web: [https://www.citiprogram.org](https://www.citiprogram.org)
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[https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1118&context=slcestgen](https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1118&context=slcestgen)


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