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PRACTICE WHAT YOU TEACH

Social Justice Education in the Classroom and the Streets

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TEACHING FOR JUSTICE

Developing Strategies for Integrating SJE in the Classroom

While the last chapter focused on teachers who used the Tools of Whiteness to avoid having to recognize inequality, power, or privilege, this chapter examines new, young teachers who, in contrast, developed an emerging sense of social injustice. The teachers in the last chapter were unwilling to take responsibility for their own racial privilege and saw no reason to take action for social justice. In contrast, the emerging social justice teachers, who were also former students of mine, had a budding interest in inequality and wanted to become the kinds of teachers who would address social issues in their classrooms. Unlike the teachers in the last chapter, these emerging social justice educators were willing to seek out a space in which to grow and transform. They joined a Social Justice Critical Inquiry Project (CIP) that I facilitated so that they could reach their goal of integrating social issues into the classroom.

After working with the graduate students featured in Chapter 2, I taught a cohort of undergraduate pre-service teachers for two years, also focusing on issues of social justice. Working with these two different groups of pre-service teachers was like night and day. Instead of spending my time figuring out how to combat the Tools of Whiteness, many of my undergraduate students were open-minded and excited about the potential of creating transformative classroom spaces where students grappled with real-world issues. Their excitement was contagious and I wanted to be able to support those that were going straight into teaching in New York City after they graduated.

To provide this support, I created CIP so they could work with myself and their peers to continue to develop as social justice educators. Based on work by Duncan-Andrade (2005) and my own subsequent pilot version of such a group (Picower, 2007), critical inquiry groups provide a space for teachers to examine their own practice. The social justice critical inquiry group that I facilitated and that is written about in the next two chapters ended up being a five-year project with

new alumni from my courses joining after graduation every year. This chapter is based on the first year of the group.

The major differences between the teachers in the second chapter and what the CIPers brought to the table were that CIPers felt a "sense of injustice" when they learned about issues of inequality. I use the phrase "sense of injustice" deliberately. In contrast to a drive, a calling, or a passion, a "sense" of injustice points to the emerging nature of their understanding of inequality. They had an understanding that injustice was wrong and a sense of empathy for people whose lives had been caused pain by oppression. While this sense of injustice motivated them to want to learn more about issues such as racism and poverty, it still had nebulous qualities pointing to the amount that they still had to learn in order to have a complex political analysis of how inequality operates. However, they were absolutely clear that they wanted to develop curriculum to teach about social issues and they saw this as a form of activism. While Chapter 4 will discuss the ways in which teaching about injustice is an incomplete strategy for change, this chapter will examine the creative ways that these teachers managed to reach their goal of teaching about social justice in settings that were not always friendly to such curricula.

The emerging social justice educators in this chapter may have had a desire to teach social issues, but they faced a number of barriers in trying to reach their goals. Like other new educators concerned with social justice, they faced a daunting task as they began teaching in the neoliberal context of American schooling. In addition to learning how to teach, these new educators had to negotiate challenges such as mandated curriculum, high-stakes testing, and colleagues who didn't share their political ideology. This environment created a state of fear for these new teachers as they found themselves alienated in a system where it was unclear whom to turn to for support.

By developing four survival strategies, these emerging teachers were able to reach their goal of integrating social issues into their classroom curricula. First, these teachers worked together to build a safe haven that supported their pedagogical efforts while defending themselves from criticism from within their individual school contexts. Second, the teachers camouflaged their social justice pedagogy within their classrooms by using tactics such as integrating it with the mandated curriculum or substituting alternative materials. Third, the teachers prepared their students to become critically conscious of larger systems of inequity and taught them the tools they will need to struggle for social change. Fourth, in a few instances, the teachers went public with their stances by openly rejecting school policies and publicly voicing their dissent. By using these strategies, the teachers were successful in creating classrooms where students engaged in critical social justice pedagogy.

The first year of CIP began with a one-day retreat and then regular biweekly dinner meetings were held in the fall with six teachers.[1] Early meetings were dedicated to developing shared norms, goals, and future agendas. The meetings consisted of focused discussions on shared readings, curriculum development, lesson feedback,

presentation preparation, and general issues and concerns that arose from their classroom settings. Of the teachers, four were White, one was African American, and one was Latina. Four of the six participants were full-time classroom teachers. The two other participants were still taking education classes. I served as both the facilitator and researcher of the group. This chapter is based on data collected during this first year. The group grew and new members joined in each of the subsequent four years of the project.

Teaching in a State of Fear

The school environments that many educators, such as the ones in CIP, find themselves within make it difficult to teach for social justice inside the classroom. By allowing policy makers inexperienced in education to use corporate trends, rather than community voices, to decide what curricular packages should be used in schools (Kozol, 2007; Privatization of Public Schools, 2008) and by relying on high-stakes testing and merit pay as tools for accountability (Sleeter, 2007), such policy makers control what information and ideological perspectives are shared in schools. This outside control serves to reproduce inequality rather than create environments that engage students in struggles against oppression. Therefore, much of the neoliberal agenda that dictates local and school policy creates a "state of fear" for educators who wish to veer from this corporate-driven status quo of teaching as usual. For teachers who explicitly want to provide a different kind of educational experience for their students, this state of fear severely limits their ability to teach for social justice because of the constant monitoring and policing of their classrooms and curriculum. This state of fear refers both to the emotional state that individual educators find themselves in, as well as the general environment of schools in which teachers and administrators find their jobs and autonomy threatened if they do not conform to the pressures of school accountability policies.

Because the CIP members wanted to teach about issues that veered from mainstream ideology, the implementation of these policies at the local level created a politically charged terrain that was difficult to navigate. This state of fear was reinforced by colleagues and administrators who, under the same pressures to conform to normative styles of education, functioned as spies and traitors because of their inability or unwillingness to take risks to transform their own classrooms. This made it challenging for the CIP teachers to know who to trust or with whom they could collaborate. From ideologically intimidating teacher lounges to testing policies and curricular mandates, their school climate was filled with landmines that made it difficult to feel safe or to learn how to use their classrooms for social change.

The maintenance of this state of fear requires strict control over what information is taught and what political ideology is reproduced in schools. As Bowles and Gintis (1976) explained, "dominant classes seeking a stable social order have consistently nurtured and underwritten these ideological facades and, insofar as their power permitted, blocked the emergence of alternatives" (p. 104). To this end, two current

tools used to reproduce the status quo in schools are mandated curricula and standardized testing (Oakes & Lipton, 2007; Sleeter, 2005). Mandated curriculum can take the form of a textbook, a loosely defined program, or a tightly controlled curriculum supervised by coaches or administrators who strictly monitor the way in which the program is delivered. These function as tools of the neoliberal state in that they funnel public funding to private corporations and are framed as strategies that ostensibly help support student learning (Kumashiro, 2008). In reality, they function to carefully control and monitor the content, form, and ideological perspective of the instruction that students receive, while requiring constant monitoring and surveillance to ensure conformity.

While many educators surrender to these forms of oversight and control, the CIP members began to recognize the dilemma teachers face and the way in which resisting the mandated curriculum was a political choice they needed to make. Jonathan, a fifth-grade special education teacher, learned to recognize the inherently political nature of curriculum and that to obediently follow the mandated curriculum is not neutral, but rather is to side with the status quo. Developing this awareness was critical to Jonathan and the other CIPers' understanding that teaching for social justice requires taking risks and making waves in a sea of conformity. Jonathan reflected, "One of the understandings I've been coming to over the last four years is that this [SJE] is not neutral. There is a lot of fear that am I going to offend someone, or that I am going to get fired for this. But it's really about knowing what your opinion is and choosing a side." Jonathan recognized that there are potential consequences and risks associated with social justice education and that teachers must take an active stand. He continued, "It's [SJE] a very active process, you can't be passive. It's more than just communicating information ... and that is a big part about whether you are a social justice educator or just doing what another history book says." Unlike the teachers in Chapter 2, CIP teachers understood the political nature of teaching and were willing to take risks, key characteristics of social justice educators.

For Jonathan and Stephanie, also a public school fifth-grade teacher, one of the most restrictive policies of the neoliberal context was the mandated literacy curriculum, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TC). The TC program, adopted citywide in 2003 under New York City's Mayoral Control, was an attempt to standardize curriculum across schools (Traub, 2003). While the program pedagogically has both advantages and challenges, the blanket way that it has been enforced in city schools has served to negate teacher autonomy and ignores local context. Each school has a literacy coach on staff, and has regular visits from TC consultants who train the teachers to identically implement the curriculum across classrooms and schools. Jonathan explained,

> The reading and writing curriculum is kind of dull, and social studies keeps getting pushed off to the side, especially in NYC public schools. At the elementary school level, it's either not taught or it's something boring like

> map skills or latitude and longitude. ... Unfortunately in NYC public schools, the curriculum is really rigid.

As Jonathan articulates, social studies, the subject most amenable to social justice, had virtually disappeared from the curriculum because of the national emphasis on reading test scores. A national survey on the effects of No Child Left Behind showed that 71 percent of school districts reduced instructional time in subjects other than math and reading, with social studies reported as the most frequently cut subject area (Westheimer & Kahne, 2007). As a group, the CIP teachers repeatedly expressed concern about their students' lack of historical knowledge ("How does a fifth grader not know what 9/11 is?") and this became a driving motivation for their pursuit of developing strategies to address social issues in their classrooms.

By making it difficult, if not impossible, for teachers to provide social studies instruction, the use of mandated curriculum is producing a generation of students who are not learning about where they come from or why current inequalities exist. The strategy of stealing the history of oppressed people can result in internalized feelings of inferiority or blame for their circumstances created not by personal failure but by institutionalized oppression (Freire, 1970; Loewen, 1996). This is one of the most problematic effects of federal policies and how they play out in local contexts.

CIP teachers also recognized their own lack of historical knowledge as a detriment to teaching social studies. Demonstrating another difference with the teachers in Chapter 2, these teachers tried to fill in some of their perceived gaps. As Amanda from Chapter 2 expressed, "Like I had been taught that Columbus discovered America, and then somewhere along the way I had heard that he didn't, but I never looked into it. Because it's something I just don't care about." In contrast, the CIP group dedicated several sessions to educating themselves on historical knowledge they felt they were lacking background in, such as Malcolm X and immigration issues. This growing historical content knowledge helped them to better integrate issues of social justice into their curriculum.

The rigidity of the curriculum the CIP members were given and the pressure to conform to it was confounded by the high-stakes testing environment of NYC schools. As fifth-grade teachers, Jonathan and Stephanie shared that they were responsible for administering dozens of standardized tests over the course of the year. Jonathan explained that, from December to March, the entire school's focus is only on preparing students for the tests. Stephanie clearly understood the broader political and economic context that drove the test prep frenzy in her school. "They're spending money for me to go to a test prep PD [professional development] to learn how to do this garbage and how to teach garbage better when they could be sending me to a PD where I could learn how to create a thematic unit with great social justice themes." Stephanie, like others in the group, was infuriated that her school was prioritizing testing, a policy that she saw as harmful to her students, over programs that she believed could better prepare her to lead her students to be successful and engaged citizens.

As an emerging social justice educator teaching in a neoliberal context, Stephanie was beginning to develop a political analysis of the forces and pressures that determined the kind of professional development she received. She continued:

> So why are they sending me here and not there? Because tests are the most important thing to administrators because the most important thing is the school report card, and if it isn't up to par, that means test scores aren't up to par, which means THEY aren't up to par. So they have to make sure that the teachers are teaching to the test because if not it makes them look bad. And, you know all those principals want that $25,000 bonus they get if they get an 'A' [emphasis in original].

Stephanie recognized that test prep professional development is part of a political-economic milieu that valued financial incentives over her students' best interest. Like Jonathan's acknowledgment that nothing was neutral, Stephanie was able to identify the political motivation behind the mandates.

Neoliberal policies such as mandated, uniform curriculum and high-stakes testing created an ideological environment hostile to SJE. On the school level, such policies were maintained by individual co-workers and administrators who were also operating under fear, reinforcing the CIP members' sense that they were teaching in an environment dominated by compliance.

Within this context, seemingly innocent co-workers unwittingly functioned as traitors or spies to the CIP participants. While these colleagues were most likely well-intentioned and caring educators, their own unwillingness to rock the boat created an environment that made it difficult for the CIP members to implement their social justice curriculum. As a result, the CIP teachers began to finely hone their ability to analyze where their colleagues stood ideologically and to decide whether or not they could risk opening up about their teaching goals. Stephanie reported a story from when she was first setting up her classroom at her school in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, a school that served mainly Latino children. Another teacher welcomed her by showing her where things were and looking over the class list to give advice and insights into Stephanie's new fifth graders. When reading that a child named Lourdes was in her class, the teacher warned, "Oh, that girl and her mother are going to hate you because you are White."

While this co-teacher was offering what she most likely assumed to be insider and friendly advice, because Stephanie was moving away from Tools of Whiteness she was able to recognize this as bad advice. If Stephanie were to follow this teacher's comment, she would rely on a racialized preconceived idea about Lourdes and not get to know her as an individual. Stephanie exclaimed, "It made me so mad, I mean, if I weren't already thinking from a social justice lens, I might not have liked that student, or I might have treated her differently!" Stephanie's emerging racial lens helped her to see how her colleague's advice functioned as a problematic assumption, serving to maintain racial stereotyping rather than suggesting real

strategies to build cross-cultural relationships with her students. Because of the ways in which the CIP teachers were developing a political analysis, they had a harder time relating to their colleagues who were still using the Tools of Whiteness. Examples such as this created unfriendly environments for the participants because, without knowing who to trust or where their colleagues were coming from, the CIPers often found themselves alienated and without support.

Stephanie reported that at first she tried to collaborate with other teachers, and described a time when she showed them a unit that traced the historical routes of racism that led to current racial injustices such as the situation of the Jena Six.[2] Her colleagues reacted by using the Tools of Whiteness to dissuade Stephanie: "They were like, 'Well, this makes White people look bad.' ... We just had arguments about it because they wouldn't teach anything that made White people 'look bad.'" For a young, inexperienced teacher, having veteran school-based colleagues who support your work and provide advice is invaluable. However, Stephanie's colleagues, relying on tools such as those used by the teachers with oppositional stances in Chapter 2, were fearful of teaching about race and created an environment that made her feel alienated because of her commitment to the tenets of social justice that included exposing and addressing historical and current racism.

Being dismissed for trying to do what she felt was right created an unwelcoming environment in which she had few colleagues to turn to for help planning lessons or for help with the kinds of challenges that all first-year teachers experience.

> I don't really talk about it [her curriculum] with them. I don't say, "Let's develop this together" and I feel like they are criticizing me for it. I don't really care, but I do because I guess I want to be respected by the other teachers and I want them to come by my room and be like, "Wow, look what she's doing. This is amazing" whereas I don't always feel like they do that. They are more like, "What is she doing, is she crazy?"

Stephanie found herself craving the support and approval of her peers, but because of her emerging political analysis she became alienated by their use of the Tools of Whiteness and the ways in which they dismissed her commitment to issues of race and inequality.

At other times, Stephanie, like other CIPers, found herself in situations in which she initially felt at ease with her co-workers, only to unwittingly step onto landmines. She reported that one day, while passing time in the teachers' lounge, Stephanie and her colleagues were flipping through the New York *Daily News* and engaging in casual conversation when they came across an article about Barack Obama, who at the time was in the midst of his first election campaign, that claimed he was Muslim.

> I was like, "This is propaganda," and I was saying how the article was trying to make Obama look bad because he was Muslim, and I was like A) He is not Muslim, and B) It's not a bad thing if he was. And the other co-worker was like, "No, he's got to have some ties with terrorists, and we are all going to get attacked," and I was like, "Never again will I bring that up," because I don't want to have a bad relationship with them and I think, you know, they're good people but they can keep their politics to themselves, and I'm not going to bring that up again.

By innocently expressing her opinion, Stephanie inadvertently stepped onto a landmine that exposed that the ideology of her co-workers was antithetical to her emerging analysis of current issues. This exposed the complex challenge of being committed to social justice while also wanting to have the camaraderie and validation of co-workers that help any new teacher feel accepted at their school. The fear of offending her colleagues kept her in a state of paranoia as she felt she had to watch what she said at all times. Between the ideological imprisonment of mandated curriculum and standardized testing, as well as the spies and landmines at their school sites, these new teachers felt like they always had to watch their backs. With a lack of places to turn to for support within their own schools, they searched to find a place where they could learn and grow with like-minded individuals. Finding such a place in CIP, they committed themselves strongly and used it as a safe space in which to seek respite and reinforcement for their goal of integrating social justice into their curriculum.

Finding Their Place

Because most of their time was spent in their politically charged schools, one of the first things the participants did to protect their goal of teaching for social justice was to find a place for themselves that would feel supportive and safe. They found this place in CIP and used it as a respite from the stress and alienation they felt daily in their schools. As a kindergarten teacher in a Catholic school, Hally shared that she often had to have conversations she found uncomfortable and difficult in order to have her perspective included in the school curriculum. Within the CIP group, she found a protected space to catch her breath and re-energize. She explained, "I think this group is kind of like a winter break. You come here, you get away from it all, and then it motivates you to do better ... It lets you separate yourself a little bit." This "break" served to reinforce her commitment and prepared her to re-enter her school with more clarity and strength. Stephanie added:

> I would come to the meetings and I would be all over the place, worried about the curriculum and the students and the parents and the administration and I would come here ... and it was this group that helped me regain my center and refocus. ... Having a place to go where if I felt something was wrong or not being addressed, I can say, "Listen guys, this is messed up," or, "This is what my principal is doing." ... Whenever I left here, I was like [takes a deep breath and exhales], I would feel balanced again. I'm excited for our meetings now, that we are going to get to talk.

By finding this place, the CIP members were able to grow as social justice educators because they had people with whom they could discuss tough issues away from their school-based colleagues with whom they often clashed ideologically. They were able to fill key needs that were missing at their schools by supporting each other to develop social justice curricular projects and served as sounding boards for each other's work.

Another way in which the teachers were able to grow as social justice educators was by becoming aware that a broader movement of SJE existed. In the broadest sense, CIP allowed them to feel that their contributions were part of something bigger and that there was strength in numbers. As Nina explained, "Even though I feel like I'm just doing a small little part, and I still feel like I could do a lot more, I feel that what I am doing is something." The feeling Nina described was greatly increased after the group presented at a conference on social justice and teacher education in Chicago. The members were just beginning to see how what they were doing in New York was connected to a national movement of educators who were motivated by social justice and this provided them with a sense of efficacy in their efforts.

Stephanie stated, "Knowing that there are other people out there that want to do the same thing that I now want to do is really exciting and motivating and pushes me almost everyday where I'm like, 'Well, I really don't know if I want to teach this lesson but I will because I *need* to.'" The feeling that she was part of something bigger provided her with a sense of responsibility to a larger movement that fueled Stephanie to push herself further than she would have if she had been on her own. It also helped her to feel that her effort was part of something more powerful. "Before, if I didn't like something, I'd go, 'Well that sucks,' and I didn't realize that other people think it sucks too and we can all get together and do something." Just as one pencil can easily be split in half while a group of pencils is unbreakable, Stephanie realized that by working collectively on issues, she was part of a powerful whole. While she wasn't quite at a point to articulate a sophisticated political analysis about exactly how things "sucked," she did have enough of a sense that something should be done about it. CIPers' new sense of belonging in a broader movement strengthened the members' commitment to teaching about social justice in the classroom. Rather than buying into the nagging sense that they were crazy individuals who were alienated at their schools, they began to understand that they were part of something bigger, a professional movement of caring educators committed to similar goals of SJE.

All the group members believed that without finding their place in CIP and the larger movement, they would not have grown as much as social justice educators. They felt that SJE would have been done in "passing." Jonathan summarized how the group functioned to provide a sense of belonging and accountability. "Maybe none of us would be doing this if we weren't together in it. Don't you feel like it's kind of a club, or kind of like a coalition? I feel that way—it's like a pledge." This pledge that the members made to each other kept them committed to their goal of

teaching social justice in unfriendly environments. The next chapter looks more deeply at the role that their reliance on each other to push their social justice agenda played out and how, in some ways, this strategy backfired in moving them to take action outside of the classroom.

Camouflaging Critical Pedagogy

In an attempt to survive the multitude of challenges experienced during the first year of teaching, the CIP members attempted to camouflage their critical pedagogy to keep what they were doing out of the view of others. This allowed them to successfully teach about social justice issues. By substituting alternative materials to integrating themes of equity and justice into the mandated curriculum, the teachers became quite adept at figuring out how to teach within the constraints they faced while still focusing on issues of social justice within their classrooms.

By using the mandated curriculum as a starting point, the participants were able to camouflage the more controversial topics they wished to cover. Inspired by a unit that Hally taught on people without homes, Marissa decided she wanted to introduce the unit to her kindergarten class in a strict Catholic school. She had already been chastised for teaching about Martin Luther King and had constant "visits" to her classroom by administrators and other school personnel. Understanding her context, she decided to disguise the inquiry on poverty within the mandated unit of "families."

According to Marissa, she introduced the unit by talking about her own family and how families are similar and different, focusing particularly on where different families live. She then read the children the book *Fly away Home* (Bunting, 1991), a story about a father and his son who live in an airport because they can't afford a home. "My kids enjoyed talking about this because I really zoomed in on the fact that not all homeless people are alone, but they have families just like them (as one of my kids brought up)." Marissa felt that this helped her students break free of some of the stereotypes they held about people without homes. "They understood that not all homeless people are mean, stink (one of my students shared that her mom thought that), or are starving (shelter homes and food banks)." The project culminated with a showing of the Reading Rainbow video of *Fly away Home*, which also featured children and young teens that lived without homes because of fires or economic problems. By centering this unit on families and by using children's literature, read-alouds, writing webs, and other traditional and mandated forms of literacy instruction, her approach protected her from watchdog colleagues because it appeared that she was teaching a safe unit about families. In reality she was infusing time-honored academic skills with critical topics about poverty and equity with her 5-year-old students.

In another attempt to conceal her social justice curriculum, Marissa used activities that could be deemed as politically neutral as opportunities to challenge students' stereotypes. For example, she shared with CIP that her students held very stereotypical

understandings of gender roles, views that were reinforced by school policies such as separating boys and girls for lining up and other activities. To challenge these notions, Marissa built upon an ordinary mathematics lesson on bar graphs by introducing content on gender roles. "What I did was a t-chart and the students named what they thought boys like to do and what girls like to do. We compared the columns, and it was really stereotypes, like girls like dolls." She shared that the next day she listed the activities separately and had the students put checks next to the activities they themselves like to do. The activities did not fall into gender predictive categories as both the boys and the girls in the class enjoyed activities originally assigned to one gender, such as playing with trucks. They used this data to create bar graphs and compared both graphs, contrasting what they thought boys and girls enjoyed with the reality of what they like to do. By using a traditional math activity appropriate for early childhood education, Marissa was able to help her young students develop critical thinking skills and challenge stereotypes while never appearing to have strayed from the mandated math curriculum.

Jonathan and Stephanie, the two fifth-grade teachers in traditional public schools, reported that they were under strict orders and surveillance to execute the mandated literacy curriculum. They both became quite skillful at looking for openings within the curricular structure to integrate social justice themes into their reading and writing blocks. Their most common strategy was to substitute culturally relevant books for the mandated materials. For lessons on "short texts," both chose to use articles from a progressive, independent children's newspaper called *IndyKids* rather than use what Stephanie described as "stupid little books that are just questions and passages, passages and questions."

Both teachers also decided to use the book *Leon's Story* (Tillage, 1997) as part of their mandated character study unit. This book, and their ensuing strategy, had been introduced to them in my social justice education class as undergraduates. *Leon's Story* was written by an African American man reflecting on his experiences growing up in the share cropping South as a child and his experiences in the Civil Rights Movement as a young man. Substituting this book allowed Stephanie and Jonathan to teach about historical oppression while still using the same lesson format that was required by the administrators and coaches who sporadically entered their classrooms to ensure they were at the designated part of the program. The teachers quickly found that, as long as they were addressing the skills required within the units, the administrators were rather indifferent, and sometimes supportive, about the texts they chose. By understanding the administration's priorities, and looking for opportunities to teach social issues while addressing the mandated curriculum, the teachers were able to continue to reach their goal without negative consequences.

Developing Their Students as Activists

Another strategy that a few of these new teachers used while trying to teach social issues was that of teaching their students to be able to analyze and address issues that they faced in their own lives. Unfortunately, not all of the teachers were able to take it this far, as discussed further in Chapter 4, but it is worth sharing one of the successful examples of this strategy. One of the most in-depth social justice projects was completed in Jonathan's classroom. The CACAO Project ("Children Against Chocolate-Aided Oppression") was a semester-long unit that Jonathan and a fellow teacher developed to provide students with multiple experiences with social activism skills: from letter writing, to petitioning, to campaigning, and finally to carrying out a public demonstration. According to Jonathan, the project began simply enough when he and Nick,[3] the other fifth-grade teacher at his school, substituted a test-prep passage with an article about child labor on cocoa farms. After seeing how shocked and angry, yet engaged, their students were with the issue, Jonathan helped his students research more on the topic.

> We looked at the list of companies, and the kids were like "M&M's!" And I said, "Well, what's one thing we could do?" and they were like "We can stop eating M&M's!" and I said "What else can we do?" and it was cool because they were automatic with it: "Get other people to stop eating M&M's!" I was thinking "Right on."

As part of their development, Jonathan wanted to build upon his students' righteous indignation and clear motivation to take action on the issue.

Working with fellow CIP members, the group looked over the scope, sequence, and upcoming units for opportunities to develop further inquiry within the confines of Jonathan's literacy program. During the mandated "realistic fiction" unit, he helped his students imagine what it must be like to be forced to work in intolerable conditions. To develop a sense of empathy, he taught about César Chávez and had students write short stories from the perspective of a fictional child farm worker. Just as Marissa and Hally did in the people without homes unit, Jonathan reframed what could have been a typical charitable approach to one that develops empathy for the purpose of justice.

Next, Jonathan and Nick wanted to provide their students with an opportunity to voice their dissent to the corporations that exploit and benefit from child labor on cocoa farms. Using a curriculum developed by Global Exchange (Schweisguth, n.d.) their students wrote Valentine cards to the CEO of World's Finest Chocolates, a company that is the leading manufacturer of fundraising chocolate but that does not use fair-trade labor practices. These letters easily fit the criteria of the mandated persuasive-essay unit. The cards expressed their anger about child labor on cocoa farms and demanded that the company start using fair-trade practices. Through this part of the unit, the children engaged in a classic activist strategy, power-analysis, to understand which stakeholders were perpetuating and benefiting from this injustice, and to decide what could be done.

The next leg of the mandated curriculum focused on "Social Issues," making it easier to integrate the unit with this segment. The classes learned how to write

petitions that they then used to organize their community to persuade the local grocery store to stock fair-trade chocolate. After drafting a compelling petition, collecting over 400 signatures, and hand delivering the petition to the store, the manager happily began stocking the fair-trade candy. The students also worked with the technology teacher to write and create public service announcements, which they filmed and screened for other upper-grade students.

Jonathan and Nick next prepared their students to hold a public demonstration. They watched video footage of other protests, made posters and fliers for the event, called the local police precinct, and then took a field trip to Times Square where the students held a demonstration in front of the M&M/Mars store. The students chanted, held their homemade posters, and passed out their informational fliers to protest the company's use of child labor and to encourage M&M/Mars to use fair-trade practices.

Through the CACAO Project, Jonathan raised his students' consciousness, helped them build empathy with those affected by the injustice, engaged in a power-analysis, and provided concrete skills in letter and petition writing, media production, community organizing, and public demonstration. By providing practice with the hands-on tools and skills of social activism, Jonathan and Nick gave their students opportunities to look critically at the world around them and to take action about injustices that anger them. Because he understood the priorities of his school, he worked within the boundaries of the mandated curriculum, allowing him to enact his goal of teaching about social issues as a form of activism. By integrating this unit within the reading and writing program, Jonathan and Nick won the support of the principal, who was impressed with the blog of the project the teachers created to spread word of their work to other educators.

Going Public

The final strategy was for the teachers to go public with their unwillingness to conform or comply with the pressures found in their schools. Although this was used less frequently than camouflaging, the teachers employed this tactic by rejecting certain school policies, voicing their dissent to colleagues, and teaching their critical pedagogy out in the open. This served to challenge the policies and individuals that continued to make their schools hostile for social justice. By openly questioning or disagreeing with colleagues or policies, the participants invited people to stop complying with mandates and unjust practices by making, or at least exploring, an ideological switch. Examples of going public happened in moments where the participants could have retreated to the protection of the safe haven, but instead felt resilient enough to stand up for their beliefs.

Of all the environments, Marissa's Catholic school was the most restrictive, yet it was she who was the most public with her social justice perspective. Time and time again, Marissa shared stories in which other teachers "popped" into her room to oversee her teaching. She described a colleague: "She comes into my room, pops in

all the time. I was teaching about Martin Luther King, and she was just staring at me. She was like, 'Why are you teaching that? You are going to get yourself in so much trouble. Just leave it for some other teacher,'" she said." Rather than "leave it," this watchdog motivated Marissa to speak out at a faculty meeting.

> Just the fact that they tell me "Oh, don't teach that" just makes me want to teach it more now. It's like, "No. We are going to learn it." ... I know it's a Catholic school, but you know, I think there are things that are more important that go beyond prayer. ... I said that at a meeting, I said it goes beyond prayer—it's who you are as a role model. Reality is that it's not by praying that you are going to solve issues. You have to get out there and be aware of your surroundings. ... I told the kids that too.

Marissa stood up to her colleagues who were attempting to get her to comply with the school norms of staying away from social issues. By making her stance public to her faculty, students, and parent communities, she invited them to question themselves and their actions. This served as an advanced strategy because she moved beyond camouflaging and attempted to challenge her non-active colleagues to move away from their own complacency and change what they themselves teach and believe.

In keeping with her comment at the faculty meeting, Marissa kept her SJE public. She still used the strategy of beginning with the mandated curriculum as her starting point, but she did so out in the open, in plain view of other teachers and families. "I am drawing together Malcolm X with the [required] fairness unit. I wrote to the parents and told them that we are using great books, they can read them, the pictures match the words, and also it brings an important message. I put it right in my parent communication that I do everyday." Because Marissa was excited about and committed to this unit, she felt bolstered to share the details of the project openly.

While many of the parents had positive reactions ("Good job, My kid was telling me about Malcolm X when I was showering him!"), many of her co-workers did not. Marissa didn't allow negative reactions from these teachers deter her. She described her heritage month unit: "I didn't even close my door for this. I was like, 'I'm going to leave it open and if they hear it, they hear it.' Special education teachers would come in and pull my kids, and they would just sit and stare." Rather than stop her lesson, Marissa went on to describe how she would have her students engage the stunned visitors in a conversation about the topic. Despite the reactions of her co-teachers, Marissa said that her principal did not interfere in her classroom and Marissa never changed her focus. By keeping her pedagogy public, Marissa refused to give in to a climate of fear and silencing. She stood up against the conservative ideology of her school by demanding that people be aware of the kind of critical pedagogy that is possible with young children.

Conclusion

By building a safe haven to protect their vision and developing strategies such as camouflaging, developing their students as activists, and going public, the teachers in this chapter were successful in accomplishing a key characteristic of SJE—teaching about social issues. As a result, their students had opportunities to investigate current and historical oppression, they learned how to research issues of injustice, they made connections to their own lives, and they engaged in some types of social action.

By using these strategies, these emerging social justice teachers were able to create a context that supported them to enact the goal of teaching about social issues. There were several factors that allowed this, factors that can support other new teachers to further their political analysis and integrate social issues into their curriculum. One factor was that there was a long-standing relationship between the members of the group and myself as the facilitator, which helped the teachers to have a strong degree of trust, allowing us to push each other further.

The teachers, all members of the same cohort of undergraduates, were all at the same stage of their careers and had transitioned together from students to new professionals, helping them to feel a sense of camaraderie and equality. This was important as they began to talk about tough issues that had been "taboo" topics of conversation for many of them prior to CIP. Without having this sense of safety, they may not have been able to have had a space to begin to explore issues or historical events that helped to shape their emerging political analysis, which in turn informed the curriculum they developed.

Along with trust in each other, the teachers trusted the direction in which I led the group because of my experience as a classroom teacher in urban settings, my work as an organizer with NYCoRE, a teacher activist group, as well as being someone who had supported them for the last three years as their undergraduate professor. Through constant check-ins, shared agenda and schedule setting, goal and norm setting, I was able to set into place structures that allowed the participants to feel more ownership over CIP than in a more generic professional development project. This attempt toward shared leadership allowed me to hold multiple roles with the participants, from mentor, to friend, to someone who held them accountable to the social justice goals they had set. This allowed the teachers to see themselves as professionals, which subsequently supported them to feel more confident in their political stance in their schools. Creating trust like this in groups such as CIP is essential so that teachers have support as they take the often intimidating steps of moving against the ideological norms of their colleagues.

For those interested in teaching for social justice, these successes, however, are bittersweet. On the one hand, what these CIP participants accomplished was no small feat considering that they were young, inexperienced teachers working in conditions that did not support the kind of teaching they wanted to do. By having access to a network of supportive peers, these teachers were able to integrate social issues into their classrooms, unlike many of their contemporaries.

These are teachers who entered the profession with the hopes of "making a difference" and contributing to positive change in society. However, the constraints they faced within public schools made it difficult for them to realize their idealism, leading to frustration, a lack of efficacy, and attrition. Research on teacher attrition shows that a key group of educators who leave the profession are teachers like the ones in this study, who could be described as "service oriented" and "idealistic" (Miech & Elder, 1996). CIP and the strategies that this group developed may have helped to keep such social justice-oriented teachers in the classroom longer than if they did not have this kind of support. All of the teachers in this chapter returned to the classroom the following year, and the enrollment in the project more than doubled the following year. Given the statistics on new teacher attrition, over half of them should have left by now.[4] Of all the teachers that participated in CIP over the course of its five years, only one has left the classroom, and that was to enter graduate school for school leadership and advocacy. By building their safe haven and developing strategies, it appears as if the teachers in this study found an outlet to funnel their frustration and alienation, and establish efficacy in ways that contributed to their ability to navigate the unsupportive environment that other teachers are unable to thrive in.

On the other hand and as will be discussed further in the next chapter, these strategies as a whole did little to transform the larger forces that are waging a war for control over public education. As Montano, *et al.* (2002) point out, working solely within the classroom is but one component of SJE. While it may be all that we can hope for with new teachers, working on curriculum will have little impact on the existing power structure. When we consider neoliberal forces such as privatization and corporate control as some of the enemies of educational justice (Anyon, 2005; Kumashiro, 2008), then simply substituting readings about school segregation may be a successful strategy for integrating social issues in the classroom, but it is not a tactic that will actually address institutional racism. An additional danger with the strategies used by the teachers in this study is that they can provide a false sense of satisfaction that what they are doing is "enough"; in reality the context they are teaching remains just as menacing to the well-being of students.

This dilemma of not working to change root causes of oppression has serious implications for those concerned with using SJE as a vehicle for equity and change. The findings from this chapter reveal that while emerging social justice educators can be successful at creating classrooms in which students learn about social issues and have occasional opportunities for action, without larger forays into social movements or activism, these teachers are fighting a losing battle, as they are not transforming the broader neoliberal agenda (Anyon, 2005; Oakes & Lipton, 2007). If teachers continue to work as individuals in their classrooms, they can make the confines of their narrowing academic freedom more palatable, but they are doing little to stop the continuing invasion of corporate takeovers of schools. You can decorate a jail cell, but you still aren't free. By creatively adapting their classroom practice, teachers impact only the effects of the neoliberal policies, and not the root causes that will

continue to bear down on schools, making ongoing strategies that much more difficult to negotiate.

The teachers who joined CIP were at a beginning stage of developing a political analysis about social injustice. Like the teachers in Chapter 2, many did not have life opportunities in which they learned to critically recognize injustice nor engage in activism prior to joining CIP. Only one among them, Nina, regularly engaged in social activism in their own lives. However, the teachers in this chapter all had a sense that injustice was wrong and they felt that the best strategy to address it was to teach about it. In that sense, they were successful at reaching their goal. They wanted to be the kind of teachers who taught about social justice. They were not quite ready, however, to be the kind of people who wanted to work to change the conditions that caused social injustice in their daily lives. Part of this was because they had not yet developed a fully realized vision of a world without injustice that would allow them to understand and target the forces that create the inequality that they had begun to recognize. Without such a vision, it was difficult for them to know where to start or what to do to push further than their classroom, leaving the inequality that they were concerned about in place. The next chapter explores this dilemma in more detail.

4

STUCK AT THE CLASSROOM DOOR

Falling Back on Tools of Inaction

As seen in the last chapter, these new young teachers in CIP did an excellent job of integrating their developing understanding of inequality into their classroom curriculum. The process of integrating issues of social justice with the mandated curriculum was a skill in which they became increasingly adept. They were successful in this one key component of social justice education (SJE): creating classrooms in which their students critically analyzed social issues on a regular basis. Despite the fact that they were young teachers with little experience with social justice issues, the members were successful at finding resources, and figuring out how to integrate social issues into their elementary school curricula.

The next logical steps in their journey would have been to become teacher activists by moving outside of the classroom door to engage their students in social action and to develop as activists themselves. Without such efforts, teachers such as the CIPers will never impact the conditions they teach about and that they profess to be against. By only teaching about social issues, the CIPers raise awareness about the symptoms of injustice, but never impact the roots, creating an endless cycle. Unfortunately, the CIP teachers admittedly provided few to no opportunities for their students to address root causes by engaging in action in sustained ways, and they themselves rarely used their time outside of the classroom to work for social change.

Two components of SJE that appear less frequently in the literature are 1) how teachers can engage young people in actively transforming their communities and worlds (Christensen, 2009; Freire, 1970; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), and 2) how teachers can become activists themselves (Montano, *et al.*, 2002; Marshall & Anderson, 2009). While there is literature that raises the importance of teachers stepping outside of the school to engage in social justice activism in the community and broader society (Giroux, 1988; Kincheloe, 2005), there are few teachers taking on this role and there are fewer professional development opportunities that actually