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Becoming Whole Language Teachers and Social Justice Agents: Pre-service Teachers Inquire with Sixth Graders

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Abstract

As we strive to help pre-service teachers understand both why and how to teach for social justice, we face the challenge of making whole language teaching less abstract and intangible. Frequently pre-service teachers understand the principles of teaching for social justice but have no sense of how to infuse them into their teaching. They accept that these theories can be utilized in their education courses but they are doubtful that they would work successfully with children or even be accepted in K-12 school environments.

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Introduction

> We speak often of generating a sense of agency in young people; and it seems evident that this mode of teaching is at least likely to communicate a sense of agency, if the young can feel themselves engaged with those around. Once awakened to concrete examples of injustice they might, together, invent a project of remediation, palliation, repair (Greene, 1998, pp. xx).

We are a teacher educator in a curriculum and teaching department and a sixth-grade language arts/social studies teacher who have grown to know one another while our schools, a suburban middle-school and a state university in New Jersey, prepared to establish a professional development school partnership. Grappling together with issues of democracy, in a two-week Summer Leadership Associates program sponsored by the university's Agenda for Education in a Democracy, we realized how powerful our collaborative inquiry was and we wondered how we could replicate this type of exploration for our students. Through coordinating pre-service on-site courses with sixth grade social studies classes, we have devised an inquiry unit that explores social justice issues tangibly and safely.

Rationale

We know from our own process of becoming teachers, as well as from much of the research in teacher education (Anders & Evans, 1994; Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000) that it is through constructing one's knowledge, negotiating curriculum, engaging in inquiry, and critically examining the world (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Cochran-Smith, 1991) that a teacher is able to find the best practices for her students. Engaging in inquiry with middle schoolers, examining and researching authentic questions collaboratively, and sharing and discussing their findings may open up the possibility for our pre-service teachers of creating their own whole language framework within their content area. As Whitmore and Goodman (1996) wrote, "The same principles that underlie whole language also apply to teacher education. Our teaching of teachers must be consistent with the principles we advocate" (p. 2).

We search for ways to disrupt the pre-service teachers' traditional notions of teaching, learning, and curriculum. We model these constructs from whole language and social justice lenses, highlighting the theoretical, practical, and political. This is important because although our teacher education program emphasizes social justice, the pre-service teachers have a difficult time translating it into practice. This challenge is augmented by the pre-service teachers' experiences both within their individualized content areas as well as in their field experiences in school settings. Too often they fall back into the direct instruction model with which they feel comfortable. They are unsure of the ways to diverge from transmission teaching, and with little power, are fearful of veering from the norm. We understand how high the stakes are, but we strive to use practices that open up conversations about whole language, social justice, and inquiry. Inviting both groups of students to scaffold for one another enhances their efforts to, "read the word and the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987). We encourage our pre-service

teachers to develop their own frameworks rather than a uniform way of social justice teaching because just as whole language, "looks very different from teacher to teacher" (Whitmore & Goodman, 1996, p. 2) so should their philosophies (Edelsky, Altwerger, & Flores, 1991; Goodman, Hood, & Goodman, 1991).

Additionally, our pre-service teachers need to develop their social justice lens because they, as well as our sixth graders, are primarily white and from suburban communities. They have little to no experience with people who are different from them and take their positions of privilege for granted. They are unaccustomed to examining their world critically and view racism as isolated incidents rather than institutionalized or societal norms. They have had mixed experiences with whole language in school, and social justice is a significant leap of faith. Having opportunities to examine the world from multiple perspectives (in our eyes one of the primary goals of inquiry) invites them to reexamine texts and the world with fresh eyes so that they are able to begin to identify stereotypes and absences of voices. We feel strongly that in order to promote social justice, a teacher must first, "understand the roots of injustice and the ways in which inequalities are perpetuated so that they can grow to make informed and ethical decisions as citizens in our society" (Taylor & Otinsky, 2007, p. 106). We are in accord with Edelsky (1999) when she writes, "If whole language is to promote democracy, justice, and equity, whole language educators must recognize the undemocratic nature of the existing political system in the United States. Despite secret ballots, rhetoric, and governmental structures, the United States is a long way from being a democracy" (p. 9).

How Do We Define Inquiry?

As Short, Harste, with Burke (1996) point out, to understand inquiry we must look at how, "learners actually go about inquiry in their lives outside of school" (p. 257). They explain, "Inquiry comes from exploring and being interested in the world. Through their active explorations of their world tensions arise and they ask questions about aspects of the world that puzzle them" (p. 257). Inquiry involves constructing knowledge, building upon prior experiences, and critically engaging with information. It operates from the understanding that knowledge is dynamic, ever changing, and multiple, and is not static, does not reside in textbooks or with experts, and cannot be simply transmitted to students. To invite learners to engage with authentic questions and construct their own knowledge and perspectives, we have to share the authority of the asking, the process, and the end products (Weaver, 1990). "Students," according to Wells (2001), "need to be given the opportunity to develop personal initiatives and responsibility, adaptable problem-posing and –solving skills, and the ability to work collaboratively with others" (Dewey, 1916, p. 173).

Inquirers are not encouraged to accept information as truth, and they cannot make unsubstantiated claims; they have to question, investigate, and justify. They are, as Freire (1985) insists, "problem posers, not just problem solvers" (Short, Harste, with Burke, 1996, p. 257). When inquiry drives the curriculum, learners are pushed to think as researchers. Part of being a successful researcher involves being immersed in a topic, "wondering and wandering" (Short, Harste, with Burke, 1996, p. 265), designing and

redesigning a question and then articulating "understandings" (p. 260). Questions are defined and explored in an environment of uncertainty and learners are invited to resist their human desire to confirm knowledge. Rather they look for shades of grey instead of viewing the world in black and white.

Learners cannot be engaged in inquiry alone. Inquiry is a relational process: it relies on the give and take of questions, ideas, perspectives, and even explanations to draw conclusions about the world and raise new questions and ideas. So inquiry flourishes when the student/teacher relationship reflects the authority and expertise of both parties. Equally important is the collaborative relationship of the students (Vygotsky, 1978). In dialogue, students can examine a question from multiple perspectives. Often the dialogue leading both to and from the inquiry process is quite rich. Inquiry requires a dialogical community of students and teacher where ideas are shared, discussed, examined, and reformulated (Stock, 1995). In dialogue, learners construct new understandings and questions of the world. Both students and teachers share reciprocal authority and alternate roles as knowers and learners, depending upon the question, the expertise, the prior knowledge, and the mode of exploration (Taylor & Coia, 2006). Ultimately, "knowledge building takes place between people doing things together, and at least part of this doing involves dialogue" (Wells, 2001, p. 186).

Whole Language and Social Justice Teaching

We believe that whole language is not limited to teaching language and literacy. It promotes critical, pro-justice, and democratic teaching (Shannon, 1990; Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 1998). The whole language movement, "is inherently democratic: the power of the philosophy resides in the ways in which teachers and their students take ownership of their learning and teaching" (Taylor, 2007, p. 5). Our whole language beliefs cannot be separated from our commitments to teaching for social justice. We believe that the two philosophies share common objectives. As whole language teachers we teach through, "a range of social and cultural practices which assist students to question the truth of texts, to ask different questions about texts, and indeed to seek out conflicting texts" (Boran & Comber, 2001, pp. viii-ix). Whole language teachers encourage students to use language and literacy critically to problematize the social and cultural norms that are produced and reproduced in texts (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Goodman, 1986; Cambourne, 1988). They accept and respect their students regardless of ability, race, gender, religion, class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, and believe in their abilities as learners. They care about their students and often act as advocates. In a whole language classroom, "inquiry is not simply finding right answers to old and familiar questions," but also entails interrogating the questions and resources investigated (Boran & Comber, 2001, pp. vii-ix). Whole language focuses on the individual student so that inquiry is relevant.

In our whole language classrooms, students ask the following essential questions: "Who makes decisions and who is left out? Who benefits and who suffers? Why is a given practice fair or unfair? What are its origins? What alternatives can we imagine? What is required to create change?" (Bigelow, Harvey, Karp, & Miller, 2001). We strive

to uncover the ways in which some people are privileged and have access to wealth and power and others live as objects of discrimination and injustice. Using inquiry as a habit of mind in classrooms produces, "a more equitable, a more just, and a more thoughtful world" (Harste, 2001, p. 1). Inquiry promotes social justice because it, "begins with voice, inviting all learners to name their world. It ends in reflexivity and action, inviting all learners to interrogate the very constructs they are using to make sense of their world" (Harste, 2001, p. 15).

What's In a Name?

Our challenge grows as we struggle to find appropriate ways to name whole language and social justice teaching principles. Within both the field of teacher education as well as within the middle-school, the term whole language raises political red flags or misconceptions. Used among colleagues we find ourselves either on the defensive or in need of clarifying our position (Dudley-Marling, 1999). At the university, democracy is considered the foundation of our program, yet there is disagreement among faculty about its interpretation and many students find our social justice language uncomfortable and too political. They have difficulty accepting that teaching is political (Shannon, 1992; Edelsky, Altwerger, & Flores, 1991). Whole language is deemed a part of the literacy education program and not appropriate for our curriculum and teaching courses.

Because the pre-service teachers are more familiar with the term teaching for social justice, we have named our project a social justice inquiry. Trying to translate our own enriching collaborative experiences of inquiry around issues of social justice led to our alternative teacher education practice, a whole language model that focuses on teaching "curriculum as inquiry" (Short, Harste, with Burke, 1996).

Who Are Our Pre-service Teachers?

Our pre-service teachers, who are enrolled in either the undergraduate teacher education program or the masters of teaching program at our suburban state university, are predominantly white (75%). We have a small percentage of African-American (12%), Hispanic (10%) and Asian (3%) students. Economically their backgrounds range from lower, middle to upper incomes and for many of our students, they are the first in their families to be college educated. They are two-thirds female. These pre-service teachers are receiving their certifications to be able to teach students in grades K-12 in a number of diverse content areas including English, social studies, sciences, mathematics, art, music, foreign language, physical education, or speech. Each spring semester we have between twenty-five and thirty pre-service teachers. The data for this particular study primarily involve the pre-service teachers who were enrolled in the spring of 2004 and 2005.

The Social Justice Inquiry Project

The social justice inquiry unit takes place each day over the course of three weeks. The pre-service teachers are in their professional seminar during which they take an intensive teaching and learning course for the first three weeks and then proceed to

student teaching. During this course, Monica encourages them to move from theory into practice. The pre-service teachers write lesson plans, plan ways to differentiate instruction, discuss classroom management and assessment strategies, develop a philosophy statement, and attempt to prepare for their student teaching experience. They are required to maintain a reflective journal throughout the entire inquiry experience and as a final reflection they write a teaching for social justice philosophy statement. Several of the readings address issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and teaching for social justice (Students read *The Complex World of Teaching,* 1997). Monica and the pre-service teachers meet daily for two course hours and then work with the sixth graders for a course hour. This course setup gives them the opportunity to discuss strategies or concepts and then try them out with sixth graders.

The unit coincides with the sixth graders' theme of civil rights with the hopes that the various activities of the unit act, as Greene (1998) writes as, "a series of occasions for individuals to articulate the themes of their existence and reflect on those themes until they know themselves to be in the world and can name what has been up to then obscure" (pp. 18-19). This principle of naming the obscure resonates on many levels with both the sixth graders and their adult co-inquirers. At the beginning of the unit, groups are formed with two pre-service teachers and four sixth graders. The unit incorporates a variety of whole language teaching strategies including brainstorming, poetry writing, reader response to texts, films, and visual images, role-playing, and inquiry projects. Specifically our unit covers the following topics: building community, identity sharing, explorations of race, class, and gender, examination of stereotypes in the media, introduction and discussion of the term social justice, models of young social justice activists, and social justice inquiry projects.

After introducing the inquiry cycle (Short, Harste, with Burke, 1996), and some large group brainstorming of possible social justice questions, individual groups develop a shared open-ended authentic question. Narrowing a group question involves negotiation and collaborative decision-making. Then, in the media center, students plan their methodology and carry out their research. They must use at least one periodical, book, Internet site, and interview for their investigation. They not only find information, but they synthesize different perspectives and draw conclusions. They create a poster board that presents their findings visually. The board shows the original open-ended question, their methodology and bibliographic information, their results and findings, a social action plan (something that they can do themselves to raise awareness or make change) and finally, any new questions that they have.

The inquiry topics are very diverse. One sixth grader's uncle ran for a seat in the U.S. Senate and lost to a millionaire, which prompted her group to ask the question: If a person can't run for office because they don't have money, then is it a democratic society? Another group, comprised of five females and only one male, asked the question: Why hasn't a woman ever been elected president in the U.S.A.? Other groups wondered about the following: How does Title IX affect sports? Are athletes more important than teachers? Does the media portray stereotypes and how can we protect ourselves from it? Why are there more African Americans than whites in jail? Why is

there world hunger? Why do some school districts have more money to spend on education than others?

The students share their findings along with their proposed action plans. Action plans range from student-run after-school events designed to raise awareness about homelessness, racism, or bullying, to collection boxes to raise money for the Sudan, to letters to local papers sharing concerns that there are no women presidents in the US, to pamphlets on ways to prevent accepting stereotypes in the media, and lists of resources against bullying. Sharing their findings leads to new questions.

Methodology and Analysis

Throughout these projects, we collect data to understand the impact of participating in the social justice inquiry project. We gather and photocopy reflections that are written after each session from all student participants. We conduct a series of three 45-minute phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 1991) with a small representational group of students. These interviews are tape-recorded and then transcribed. We digitally videotape and photograph the students during the inquiry cycle, while they present their findings, and once they debrief after presentations. We photocopy the pre-service teachers' philosophical statements on social justice teaching. The pre-service teachers also discuss their reflections on Blackboard, the university's digital discussion community. Additionally, we record our own observations and reflections as field notes.

Our data analysis is recursive and generative. We attempt to analyze data as they are collected as well as after. We meet once a week to discuss the progress of the project and to read and reflect about the data. Using constant-comparative methods, we continually look for emerging themes, categories, or patterns that span across the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We attempt to triangulate data (Gordon, 1980) by seeking themes that are represented in multiple forms of data.

We Are Doing What With the Sixth Graders?

The pre-service teachers enter into this inquiry with great apprehension. They display disbelief at the sixth graders being interested and motivated to think about social justice issues. They state, "We are doing what with the sixth graders? A social justice project? Why would we ever do that? What do they know or care about stereotypes and social justice? Why should they know about these things? They are so young and immature." They believe that sixth graders cannot think critically because of their age and lack of maturity. We wonder how there can be such a great disconnect between our courses and the pre-service teachers' responses. We worry about how they will teach for social justice in their own classrooms. At what age or level will they deem their students old enough to critically examine texts or the world?

Interestingly, this disbelief quickly vanishes once they begin working with the sixth graders. As Anna illustrates, the pre-service teachers begin to value the critical potential of children almost immediately. She writes, "I learned that we don't give enough credit to students. Kids are never given a chance because they are seen as too young to learn about things like this."

Sixth Graders Can Wrap Their Brains Around Complex Issues

It is relatively easy for us to emphasize the potential of students as learners and thinkers, but it is much more powerful to provide pre-service teachers opportunities to experience the seriousness of a sixth grade discussion or critique of a text. We believe that these principles of believing in learners, and understanding that they come to the classroom with prior knowledge and critical dispositions to examine texts and the world, are fundamentally whole language principles. The theme of surprise and amazement at the level of sixth grade engagement pervaded the pre-service teachers' reflections. Claudia admits that she did not know what to expect when she first heard about the project: "Initially I underestimated the abilities of the students. I didn't realize how knowledgeable, sensitive and perceptive they were to understanding social justice issues." As the project progressed, Marcie writes, "They continue to amaze me with their ability to wrap their brains around these complex issues." Robert echoes, "So far I've been impressed and fascinated with how insightful the kids are. Their awareness of issues like stereotyping and identity is amazing." After the inquiry presentations, Janice writes, "I was very surprised that they had so many questions for the groups and that their minds work much more critically than I expected."

Engaging in social justice inquiry clearly helps the pre-service teachers think about their students differently. They realize that their students are equipped to think critically and discuss difficult and complex issues of social justice. They begin to recognize the legitimacy of a curriculum that moves beyond factual recall. Through "talking back" to the world, students may discover their own voices as active participants in the world. Jennifer writes, "I think without seeing this, I would not have given kids enough credit. I would have assumed I would need to be more cautious about what topics I brought up in my classroom." They begin to rethink what topics are considered appropriate for the classroom and how these topics can be discussed from multiple perspectives.

Supporting the notion of being an avid "kidwatcher" (Goodman, 1985), Dina remarks, "Don't give up on your students so fast. They tend to surprise you." She continues, "You need to constantly assess learning as it is happening." Lesley advises teachers to kidwatch when she states, "Watch your students and see what works. Observe how they learn and use that to your advantage to work on new teaching methods." The pre-service teachers reflect that teaching should be child-centered and revolve around the needs and talents of the students. They are aware of the importance of both flexibility and adaptability.

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Ownership Opens Possibilities

The pre-service teachers have hands-on experiences that strengthen their understanding of the need for learners to have ownership of the learning process. They acknowledge that learners can be, "trusted to assume responsibility for their own learning" (Whitmore & Goodman, 1997, p. 3). Susan demonstrates this trust: "Students will come up with a lot of ideas on their own. You don't always have to push them towards a certain conclusion." Julie writes, at the conclusion of the project, "This is a very important project to do because by these students discovering the information for themselves, they can see the proper information from some of the misconceptions that they have." Melanie adds, "I learned that when students take ownership of what they learn, they will get more out of it." Felicia also addresses the issue of ownership, "Students can direct their own learning. They took charge of what they wanted to do and how they wanted to go about it." Through learning alongside adolescents, the pre-service teachers move from teacher as provider of information to the role of, "facilitator and coach," where they have to, "step back" and let the students come to know.

Teacher/Learner Reciprocity

We model our inquiry after Freire's (1994) idea that, "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" (p. 67). This principle of sharing the roles of teachers and learners seems natural to the pre-service teachers as they learn collaboratively with the sixth graders. Jack discusses his surprise at learning research strategies from the sixth graders, "It was interesting seeing how students half my age do things. They were so savvy about the Internet. It showed me that my process is also a little one-sided and that I need to re-evaluate my research methods." "Working with the students reinforced the idea that our students will teach us as much as we teach them," reiterates Debbie. Laura concludes, "The children really teach you to see things from a different perspective."

Debbie continues, "Working alongside the students was a great experience because they helped me to think about the inquiry process and question things that I would never have thought of." Luisa concludes, in her philosophy statement, "Contrary to traditional methods of education where the teacher provides the information and asks students to 'get it,' when students construct their own meaning based on what they may already know, they have potential to move beyond the conventional student role and become a teacher."

Inquiry Curriculum as Evolving

As they shift their perceptions of learners, the pre-service teachers begin to rethink the ways in which they will approach curriculum. As they move to value their learners in the teaching equation, they realize that curriculum is not fixed but rather evolves with the students. This re-examined understanding of curriculum resonates with Goodman's (2005) description of whole language curriculum: "Whole language puts the

focus in curriculum on starting where the learners are. The curriculum builds on the language, experience, interests, and cultures of the learners. The curriculum is based on problem solving and inquiry" (p. 91). Lesley notes, "I will use my curriculum as a guide but it can and will be changed if I see that something else has intrigued my students but doesn't follow exactly what I had planned. Textbooks should be a resource not a lesson plan or guideline."

Social Justice Teaching as a Lifestyle

The social justice inquiry helps pre-service teachers think about whether or not they are committed to teaching for social justice on a personal level before entering the classroom. Lily writes, "Social justice is so multifaceted that as a classroom teacher I must begin at its core. First, in my personal and professional life, I must want to live in a socially just manner and want to see others around me being treated with justice. I must be willing to reflect honestly on my own hidden biases." Susan echoes these sentiments as she thinks about her future identity as a special educator and a, "facilitator of social change." She reflects, "We must first examine our own assumptions, perceptions, preconceived notions, and prejudices that we have learned about disabilities through the course of our lifetime. Once we face our beliefs and our fears regarding physical and mental differences in people then we can guide young children to do the same." These reflections resonate with the objectives of the project: to invite our students to first examine their own positions in society, the positions of others, and the interplay of the two. Before promoting social justice, teachers must first unpack their positions.

"Truth Tellers and Change Makers"

Our pre-service teachers demonstrate that social justice teaching involves two interrelated dimensions: providing content knowledge that represents multiple voices and perspectives through the filtering of curriculum and materials and developing critical lenses through their content areas that expand students as learners, thinkers, and moral citizens. Dana believes that social justice teaching, "includes helping students learn how to recognize injustices within society, not just those on the surface; how to think critically about how those injustices affect the subordinate groups, themselves, and society as a whole, and finally how to find their voice as part of society to help them become 'truth tellers and change makers.'" Sam, a future social studies teacher, begins to think about valuing alternative historical perspectives. He gives the example of World War II and the Japanese American perspective: "Japanese Americans were put in prison camps because of the war with Japan. For Japanese Americans this may be the biggest event of the war. It is important to look at social studies from a variety of perspectives so that all people's pasts are included as part of the vital issues of history." Justin realizes that his students may have little exposure to oppressed people. He reflects, "It is important for students to understand social justice through the eyes of people who may not be represented in their student population. A different way to introduce students to other cultures is learning about the struggles that other groups of people had to face in order to obtain better equality."

Lily believes that studying art naturally lends itself to talking back to texts. Thinking about art as literacy, she reflects, "By decoding messages in our visual surroundings my students gain an understanding of contexts such as institutionalized, interpersonal, and internalized racism and sexism. This practice of visual literacy will enable my students to "talk back" to their surroundings by critiquing and evaluating visual messages that constantly bombard them." She hopes that in recognizing these messages, her students will be able to resist maintaining the status quo and perpetuating stereotypes.

Jennifer, a future art teacher, moves beyond the curricular content and reflects on her moral responsibility to promote informed and engaged citizens. She hopes to push students to, "value more than just the familiar." She does not want to change their opinions rather she hopes that they will come to know on their own. This idea of opening up spaces for her students to discover for themselves their moral voices is a more complicated teaching objective, but one that clearly values the authority of the learner. She eloquently explains:

> I believe that we are not just teaching our students facts and how to combine them but how to live. We live in a country where our laws are written so that we have the ability to change if it is needed and we need to teach our students to take advantage of this. If students are confident and capable of inquiry they will keep exploring the world around them. I see students who come to my classroom with negative stereotypes imprinted in their thinking, as a challenge but not bad or someone I try to keep quiet. Allowing students to have their opinions but insisting they know why they think the way they do forces them to look beyond the, 'it's right because my Dad said so' or 'my friends said.'

Nurturing Activists

Inquiry connects learners to the real and pressing problems of the world. It enables them to name those problems, and leads naturally to their engagement in those problems. Thus, inquiry leads to action in the world both inside and outside of the classroom. In classroom-based inquiry we acknowledge that action or experience is a fundamental part of thinking and learning, or as Dewey (1997) argues, "The material of thinking is not thoughts, but actions, facts, events, and the relations of things" (pp. 156-7). This expanded notion of thinking and learning is inherently democratic in that it values the unique and infinite actions and experiences of all learners. Both Sam and Justin conclude that raising awareness about injustice is just the first step of social justice inquiry. Students need avenues by which to take action once they understand about injustices, otherwise they become hopeless. Justin illustrates: "Teaching for social justice also means that teachers have a responsibility in teaching students who will become critical enough to make rational decisions on their own and participate to make a change." Sam reflects similarly about the sixth-grade inquiry project, "We did not only raise a question, we were also required to create an action plan. This is important in

regards to social justice because not only are we drawing on the past but we are creating ways to change injustices in the future." We agree that action is a vital part of social justice teaching.

Diana, as she thinks about her future language arts classroom, identifies promoting social justice as a way to unearth, "truths about the world." She feels responsible to investigate the issue of power with her students and help them to devise ways to become agents of change themselves. She hopes to have her students, "ask questions about decision making and the repercussions of negative choices, fairness, and most importantly power dynamics." She continues, "I want to make them understand how and why some differences will 'translate into wealth and power and others will be a source of discrimination and injustice.' By creating situations where students can think critically about ways to apply the tools to real life, there is still a chance that students will try to make change beyond the classroom."

Our Views on Inquiry

Inquiry is often a risky and uncomfortable endeavor, for there is no predicting what twists and turns the process takes, nor can we be sure of the final product. Each time we invite learners to engage in inquiry, the ingredients of the process emerge with the investigation and more importantly the investigators. Allowing for the unpredictable in our classrooms through inquiry is a drastic change from the traditional ways that we view teaching and learning, but it is inherently democratic. Teachers do not construct democratic classrooms using a transmission model of teaching. If they hope to promote democratic principles then they have to trust that inviting their learners to take ownership of their learning will promote a more in-depth and critical understanding of the world. Inquiry necessitates the space and time for learners to develop and explore their own authentic open-ended questions.

We want to make it clear that coming to understand and incorporate inquiry in our classrooms as a habit of mind does not occur overnight nor is it easy. It is a process in which we take one big leap and several small steps. We believe that we take the jump each time we open the class to inquiry. It involves a type of letting go – letting go of the reigns of control in terms of focus of the class. It involves trusting the students as learners and trusting the learning process. It also involves providing structure to help students when they struggle or need some redirection.

Implications: Finding One's Agency

Although we continue to adjust to meet the pre-service teachers' needs, we believe that collaborative inquiry with adolescents helps them re-examine issues of power and equity and develop a disposition toward promoting social justice. Ultimately we hope that our project raises consciousness and encourages pre-service teachers to consider their roles as whole language teachers and moral change agents in a democracy. We believe that this is just the first step. We realize, as we send our pre-service teachers out to

student teaching and later teaching, that there are many obstacles that can obstruct their actualization of these whole language principles.

We know from our seminar discussions during student teaching that some pre-service teachers struggle to incorporate these principles into their teaching. Alan, a technology pre-service teacher, is unsure what social justice means to his teaching. By the end of his inquiry, he begins to embrace social justice practices but is frustrated when he realizes that his cooperating teacher does not have the same beliefs. He recognizes the political implications of his new framework:

> Now that I have started student teaching, I am not sure how to teach for social justice. The sixth graders were given projects that stimulated research, critical thinking, and fostered a sense of inquiry. The students that I am working with are asked to sit quietly, take notes, do well on assignments and not cause disruptions.

Alan's experience represents the voices of many pre-service teachers. Felicia, a pre-service English teacher, expresses concern about finding a job in a school where she can really "carry out" her social justice beliefs. She wonders if her whole language practices will be appreciated in all schools.

These reflections raise serious questions as we continue to examine what preparing social justice teachers involves. We believe that transparency is essential in terms of our own political activism and advocacy in the field of education. We must model the ways in which we navigate bureaucracy, teaching our pre-service teachers both the appropriate language and strategies necessary to work within the system. How do we currently do this? We strive to demonstrate the means to publicize our social justice work. We attend and present our projects to the local school boards, we meet with parents within the school, and we contact local newspaper journalists to write articles about our social justice inquiry projects (Moore, 2005). We attend multiple local and national professional conferences and we attempt to publish about our inquiries in professional journals. We also share with our pre-service teachers our own instances of struggle within the university and middle-school settings so that they are aware of the methods that we use to make change.

We strive to help our pre-service teachers understand that their roles as teachers include a political dimension. We know that this is particularly difficult to embrace as a new teacher with many pressures to conform to the system or to gain tenure. This is an aspect of teacher education that we specifically need to further develop. How can we support our pre-service teachers politically once they are student teaching and later teaching? How can we equip them to be advocates of social justice teaching? In what ways can we strengthen their political voices as whole language teachers?

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