

Passion Into Action:
Facilitating Teachers to Act Critically
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Abstract

This inquiry highlights K-12 teachers' commitment to turn their passion of providing equitable educational opportunities to all students into concrete actions. The inquiry uses a case study approach to investigate the process teachers undergo beginning in an MA course on multicultural education, and continuing through their MA program to define, develop and implement actions that address social justice and equity issues the teachers are passionate about. Results show that when K-12 teachers are facilitated through the MA course curriculum rooted in critical pedagogy, they can become change agents rather than people who merely know about educational change.

Keywords: multicultural education, social justice and equity, MA program

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Social Justice Education in Response to Change

A number of scholars have researched and written about the importance of teaching for social justice and equity through the lens of critical pedagogy in response to academic and other gaps separating educationally disadvantaged learners from their more advantaged peers, though few offer concrete feasible how-to strategies for practicing teachers working in K-12 classrooms to translate these theories and research into practice (Ayers, Michie, & Rome, 2004; Bell, Adams, & Griffin, 2008; Irvine, 2003; Kincheloe, 2008; Wink, 2004). This is not to say classroom teachers are not working hard to implement teaching for social justice. In fact, there have been a number of studies describing social justice applications in classrooms as a result of culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Irvine, 2003). Some of these inquiries have taken place in pre-service teaching programs or featured the practices of novice teachers (Romo & Chaez, 2006; Santamaría, Santamaría, & Fletcher, 2009; Villegas, 2007); other research has considered the praxis of applied social justice in classrooms through a practitioner lens (Camangian, 2008); and still other researchers have taken into account practicing teachers (Zenkov & Corrigan, 2008). However, a small number of studies describe a process by which practicing teachers in a graduate program are able to translate critical pedagogy and social justice research into action, thereby translating research to practice (Reed & Black, 2006).

This disciplined qualitative inquiry focuses on K-12 teachers' commitment to turn their passion of providing equitable education for all of their students, into concrete

actions rendering social justice education relevant, feasible, and accessible. The teachers are graduate students enrolled in an MA course in a College of Education in a public university in North San Diego county. The inquiry uses a case study approach to investigate the process teachers undergo beginning in the course, and continuing through their MA program to define, develop and implement actions that address critical social justice and equity issues¹ reflecting teachers' passions.

In our study, we demonstrate how K-12 classroom teachers taking a required "diversity" course to fulfill requirements for an MA in education, come to understand and apply critical pedagogy at their school sites. The purpose is two-fold. First, it describes the process through which K-12 teachers are taken, to move beyond understanding issues of social justice and equity and critical theory, to taking action. The process is facilitated through instructional strategies and activities rooted in critical pedagogy by the multicultural/ multilingual professors teaching the MA course in the College of Education. In this work and by our facilitation, we make a case for the importance of faculty scholars as "committed intellectuals [to] move into spaces beyond the academy to participate in real change" (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, p. 297, 2005). Real change in this case comes as a result of our working directly with classroom teachers and therefore, directly impacting K-12 classrooms.

To make a case for facilitating teachers to act critically in their classrooms and schools, we first present the sociopolitical context followed by the theoretical

¹ Critical social justice and equity issues are matters related to ways in which power becomes domination related to education, knowledge attainment, and social opportunity. These topics often involve race, language, socioeconomic status, gender expression, academic diversity ---and other context variables associated with social justice and educational equity (Bell, Adams, & Griffin, 2008).

perspective undergirding the study. Next, we summarize background literature to situate the work. In order to demonstrate the value of conducting qualitative case study research we then describe the methods process examining and analyzing student action plans, reflections, and observations. This process is carried out as a result of our poring over the data for emergent themes and salient practices. Next, we offer several examples of specific ways in which teachers are able to translate their passion into action. Finally, we conclude with results, scholarly significance, and implications for K-12 education, as well as offer suggestions for future research.

Sociopolitical Context

K-12 teachers today are often times faced with limited resources, increasingly prescribed curriculum, and pressure to focus their pedagogy on their students receiving passing scores on numerous standardized tests. Given these and other constraints, it becomes increasingly disheartening for teachers who are passionate about teaching for social justice and equity to devote time and energy to act on addressing issues. Adding to this current state of education, administrators, policy makers and politicians publically obsess about how to best address issues of inequity and failing test scores on a broad scale. However, enacted policies seem to create as many problems as they solve (e.g., NCLB, RTTT). On the classroom level, teachers can enact change more quickly and effectively in regards to their students, families and the communities in which they live. In fact, research sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation surmises, “A teacher’s effectiveness has more impact on student learning than any other factor controlled by school systems” (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005, p. 425). As this inquiry

will demonstrate, effective teachers can identify issues of inequity they are passionate about and want to pursue regardless of professional constraints.

Theoretical Perspective

Critical theory as critical pedagogy provides the perspective and framework for this inquiry, because like all critical pursuits, this work aims to be practical in a moral sense. Critical theory in this case is the macro theory explaining challenges in the current educational reality, identifying the actors to change it, while providing clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation (Kincheloe & McClaren, 2000; McClaren, 2005; Wink, 2004). A critical perspective has at its goal “human emancipation” in circumstances of domination and oppression (Horkeimer, 1993). In the case of public education there are countless violations to learners’ social justice and equity made possible by institutional power structures and people who uphold them (e.g., achievement gaps, over and underrepresentation of students of color in special education, language and cultural injustices for English language learners).

In the data presented by Horkeimer (1993), “human beings as producers of their own historical form of life,” teachers and their theory to practice applications, will be featured (p. 21). As such, critical theory will be applied in light of the practical research goal of describing the process through which the teachers are taken as part of their MA educational process, to move beyond understanding issues of social justice and equity translating their understanding into action. Through the data collected and presented, readers will gain evidence of teachers’ own psychological and cultural experiences, as well as first hand accounts of their overcoming institutional forms of domination through

applications of their developing understanding of critical pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Situational Literature

Researchers, who study and write about social justice and equity education, have taken several distinct approaches united by the use qualitative methodology. A subject specific approach, such as Camangian's (2008) consideration of performance poetry for social justice, provides a window into the hearts and minds of high school students in South Central Los Angeles. This researcher's work, like many social justice and equity contributions, captures the essence of student empowerment to examine issues of privilege, social control, and oppression in U.S. society. Similarly, Golod (2008) describes civil rights curricular practices at a charter school serving 94 students in urban Minneapolis, Minnesota. Students at the school range from 11 to 14 years of age. The main focus of the integrated curriculum at the Southside Family Charter School described by one of the activist/teachers is the "struggle for justice and the understanding of injustice" (p. 3).

Unlike Camangian (2008) and Golod (2008), Reed and Black (2006) provide a compelling overview of a teacher preparation program that prepares pre-service educators post-baccalaureate through MA, for anti-oppressive teaching, critical pedagogy, and social activism. To accomplish this end teachers are immersed in a 12 month integrated program at Keene State College in New Hampshire. The goal of the program is "transformative learning through a reconstruction of socio-political-historical knowledge, demonstrated through language and action on the part of the learner" (Reed & Black, p. 34, 2006). During the program students learn about marginalized groups in

the U.S., the detrimental effects of tracking practices, the role White privilege plays in K-12 education including the recognition of their own power and privilege, and to ask questions such as 'Who benefits from status quo practices?'. With full justification, the authors point to the limitations of their study and the need for further research.

Participants were two cohorts consisting of 13 and 16 exclusively White students, following them into the classroom to assess their performance in 1st year teaching jobs might further inform the study. They also discuss the importance of faculty composition and the effects of institutional resistance to the program as barriers to the future of the inquiry (Reed & Black, 2006).

In another pre-service teacher study, Villegas (2007) argues that assessing teacher candidates' dispositions related to social justice is reasonable and defensible. The author explains why social justice matters in teacher education, provides a definition of the term 'dispositions' and discusses why teacher education programs must attend to teacher behaviors and attitudes; providing exemplars of practices used at one university to assess teacher candidates' dispositions related to social justice. This author challenges the use of social justice terminology without authentic meaning or praxis resulting in educational change and the role of disposition in the context of teacher competence.

The study of teaching pre-service teachers through the lens of Border Pedagogy to help them develop multicultural competencies is one way of addressing teacher dispositions. Romo and Chavez's (2006) inquiry, which took place in Southern California, considered post-baccalaureate through MA pre-service teachers taking a multicultural course featuring Border Pedagogy. These researchers, like others

interested in the effects of immersion experiences for pre-service teachers, found that immersion in language and culture served created circumstances where participants experience being the 'other' resulted in their movement along a continuum of cultural proficiency (Santamaría, et al., 2009). As in the inquiry conducted by Reed and Black (2006), all participants in Romo and Chavez's (2006) study were White and as a result had a difficult time adjusting to the critical content demands of the curriculum. The researchers ultimately found that "students and teachers must be skilled in negotiation, language, immigration, race, culture, and class issues" in order to meet the needs of increasingly diverse learners in K-12 classrooms (p. 152).

Although as noted, there has been some research activity in the area of socially just teaching practices for pre-service teachers at undergraduate and graduate levels; however, there is a paucity of disciplined inquiry on these teaching practices for K-12 teachers in the classroom (Delpit, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994). To this end, Zenkov and Corrigan (2008) follow their MA program graduates into the classroom as suggested by Reed and Black (2006) in their study. Zenkov and Corrigan (2008) present teacher quality as defining progressive outcomes for teachers of urban student populations. They sought to discover what kinds of social justice concepts program graduates were teaching and what kinds of teaching practices graduates were using to teach social justice concepts. In this Ohio based study, 200 program graduates from a social justice oriented pre-service MA program for secondary teachers across subject areas, completed surveys to determine the relevance of the program's concept of social justice in terms of teaching practices over 3 years. Findings indicate social justice principles matter to practicing teachers but that they become less relevant to teachers

once they enter the profession. These findings are alarming and coupled with the dearth of literature on teachers teaching for justice, provide the impetus for continued study on social justice and equity teaching practices and applications of critical theory and pedagogy with practicing teachers in K-12 classrooms.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the critical social justice and equity teaching practices of K-12 teachers while MA students in a required program diversity course. The practices were examined through a two-fold process for teachers in a graduate program towards a Master of Arts in Education degree. First, the inquiry will describe the process teachers are taken through to move beyond understanding issues of social justice and equity into taking action. Building on this process, the inquiry then describes how the K-12 teachers are facilitated to design individual action plans. The following research questions guide this inquiry:

1. How do teachers define social justice and equity as it pertains to their roles as critical leaders?
2. How do teachers turn their passion for social justice and equity into concrete actions in their classrooms, schools and communities?

Research Design

This inquiry uses qualitative methods to facilitate the collection and analysis of data using a “naturalistic” approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This research approach helps explain “how” teachers define social justice and equity, and then turn their definitions into action at their school sites. Qualitative data analysis offers a variety of perspectives in which to examine the teachers’ processes within the context of the

multicultural education course and the context of their school sites. Multiple sources of data have been collected and analyzed for triangulation.

A case study approach is used to focus on this phenomenon by examining in depth, and in a holistic manner, particular instances of the teachers' critical social justice and equity teaching practices. According to Yin (2009), a case study approach is used to examine both the scope and logic of the research design as well as the data collection and analysis process. A single-case study approach for "representative or typical" research captures the critical leadership practices in "representative" social justice action plans with "typical" K-12 teachers enrolled in the MA program (Yin, 2009). The explanatory nature of the case study approach informs the field of the experiences of the typical or representative teacher. In order to explain the phenomenon of critical social justice and equity teaching practices, the researchers have observed the teachers in the MA course, collected course assignments and instructional materials, and present an analysis of the data through a "revelatory" approach.

Context. The inquiry takes place in a College of Education at a public university in North San Diego county. The Master of Arts program within the College of Education has been in existence for over fifteen years and primarily enrolls classroom teachers within the college's service area of southern California. The multicultural course where the data for this study was collected is required of MA students in all of the college's programs including special education, literacy, educational technology and multicultural education.

The College of Education is mission driven with the mission of collaboratively transforming public education. The instructors of the required multicultural education

course are faculty in the multilingual / multicultural education program, are personally dedicated to teaching for equity and social justice, and designed the courses to guide teachers to translate their dedication into action at their schools. The instructors use an array of instructional activities designed to move students beyond simply understanding textbook knowledge to transformative practices in their classrooms. In general the course focuses on developing an understanding of what social justice and equity is for each individual. Readings cover topics in multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, critical pedagogy, and caring-centered instruction. Course assignments include critical examination of readings, videos, data and discussions. The instructional activities are designed to support and push students (classroom teachers) in their own development as educators for transformational change at their school sites – moving beyond “celebrating differences” to enacting change. The culminating assignment of the course allows teachers to develop and implement personalized social justice and equity action plans at their schools.

The goal of the multicultural education course is to use a variety of teaching activities and approaches engaging students on at least two levels: the personal exploration of who they are and translating that personal knowledge into a commitment to providing equitable education for all students. Often times, students enter the required course with misperceptions and misunderstandings about multicultural education. From our years of teaching experiences, we understand our students often start from a place of superficial knowledge and commitment to multicultural education. They also can be resentful that they are required to take “another class on diversity.” We have learned that the process of re-framing takes time and the specific activities we

share in this article help to scaffold students to a place where they can identify issues of inequity and take action to address what they believe they can.

Course discussions and activities lead to the critical culminating activity of the course, which is the development of social justice and equity action plans. Based on Joan Wink's (2005) book, *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World*, the researchers asked students to develop personal definitions of social justice and equity based on the context in which they live and teach. Wink suggests a framework of "To Name, To Reflect Critically, and To Act" that is used as the foundation for the final social justice and equity action plans.

Population and sample. The subjects are students enrolled in a required multicultural education course in the Master of Arts program. As the course is required, students from all programs within the College of Education are included in this inquiry. Specific programs include special education, literacy, math, science and educational technology and multicultural / multilingual education. The student population in the MA program primarily is comprised of current classroom teachers. The majority of subjects in the student population received their teaching credential in the College of Education and has returned to complete a MA degree.

Purposeful sampling was used in this inquiry. This is a convenience sample based on the student enrollment in the required MA course, Schooling in a Multicultural Society (EDUC 602) during the fall 2007 and spring 2008 semesters. During the fall 2007 semester, a total of 22 students were enrolled in the course (17 female and 5 male). Similarly, 22 students were enrolled in the course during the spring 2008 semester (19 female and 3 male). The sample of 44 students is typical of the student

enrollment in the College's MA program which has a majority of students who are White and female. The table below presents the student enrollment in the course for the fall 2007 and spring 2008 semesters by gender and ethnicity.

Study Participants by Gender and Ethnicity

	Female			Male		
	White	Latina	Asian/PI	White	Latino	Asian/PI
Fall 2007	12	4	1	5	0	0
Spring 2008	16	3	0	2	0	1
TOTAL	28 (63.6%)	7 (15.9%)	1 (2.3%)	7 (15.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.3%)

Data collection. Data for this inquiry were collected during the fall 2007 and spring 2008 semesters from the required multicultural education course. The data include student individualized action plans, reflections, observations, and course materials. Observations and data collection settings ranged from natural (in class) to artificial (contrived reflections), with relatively unstructured to highly structured elicitation tasks and category systems in the inquiry (Cohen & Manion, 1994). The multiple sources of data bring together (*triangulation*) multiple perspectives, methods, and sources of information adding texture, depth, and multiple insights to the analysis and enhance the validity and credibility of the research results.

The individualized action plans are developed by the students throughout the 15 week course. The final assignment, *Critical Pedagogy / Social Justice Action Plan*, was collected for each student. Plans consisted of three sections; identifying the problem to

be addressed, reflecting critically on the problem through research and critical examination of practices, and the action plan itself. Throughout the 15 week semester, students met in small groups to discuss and analyze their action plans, received feedback from their group members, and revised their plans accordingly. Students' final action plans were a culmination of this reflective peer review process.

Student reflections consist of two narratives completed during class sessions. The first narrative is a reflection of "where the student is" in regards to understanding and enacting social justice and equity. In their reflections, students were asked to choose from a range of statements describing their level of commitment (e.g. "I do not do anything" to "I understand issues and have already taken action"). Students composed this narrative during the second week of the semester and then worked in small groups with colleagues who were "at" the same level to critically examine their level of commitment. The second narrative was completed during the last class session on week 15. Students were given the narratives they composed during week 2 to review, then asked to compose a new narrative to describe their level of commitment at the end of the semester.

Additional data sources include the instructors' observations during the course, and course materials. The observations were unstructured and took place as students discussed the course readings, activities and their own feelings and actions. Recorded observations of these discussions were kept by the course instructor with the student reflections and other assigned work. Course materials collected as data sources include the syllabus, power point presentations for each class session, course texts and readings, course activities and handouts.

Data analysis. Data analysis began by finding types of patterns in the various data sources collected. In order to address construct validity, the researchers triangulated the multiple sources of data collected in this inquiry. Data sources were merged to find common themes and trends of the phenomenon established through the evidence in the findings. The researchers maintained a chain of evidence through the data collection process to increase construct validity (Yin, 2009). During the analysis, common themes in the social justice action plans were identified through an open coding process. Themes were reviewed and compared to the other data sources. This process was followed until patterns were identified to move from broad analysis to the specific questions of “how” students define and enact social justice (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). The action plans were also analyzed using Wordle, a computer program that brings words to the forefront in a “word cloud” with words that appear most frequently in the source text (Wordle, 2009). Using both data analysis processes helps verify the themes identified as accurate. Ensuring that the stated research questions guided the analysis was done to address the study’s internal validity, while external validity was addressed by identifying typical critical leadership practices that have been replicated from those identified in the literature.

Data analysis followed an explanation building process of the phenomenon of the teachers’ critical leadership practices (Yin, 2009). The process of identifying “how” K-12 teachers define and enact social justice and equity at their school sites was done to build an explanation as data was examined, re-examined and theoretical propositions were revised accordingly. For example, comparing the social justice and equity action plans of the K-12 teachers either presented similar outcomes or new perspectives about

critical leadership practices. A typical case was chosen to exemplify the process from beginning (defining social justice and equity) to the end (implementing the plan at the teacher's school site). The researchers referred back to the research questions guiding this inquiry, maintained consistent data analyses processes reduced potential problems in misinterpreting the data, and analyzed the multiple data sources within this explanation building process to strengthen the research results.

Positionality. Both researchers have personal and professional interests in this inquiry. They have been professors in the College of Education in area of multicultural / multilingual education for almost a decade. Both are from working class culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families and have research interests in the area social justice and equity. They share a commitment to the College's mission of collaboratively transforming public education. This commitment is evidenced in the researchers' work and teaching pedagogy.

Results: Passion into Action

Data collected in this inquiry show that teachers enrolled in the MA course on multicultural education are able to move from being passionate about issues of inequity into taking real, concrete, and measureable action. All 44 teachers enrolled in the MA course developed an action plan rooted in their definition of social justice. Results from this inquiry indicate that teachers' passions encompass a broad range of areas, and their actions are correlated to what they define as "doable" based on how they individually apply their definition of social justice and equity. For example, based on their individual definitions and commitment levels, one teacher collaborated with her colleagues to address the educational needs of her caseload of special needs students,

another created a series of workshops for Spanish-speaking parents to empower them to learn about and participate in their children's education. An analysis of the data also shows that availability of resources, school and community climate, and time constraints were factors in the actions teachers choose and enacted.

The analyses of the plans indicate that the 44 teachers chose three main audiences as the focus of actions: students, teachers and parents. The vast majority, 29 out of 44 plans, are centered on students and involve issues the teachers felt somehow inhibited the overall school success of the students. While most teachers developed action plans for their own students, some special education teachers chose students in "mainstream" classes as the focus of their plans. Primarily, these teachers felt there was a gap in the knowledge base for students in "mainstream" classes in regards to their peers with special needs. Nine of the teachers created plans focused on actions directed towards other teachers at their school sites. Finally, six teachers chose to develop action plans for parents of the students in their classes.

The plans teachers developed were creative, innovative and customized for the teachers' classrooms and/or school sites. Given the creative nature of the plans, some teachers' actions were unique and did not fall into a general category. Those plans that can be categorized, fall into four general areas; curriculum, programs, student clubs, and resources. Correlating with the majority of plans focusing on students, the majority of teachers (14 out of 44) chose curriculum development as their action. Some of the teachers developed curriculum that was culturally responsive or incorporated multicultural, critical social justice and equity issues into a standards-based curriculum. An example is a health curriculum unit for a physical education middle school class that

teaches about health issues prevalent in various cultures/ ethnicities and how students can be proactive and engage in preventative measures to reverse these common trends. Other teachers developed curriculum which helped their students with special needs either understand their disabilities or to advocate for themselves. One teacher created a series of curricular units to teach her students with special needs to learn about the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process, and then take the lead in their IEP meetings with teachers and parents.

The teachers who created programs (8 out of 44) as their action plans designed their programs for their colleagues or for parents. One teacher created an in-service training program for her colleagues to train them how to use the strengths of their “mainstreamed” students with special needs as a resource in their classes. Another teacher designed a program for the Latino parents of her students. As many of the parents did not speak English, her program taught them about the content their children are learning as well as the expectations the school has of them regarding parental involvement in their child's education.

Six out of the 44 teachers created student clubs offered either during lunch or after school as their social justice actions. In response to a prescribed and limiting curriculum at his school site, one teacher created an after-school drama club. Another teacher formed a lunchtime multicultural club at her middle school to address the fact that students primarily only interacted with peers from their own cultural backgrounds. The goal of this club was to bring together students from varied cultural backgrounds to learn about one another and bridge the gaps within and across the different groups.

Five teachers focused their action plans on creating resources for parents or teachers. One teacher designed her action plan in response to “family” units her colleagues were using in their second grade classrooms that only recognized traditional families. She created various resources and a book list for teachers that focused on “non-traditional” families. Another teacher designed a binder of resources for Latino parents in Spanish and English to help them understand “how the school works” and to best support their child’s education.

Critical Teacher Leadership for Authentic Change

The process of defining social justice and equity undergone by the teachers and its outcomes are exemplified in one teacher’s individualized action plan from the MA course on multicultural education and how it evolved into continued and broader actions. The teacher taught at a middle school in a low-income area with a diverse student body. She taught many of the students who were labeled as “at risk” by the school, many of them classified as English learners and all of whom scored below basic proficiency on state standardized tests. When enrolled in the MA course, this teacher adapted several curricular units for her students, which addressed her students’ specific academic needs and incorporated their interests, their cultures and their worlds. The multicultural curriculum she created was the basis for the research project she designed for her MA thesis. As a result, her students became more engaged in their learning, and their academic performance improved both in her class and on standardized tests. During the two year of her MA studies, the teacher also brought her students to the university to attend several events including a World AIDS Day observance. The teacher and her students created a session wherein they presented the multicultural

curriculum along with suggestions the students had for the university to support them in their educational goals of meeting the requirements and enrolling in the university.

This teacher's passion, to develop engaging and equitable curriculum for her students, turned into a series of actions by the teacher and the students that may very well have changed the trajectory of her students' educational careers. Over the course of time, scaffolded by a social justice and equity MA program facilitation process, the teacher evolved into a critical teacher leader in her own right. According to Santamaría and Santamaría (in press):

Critical leadership is the emancipatory practice of choosing context specific educational change in response to power, domination, access, and achievement imbalances; resulting in improved academic achievement for learners at every academic level involved in the institution of schooling in the U.S. (p. 34).

This teacher's actions led to authentic change. She is now enrolled in a PhD program in Teaching and Learning, works as a diversity consultant with her school district, and teaches 'diversity' courses for the local university. Since her action plan, the teacher's critical social justice and equity impact has increased many times over. As in the case of this particular teacher, from this inquiry, the researchers found that once teachers had the essential equity and social justice knowledge and tools, they could be facilitated through the process of turning their passions into action both in the MA course and beyond.

Discussion and Scholarly Significance

We do not suggest we have a prescription for the ideal design and implementation of a critical social justice pedagogy for all MA programs in education.

We have learned, however that a synergy between critical theory and social justice and practice can begin in a university graduate program that has real and lasting impact on K-12 teaching practices.

Implications for Critical Leadership

The teachers participating in this study all defined social justice and equity through the action plans they created for the MA class. Examining the range of “actions” created, the teachers perceived their roles as critical leaders within the context of what was “doable” for them (Santamaría & Santamaría, in press). These “doable” concrete actions were done outside of the teachers’ defined jobs and done without compensation. Teachers who developed curriculum for their classes all chose to focus on multicultural or social justice topics that are not covered in the state-mandated standards. Teachers who created student clubs did so by meeting with students either during their lunch break or after school. Similarly, teachers who developed programs for their colleagues or parents all did so with the intent of delivering their programs after normal school hours.

All the “doable” actions created by the teachers were initiated by the teachers themselves. The actions were not conceived as being done collaboratively with the teachers’ administrators, but rather what the teachers understood through their experiences as issues that needed to be addressed. They demonstrated their roles as critical leaders by committing their time, resources and passion towards actions they defined as socially just rather than actions administrators, policy makers or politicians design. While some of the issues addressed by the teachers are the same as those identified by administrators, policy makers or politicians, the teachers committed to

following through with their social justice action plans because they reflected each of the teachers' passion and creativity in solving problems they defined.

Returning to the literature review, it is evident that most of the research done in the area of social justice and equity has been in urban settings. Conversely, this study was conducted in a suburban setting in southern California. The vast majority of teachers taught in schools in suburban communities, and identified issues prevalent in those schools and communities. While research has been conducted with pre-service teachers, this study addresses a gap in the literature in that it focuses on socially just actions as defined and enacted by K-12 classroom teachers. The teachers in this study are representative of teachers in California and across the country, and their actions exemplify ways that social justice and equity is defined and enacted by the mainstream for the masses.

It is beyond the scope of this inquiry to claim the described pedagogical practice and projects are more unique or superior to other findings in our area of study. Though, we have learned that modeling, integrating, encouraging, facilitating, and supporting theory into practice of practicing teachers in graduate studies has had a significant impact on their critical understanding and application of social justice and equity teaching practices. We have learned that integrating critical theory into social justice and equity teaching practices constitutes a promising future for educational change.

Further research in suburban schools would help educators understand issues of social justice and equity that can be defined and addressed by mainstream teachers. Studies that build on this work could continue to define teachers' roles as critical leaders. Moreover, based in special education teachers' perceptions and

understandings of social justice and equity, a closer look at the special education critical pedagogy interface may prove intriguing. Future research in this area also should continue to identify teachers' passions in working towards a socially just and equitable school environment, as well as other paths teachers can follow to turning their passions into actions.

This work captures two culturally and linguistically diverse professors of Multicultural Multilingual Educations' experiences teaching a required Masters level course that has as its goal providing teachers with the knowledge and tools necessary to transform public education in regard to providing equitable educational opportunities to all students. Just as the very words '*social justice and equity*' have replaced the vernacular of "multicultural education" and as such has become more buzzwords than real pedagogy, they have become more and more prevalent in discussions about the academic and other achievement gaps separating learners, and educational equity in general. The actual power and potential for sustainable change and transformation intended by change agents and progressive educational leaders, becomes lost in a sea of educational rhetoric. As a result, classroom teachers have felt disconnected from social justice initiatives and practices. This work reverses these trends and tendencies and is therefore significant because the professors were able to facilitate teachers to take what they felt passionate about and turn it into an action; thus, ultimately creating K-12 teachers who are change agents rather than people who merely know about educational change.

Existing literature on critical action (Wink, 2004) takes readers from naming an issue, to critically reflecting on the issue, to address the issue through action. This

contribution suggests taking the action one step further. It asked that practicing K-12 classroom teachers create individual action plans within their sphere of influence (e.g., home, classroom, school, community), which then became part of their praxis. Some action plans impacted communities, some became theses, some became district guidelines, and others professional development workshops. One evolved into a doctoral line of inquiry. The findings from this study indicate the need to keep critical pedagogy and social justice and equity action alive in K-12 teachers' classrooms in order to continually fuel the passion that initially brings teachers to the profession: The hope and promise of making a difference in individuals, their communities, our nation and the world.

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