Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn:
Supporting the Development of New Social Justice Educators

By Bree Picower

Introduction

Beginning teachers are more likely to leave the profession than seasoned counterparts; 14 percent of new teachers leave after their first year, 33 percent leave within three years, and almost 50 percent leave in five years (Alliance for Quality Education, 2004). Research on teacher attrition shows many educators who are part of this "revolving door" (Ingersoll, 2001) are "service oriented" and "idealistic" teachers (Miech & Elder, 1996). These teachers enter the profession to "mak[e] a difference" and contribute to positive change in society. The constraints they face within public schools, however, make it difficult to realize their idealism, leading to attrition. With fewer teachers in the field teaching from this perspective to serve as mentors, how can emerging teachers, dedicated to social justice education (SJE), find the support needed to develop as professionals and remain in the field?

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This study explored the role that participating in a critical inquiry project (CIP) played on the development of new educators who aspire to teach from a social justice perspective. The study also examined

how relationships between the first- and second-year teacher participants shaped their development as social justice educators, learners, and leaders. Findings contribute to understanding two areas: new teacher induction and peer and near-peer mentorship. Unlike most new teacher support groups, CIP was specifically geared to support teachers in their pursuit of SJE. It provided induction designed to combat the attrition of "idealistic" teachers, a group often not targeted through professional development literature. Additionally, little research in the field examines how peer and near-peer relationships between teachers at varying stages of teaching impact their development as social justice educators and leaders.

Literature Review

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) contends that one strategy to support teachers professionally is to prepare teachers for the challenges they will face in urban schools. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) argue that quality professional development must "provide teachers opportunities to share what they know, discuss what they want to learn, and connect new concepts and strategies to their own unique contexts" (p. 597). Quality mentoring by veteran teachers and access to networks of educators who share similar concerns are strategies that are often promoted (Alliance for Quality Education, 2004; Achinstein & Athanases, 2006).

While there is much research on general support for new teachers (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; NCTAF, 2003), there is less research on how to meet the needs of what Miech and Elder (1996) call "idealistic" teachers "who seek to make a significant impact on society" (p. 239). Idealistic teachers place less importance on a job's extrinsic rewards, such as income and prestige (Mortimer & Lorence, 1979; Rosenberg, 1981) and instead have a "desire to help people" (Simpson et al. 1979). Unlike teachers who enter the field without this service orientation, these teachers have a higher rate of attrition due to working in an "environment that offers them little guidance on the goals, means, and evaluation of their work" (p. 249). By introducing such teachers to the goals and skills of the field of SJE, projects such as CIP are spaces that can provide guidance to such educators with a specific focus on the service nature of teaching that attracted them to the profession in the first place.

There is a rich tradition of teachers who also approach education from this perspective, seeing it as a vehicle for freedom and liberation (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998; Freire, 1993; Greene, 1988; Payne, 2008). Westheimer and Kahne (2007) assert, "For many, a commitment to social justice also involves a critique of current inequities in society and experimentation with ways to create socially just conditions within schools that model the equality of educational access and equity of educational outcomes we want for the larger society" (p. 97). Like Dewey (1932), Counts (1932), and scholars that have followed them (Anyon, 1981; Ayers, 2004; Banks, 2006; Giroux, 1995), social justice educators contest the notion

that teaching is a neutral enterprise, and in contrast embrace the political nature of education that is situated in the cultural, racial, economic, and political tensions of the time. Such teachers are concerned with providing their students with opportunities to develop a political analysis, to link that analysis to academic skills and to provide opportunities to take social action (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Oakes & Lipton, 2006). To combat the attrition of idealistic teachers, projects that help them gain these skills, improve their pedagogy, and take action can help them feel empowered rather than defeated (Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Picower, 2007).

Duncan-Andrade shows that critical inquiry groups support such teachers in the difficult work of creating classroom environments in which students are engaged in critical analysis of and take action to improve the world around them. Critical inquiry groups he facilitated "work to powerfully address the needs of [the participating teachers'] students while [participating teachers] are engaged in their own professional growth" (Duncan-Andrade, 2004, p. 340). Research at the University of California Los Angeles's Center X, a program that explicitly works to develop social justice educators, found that the relationships created as novice teachers worked toward equity positioned them as valued leaders at their school sites and kept them in the profession longer than average (Quartz, 2003). In a pilot study, Picower (2007) found that the CIP project provided first-year teachers with ongoing support, culturally relevant curriculum development, and accountability to continue to teach SJE. Without like-minded veteran teachers at their school sites to turn to for the mentorship suggested by the literature, these teachers turned to each other for support.

Method

In an attempt to learn about educational innovation in everyday settings (Bell, 2004; Sandoval & Bell, 2004), I designed the Social Justice Critical Inquiry Project as an environment in which to collect phenomenological data that uncovered how participating in CIP supported the development of new social justice educators. CIP is a multi-year study in which data are collected from audio-taped, bimonthly meetings, annual individual interviews, limited classroom observation, K-5 student work, and field notes. While the content, tone, and activities of the CIP meetings are driven by the participants, I focus on a different research question every year based on my observations and assessment of what is happening within the group at the time. For example, a prior study that emerged was the strategies that the participants used to teach SJE in hostile climates (Picower, 2011).

The present study aimed to assess the role that the group, as well as the role that peer-to-peer relationship, played in their sense of their development as social justice educators. The annual 60-90 minute ethnographic interviews that were conducted at the end of the academic school year were designed to elicit a sense of their experiences, perceptions, feelings, and knowledge of these roles (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Open-ended questions allowed participants to reflect upon the

prior two years and how they believed the group and group relationships impacted their development as social justice teachers and emerging leaders. An example of such a question was "Given that CIP is made up of 1st and 2nd year teachers and graduate students, how has this contributed to your development as a social justice educator?" The findings were compared with data from the previous yearly studies to provide a sense of growth over time.

All interviews and meeting sessions were transcribed and the data were analyzed using grounded theory, allowing the data to inform the analysis, rather than forcing it into *a priori* categories. I read through all interview and session transcriptions looking for examples of the role of the group and peer-to-peer relationships and wrote codes in the margins, creating short line-by-line units, staying as close to the participants' words as possible (Foss & Waters, 2007). I then physically cut these line-by-line units, with only a color-coded system as to who said what, and created piles of data that shared similar themes. These piles were checked for consistency and put into envelopes, each titled with a label that described the phenomenon within. As I arranged these labels and thought about the relationship between them, my conceptual framework of the norms and collaboration that supported the teachers' development emerged as the story these labels told together (Foss & Waters, 2007). Glaser and Strauss (1967) contend that this approach ensures that the theory fits the phenomenon studied, that it does not include any forced elements.

Participants

As a professor of a two-course sequence on social justice education, I offered the opportunity to participate in CIP to students before graduation. Two years in a row, students inspired by the courses volunteered based on their desire to enact social justice education. Eleven of the 12 participants graduated from 2007 and 2008 cohorts of the undergraduate program.[1]

Table 1 shows the diversity of race, grade, specialty, and experience of the teacher participants. The teachers taught in nine different schools in a variety of communities in New York City (with the exception of Luis, who taught in urban New Jersey) that served predominately students of color who qualified for free and reduced lunch. Several were in schools that had a high percentage of English Language Learners. While each school provided a range of professional development opportunities, the teachers reported that most of the in-services and mentoring they received focused more on technical aspects of teaching (i.e., filling out report cards, data analysis, training on specific curricular programs) than on issues pertaining to critical pedagogy, culturally relevant teaching, or social justice education.

CIP met biweekly at the university from which the teachers graduated for two-hour dinner meetings. Kicking-off with a full-day retreat in September, participants set goals and decided on how to structure the subsequent meetings. As the researcher/facilitator of the group, I facilitated the retreat, and then created a

structure in which the participants took turns creating the agendas and facilitating the remainder of the meetings in pairs. Most sessions opened with check-ins with critical friends trios, which remained constant for the year, in which they talked about issues they faced in their classrooms or schools. Every session closed with teachers appreciating something they learned from another group member. Other than that, the sessions often varied and included a range of activities: responding to readings, developing curriculum on social justice topics (child labor, Iraq war, historical racism, genocide), sharing and troubleshooting enacted curriculum, examining student work to see how students were understanding themes of social justice, researching and learning about specific topics they identified as knowledge gaps in their own learning (Malcolm X, service learning), listening to guest speakers on social justice pedagogy, preparing for presentations on their work, creating blogs of their projects, and more.[3] They also presented at local and national conferences and presented to current pre-service teachers in multiple courses at their alma mater. The teachers received no credit or financial incentives to participate; they chose

Table 1
Participant Information[2]

Member	Race/Ethnicity	Teacher of	Type of School	Years Teaching	Years in CIP
Stephanie	White	5th Grade	Public	2	2
Jonathan	White	5th grade, Special Ed CTT	Public	2	2
Hally	White	Kindergarten	Catholic	2	2
Nina	African-Amer.	Pre-K	Independent	2	1.5
Nick	White	2nd Grade, bilingual ASL	Public	1	1
Luis	Latino	6th, 7th, 8th Grade, Sp. Ed.	Public	2	1
Chantale	Black/Haitian descent	6th Grade, Math, Science	Public	1.5	1
Reina	Jewish/ White	5th Grade	Public	1	1
Dana	Jewish/ White	4th Grade	Public	1	1
Vanessa	Latina	4th Grade	Public	1	.5
Shama	Indian	Ass't Teacher, Special Ed.	Independent	1	1
Beth	White	Ass't Teacher, Special Ed.	Independent	1	1

to participate solely because of their desire to continue to develop as social justice educators.

As the facilitator and researcher of the group, I had a variety of roles. I handled most of the logistics such as ordering dinner, reserving space, gathering materials, etc. While some of my roles shifted from professor to facilitator, I still was looked to as the "expert" when it came to issues of SJE. I identified and shared readings, resources, and speakers connected to topics that the participants decided to learn more about or develop lessons on. I was often turned to for an empathetic ear, listening and giving advice to situations that overwhelmed the teachers in their schools. I reviewed the agenda that the facilitating teachers planned prior to the meeting and gave feedback on content, continuity, and time, and often debriefed their facilitation with them afterwards. As taskmaster, I often kept them on time, and redirected when they got stuck or didn't follow through on their responsibilities. I believe my most important role was to raise critical questions connecting them back to the social justice goals they set.[4]

Findings and Discussion

CIP was made up of first- and second-year teachers going through similar teaching experiences who shared commitments to social justice education. These factors led to the creation of a collaborative space characterized by several unspoken norms: (1) members were expected to be full participants, no matter experience level; (2) to expect difference and explore multiple perspectives; (3) that members should allow for a certain level of tension; and (4) CIP was a place to discuss 'taboo' issues that aren't typically possible in mainstream conversations.

The collaborative space coupled with these unspoken norms paved the way for collaboration characterized by an exchange of ideas, resources, and feedback. This supported the teachers' development in three ways. First, members became role models to each other and were able to learn from each other's experiences and projects. Second, collaboration improved members' ability to actualize social justice education in their classrooms. Third, the collaboration taught members necessary social justice leadership skills.

Participation resulted in members becoming reflective of their journey and remaining committed to teaching and social justice. The members learned to "have each other's backs," began presenting to other educators, and felt a sense of pride in their accomplishments. These results kept them on their social justice teaching journey, which also contributed to deepening their political analysis.

Unspoken Group Norms

The make-up and tone of the group set the stage for four unspoken norms that supported members' development as social justice educators. The first norm was that CIP expected, even pushed, members to be active participants. Second, the participants

understood that even though they had shared goals, they were not going to agree on every issue; therefore, they created an expectation for difference and multiple perspectives. Because of this, the group allowed for tension in a way that challenged and furthered their thinking, rather than damaged the cohesion of the group. This third norm challenged them intellectually and created a space for them to unpack complex issues. As a result, the fourth norm of the group was that there was a different way of talking in CIP; they could discuss topics that were taboo in general company and do so in ways that might have resulted in conflict outside of CIP.

Norm One: Expectation of Full Participation. Members understood CIP was not a place to sit back and observe; that it was acceptable, even desirable, to participate even if you didn't have all the answers. There was an unspoken expectation that if you were there, you were going to contribute. As Hally said:

> It's not competitive, but it is. If you have nothing to bring up, what are you doing, just sitting there? You have to have something to talk about… you *want* to say what's going on in your classroom, that's a good part of it.

The members recognized the sense of pressure in the group, but felt that it contributed positively to their development. Instead of being positioned as beginning teachers with no professional knowledge, CIP framed members as intelligent people who had every reason to participate. This norm set the stage for rich collaboration that supported their development.

Another factor that increased participation was the sense that members need not 'have all the answers' to contribute. Members felt free to take risks no matter their level of experience. Being on the same plane allowed CIP members to explore, as equals, a new way of thinking. As Chantale stated:

> We're humble enough to be on the same plane and knowing that we don't know all the answers but that we can get help from anyone. The fact that … I am just like a first-year in CIP, but that someone would ask my opinion about something- it was great.

Not feeling compelled to have all the answers allowed people to be more fully involved. The participation was made easier because even though they were expected to contribute, no one felt judged; rather there was an equal exchange of ideas.

Norm Two: Expectations of Difference and Multiple Perspectives. Members understood that topics discussed would sometimes be uncomfortable. Therefore, there was an unspoken expectation that people might come from different perspectives, and these must be respected. Members characterized CIP as a place that has "tolerance of other people and other views" and where "most of the people in the group are not going to take offense easily." As Stephanie explained:

> We all know that nothing in CIP is ever going to cause us not to be friends or be nasty to each other. Any disagreement is taken with the sense that we're social

> justice educators. We know that we're going to have different views on topics. I think having a lively discussion about it is important, and that these discussions are vital for us to understand them more deeply.

Here Stephanie demonstrated that to not agree is a vital part of being a social justice educator. Unlike polite circles where disagreement is swept under the rug, CIP members actively sought out lively discussions that pushed them to think.

CIP members relied on these multiple perspectives as a way to broaden their understandings of different issues. They identified the racial and cultural diversity of the group as a key factor in helping them find alternative perspectives they would have trouble getting outside of the group. Reina, a White Jewish member explained, "There's not too many places in society you can go and ask somebody 'as a Black woman, how do you feel about this,' right? So that's been really good." The members' understandings that were deepened through the norm of expected differences set the stage for them to have difficult and often unresolved discussions that supported their development.

Norm Three: Allowance for Tension. The fact that CIP was a diverse group, coupled with their openness to different perspectives, paved the way for intense discussions marked by some level of tension. This norm took three forms: it was acceptable for issues to remain unresolved; there was room to unpack complexity; and it was desirable to be challenged intellectually. As an example of unresolved issues, almost all members referenced a discussion about what Obama's election meant for race relations between Chantale, a Black woman of Haitian descent, and Jonathan, a White man. Both members talked about how they felt that their racial and economic background had shaped their status and achievements.

> *Chantale*: [Success is]… all mental. … We all have the same opportunity.
>
> *Jonathan*: We do not.
>
> *Chantale*: Yes we do. Jonathan, I grew up in a neighborhood where I'm telling you a lot of people think the way that you're saying 'oh no, my mom did it like this so I'm gonna do it just like this.' My mom worked in a factory, ok? .... She didn't go to college; she only has a third grade education. Look at me... My mom said 'I'm working hard so you can become somebody. You do it. Don't use me as an excuse.' So I did it and I kept going forward and I've never looked back. I don't knock the people in my neighborhood who didn't move forward in their lives. I just said that's not gonna be me.
>
> *Jonathan*: Do you think that works for everyone?
>
> *Chantale*: It can if you just decide to. It can.
>
> *Jonathan*: Cause I'll tell you why I'm here. I'm here because I came from a middle class White family that sent me to private school and had the money to send me to NYU and had the money to buy me lawyers when I needed them and to shave me and get me a haircut when I needed to go to a job and that woke me up for

> school and that made me do my homework. It wasn't because I wanted to. … I wholeheartedly believe that if I didn't have the parents or the money or the morals that my family tried to instill in me, I wouldn't be here. And I don't think that has to do necessarily with me having given it my all cause I definitely didn't… Like you had to overcome your things and I slept through a lot of my things. But we're doing the same thing now.
>
> *Chantale*: Well that's you're talking from your standpoint. I'm telling it from my standpoint… For me personally for me I don't think about it in the sense of 'oh its just so much tougher for me as a Black woman' you know. It just is. That's the world we live in; therefore I have to push that away and just focus on me and what I need to do. I don't have to think about anybody else; I'm running my race. You run your race, you run your race, and I'm running my race.
>
> *Jonathan*: I think this is a great conversation and I just want to, I know we're far over time and I wanna tell you Chantale that I appreciate you engaging in this with me and with us and you now I feel safe to go head to head with you here and I hope you do and its not personal. Or is it? But you know I think we need to have these conversations. (Picower, 2008, Transcript)

What characterized the unspoken norm in this discussion was the group's ability to allow tension to exist, and to learn from each other's viewpoints, rather than to attempt to come to agreement and "all just get along." As Chantale reflected months later:

> There was a lot of tension there but we heard each other out, even though we had strong opinions about something. I think we were both willing to say: "Okay, that makes sense." I may not agree with it, but it's okay to disagree with that, so I think that was good for me. Not that I'm a confrontational person, but I'm a bold and honest person, and I think I expected a big blow up. It was great to see someone handle it the way he did.

Although the majority of other members did not actively speak during the exchange, they also learned from the nature of the give and take. As Shama explained:

> To be part of a group where we are supposed to expose our kids to these kinds of issues, to just see that tension made me realize, okay, well, we can talk about it. ... We left kind of agreeing to disagree… there was still respect towards the person making the argument.

Typical models for cross-cultural discussions on race are tense, unfriendly, and usually end poorly. In contrast, CIP's ability to hear the multiple perspectives and not seek resolution allowed for deeper understanding of a complex issue.

The allowance for tension provided opportunities to unpack complicated issues that members might not otherwise know about based on their own lives. This allowed them to challenge their previous assumptions and think about situations differently. For example, one evening a member suggested that CIP learn more about the conflict between Israel and Palestine after Israel launched a wave of air strikes against targets within the Gaza Strip in December 2008. One Jewish mem-

ber who was not in attendance that evening had a strong pro-Israel stance, while the majority of the other members professed to know less about the situation but had a pro-Palestinian stance. The group engaged in an intense discussion about whether or not they should use CIP as a space to learn more about the conflict. Unlike most topics discussed in meetings, such as the civil rights movement, the holocaust, or child obesity which had a 'target' or 'enemy' that they all identified, the group did not agree on which country was on the side of justice. The group ultimately decided that it would be too divisive to approach it in depth, but during the evening they respectfully listened to each other's perspectives in the group and agreed to disagree (Picower, 2009, Transcript). Dana, a Jewish member, was even able to challenge her taken-for-granted assumptions about the conflict by listening to the perspectives of her peers:

> Maybe I would have taken a pro-Israel stance, because that's what I have been surrounded by my whole life, without ever thinking that there is a very real pro-Palestine stance. I might have automatically come into a situation assuming that my opinion is in the right, and I think CIP having the conversation reminded me just how sensitive it was.

By having a space that allowed for tension, Dana was able to recognize that some of her previously uninterrogated stances might originate from her upbringing, and CIP provided her a space to examine them. The group's allowance for tension permitted members to explore issues more deeply because they let the complexity of the issues guide them rather than the tension inherent in such discussions.

Norm Four: Different Kind of Talk. The tolerance, safety, and desire to hear multiple perspectives allowed the participants to talk to each other in ways that aren't typical of mainstream discussion. As Luis said, "The rest of the team is so open-minded that it is comfortable to put those issues out there that are kind of taboo." Typically, when tension arises during "taboo" discussions, it is interpreted as hostile. The CIP talks stood out to members as qualitatively different because, when people with different opinions disagreed, it didn't affect their relationships. These discussions taught members ways of engaging in positive cross-cultural dialogue. Reina observed:

> Hearing Chantale speak made me think about how you can talk to people when you want to ask them a personal question about their background, their lifestyle, their culture, but you don't want to be demeaning or disrespectful. I think that she proved that there are ways to do it, and to make the person feel like you're actually honoring them by asking and talking, versus attacking them.

The conversations in CIP were perceived as skill building, allowing members to learn how to express themselves and to recognize the value of having difficult talks.

Style of Collaboration

The group make-up and norms facilitated a motivating collaboration within CIP. Despite their years teaching, all members felt they had something to contribute. This sense of efficacy fostered a reciprocal exchange of feedback, ideas, and resources. This give and take stayed with them even when apart. As a second-year teacher, Stephanie reflected:

> The fact that [Dana] was coming to me showed that she respected my opinion and she valued it and that made me feel like she sees me as somebody that knows what I'm doing… There are times when I've felt like a leader, people are looking to me for guidance or an example, or advice and it made me feel like I have something to contribute, and I am a professional, and I am good at this, and so it's bringing forth confidence in myself.

Often times, beginning teachers feel they are at the bottom of the pecking order and have little professional knowledge. By being able to contribute and feeling well received within CIP, the teachers gained confidence that they were growing leaders with advice to share.

From feedback to resources, what most characterized their collaboration was that of a reciprocal exchange. This contributed to a unique space in which they mentored and served as role models, while gaining confidence and receiving ideas. Unlike traditional professional development in which there is an "expert" leading "learners," in CIP everyone played both roles at different times, allowing them to benefit from each others assistance, while simultaneously developing as leaders. A specific type of give and take happened during feedback time, particularly on classroom issues and curricular plans. Having people to provide feedback helped them to feel less alone by having a community of like-minded people to support their ideas. Because they often didn't have other places to turn to discuss issues of SJE, CIP provided them with critical space to get valued advice, making them feel less alone. Another benefit was that the feedback members gave each other continued after meetings. They internalized the process and learned to think about each other's perspectives when they developed their curriculum on their own. As Stephanie planned she said, "I'll think: 'Oh what would Val say about this?' or 'What would Chantale say?'" This feedback helped them think about multiple perspectives when creating curriculum independently.

Ideas were not the only thing that CIP members shared. Often members referenced, brought in, or emailed each other tangible resources that connected to units mentioned in sessions. The materials often "saved the day" for these new teachers who might not have found time to research them. It also strengthened their sense of teamwork. Chantale described, "I remember I was doing ratios and I was telling Jonathan and he was like: 'Oh, I have an article for you.'" Jonathan gave her a class set of *IndyKids*, an independent student newspaper that focuses on progressive topics. The cover story was on the mortgage crisis and provided her

with data and statistics that transformed her textbook driven ratio lesson into one that allowed students to use mathematics to better understand the economic crisis and the rise in homelessness (Picower, 2008, Classroom). She continued, "He gives me the article and it was perfect…I was like 'Ahhh.' Suddenly the heavens opened up!" These exchanges provided them resources that moved their teaching toward social justice and created a resource for future projects. Through the give and take of feedback, ideas and resources, CIP expanded the knowledge and strategies of each of the individual members.

Collaboration Supports Their Development

The style of collaboration the teachers engaged in supported their development in three main areas that are explored in this section. First, members provided each other with models of what it looked like to be social justice educators. Second, the collaboration provided concrete plans that increased their ability to actualize SJE in their classrooms. Third, through collaboration members developed leadership skills.

Collaboration Led to Models of Social Justice Education. By acting as models, members provided each other with inspiration and motivation. The more experienced teachers gave a sense of what was coming next and their projects helped newer members understand how to get started, and sparked ideas for new projects for everyone. Additionally, listening to each other's experiences helped them all to better analyze their own contexts.

CIP members inspired each other by providing models of what was possible for people who are going through similar experiences. As Chantale shared:

> It gives me something to aspire to. I get the opportunity to see Jonathan and Stephanie and how they work together really hard to integrate social justice inside the curriculum. They're very passionate about it and I think you have to be loony not to have that pass on to you.

Often new teachers are acculturated into an atmosphere of compliance or teaching only the mandated curriculum (Picower, 2011). By setting a different example, one of deep commitment to SJE and the work it entails, members created another culture, and a new orientation of being a first-year teacher. The accomplishments of the second-year group members became models of aspiration, guiding the newer members into a culture of teaching for social justice from the beginning of their careers. The second-year teachers' experiences and strategies served as models to know what to expect. Beth explained:

> Hearing from other people and seeing their progress lets me have a catalog of what can happen, and later on if something like that comes up, I have a reference for how to deal with it … I do realize it's going to be hard, so just knowing that they did it makes me feel better, and it gives me lots of ideas.

Often, the only thing new teachers hear is how hard and overwhelming the first year is. Hearing success stories directly from people who had the same preparation, were teaching at similar schools, and had successfully implemented SJE provided a sense of relief.

Collaboration Improved Ability to Teach for Social Justice. The ways in which members collaborated also improved their SJE practice by triggering their thinking, helping them get work done, and preparing them for multiple contexts. Often, the nature and content of CIP meetings translated to members' classrooms because they practiced discussing complex issues and had time to think about how they would introduce them to their students. The members were adapting their willingness to allow for tension into their ability to facilitate discussions with students. Additionally, CIP gave them a space to workout and examine some of their own beliefs prior to presenting a topic to their students. For Stephanie, it also prepared her to better respect the multiple perspectives of her students:

> We have respected each other's opinions and feelings, and I apply that to my classroom. Because my kids are going to think something different than I think most of the time, I need to keep in mind that it's their opinions, and I need to respect them just as much as I would respect Reina, or Chantale. My kids are people, and knowing how to practice that with adults, that backing-off or knowing when to push, having that skill is really important to have in the classroom.

Critics of SJE (Labaree, 2004; Stern, 2006) often claim that such teachers are indoctrinating their students to a particular ideology. Stephanie clearly demonstrated her role as the antithesis of that. Rather than forcing all students to share one stance, members actively worked to respect their students' multiple opinions.

CIP also provided a space to get concrete work done. Newer teachers are often overwhelmed by how to manage their time and responsibilities. As Jonathan stated, "When you get home from work, [social justice curriculum planning is] just not something you're going to jump on. We are all busy people, and there needs to be time for those things." A key component of CIP sessions was time to develop and get feedback on curriculum. During this time members planned units and lessons on topics ranging from genocide, to the Iraq War, to child obesity. The teachers often shared the units with each other. For example, Stephanie and Reina exchanged units on the Holocaust and on school segregation, which cut their planning time in half while increasing the amount of time students learned about issues of justice. By providing time and space for collaborative planning, members developed SJE projects that they could implement the next day.

The different contexts in which members taught (public school, catholic school, special and general education, multiple grade levels) exposed them to what SJE looked like in multiple settings. Teachers often think that certain ways of teaching aren't realistic for their setting and make excuses for why it can't be done. Jonathan admitted, "I think a lot of times I make excuses for my kids or my school and say:

'They won't get it.'" By seeing his peers' projects in different contexts, his mindset was challenged.

> Look at Nick, he's teaching ASL and teaching really tough topics with absolutely no sacrifice of content at all. And this sticks its tongue out at those mind-sets, because who are you to say they aren't going to get it. Because all signs point to that you can do this almost anywhere, at any age, and with any ability or disability.

Seeing Nick in action reminded the other members to question the excuses they might bring to the table.

Collaboration Developed Leadership and Mentoring Skills. Finally, the third result of collaboration was to develop members' ability to lead for SJE. By taking turns setting agenda's and facilitating meetings, the participants learned to lead a group of adults, which provided leadership practice for other settings. While teachers may be expected to exhibit leadership when promoted to coaches, cooperating teachers, or administrators, their leadership skills are rarely *consciously developed*. CIP explicitly built in opportunities for practice at leadership, and members were given feedback about their style. By providing practice in facilitating and presenting, members felt more confident in themselves, their skills and their ability to be leaders in the field. As Stephanie shared:

> I had the chance to facilitate, and people actually used what I did in their classrooms. It's such a boost of confidence because they took what I did... Just getting that chance to plan a meeting and an agenda, now I feel like I could do that for any meeting; I can take leadership.

Rather than feeling like fledglings, CIP experiences helped them to perceive themselves as leaders, confident to act in a variety of settings. For those concerned with social justice, the ability to step up and lead in multiple contexts is a required skill with which they now have practice.

The skills and resources that members brought back to their schools positioned them as leaders with expertise in issues pertaining to SJE. Through the exchange in sessions, members were equipped with an arsenal of resources and the ability to share them with colleagues in collaborative ways. Nick, a first-year, became the "go-to-guy" on social justice issues for his principal and other colleagues because of the projects and leadership he had exhibited.

> My principal asked *me*: 'Should we do professional development on this?' And so I gave her my feedback … People at my school are like: 'Oh wow! You're doing this and this; You're so involved.' So it's cool. Some of the other teachers come to me now.

While many new teachers are perceived as needy, the confidence, knowledge and skills gained at CIP positioned members as leaders with tangible resources to contribute. This helped to give credibility to the SJE units that they integrated into their classrooms and, in many cases, caused colleagues to want to do similar projects.

Tangible Results

Four tangible benefits to the members emerged from the data. First, members were able to reflect on their journey of developing as social justice educators, seeing where they started and where they were still heading. This ongoing reflection and their own perception of their development kept them committed to the group and to the goal of SJE. Second, members demonstrated some of the mindsets and skill sets of social justice activism by the ways in which they "had each others' backs" when they faced challenging circumstances. Third, by publically sharing their work, members began to spread social justice education to others. Finally, the culmination of these results increased their confidence and their motivation to remain teaching.

By having opportunities to present to current students in the program from which they graduated, members were able to see how far they had come in their journey of thinking about teaching and social justice. After leading a workshop for freshman, Reina said, "We used to be like the freshman…I would have answered the same way… That was awesome to see we've come so far in the way we think about society, education, everything. I think it was cool to see the transition, to prove how far we've come." Seeing how far they had come served to keep them motivated and to realize that they were on a trajectory of learning that is ongoing.

CIP played a profound role in keeping members committed to teaching. Without CIP many members felt they would not have been as successful, or might not have even attempted to teach for social justice. When asked what their year would be like had they not been in CIP, Chantale's emotionally-charged response was:

> I'd have quit teaching. I think I'm going to cry… [CIP] inspires me to keep being a teacher, because I know that you've got to start somewhere. I really love being [at CIP]… I just see now that being a teacher is not about teaching this, this and this. It's is about preparing our kids for being knowledgeable human beings that understand the way of the world, and to understand not just their cause, but all causes… It keeps me going, it definitely keeps me going.

With over 50 percent of new teachers leaving within the first five years, CIP played a role in helping members put their vision of preparing human beings who understand the way of the world into practice. The satisfaction they gain by teaching with a purpose and being able to improve their craft in a community of peers kept them going.

Another tangible result was how members learned to have each other's backs. In many ways, they exemplified some of the tenets of SJE by being ready and willing to take action on each other's behalves. For example, Nick learned that his American Sign Language school was being threatened with closure. Nick turned to the group and their encouragement bolstered his efforts to save his school. The CIP members learned the power of collective support by having each other's backs. While most teachers feel isolated and alienated, members learned how power in

numbers further sustained their social justice efforts. They also realized that this level of unity is personally rewarding as well.

A third result was that CIP gave members opportunities to teach SJE to others. Through leading workshops for students in their former program to presenting at national conferences and writing a book chapter about CIP, members grew as leaders by passing on their knowledge and encouraging others to teach SJE. Stephanie stated, "If people like it and read it and are inspired by it, then I want to continue to write. It makes me feel like I'm really doing it and it's not like; 'oh when I get it together.' I have it together! I can do it and I am doing it." By having the opportunity to spread their knowledge, members gained confidence and a sense of expertise. This kept the teachers connected to the reasons they went into teaching. Rather than feeling like cogs in the system, or getting bogged down in the daily grind, CIP members were having positive experiences spreading their vision of what education should be.

Finally, members felt a tremendous sense of accomplishment. The sense of pride they felt boosted their confidence and motivated them to keep learning and teaching SJE. When Nick learned their book chapter had been accepted, "I told my old cooperating teacher and he was so proud of me, and just hearing him like: 'Ah, you're doing so great, I can't believe you are doing this!' …It built my self esteem." For these young teachers, their successes in CIP represented some of their first professional accomplishments. Without the opportunities presented in CIP, they might not have had other chances to stand out from the crowd. These experiences left them excited and motivated to take on more challenges while furthering their dedication to CIP.

Implications

These findings indicate that collaboration within CIP furthered the development of new social justice educators. While it may appear that it was the activities of the project that led to their increased capacity, the data show that more significant was the norms and tone of the group. While the activities of lesson planning and presenting, were key elements, without the four norms that expected participation, encouraged multiple perspectives, allowed for tension, and encouraged "taboo" talk, the stage would not have been set for participants to push each other towards growth. This has implications for those interested in replicating critical inquiry groups for new teachers. Copying the agendas of CIP sessions will be insufficient; it is necessary to create the collaborative space that allows for critical discussions that aren't always resolved. These findings also demonstrate how traditional models of professional development may not be successful in supporting the development of new social justice educators. Often characterized by large groups that meet once or twice led by an "expert," these traditional models do not allow for the relationship building, participation or kinds of discussion necessary to create critical collaboration. Not as simple as gathering many teachers in a room for two hours, the findings in this study demonstrate that true

teacher development requires long-term and intense investments in the relationships and well-being of aspiring social justice educators.

Notes

[1] The 12th participant had been a graduate student at the same university. She was also a former student of mine, received similar preservice education, and taught at the same school with three other participants.

[2] There is less data reported on Vanessa and Nina because they only participated in CIP for half the year because of schedule conflicts and therefore were not interviewed.

[3] For more information on the logistics of CIP, see Picower, B. (2007), Supporting new educators to teach for social justice: The critical inquiry model. *Penn Perspectives on Urban Education*. Vol 5(1). This previous article describes a pilot project of CIP.

[4] As their former professor/facilitator of the group, it is very likely that I had an influence on the participants. However, this article is a review of the role that the group members played on the members' development.

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