Chapter 3

Literacy Teacher Preparation for Educational Justice Through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors describe their positions as social justice educators and provide concrete examples for engaging educators in reflection, discussion, and praxis in a required course for preservice teachers in literacy. They describe concrete steps they have taken to incorporate and model a culturally rich pedagogical practice. They both believe that a course that requires reading, writing, and thinking provides a rich backdrop for engaging with preservice teachers about cultural and linguistic diversity and for moving into spaces of working towards equity and justice in society by engaging in action. Given that they each require students to apply what they are learning in the creation of learning centers and final projects, the authors believe their models of practice and praxis along with conversations about the necessity of a social justice stance will manifest in quality work as students design reading and writing assignments of their own.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter paints a picture of what socially just teacher education can look like in a literacy course focused on integrating reading and writing. The course is required in one of the largest programs for initial teacher preparation in Texas. This chapter is not a critique nor a one-size fits all call for replica-
tion, rather it is an example of how two teacher educators came to the same course from slightly different perspectives. This work also reflects the efforts of two teacher educators’ attempts to develop a model of practice – as noted in the hooks quote above – that can center critical consciousness within a required teacher preparation course.

We begin by defining social justice education, exploring our development as advocates for change, and describing a shared literacy course we use as a vehicle for addressing cultural and linguistic diversity and the need for socially just curricula. We then describe our efforts to refine and reflect on this course, both individually and through collaborative inquiry. Our hope is this chapter can provide a model for others who wish to integrate culturally sustaining pedagogies into literacy teacher education.

BACKGROUND

Defining Social Justice Education

For us, social justice education requires a recognition that society is stratified in many significant ways, including along lines of race, language background and proficiency, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. This stratification is built into the sociohistorical and structural fabric of our schools and institutions and impacts people on both structural and individual levels (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). As social justice educators, we must recognize these power relations and understand our role in systems that can lift up some members while marginalizing others (Carlisle, Jackson & George, 2006). Perhaps equally important, we seek opportunities to take action (Grant & Sleeter, 2010). That means aiding in the identification and examination of instances of injustice so our students – who will soon follow us into the classroom – can grapple with issues of injustice that they might otherwise overlook in their daily lives.

In acknowledgement that we fit the dominant demographic of teacher today: white, middle class women, we believe it is necessary to examine the role we play in the overall system. We understand that our voices have power, and it is necessary to not just how we think of how we fit, but how others may perceive us. As social justice educators, we constantly reflect and analyze our own thinking, actions, and ideologies and in turn we teach our students to think critically about our singular and collective knowledge bases, beliefs, and ideologies and how we have come to know and understand concepts, as well as whose knowledge(s) we are privileging in our curricula, pedagogies, and understandings. As we learn more and reflect on these concepts, we are also driven to action, to praxis, and we understand the importance of engaging constantly in this cycle of learning, reflecting, doing (Hackman, 2005). Because for us, the point of being a social justice educator is to create a more just society.

This is where our practices come in. We believe that in order to achieve a more just educational system, we must reframe issues of access and equity for students of color (Paris & Alim, 2014) on two fronts: we must foster linguistic and cultural flexibility for students of color as well as white students; and, we must re-center the aim of education to multilingualism and multiculturalism. Promoting these aspirations is increasingly important to meet the demographic imperative (Hodgkinson, 2002) of the educational landscape across our state and the nation: there are increasing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students represented in public school classrooms, students who deserve to be seen, supported, and cared for by the predominantly white teachers who work as educators today.
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Our views on social justice in education align with the values and norms of culturally sustaining pedagogy. In 2012, Django Paris offered the term and stance of culturally sustaining pedagogy to expand the conversation around asset pedagogies. Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) builds and honors the prior work on culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive pedagogies (Cazden & Leggett, 1976; Gay, 2000) while pushing educators to explicitly support and sustain multilingual, multicultural practices and perspectives. In addition, culturally sustaining pedagogies aim to move away from those aligned with linguistic, literate, and cultural hegemony and instead to include pedagogies that de-center whiteness, reframing access and equity in education and society outside of white supremacist norms. Educators with a CSP mindset support multilingual and multiethnic perspectives in order to sustain, revitalize, and nurture linguistic, literate, racial, and cultural pluralism in education.

As teacher educators whose experiences as teachers were in multilingual classrooms in urban schools, both of us were drawn to the ideas of culturally sustaining pedagogy in teacher education as a way to recognize students’ diverse identities and experiences while engaging in robust instruction that has the potential to redistribute power and counter inequalities in public schooling (Lee & Walsh, 2017). In order to achieve these aims with our preservice teachers, we recognize the need to be intentional in our choices and we must continually examine and re-examine our practices as well as our impact. In other words, we must be intentional and ask ourselves, whose knowledge matters and is at the center? How is this knowledge used in education to colonize, to reproduce inequities, or to challenge or to disrupt the status quo? These are important questions that guide our planning and curricular choices. These choices and focus on intentionality include the readings we select for our classes, the language(s) we utilize and encourage in our teaching and in students’ writings, how we draw on lived experiences, and how we create classroom community, to name a handful of the core components of our class.

Authors as Burgeoning Advocates

If you want to understand a person’s dedication to social justice and equity, you can often discover this through the stories they tell of their early lives. This is certainly the case with the authors of this chapter. We each grew up in flux, with families that moved frequently; this reality taught us the importance of compassion, flexibility, and a tolerance for different perspectives and lived experience. Moving frequently surfaces systems of power that privilege some groups of humans over others, regardless of what circumstance you come from. Minda lived outside of the United States and was exposed to a wide swath of languages and cultures throughout her childhood. By the time she was ten years old she knew she looked, sounded, and behaved differently than others her age back home, but this did not manifest in negative consequences until she found herself in a public middle school in Dallas, Texas in seventh grade. It was there that an awareness of society’s stratifications entered her consciousness in ways that made little sense to her.

For example, she came to understand that students who had attended elementary school in this district were privileged in many ways over those who had come into the school system later, like Minda. Her early years were spent in remote areas of the world such as the Philippines and Guatemala. She lived a childhood as a “third culture kid” (Pollock & van Reken, 2009), immersed in cultures and languages that were not her country of origin. When she returned to the United States as an adolescent, she witnessed the privileging of athletes, boys, and Dominant American English (DAE) speakers over those who were
not and realized it just wasn’t right; it wasn’t equitable. She knew then and there that she would work her whole life to try to do something to change that system; to work for equity and justice.

Jane’s equally informative mobility happened in the southwest United States, where she attended more than 8 schools between kindergarten and high school. Each move represented distinct school and community cultures and priorities and required constant adaptations to difference. Desegregation busing provided a pivotal experience for Jane in the 1970’s when she entered a magnet school program that drew high-achieving students from across the city. Intended to ameliorate the social and racial separation of students by neighborhood, the program required a representative balance of the race, ethnicity, and gender reflected in the larger community. It was here that Jane understood that intellectual curiosity, creativity, and ability were not the domain of any particular demographic group. She was challenged by the variety of thought and cultural diversity of her classmates remembering this as the happiest schooling experience she experienced: a place where differences in race, religion, and language were elevated and drawn on for learning and understanding others. Students took field trips to cultural sites, museums, and performances all over the state of Texas, offering countless hours to explore differences of experience and opinion.

When her father took a position in a neighboring state, Jane found herself in a racially homogenous school with a culture of disdain toward scholarly pursuits and a privileging – like Minda’s experience – of athletes and those long in the community over newcomers. There was also a more openly religious aspect to the community than she experienced previously. Almost three years ahead of her peers in terms of course content, she learned quickly that there were repercussions for raising your hand in class and engaging with the teacher’s content: this was the quickest journey toward social death. Having thrived in the vibrant and interdisciplinary education she had received in the magnet school, Jane kept quiet until she was able to co-enroll in college courses while in high school. University coursework reignited her passion for school, and she knew that teaching and learning would be central to her future pursuits.

**A Course in Common**

For the past decade, we have each taught Reading 3320: Integrating Reading and Writing, which is a required course for preservice teachers seeking elementary or middle level [English or social studies] certification. This course draws on a workshop approach to develop confidence in preservice teachers as writers and teachers of writing. Central to the course is an investigation of the theoretical and practical, with a focus on meeting the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse students who populate the public schools of our state. Among our goals for the course are that students:

- Understand their own development as readers and writers and actively engage in the craft of writing;
- Evaluate and create lesson plans and materials for teaching reading and writing for ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse students;
- Identify, describe, and apply strategies for integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the content areas and technology; and,
- Develop a reflective praxis.
Although many of us share professional texts and pedagogical ideas with one another, professors teaching the course draw on their own interests and expertise and are not beholden to any restrictive curricula or shared syllabus.

One of the challenges addressed in this book is the difficulty teachers face in attempting to enact a culturally sustaining pedagogical practice. This can surface for a variety of reasons. Social justice is a contested concept, and preservice teachers often shy away from controversy, worrying that the school districts where they are learning to teach will view them unfavorably if they stir things up. Even those of us who are committed to equity in our research and practice can feel overwhelmed by all that we need to do to prepare students for the complexities of teaching in schools in this divisive historical moment.

What follows here is a self-study outlining the concrete steps we have taken to incorporate and model a culturally rich pedagogical practice in the Integrating Reading and Writing course described above along with the critical step of praxis – of moving to action. We both believe that a course that requires reading, writing, and thinking provides a rich backdrop for engaging with preservice teachers about cultural and linguistic diversity and for moving into spaces of working towards equity and justice in society by engaging in action. Given that we each require students to apply what they are learning in the creation of learning centers and final projects, we believe our models of practice and praxis along with conversations about the necessity of a social justice stance will manifest in quality work as students design reading and writing assignments of their own.

**METHOD**

This study emerged from a desire to critically reflect on our own practice, and self-study provided a framework for us to analyze how we engaged our students in equity, social justice, and culturally sustaining work in the same literacy course for undergraduate preservice teachers. Self-study is an approach used to systematically document the authentic voices of those who seek to understand the why and the what of a process or experience from an insider perspective. Self-study researchers focus on their practice by examining their personal values and their professional work while engaging in reflexivity (Kleinsasser, 2000), documenting their own perspectives and classroom experiences to learn about teaching and the impact of their teaching on their students. The method includes a variety of data and analysis procedures, essentially whatever will provide the evidence and context necessary for better understanding their practice (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998; Loughran, 2007).

For this study, we served as critical friends as we turned the investigative lens on our own thought processes, rationales, and decision making. The data we collected for the study include curricular choices (i.e. readings, discussions, assignments), classroom activities (PowerPoints, discussion prompts, in-class assignments), and professor reflections recorded through email conversations, journal entries, and notes. Data analysis was approached through the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and thematic analysis. Data were examined first by each researcher where patterns and themes were compared and categorized to locate patterns of global competence, then presented to each other for comment. We served as critical friends and gave each other feedback, adding to our understanding.

We recognize the method has limitations. The self-reported data in self-study has been cited as its biggest limitation – that the researcher is too close or emotionally tied to the work and therefore biased (Sandretto, 2009). Additionally, a potential pitfall can include researchers merely asking questions whose answers will confirm existing beliefs (Schuck, 2002). These limitations may result in congratulatory
results, rather than critical awareness and thus the studies lack validity (Feldman, 2003). To ameliorate this shortcoming, we shared our data, analysis, and reflections with each other.

Although self-study may elicit critique and doubt regarding its rigor (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008), self-study has been cited as one of the most effective methods to learn about teacher education and improve the quality of teacher preparation (Zeichner, 2007), and is particularly powerful when carried out collaboratively (Dinkelman, 2003). As Loughran (2005) echoes “Self-study then is the academic activity that is responsive to these individuals’ desire to better understand the nature of teaching and teaching about teaching and in so doing, improve the quality of teacher education” (p. 30). Through this self-study, we add to the field of teacher education and provide examples for others to build upon. We acknowledge we do not hold all the answers and yet we share some examples of how to integrate social justice and culturally sustaining pedagogy into teacher preparation.

**PORTRAITS OF PRACTICE**

In the section that follows, each author considers her teaching practice - with particular attention paid to the teaching of writing instruction. We then make connections to our understanding of culturally sustaining approaches. Then, we delve deeper into our notions of *praxis*, defined by Freire (2005) as “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed,” and draw conclusions about the need for a more purposeful praxis capable of enacting a culturally sustaining pedagogy.

**Minda - Developing and Claiming a Writer’s Identity**

Who we are influences what we do in the classroom. This belief is fundamental to Minda’s work as a teacher educator and permeates all the choices she makes, from the first day of class when students introduce themselves with stories about their names by means of “I am” poems to the very last day when students make their writings public through sharing in the author’s chair in a community celebration. And over the years of teaching this class on teaching writing, Minda has discovered that many of her students do not see themselves as writers. Many see themselves from a deficit perspective, their creative lights dimmed by the critique of society, by well-meaning parents and teachers as well as by the pervasive hegemony of Dominant American English and ideas of “appropriateness” in language (Rosa & Flores, 2017). This is even more common in students of color and multilingual students whose voices have been silenced by a colonizing system intent on measuring their success by a norm that is disconnected from their lives.

Minda’s approach to teaching writing is based on a workshop model where preservice teachers are engaged in writing during every class period. She wants preservice teachers to identify as writers themselves; to claim that identity. Then they examine the craft of writing, the pedagogical practices that allow students to develop the craft of writing and Minda believes this is how they become teachers of writing. So, each class has a writing component as well as an examination of the pedagogies around teaching writing through reflection and discussion.

Using some of the wisdom and teachings of foundational writing teachers such as Ralph Fletcher, Barry Lane, and Nancie Atwell, Minda believes that writing is something all of us can develop by paying close attention to our own lives. Writing does not require a dramatic tragedy or an exotic locale. Instead, writing comes from students’ themselves, from the unique lived experiences of each person. Students
naturally begin with themselves, starting out the semester out with deeply personal writings like the “I am” poems discussed above, then brainstorming writing territories (Atwell, 2015), and engaging in heart maps (Heard, 2016).

Students move from these seed ideas of writing to thinking about writing and storytelling throughout history. This includes oral traditions and multimodalities beyond written texts including semiotics, technological advances, and various tools around writing. This affords discussion of more diverse perspectives and epistemologies. Students consider the past, present and the future of writing, including how stories have been passed down through generations to teach culture and build knowledge in indigenous communities around the globe. The class can then unpack and examine the intricate interconnectedness of language and literacies, of hegemonies of English and Spanish, and ideologies of language. Conversations reflect how structures of power undermine the language, culture, and identities of our K-12 students, particularly students of color (Cummins, 2000) and this often pertains to the preservice teachers in my class as well.

**Minda - Drawing on Touchstone Texts**

After discussing structures of power and unpacking the ways historically marginalized students and communities have experienced schooling, their histories and practices often erased and left out of the curriculum, Minda draws on a touchstone text chosen intentionally to bring to light collective memories of subjugated histories (López, Ynostroza, Fránquiz, & Cárdenas Curiel, 2015). Thus, the subject and themes of the text are very important. This deep dive allows for more discussion into a series of related themes and also provides an opportunity for the class to cover subject matter that disrupts deficit perspectives of communities of color and has themes that serve to sustain, revitalize, and nurture linguistic, literate, racial, and cultural pluralism in education.

In addition, the timing is important. Minda intentionally introduces the touchstone text in the middle of the semester once the group has developed community and established the tone of our class as one of social justice and equity, of working to repair and heal from racial and other inequalities. Working with the text in the middle of the semester is also crucial as it allows students to apply what they have learned about writing; this enables the group to discuss the craft of teaching writing within the context of a written text. Minda uses the touchstone text to delve deeper into exploring the pedagogical processes – of how her students can integrate reading and writing as well as social studies and history into the writer’s workshop.

For the past few years, Minda chose *Sylvia and Aki* (Conkling, 2011) as the touchstone text, described by Calkins (1994) as a text that guides and excites the imagination of writers, for several reasons. It is a beautifully written, award-winning young children’s novel with a wealth of compelling themes on complex topics. In this historical fiction, parallel stories of two girls who lived in California during World War II are chronicled. The story begins in 1941 shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Aki Munemitsu’s family is sent to an internment camp in Poston, Arizona, and Sylvia Mendez’s family leases the Munemitsu asparagus farm and house during the internment period. Although Aki, a Japanese American, was allowed to attend the neighborhood school, Westminster Elementary, Sylvia and her two brothers were turned away. Instead, they were forced to attend the run-down Mexican school across town, called Hoover Elementary. Sylvia’s father rallied four other families to file a court case against the school district (Mendez v. Westminster School District). The lawsuit against segregating Mexican children into impoverished schools was eventually won. Although little is known about the Mendez v.
Westminster case, it served as a significant precedent for the 1955 Brown v. Board of Education ruling ending segregation of children of color in U.S. schools.

The protagonists are young girls – a Latina of Mexican-American and Puerto Rican heritage and a Japanese American living during the beginning of WWII in California. Their lives intersect at an important historical moment as Aki’s family is sent to a Japanese Internment camp and Sylvia’s family rents their farm. The themes of separation, segregation, discrimination and injustice are woven throughout the novel from both girls’ perspectives. There is also movement towards action – as the Mexican American families fight for justice through the court case. In addition, because this is historical fiction, there are important historical moments and social movements that can be researched and examined, such as racism and segregation of US public schools in the 1940s, Japanese Internment, and the court case Sylvia’s family was the plaintiff in Mendez vs. Westminster. These themes and events are important aspects of history that many of the preservice teachers are unaware of and yet they mirror current events and are critically relevant to society today.

The use of a touchstone text in Minda’s class offers students the opportunity to grapple with a complex text while considering its practical application as a tool for teaching writing. This is explored in greater specificity in the section detailing Minda’s praxis. For now, we turn to Jane’s practice.

**Jane’s Practice - Telling Stories**

Jane believes that there is an inner writer in every student, but the reliance on high stakes testing and scripted writing formulas have diminished her students’ willingness to write for pleasure or to explore their own experiences. Many of her students have been critiqued harshly, so a big part of the semester is spent on how to help folks with their writing without crushing their spirit – something that is necessary for teachers of PK-12 to understand. She draws on a variety of professional pedagogical texts, memes, poems, picture books, videos, graphic novels, and any other “text” to nudge students into writing. Drawing on the tenets of writing process pedagogy, each class meeting offers students the chance to plan to write, write, revise, edit, or make their work public. As a result, students often begin a writing assignment in class and those that captivate their interest are taken all the way through the writing process.

Jane’s approach to teaching writing is to focus first on storytelling, starting with students’ own lived experiences. She recently asked students to read and respond to “Mapping childhood: How our stories build community” (Christensen, 2017), which affirms the importance of developing students’ narrative voice. The article suggests that narrative writing has been lost, and with it an opportunity to use storytelling as a means of both understanding and critiquing our communities and the world around us. Jane asks students to map a space from their childhood that hosts a wide swath of stories; students map their neighborhoods, their schools, family members’ homes, parks, and other places of value. Stories that come from this exercise range from the hilarious to the poignant or sad. Students reminisce and at times judge their earlier selves, and the reading and revising that happens with these pieces serve to anchor the rest of the semester. As students share their stories, they build trust with one another and begin to talk about how to adapt this activity with the age/grade students they are working with in field-based courses.

In one instance, a student who was substitute-teaching found that the absent teacher had left behind no lesson plans. She took out crayons and paper and asked the students to draw one of their favorite places, their neighborhoods, or a place that held memories. She then asked the 3rd graders to sketch one to write about, mirroring what she had learned in her reading/writing course. In recent semesters, Jane has begun incorporating the social justice standards contained in Teaching Tolerance’s “Anti-bias
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framework for teaching” into her classroom practice. Like Minda, she has assigned *Sylvia and Aki* as an anchor text that students use to plan reading and writing activities. Students read and respond to the novel – and make links to the framework’s four domains: *identity, diversity, justice, and action*. Each domain is represented in some way in *Sylvia and Aki*, and parallel our current historical moment. Sylvia and Aki’s families are both marginalized for cultural, ethnic, and language differences and this mirrors stories about DACA, religious intolerance, racial disharmony, and immigration that are omnipresent in the news. While most of our students have studied concentration camps in relation to the Holocaust and Hitler’s reign, fewer have an awareness of the Japanese internment camps. In recent semesters, students have drawn connections between Aki’s experience being separated from family members and media stories describing the separation of kids from their parents at the Texas/Mexico border.

**Jane’s Practice - StoryCorps and Beyond**

In addition to *Sylvia and Aki*, Jane draws on a wide swatch of writing to undergird her teaching: photographs, obituaries, memes, commercials, social media posts, and news articles of topical interest to students. A newer addition is the immense StoryCorps library, which includes audios and videos of folks sharing stories with others. Supported by the mission “to preserve and share humanity’s stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world,” StoryCorps started with a story booth in Grand Central Terminal in New York City in 2003. It has since expanded and additional categories of stories have bubbled up, including: the experiences of military veterans, LGBTQ community, families who have been impacted by mass incarceration and more recently, stories of families divided by politics.

Many of the stories housed within the StoryCorps web site have been adapted into short, highly engaging animations that are directly related to the Anti-bias Framework. For example: Julio Diaz tells the story of getting held up by a young man that he ends up taking to dinner. In “Lessons Learned,” Dr. William Weaver reflects on his experience as a black student forced to integrate into a predominantly white school, including the discrimination he faced at the hands of his new teachers. In “Icing on the Cake,” Connie Alvarez interviews her mother – an immigrant to the United States – and discovers poverty she did not understand as a child; she then reflects on the importance watching her mother attend school had on her own development. These stories tie directly to the readings of the course, and can leverage far richer conversations than formal textbooks and research articles. Perhaps more importantly, the stories provide a wide swath of personal experience and perspective, which is valuable for preservice teachers who will be entering classrooms full of people both like and different from themselves.

**CONNECTIONS TO A CULTURALLY SUSTAINING APPROACH**

Through conversations with each other about the challenge of developing a culturally sustaining approach to teaching and learning, we both have found it necessary to help preservice teachers understand its necessity in the first place. Our students are moving into the classroom at the same moment that “explicit assimilationist and antidemocratic monolingual/monocultural educational policies (are) emerging across the nation” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 88). Thus, while they may not be attending to these policies in great detail, it is incumbent on teacher educators to make these policies evident and help preservice teachers consider their impact on schooling in general and their future students in particular.
This is particularly pressing in a state like Texas – where we teach, and where demographic shifts suggest that schools are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of both language and racial/ethnic identity while white teachers still dominate the profession. And, while research suggesting the need for a culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994), responsive (Gay, 2000), and additive (Valenzuela, 1999) approach have been invaluable in helping teachers identify the damage a deficit orientation toward students can have on their intellectual and identity development, there is more work ahead.

While we have fewer preservice teachers questioning our critical stance, we still find many grappling with how to privilege cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset - rather than as a deficit to be cured - while simultaneously focusing on their students’ ability to perform on state-mandated tests. They question: “If I allow my students to write in their first language, will that make them less successful on the STAAR (a state mandated high stakes standardized) test?” “Will I get in trouble if I spend too much time on activists in history instead of the largely white/male figures our state curriculum requires?” “How can we model taking action?” These are not simple questions, and we seek a variety of pieces of writing and multimedia to facilitate reflection, conversations, and action around ethnicity, race, language, culture, and various aspects of identities and cultural practices that move beyond “food, fun, and festivals” to take on a more critical approach.

**PORTRAITS OF PRAXIS**

In the section that follows, we turn next to each author’s efforts toward a transformative practice. We also consider the challenges educators can face in enacting a more agentive approach to teaching and learning.

**Minda - Supporting Preservice Teachers’ Journey into Praxis**

While reflections and discussions around social justice are absolutely essential for preservice teachers, so is moving to action or praxis. Often, the action is the hardest part. In order for her preservice teachers to understand how an integrated unit of study around a touchstone text can include essential questions, themes, standards and praxis, or an action component, Minda shares with her preservice teachers the case of Kristina Kramer, a fourth grade teacher with whom Minda worked in a local school. They worked together on a unit teaching *Sylvia and Aki* to emerging bilingual fourth graders in a transitional bilingual program and wrote about their experiences extending themes and ideas from the unit using a cosmopolitan lens on global citizenship that integrated language arts, social studies, and science (see López & Kramer, 2013). The preservice teachers read the article and Minda shares with them the impetus for the unit around *A Long Walk to Water* (Park, 2010). The idea grew out of a student who commented to Ms. Kramer in class one day that she was concerned about the lack of clean drinking water in some parts of the world. She told Kristina that her family had learned about places in Africa where young girls like her had to walk long distances to collect clean water for their families. Ms. Kramer took up the conversation and presented it to the class as a possible inquiry project. The majority of the class was immediately interested in pursuing the topic, and that is how the unit began.

Minda shared background information with the preservice teachers such as additional planning that went into the unit including mapping of state standards and content areas, identifying specific teaching strategies and skills, planning for English language instruction and bilingual support, and making interdisciplinary connections. Preservice teachers examined student responses, classroom artifacts, and photos
from the culminating activity of a fundraiser for clean water in Burundi through the Gazelle Foundation and a clean water awareness day for the entire fourth grade. The praxis that resulted from Ms. Kramer’s unit in a bilingual fourth grade class was building awareness and raising money for access to clean water. After learning about the possibilities through the case of Ms. Kramer and her students, the preservice teachers are ready to take up the task of creating a similar unit built around essential questions, state standards in literacy and social studies or science, and social justice issues.

**Minda’s Praxis - Taking Action**

Taking our experiences as a class studying the touchstone text of *Sylvia and Aki* and learning about Ms. Kramer’s class and their unit around *A walk to water*, Minda has students self-select themes and topics of interest to examine more closely. Preservice teachers join in groups to build units of study around the themes they have chosen, and they teach their units in our service-learning project at a local elementary school. The students share their units of study with each other before teaching them in the writing club after school and it is the culminating project for the course.

The themes that students choose from come out of *Sylvia and Aki* or they can be drawn from students’ own interests. It is required that groups tie the themes to “essential questions” (Jacobs, 1997) and integrate social studies or science and language arts standards into their unit. The essential questions are open ended, meaningful and non-judgmental; and, they are meant to help preservice teachers direct their instructional choices, to create clarity and precision for what they will teach and why. Well thought-out essential questions create even more questions and move students towards inquiry. And, it is through this process of creating units around essential questions, then enacting their own lessons with students that preservice teachers can in turn work towards action. Some examples of essential questions preservice teachers have coupled with themes include, “Does history repeat itself?” with the theme of school segregation; “Why do people move?” with the theme of migration and immigration; “How are music and culture related?” with the topic of the history and culture of the blues in Texas; “What does it mean to be free?” with the topic of slavery and the theme of civil rights.

After selecting an essential question and a theme, groups build their units by deciding which state standards apply, what grade level(s) they will work with, and what sequence of skills and sub-questions makes the most sense for a two to three week unit. In addition, a requirement of the unit plans is that preservice teachers include a social action component. All of these parts come together into their unit plans and preservice teachers engage students in some of the lessons in the after school writing club.

**Minda’s Praxis - Celebrating the Journey**

Minda finishes the course and the semester with an author’s celebration. There is a celebration with young authors at their after school writing club and another celebration back on campus. As part of the celebration, preservice teachers are invited to share a piece of writing they developed over the course of the semester; Minda shares a piece of her own personal writing as well. Celebrating and sharing together is an important aspect of building a learning community, of making writers visible, and of valuing diverse perspectives. Often the writing that is shared comes from in-class writing prompts or responses but that is not required. There is a section of the book where Sylvia finds Aki’s doll hidden in the top of her closet. This is a traditional Japanese doll and has porcelain hands. The book reads,
The doll’s fingers were long and thin and white, posed in a relaxed and graceful position with the thumbs slightly extended away from the other fingers…. Sylvia began to examine her hands as if she had never seen them before, inspecting the lines that ran across her palms as well as the intricate, fine swirls of her fingerprints. Her hands belonged to her and no one else; no two like them existed anywhere on earth. Yet others used their own hands to hold her and her brothers back and even wave them away… she thought about her mother’s strong brown hands, so skilled, so fast at slicing onions or braiding hair. She could never think of her mother’s busy hands being as still as Keiko’s [the doll]. Then she thought of her father’s powerful hands—they were never idle, either. In the fields, his hands constantly moved, tirelessly reaching and snipping fruit from the trees or slashing asparagus stalks in a single, swift motion. Sylvia imitated the motion of her father’s hands, flashing back and forth from fruit to burlap bag (Conkling, 2011. pp. 33-34).

The in-class assignment was to reread pages 33-35 where Sylvia is thinking about hands and read it like a writer: look at the language she uses and the different hands she examines more closely. Think of someone in your life. Describe their hands and “the story they have to tell” (Conkling, 2011, p. 34). While everyone in the class participated in the writing assignment initially, Trish decided to work on it more throughout the semester, taking it through the stages of the writing process. She shared this version at our author celebration.

My Mother’s Hands by Trish Jimenez

“Your hands are so pretty. I remember when my hands were young like yours. I hate the way they look now,” she said as she held out her hand and examined it. I disagree. My mother’s hands have a long and trying story to tell.

She used them to cover her face as her mother beat her as a child because she was never as good as her brother.

My mom used her hands to drive herself from San Antonio to San Marcos every day, commuting to and from school for much longer than 4 years because she had to pay for it herself.

Her hands were the ones that played peek-a-boo with me when I was a baby and got a kick out of it every time.

My mother’s hands raised me to be the person that I am today. They held me, cuddled me, read to me at night, cooked for me, taught me to count, and held me when I was afraid or sad.

My mother’s hands put together lessons, crafts, and field trips for her students when she was a teacher for 33 years.

Even after her happy retirement, my mother’s hands continue to work two jobs so that I can live away from home and attend Texas State. The hours are long and the work is continuous, but my mom’s hands persevere.
“I wish my hands were still young and pretty looking like yours,” she says as reaches across the car and runs her thumb across the top of my hand. My mother’s hands might be much older and might even look that way, too. But hers are the prettiest hands I have ever seen.

This piece reflects not only the experience of its writer; it also represents the trust that Minda and her students have developed as a result of reading and writing together for a semester. Trish can now use this as a model for her future students to read and connect to Sylvia and Aki, should she draw on that text in her future teaching practice. Applying what students learn in their course is important to both authors, who both believe that praxis is realized only through concerted effort and through examining a variety of pedagogical practices. For now, we turn to Jane’s praxis.

**Jane’s Praxis - Applying What They’ve Learned**

As a culminating assignment for the semester, Jane requires that students create reading and writing centers that incorporate both the state curricular standards and the social justice framework’s four domains (IDJA): *identity, diversity, justice, and action*. Centers employ writing ideas from the semester drawn on a variety of in-class demonstrations and ideas learned through reading professional journals and texts. She models this by asking students to test out centers she has developed over time, or that are exemplars of good work from past students. These are short activities that can be completed within a 15-20 minute timeframe and draw on culturally rich picture books, poems, essays, and current events that link to simple writing tasks, like creating a meme, responding to literature via Twitter, or employing one of the writing strategies students have practiced over the semester.

Taking action is often the most difficult of the domains to incorporate into the centers, and students ask questions like, “What can we expect a 6th grader to do about a large social issue that adults can’t fix?” And yet action seems the most important domain in its capacity to empower students. Jane pushes back: “Greta Thunberg began agitating about climate change by holding up protest signs outside of the Swedish Parliament. Her message grew and she gave a speech to the United Nations this year.” She believes that in order for action to be successful for students, it should first start with students’ local community – where they experience life and are educated. This is why it is important that teachers know their students and have some understanding of their lived experiences.

One of her favorite activities is to show the Story Corps animation “Eyes on the Stars,” which details astronaut Ronald McNair’s experience growing up in 1959, before the Civil Rights Act became law. An African American in the segregated south, McNair got into trouble for attempting to check out books from the public library in Lake City, South Carolina when he was nine. Narrated by McNair’s brother, the story ends well; McNair graduated with a doctorate from MIT and later flew on several space missions prior to his tragic death on the Challenger, in 1984. What makes this particular animation invaluable as a tool for talking about diversity is its genuine appeal and non-confrontational discussion of some controversial historical moments. On the surface, students enjoy the story and are not troubled by the darker implicit message still present in our world today: people call the police when they feel fear, and this is often in response to fear about race.
Jane’s Praxis - Delving Below the Surface

These are not easy topics to bring up in a teacher education environment, and “Eyes on the Stars” allows Jane to unpack the more complicated circumstances of the story – to consider what lies below the surface. She asks students to consider how they could use this same animation to teach students something related to their state standards for math, science, social studies and English/language arts. Suggestions typically mirror their surface-level (uncomplicated) response to the movie:

- teachers could have students research McNair’s life;
- they could explore how many black astronauts have served the United States;
- they could read about the Civil Rights movement and develop a timeline or essay to put on the wall of their classroom.

Many students see this video as an example of a realized “American Dream” without troubling that turn of phrase.

Jane then works to help students trouble the water a bit and take a more critical stance. What problems that surface in the movie are still present in some way in American society? Is the American Dream even a possibility without money, power, or position? Are schools equitable in preparing all students for challenging careers, like astrophysics? How does McNair’s perspective about achievement and opportunity differ from his brother’s? What specific examples from the “text” offer us clues that equality of opportunity were not available in South Carolina in 1959? How much better are things today?

Students are asked to reconsider what teachers could do with this animation, related to the social justice anti-bias framework. Jane asks them to pair one item from each domain that relates to the movie and to imagine a writing assignment that could help their future students make the connection. The table below demonstrates connections Jane’s students have made.

Jane’s preservice teachers vary in their capacity to link this experience to their own when searching for engaging and valuable texts they can use to develop worthwhile writing activities for their future classroom. Some continue to live on the surface, developing token learning centers related to holidays, religious difference, or the ways that food connects to culture. Yet in those same classes, there are students who seek to push back against stereotype and hackneyed understandings of cultural difference. Recent examples include:

- Centers that compare Thanksgiving myths and stories we learnt about the holiday as children versus its far more problematic reality;
- Centers that study students’ names and how they are shaped by our culture. Supporting texts included: *The Day You Begin*, by Jacqueline Woodson and Rafael López, *The Name Jar*, by Yangsook Choi, and portions of *The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros;
- Centers that draw on *The First Rule of Punk*, by Celia Perez to examine the multiple identities we carry. These centers required students to develop zines (like the main character of the book) and to reflect on the multiplicities of their own identity.
- Centers that focus on the contributions of women in history, science, and culture.

It is important to note that while the preservice teachers with whom we work are exposed to a great deal of multicultural literature and teaching practices that support pluralism writ large, there is still re-
Table 1. Teaching tolerance’s anti-bias framework paired with the storycorps animation “Eyes on the Stars,” and possible related writing activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain: Anchor Standard</th>
<th>Topic from “Eyes on the Stars”</th>
<th>Writing Assignment Ideas</th>
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<td><strong>Identity:</strong> Students will recognize that people’s multiple identities interact and create unique and complex individuals.</td>
<td>McNair differs from his brother in terms of identity; while McNair watches Star Trek and sees a future for himself, his brother sees a work of fiction. “That’ll never happen.”</td>
<td>View several episodes of Star Trek [movies or television], write about why you think McNair valued its diversity? What media representations are currently available that demonstrate a wide swath of people completing tasks that might not have been the case in the past? What stereotypes exist, related to particular cultural groups?</td>
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<td><strong>Diversity:</strong> Students will develop language and knowledge to accurately and respectfully describe how people (including themselves) are both similar to and different from each other and others in their identity groups.</td>
<td>The animation demonstrates that intellectual curiosity is present across humanity, regardless of racial background. McNair wants and expects to receive the same opportunities as others, and he does not understand why he is not allowed to share books from the white library.</td>
<td>Have students interview a friend who is linguistically or culturally different from him/herself. The two students should construct interview questions together, to have an additional opportunity to get to know one another. After the interview, they will make a venn diagram of their likes/differences, and write up a reflection on the experience.</td>
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<td><strong>Justice:</strong> Students will recognize unfairness on the individual level (e.g., biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g., discrimination).</td>
<td>McNair is not allowed to check out a book at the public library because it is intended for white constituents alone. The police are called to intervene. This is unfair at both the individual and institutional level.</td>
<td>Write an essay that compares McNair’s experience to African American students who attempted to get served restaurant counters during the Civil Rights movement. Write a story that explores an injustice that has happened to you or someone you know. How did this make you feel? What actions might you take to ensure that same injustice does not happen to someone else?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Action:</strong> Students will make principled decisions about when and how to take a stand against bias and injustice in their everyday lives and will do so despite negative peer or group pressure.</td>
<td>The police requested that the librarian go ahead and check out books to McNair. Once these authority figures ask, the librarian acquiesces.</td>
<td>Conduct research about stories in your local community where ordinary people stand up for those with less power. If possible, make contact with that person and interview her/him – either by phone or through email. Create an infographic to share what you learned.</td>
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sistance to focusing on tolerance and inclusion. Jane has experienced push-back when requiring students to consider the cultural and linguistic diversity of the schools in which they are learning to teach, and these can manifest in negative responses on student evaluations at the end of the semester. A representative response of this ilk is, “I’ll be teaching white students, too. It would be nice to be prepared for that reality.” Most are excited for the opportunity to examine literature and texts critically and in a manner way that differs from how they themselves were taught.

Equally important is the reminder that state standards are only as limiting as teachers allow them to be. In addition to incorporating the anti-bias framework, preservice teachers must also make connections to their grade and content standards. Projects can then serve as a model for future planning and the execution of a more culturally sustaining pedagogy that views difference not only as an asset, but also as an opportunity to critique the world and possibly, to take action in service to a better tomorrow.
CONCLUSION

The Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu wrote, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” The self-study described in this chapter suggests that while each of us have made inroads in developing a more culturally sustaining and socially just pedagogy, we will continue to seek ways to transform our practice. We believe through collaborative inquiry, sharing what seems interesting and engaging for our students, and keeping the dialogue open as we find valuable resources we will continue to grow. We understand that educators and preservice teachers will be at different stages of the journey towards equity and social justice, and that in order to transform consciousness and structures, as bell hooks wrote about in our opening quote, we must begin with a step. And continue forging ahead on the journey through thoughtful reflection, critical conversations, and praxis. Our chapter has provided teacher educators with examples of how to begin the journey and some steps to take. For us, social justice education requires not only a recognition that society is stratified in many significant ways, including along lines of race, language background and proficiency, class, gender, sexuality, and ability, but also we must work with intentional progression towards changing this stratification so that students of color and historically marginalized peoples and communities can reclaim their cultures and languages and can thrive. As social justice educators, we seek such opportunities to take action, one step at a time.

REFERENCES


Literacy Teacher Preparation for Educational Justice


**ADDITIONAL READING**


KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Anti-Bias Framework: A set of anchor standards and age-appropriate learning outcomes divided into four domains—identity, diversity, justice, and action.

Critical Media Literacy: Readers interrogate text to examine and challenge the dominant power structures.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A pedagogical practice that supports multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for both students and teachers.

Equity: Fair and equitable treatment of all members of society, regardless of how groups or individuals are defined.

Praxis: Action that results from reflection.

Preservice Teachers: Students who are studying to become teachers.

Self-Study: A research method for systematically studying your own practice, teaching, or other phenomenon.

Touchstone Texts: A text with compelling attributes such as themes, characters, mechanics or organization that can be used as an example to teach about a particular content or aspect of writing.