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Toward a School-Wide Model of Teaching for Social Justice: An Examination of the Best Practices of Two Small Public Schools

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Toward a School-Wide Model of Teaching for Social Justice: An Examination of the Best Practices of Two Small Public Schools

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The purpose of this ethnographic study is to examine how a commitment to socially just pedagogies influences the core practices and policies of a school. This article presents a comprehensive description and analysis of two public middle schools committed to teaching for social justice: Urban Promise Academy and San Francisco Community School. From this exploratory research, I construct a school-wide model of teaching for social justice consisting of three central components: the integration of issues of social justice across the curriculum, the use of socially just teaching practices, and the creation of a socially just school community. This research further discusses the requirements and challenges of teaching for social justice in U.S. public schools. I argue for progressive educators to adopt practical, practitioner-oriented models of schooling, such as the one presented in this article in order to more effectively advocate for school reform.

Americans have engaged in a national dialogue about how educators should teach and what students should learn since the establishment of the first U.S. public school. In the past quarter century, a new generation of socially critical educators has called for a fundamental re-conception of schools, arguing for justice, equity, and empowerment as the center of the educational experience (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). These alternative educational ideologies including critical pedagogy (Giroux & McLaren, 1992; McLaren, 1998), critical teaching (Shor, 1992), and a pedagogy of hope (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1997), would transform schools into sites of social change where students are empowered with the ambition, confidence, and knowledge to fulfill their individual dreams. While these interrelated ideologies have established a theoretical framework for a pedagogically progressive educational model, their limited articulation of actual classroom practices and inaccessible language have kept them at the margin of education policy reform (Gore, 1993; Simon, 1992).

In the 1990s a new, more grounded and practice-oriented pedagogy termed "teaching for social justice" emerged as a response to the critiques of progressive educational ideologies (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). At the core of teaching for social justice are two central fea-

tures: teaching to foster a social consciousness in students and teaching to encourage students to act for social change (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998). This process of "conscientization," as Paulo Freire (1970) terms it, is one of self-reflection and societal reflection toward a heightened social consciousness. Teachers become agents of social change who encourage students to expose inequity and injustice from the veils of democratic and meritocratic rhetoric (Cummins, 2001). Once this dissonance is revealed, students and teachers critique the status quo and together take action to effect social change. Students become active participants in their learning process rather than passive receptacles for transmitted knowledge (Freire, 1998).

Advocates of teaching for social justice, such as Michael Apple (as cited in Ayers et al., 1998), have emphasized the importance of "know[ing] what is actually going on throughout this country in the many schools where educators, community activists, students, and others are keeping alive the very real possibilities of an education that is pedagogically progressive and socially critical" (p. 294). The growing body of academic literature addressing teaching for social justice has largely sought to answer this call with specific case studies of actual classroom practices (Allen, 1999; Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Kroll et al., 2005, Shor & Pari, 1999; Steiner, Frank, McLauren, & Bahruth, 2000). These works

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have begun to bridge the gap between pedagogical theory and classroom practice. However, these personal and compartmentalized accounts fall short of constructing a comprehensive educational model.

THE STUDY

The purpose of this exploratory investigation is to construct a comprehensive educational model by describing how socially just pedagogies influence all aspects of a school and synthesizing the policies and practices of two urban public schools committed to teaching for social justice: Urban Promise Academy (UPA) and San Francisco Community School (SFCS). My research is guided by two main research questions: How do educators teach for social justice? And how does a commitment to teaching for social justice influence school-wide practices and policies? Using participatory action research methods (Atweh, Kemmis, & Weeks, 1998; Griffiths, 1998; Lather, 1986), I conducted an ethnographic study based on classroom observation, teacher interviews, and document analysis. From March to June 2003, I spent 128 hours volunteering as a teacher's aide across all subjects at the schools. Upon completing my research, I presented my initial findings to several teachers at each school and asked for their comments and criticisms. I included the teachers of UPA and SFCS in the writing process to empower them as research subjects and to validate my conclusions.

SCHOOL SITES

Urban Promise Academy and San Francisco Community School are pioneering, small, public schools explicitly committed to equity and social justice. I identified and approached the schools through the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES), a regional affiliate center of the Coalition of Essential Schools. As BayCES members, the schools receive staff coaching and development training to assist them in their mission to be high-achieving and equitable small schools. Specifically, both schools are dedicated to graduating academically knowledgeable students, strong test-takers, critical thinkers, respectful and effective communicators, and socially conscious citizens.

San Francisco Community School is a K-8th grade public school with a long tradition of teaching for social justice. SFCS was founded in 1972 in the Excelsior neighborhood of South San Francisco by parents who wished to start a child-centered school that represented the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of their community. SFCS receives its students through the district-wide lottery process that takes into account student preferences as well as diversity indicators, such as neighborhood residence, parents' education, and eligibility for federal free/reduced-fee lunch programs. The academic calendar for the middle school is divided into four quarters. During the first and third quarters students attend single-subject, multi-age grouped classes. All subjects except math are then combined into one integrated project class during the second and fourth quarters of the academic calendar. Students are assigned to a teacher based on their preferences among the multiple challenge-driven projects.

Urban Promise Academy is a new, public, middle school in the initial stages of establishing a school-wide commitment to teaching for social justice. The school was founded in the Fruitvale neighborhood of Oakland in 2001 by a design team of four teachers working in collaboration with parents and community members to relieve school overcrowding and to provide a safe, supportive, and successful urban education to Oakland youth. Oakland students and their parents apply directly to UPA and must attend mandatory informational meetings in order to be eligible for the lottery-based admission process designed to reflect the demographics of the local community. UPA maintains single-grade classes across subjects throughout the school year. In addition to the traditional academic subjects, UPA also requires students to take a semester of Leadership and Life Skills classes in which students explore significant social issues, such as alcohol abuse, gang violence, homelessness, and eating disorders.

Working at SFCS and UPA provided a unique opportunity to study two similar schools at different stages in the development of their educational philosophies and practices. Both schools have student bodies of fewer than 300 students and maximum class sizes of 25 students. The vast majority of students at UPA and SFCS are children of color and immigrants from working-class backgrounds. Administrative decisions at both UPA and SFCS are made democratically by shared leadership committees with input from students, teachers, and parents. Both schools have also secured a relatively high level of autonomy from their respective districts with regard to budgeting, staffing, and curriculum development. This is due to SFCS's consistently strong test scores and UPA's status as a new small school.

THE TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE MODEL

As called for by Ball (2000), I have constructed a practitioner's model of teaching for social justice by describing and analyzing the practices of teachers who infuse social justice in their day-to-day teaching. This school-wide model describes how fundamental commitments to social justice and equity transform the curriculum, teaching methods, and culture of a school. Specifically, UPA and SFCS teach for social justice in three

interdependent ways: by teaching about issues of social justice, by practicing socially just teaching, and by fostering a socially just school community. Throughout my findings I include short narrative descriptions of events I observed as an action researcher to illustrate the actual practices of teaching for social justice.

Teaching about Issues of Social Justice

Three questions adorn the walls of every SFCS middle school classroom: What is justice? Why are things unjust? and What can we do about injustice? Is there a space missing? These questions formed the central theme of the 2002–2003 academic year at SFCS. Studying academic subjects through a lens of social justice is at the very core of the teaching for social justice educational model. "Because middle school students are highly concerned with issues of fairness, these three questions provide students an accessible entry point to analyze social issues," explained Ms. Kim, a SFCS humanities teacher. I found that UPA and SFCS students explore issues of social justice across the curriculum through both inter- and intra-subject approaches. UPA and SFCS teachers facilitate these explorations with teaching methods that encourage their students to think critically and actively engage with issues. It is through this critical engagement with academic material that both schools strive to empower students with the confidence, intelligence, and ambition to achieve their dreams.

Integrating issues of social justice across the curriculum. Teachers at UPA and SFCS discuss social issues across all subjects in the context of justice, equity, race, class, and gender. Social studies classes analyze past civilizations, historical events, and people in the context of social justice by using mock trials and classroom debates. English classes read culturally diverse books and newspaper articles that provide fertile material to discuss personalized examples of injustice, oppression, generosity, and activism. Science teachers discuss environmental issues, such as global warming, energy efficiency, and the application of scientific knowledge to cure common diseases and to limit pollutants (Barton, 2003). When the curriculum does not readily lend itself to explorations of social justice, such as with some math content areas, teachers focus on relating lessons to the students' lives by explaining the practical applications of academic knowledge to the real world (Gutstein, 2003).

At both schools students explore significant social issues through project-based learning in integrated language arts classes. While I was volunteering at SFCS, the middle school students were working on several different projects, such as designing energy efficient homes and ideal communities. In Mr. Katz's project class on motor vehicle pollution, student groups worked to design and build downhill soapbox cars. Each day Mr. Katz would integrate a related lesson, such as the environmental impacts of cars or the basic physics of motion. Mr. Katz explained to me that the greater goal of the project was to connect fuel inefficient cars to environmental pollution and the Iraq War.

Mr. Katz's students also created public service announcements using Adobe® Filmmaker software during the ten-week project unit. Students independently chose topics, for example, cigarette smoking, police brutality, sexism, racism, teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and a comparison between rich and poor communities. One student excitedly asked me if I wanted to see his public service announcement. His short film consisted of a complicated morphing collage of pictures of President George W. Bush, the American flag, military weapons, and police in riot gear confronting protestors. At the end of the montage the message, "Being scared is not the only option . . . So don't be scared," appears. I asked the student what he wanted people to learn from his announcement, and he explained how governments use fear to keep people from speaking out and expressing dissent.

Students at UPA examine issues of social justice through similar group projects in language arts and social studies classes. In Mrs. Johnson's 7th grade language arts classes student groups researched issues, such as the Iraq War, child labor, hunger and famine, drug abuse, terrorism, and immigration. When one group of students wanted to research guns, Ms. Johnson encouraged them to modify their topic to examine the effects of gun violence. The students began their month-long research process with a list of ten questions they wanted to answer about their topics. Using library resources, Internet research, and interviews, each group created poster boards that included a description of the issue, the new things they learned, important facts, a paragraph about the people affected by the issue, and a poem from the perspective of a victim. The project presentations I observed on gun violence and the Iraq War demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the significance and social effects of the topics researched. For example, teachers at SFCS and UPA frequently use debates and mock trials about historical events to analyze the decisions of past societies in the context of social justice. Debates allow students to view events from multiple perspectives and to see that history transpired as it did because of the decisions and actions of individuals and societies. The objective is to teach students that people are active shapers of history, not passive spectators of a fixed historical process.

Vignette #1

While at UPA, I was asked to dress up as the King of the Kongan Empire and judge a debate by Mrs. Castle's social studies class. I entered the classroom draped in African cloths and jewelry walking to the rhythm of ceremonial bongo drums. After greeting my people, a spokesperson

from each group updated me on the kingdom's current situation with the Portuguese traders: The Portuguese are continuously demanding that we sell more of our own people into slavery. The students informed me that trading with the Portuguese is making our kingdom rich and powerful, but it is also rapidly depleting and dividing our people.

The groups for and against trading slaves with the Portuguese empire both made persuasive arguments. Next, each group asked the opposing side a number of prepared questions and responded to questions asked of them after conferring as a group to decide collectively on their answers. A student representing the Kongan people asked, "What good is power and money if everyone in the kingdom is sold into slavery and there is no one left?" The debate ended when I thanked my advisors and expressed my concerns about slavery and the division it has caused among my people.

During the debate the students demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the Kongan-Portuguese relationship, the importance of powerful weaponry, and the Kongan Empire's conflict between building a powerful empire versus betraying its people. Debating about slavery from the perspective of the Kongan Empire gave Ms. Castle's students a deeper understanding of how colonialism, racism, and internalized oppression gave rise to the African slave trade. It also helped the students to independently articulate social justice arguments against slavery.

Vignette #2

At SFCS, Ms. Kim's multi-grade social studies class spent two weeks engaged in a mock trial entitled "The People vs. Global Sweatshops." Students were divided into five groups representing poor country workers, the poor countries' ruling elite, multinational corporations (MNCs), U.S. consumers, and the system of profit. The class debated each party's role in the existence of sweatshops in a "fishbowl" discussion forum where an inner circle of alternating group representatives would debate with each other while the remaining team members actively listened in an outer circle. Each team's role was to argue how the other parties were at fault for the existence of global sweatshops. Ms. Kim explained that the purpose of the fishbowl forum was "to promote respectful debate among a community of listeners, to support students in taking intellectual risks, to challenge each others' and the teacher's thinking, and to illuminate multiple perspectives on the complex issue of who is to blame for global sweatshops."

Once the judges had reached their verdict, finding MNCs and poor countries' ruling elite guilty, Ms. Kim challenged her students to think about what can be done to right this injustice. Students suggested that consumers could boycott multinational corporations that use sweat-

shop labor, ruling elites could raise the national wage and environmental standards for MNCs, and MNCs could commit to paying better wages instead of only being concerned with profits.

The students' written reflections on the trial revealed a deep level of understanding of the interconnectedness of all the parties involved. One student wrote, "Each team has reason for being innocent and guilty. A lot of groups could do something about sweatshops, but no one is taking action. I learned we are not helpless against sweatshops." Debating about important historical and social issues teaches students to critically analyze how seemingly benign practices can perpetuate global injustices.

Teaching Critical Thinking to Empower Students

Teaching critical thinking skills and fostering a social consciousness among students are fundamental components of a curriculum designed to teach for social justice and to empower students. I noticed early in my research that most activities at UPA and SFCS required students to think independently, to form their own opinions, and to think about issues from different perspectives. After noticing this trend, I asked teachers at both schools what specific methods they found to be most effective for teaching students to be critical thinkers. The teachers identified three main methods: step-by-step scaffolding, challenge-driven learning, and exposure to multiple perspectives.

Scaffolding teaching techniques (McTighe & Ferrara, 1998; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) play a major part in supporting students to critically engage with complex issues. Ms. Kim described this as a process of connecting the topic to the students' lives with an interesting "hook," providing students with stimulating background information about the topic, and pushing students to peel away the layers of the topic in question. This often involves breaking down research and writing projects into smaller, manageable steps. The goal is to support students in critically interpreting and synthesizing their research into an authentic argument supported by evidence.

Teachers at SFCS also teach critical thinking and problem solving through challenge-driven learning, a central feature of SFCS's educational philosophy. SFCS teachers encourage their students to determine for themselves what they need to know and learn in order to solve a challenge. Teachers are responsible for sparking the investigation and supporting students' efforts to analyze and critically interpret the challenge before them. The following narrative describes how Mr. Katz pushes his students to imagine alternative transportation methods.

Vignette #3

Mr. Katz began the class by asking his students to respond to two warm-up questions: "If car exhaust and pollution can cause asthma, nausea, cancer, brain damage, lung disease, why do we have so many cars? And what can be done about it?" A student said that there are lots of cars "because that's just the way it is." Mr. Katz responded, "Just because it's been done one way, it doesn't mean it's the right way, or that it has to be the only way." The students began to write down responses, but many students looked unengaged.

"What can be done differently to change these things?" asked Mr. Katz. One student explained how she thought that car commercials helped to manufacture a belief that people need to have a car. She said that car companies want people to feel cool if they have a certain kind of car. Mr. Katz responded by asking, "Why don't we just get rid of cars if they cause all this harm?" Several students reacted negatively, and Mr. Katz gave everyone a chance to share his or her opinion. One student said, "You can't take away all the cars because we need cars to get around." Another student added, "In some cities people get around on buses and subways, which are quicker than having lots of cars and traffic jams." A student criticized the last comment by saying that buses are worse than cars because they burn more fuel, but the other student replied that even though buses burn more fuel, they are better than cars because they can carry a lot more people.

Mr. Katz was respectful of the diverse opinions and kept playing the devil's advocate role to encourage his students to look deeper at the issue of car pollution. After being challenged to question their assumptions, students began to see that there are alternatives to having so many cars. Mr. Katz summarizes this process of challenge-driven learning as "encouraging and helping students to take each challenging step toward asking the next logical question in a chain of questions."

Another common pedagogical practice to build critical thinking skills is providing students with multiple perspectives. "In order to support students to learn how to think critically you need to expand the way they experience things by giving them the ability to see multiple perspectives and to know other alternatives and options," explained Mr. Fernandez, the UPA principal. Teachers at both schools expose students to multiple perspectives through reading diverse literature and inviting guest lecturers who share their personal experiences and beliefs. At UPA, students are asked to write poems, diaries, and journals from different people's perspective (McCall, 2004). In Mr. Fernandez's social studies class, students wrote poems from the perspectives of Arab Americans after September 11th and parents of U.S. soldiers who were sent to Iraq. When Mr. Fernandez asked his class what they learned from "walking in other

peoples shoes," students answered, "You got to look at both sides of the story," and "Don't judge people by how they look." "By teaching students to be critical thinkers," Mr. Fernandez asserted, "We are trying to empower them to expand their capacity to dream and to visualize those dreams." Ultimately, UPA and SFCS aim to graduate imaginative dreamers who are confident in their abilities to create opportunities for themselves.

Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices

UPA and SFCS practice socially just teaching by using pedagogical methods and creating curricula that are culturally relevant to the diverse student bodies of each school. UPA and SFCS teachers tailor their curricula and assignments to be academically rigorous and culturally representative of their Hispanic, African American, Asian, and Pacific Islander students. Teachers use representative art, journals, personal reflections, and family interviews to help relate lessons and texts to the local realities of students and to reinforce students' pride in their own cultural heritages.

After volunteering at the schools for a few weeks, I began to notice how often assignments asked students to write personal reflections about themselves, their families, and their cultural heritages. I asked Mr. Fernandez in our interview about the emphasis of "I" statements and personal reflections at UPA. He explained:

> It is important to know what [the students] have experienced and what they value, to know where the students come from. I want the students going home thinking, "My homework for tonight is *me*." This acknowledges their thoughts and ideas are important and valued.

I observed Mr. Fernandez teaching a lesson on human migrations to better understand how he practiced culturally relevant teaching and related materials to his students' lives. After synthesizing his students' ideas into a class definition of migration, he shared his grandfather's story of migration from Mexico to the United States. For homework, Mr. Fernandez asked everyone "to sit down and talk to a family member about migration in your family." Mr. Fernandez personalized the concept of migration by sharing his own family's story and then asking about his students' stories.

Teachers at both schools teach students to take pride in themselves by placing value on the importance of each student. SFCS displayed essays outside Ms. Kim's classroom in which students described past memories, what is important to them, their neighborhoods, their families, their countries of origin, and their favorite foods. Students wrote about their unique experiences growing up with Mexican, Yemeni, Peruvian, Chinese, Guatemalan, Jewish, and hippie parents. Each essay told of rich cultural traditions, such as eating "soul food from

my grandma's kitchen" or "tamales and empanadas my mom makes." In Mr. Valdez's and Ms. Johnson's classrooms at UPA, self-descriptive student essays and collages adorn the walls, describing who students are, the story behind their names, their favorite smells, what their hands would say if they could talk, and what their parents always say to them. These are just a few examples of how UPA and SFCS teachers tailor teaching practices and academic content to be culturally representative of and relevant to their students.

The School as a Socially Just Community

SFCS and UPA are educational spaces where communities of learners committed to social justice collectively explore academic subjects and societal issues. Beyond educating students and building community, teachers at UPA and SFCS socialize students into a socially just school culture by discussing, practicing, and teaching students to adopt the schools' community values. Teachers at both schools devote a significant amount of time, both in and out of the classroom, to establishing a school culture of respect, honesty, equality, and kindness. Nonviolent conflict resolution programs and constructive disciplinary practices combined with strong community values form the foundations of the socially just school communities at UPA and SFCS.

School Culture. Over the decades, SFCS has developed a strong school identity and a well-established set of community values and virtues. These virtues, listed in Table 1, adorn the walls of the school and are referred to in class on a regular basis.

SFCS's community virtues are complimented by classroom ground rules that together establish the norm

Table 1
SFCS Virtues

Justice	Balance
Is fair to others	Makes choices to stay
Stands up for what is right	calm
Propriety	Community
Does the right thing at the	Helps others
right time	Does things to make the
Puts things in their place	community better
Works before plays	Is a good role model
Harmony	Respect
Works to get along with	Respects difference in
other kids	people
Uses conflict resolution to	Responds appropriately to
solve problems	all adults
Truth	Perseverance
Takes responsibility for	Keeps trying when
actions	something is hard
Shows honesty	Shows special
	improvement

of a socially just educational environment. The classroom rules are: respect what people say, listen to others, don't spread personal things outside of class, and disagree politely. In most instances when teachers reminded students about practicing the community values and classroom rules, the students responded positively and reengaged with the class. "I always rely and fall back on the sense of community," Mr. Katz said to me at the end of one day, appreciative of how his students have embraced the school culture. Because SFCS is a combined elementary and secondary school, middle school teachers like Mr. Katz have the benefit of teaching students who have been immersed in the SFCS culture ever since kindergarten.

In contrast to SFCS, UPA is a new school working to establish a sense of community and to foster a socially just school culture. UPA's design team modeled the school's community values after Jeanne Gibbs' (1995) multicultural community building manual, *Tribes, A New Way of Learning and Being Together*. The eight community agreements of UPA are mutual respect, attentive listening, honor the hand signal, honor the time, appreciations, no put downs, right to pass, and state your needs. During UPA's first two years, the staff prioritized building community and creating a safe (from drugs, gangs, and physical/emotional violence) school environment. "We were working to create a mutually accountable healthy community of folks who support each other," Mr. Fernandez explained. It was apparent during the time I spent at UPA that the new teachers, students, and parents had embraced the supportive, respectful, and peaceful culture of UPA. Every teacher I observed at the school used the raised hand signal to quiet the class. In most instances, reminders about the community agreements and positive appreciations regained the focus of off-task students without creating animosity between the teacher and his or her students. With a safe community and shared culture better established, the UPA teachers have now shifted their primary focus to improving academic achievement.

Teachers and students alike take responsibility for upholding community agreements at UPA and SFCS. I observed several instances when a student was talking while a teacher addressed the class, and another student told the disruptive student, "Be quiet," or "Stop talking. We can't hear the teacher." During a UPA school-wide meeting, an entire class stood up and apologized to Mrs. Carson for how they had acted during a morning class. It was clear that several students had taken the initiative before the meeting to organize and convince their classmates to give an unsolicited apology to Mrs. Carson for their behavior. I asked Mrs. Lopez why students are committed to the community agreements. She explained:

> We have emphasized building community at UPA by practicing, teaching, and explaining the purpose and value of the community agreements to our students. The

idea is to create a common commitment where everyone is mutually accountable for upholding the community agreements. There are enough kids to correct the others who have not fully bought into the system. Friendly peer pressure comes down on them from fellow students.

Instead of teachers being authoritarians and creating a disciplinarian atmosphere, UPA and SFCS students are taught to embrace the community values and to check themselves.

Non-Violent Conflict Resolution. A commitment to non-violence and verbal conflict resolution are fundamental community values at both UPA and SFCS. The school cultures of UPA and SFCS do not recognize violence as an appropriate means to resolve disputes in any circumstance. The first thing that a visitor notices when entering the grounds of these schools is their commitment to peace. Hand made signs, such as "Violence Does Not Solve Anything" and the word "Peace" written in a dozen languages adorn the hallways at SFCS. Similar signs, such as "Increase the Peace" and "Show Your Might, Don't Fight" were posted on the walls of UPA after a fight broke out in school.

UPA and SFCS students are taught to use non-violent conflict resolution practices to solve conflicts. SFCS students learn to solve conflicts peacefully by following these steps: (1) Cool off!, (2) Agree to ground rules (one at a time, listen, no interrupting, no name-calling, no shouting), (3) Each person tells his/her story, (4) Each person states what he/she wants from the process, (5) Brainstorm solutions, (6) Choose one. The purpose behind conflict resolution education is to empower students to solve their own conflicts independently through peaceful dialog. One afternoon at SFCS, I observed how three students, with the help of Mr. Katz, were able to use these steps to solve a dispute.

Vignette #4

Three students started to raise their voices in a disagreement over a game of Chinese marbles. Mr. Katz heard the dispute and asked the students from across the room, "Do you need me?" He listened to their grievances and then asked the boys, "O.K., now how are you going to get it so you can play the game together? . . . The whole point of the game," Mr. Katz explained, "is so that you can find a way not to call each other names when resolving a conflict." Mr. Katz walked away from the table without passing judgment on the conflict. The three boys eventually decided it is most fair to redo the turn in question, and they continue the game.

Mr. Katz did not use his authority as a teacher to dictate a resolution to the problem. Instead, the students were able to come to their own resolution demonstrating their ability to de-escalate conflicts by (1) knowing to ask for help, (2) taking turns explaining what happened and actively listening to all sides, and (3) agreeing upon a fair compromise.

At UPA students use a more formal process for solving conflicts. Student conflict managers, trained by Mrs. Lopez, are responsible for mediating disputes between students. UPA teachers refer all inter-student conflicts to Mrs. Lopez, and she passes the "cases" on to the conflict managers. I was able to observe two student conflict managers help classmates resolve a conflict with the guidance of Mrs. Lopez's conflict management script.

Vignette #5

The students came in after being excused from class and were asked by the conflict managers to agree to six rules. Each student repeated, "I agree to solve the problem, to no name-calling and to no insults, to not interrupt, to be as honest as I can, to no physical fighting, and to speak directly to you, the conflict managers." Then the two conflict managers asked the disputants to say what happened, how they felt then, and how they feel now. After both sides had spoken, the conflict managers asked what the students can do to solve the problem, and the two students suggested ways they could have reacted differently while refraining from name-calling in the future. Then the conflict managers asked if the students felt the conflict has been solved, thanked the students, and escorted them back to their classes.

The UPA student conflict managers mediated the session completely independent of Mrs. Lopez. I was struck by how professional and thoughtful all the students were during the resolution process. The students practiced active listening, attempted to understand the dispute from multiple perspectives, and peacefully resolved their conflict through dialogue.

DISCUSSION

These findings reveal that a commitment to teaching for social justice dictates not only what you teach but also how you teach and where you teach (in what type of social/physical environment). The body of literature that describes teaching for social justice has not fully explored or emphasized the importance of the pedagogical methods and community values of schools committed to teaching for social justice. The examples of UPA and SFCS illustrate that a comprehensive model of teaching for social justice is one in which social justice is interwoven into the curriculum content, teaching practices, and learning environments of schools as a school-wide theme.

Pedagogically, teaching for social justice begins with teaching students to think critically about issues of social justice across the curriculum. Teachers at UPA and

SFCS use methods, such as collaborative group projects, student-centered classroom debates, and personal reflections to encourage their students to critically analyze societal issues. The primary purpose of studying issues of social justice, both contemporary and historical, is to empower traditionally marginalized students and their more privileged classmates with the confidence and skills to work together to effect social change. Mr. Fernandez describes UPA as a "site where disempowered individuals can become enfranchised, to have a voice and a space to speak out." Mr. Katz describes SFCS as "a school about political change that teaches people to fight for themselves in a political system that systematically disempowers people." Confronting issues of justice, equity, power, race, gender, and class in middle school teaches adolescents how to speak up for their beliefs and rights.

Teaching such a politically charged and socially critical curriculum centered around social justice at UPA and SFCS might not be possible if not for the schools' relative autonomy, diverse populations of historically oppressed students, and locations in working-class communities of liberal metropolitan areas. While the nature of these schools is not a necessary prerequisite for teaching for social justice, I do believe that teaching for social justice would look somewhat different in other regions of the country where student populations are less diverse and the political climate is more conservative. The applicability of this model of teaching for social justice would be better understood through more extensive case studies of how schools in more affluent, homogenous communities interpret a commitment to social justice.

Admittedly, not every student graduates from UPA and SFCS as an academically successful, self-confident, and socially conscious young global citizen. Not all UPA and SFCS teachers are able to skillfully employ socially just pedagogies. I observed numerous incidents where UPA and SFCS students and teachers fell short of their ambitious goals. There were instances when students were non-cooperative, disrespectful, and even violent. Some students were not academically successful despite the various teaching methods the teachers employed. However, these instances were the exceptions to the norm. I have consciously underemphasized such examples in an effort to present a comprehensive overview of the best practices and policies of the teaching for social justice educational model. Each of the elements of this model merits further in-depth investigation of its efficacy and feasibility. I do, however, describe the general requirements and challenges of teaching for social justice the teachers and I discussed together. Recognizing and further researching these requirements and challenges are essential if progressive educators wish to effectively present teaching for social justice as a legitimate educational model for U.S. public schools.

Complementary Elements of School Design and Practice

In my opinion and that of the UPA and SFCS teachers, there are three elements of school design and practice that are highly conducive to teaching for social justice as a school-wide educational model. Schools that teach for social justice must have a committed, highly skilled, and self-reflective teaching staff, must be small in size, and must have a democratically run administration. These three elements are widely espoused by the national small schools movement (Toch, 2003) and identified in the Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essentials Schools (Coalition of Essential Schools, 2006). Teachers at UPA and SFCS are expected to design a rigorous and culturally relevant curriculum that addresses issues of social justice, to teach a heterogeneous mix of students to be self-directed learners and critical thinkers who are capable of reaching high standards, and to contribute to the leadership and development of the school. It requires a dedicated and dynamic teaching staff to meet these expectations.

Second, research and my experience show small schools (fewer than 400 students) can best foster close community bonds based on strong personal relationships and common values (Ayers, Klonsky, & Lyon, 2000; Raywid, 1999). Small schools allow teachers to personalize their students' learning, and to take collective responsibility for meeting the goals and needs of individual students (Raywid, 1998). Lastly, a democratic administrative structure allows for all voices in the school community to be heard and valued in school-wide policy decision-making processes (Ayers et al., 1998). Teachers and parents become more invested in schools when they feel a sense of ownership over their students'/children's education (Fields, Feinberg, & Roberts, 2001).

CHALLENGES

The ambitious goals and demanding requirements of teaching for social justice pose significant challenges to schools and teachers who adopt this educational model. Teaching all students to achieve high academic standards is a formidable educational challenge for every school. Designing and effectively teaching dynamic lessons that promote critical thinking and foster a social conscience while teaching core academic knowledge is difficult without proper coaching and significant support. Even though UPA and SFCS teachers receive specifically targeted coaching and support, I observed many moments when lesson plans failed and students paid only lip service to the school-wide community values.

Despite the obvious challenges, UPA and SFCS teachers believe that teaching for social justice is both an ethical imperative and an effective pedagogy for teaching core academic content. The testing data support this

belief. UPA and SFCS both received a score of 6 out of 10 on the California Academic Performance Index (API) in 2002 when compared to schools with similar demographics (California Department of Education, 2002). These ratings show that UPA and SFCS students scored better on tests that measure basic educational skills than over half of the students at California schools with similar student bodies.

A major concern of the administrators at both SFCS and UPA is the high burnout rate among teachers. Sustaining the energy necessary to support all students to succeed, to augment curricula with issues of social justice, and to participate in a democratic school administration is extremely draining. Experienced teachers often lose the extra time and energy of their first years due to family obligations and age. Understandably, some teachers change careers or leave for schools with less demanding expectations, given public school teachers' low status and salaries in the United States.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing advocates of teaching for social justice are opponents who claim that education should be value-free and objective. Many people consider education that addresses real world issues of injustice, inequality, and racism to be value-based teaching that should be outside of academic education. In response to those who question SFCS's educational philosophy, SFCS's lead teacher, Mrs. Clark, asserts, "There is no value-free teaching ever. We know that here. Choosing curriculum is a value judgment." Fundamentally, progressive educators believe that choosing to avoid serious discussions about social issues is a value judgment that perpetuates injustice, racism, sexism, classism, and inequality (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). "It is our goal to support students' ability to identify power, oppression, and racism," affirms UPA principal, Mr. Fernandez. Although many progressive educators and I contend that neutral or objective teaching does not exist, the general public does not view public school curricula or teaching practices as politicized and subjective (Shor, 1992).

CONCLUSION

The examples of UPA and SFCS have illustrated how teaching for social justice can be comprehensively integrated into in the educational philosophy, curriculum content, pedagogical practices, learning environments, and administrative structures of a school. Fundamentally, teaching for social justice encourages students to embrace a sense of hope and belief that they can change their own lives and the world. This progressive model of schooling strives to endow students with a heightened sense of social consciousness, to teach students mastery and critical literacy across academic subjects, and to encourage students to be the agents of change they want to see in the world.

The examples of UPA and SFCS can help other educators produce more specific policy recommendations, advocate for concrete pedagogical practices, and design alternative curricula. Despite the structural and political resistance to public education reforms, individual teachers and pioneering schools committed to social justice have the potential to change U.S. public schooling from the ground up.

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