

Chapter 20

Bridging Social Justice– Oriented Theories to Practice in Teacher Education Utilizing Ethical Reasoning in Action and Case–Based Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Teachers rarely have preparation to analyze and disrupt the social (in)justice ethical dilemmas that arise in their classrooms. Scans of newspaper headlines reveal teachers making unethical decisions. Yet, teacher education programs rarely include opportunities for students to systematically analyze social justice-oriented cases that illuminate the inequities rooted in our sociocultural context of teaching and learning. This chapter overviews the process for social justice-oriented case-based teaching with an ethical reasoning framework to bridge the theory-to-practice gap in social justice teacher preparation.

INTRODUCTION

Social justice-oriented teaching involves a sustained critical reflection on self, theory, pedagogy, and purpose as the field evolves and teaching contexts change. It is with this commitment to an iterative process of unlearning, learning, and critical reflection that I write this chapter. It first overviews my journey learning to becoming a novice social justice-oriented educator influenced and inspired by teachers and scholars of color in the school where I taught and the graduate school I subsequently attended. I then illuminate my journey in the college classroom teaching social justice-oriented courses where I spent years trying unsuccessfully to bridge social justice theories to social justice education for P-16 classrooms. Next, I reveal how this personal and professional journey and constant search for *how* to bridge theory and practice, lead me to see how a new book coupled with a pedagogical framework from

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different disciplines would come together to create the theory to practice bridge in social justice teacher education I was missing. The rest of the chapter explains why we need to teach ethical reasoning in teacher education, what this framework and process involve, why it is high impact instruction, and how it bridges the theory to practice divide in social justice teaching preparation.

My Uphill Journey of Unpacking, Unlearning, Learning, and Critical Reflection

The journey to social justice-oriented teaching and advocacy is not a straight line that shows an upward trajectory toward mastery of content, pedagogy, and confidence to be evaluated. Instead, it is a messy uphill journey full of pitfalls, plateaus, movement forward, and movement backward. At times it is lonely and static and other times you find your collective of equity-minded folks that bring you the joy, strength, and resolve to move mountains of status quo. It is a journey of constantly unpacking years of socialization and miseducation where you realize your ignorance and privilege. What you do not know about historical injustices and present-day inequities can feel daunting as you seek to understand the structural, historical, and contextual oppression of marginalized communities. The responsibility weighs on you to push back against the 1980s and 1990s versions of your introduction to multicultural education and instead seek out social justice-oriented colleagues, resources, content, and pedagogy.

The early days of my journey slowly and consistently revealed how systemic injustices, inequities, privilege, bias, and stereotypes operated in education and society. From where I grew up and how I was schooled to places I traveled, schools I taught in, and courses I took in graduate school, it was clear that inequities were everywhere, but I had benefited from them and had immense privilege. My parents cultivated my social justice-oriented disposition of asking questions, pushing boundaries, speaking out, and taking risks. However, within my family and Catholic context, much of the language, purpose, and perspectives surrounding me would fall into the white savior complex and cultural celebrations focus more than social justice. Recognizing this was part of the unpacking and unlearning of my journey and one that I must help my predominately white, Christian students understand, too.

As I look back on my journey, it is clear that so many women of color facilitated my learning and journey with a critical lens towards social justice. My first principal, Dr. Karen Grant, took a chance on an alternatively (under) prepared teacher and gave her a shot as a long term math lab substitute and then a 3rd grade teacher. At the time, E.F. Garrison Elementary in Savannah, Georgia, was a segregated school serving only Black students. The entire school needed free and reduced lunch due to centuries of institutional racism, classism, and segregation. Veteran teacher, LaToya (Toi) Barton, took me under her wing when I was a novice teacher and pushed me to do home visits during my first year of teaching, a practice that profoundly and positively changed the teaching and learning in my classroom. My diversity professor in my Master's program, Dr. Evelyn Dandy, encouraged me to present a paper on poverty and education at a state conference as a novice teacher and graduate student. An Associate Dean, Dr. Gwen Benson, saw me present at this conference and told me to apply for a Ph.D. at Georgia State University with a full-ride research fellowship. I distinctly remember looking at her business card in my hand and wondering why she saw me as a researcher when I still pictured an old white guy with a tweed coat and elbow patches or a lab coat as a researcher. To see myself as a researcher took years of unpacking and unlearning socialization, internalized sexism, and imposter syndrome. Interestingly, I met one of my best friends on my first day of *Politics and Policy in Education* because I came without a pen or paper and needed to borrow from her to take notes. I was convinced it was all a mistake and my name would not be on the roll. This struggle with imposter syndrome has been a powerful force that has helped me

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