A Qualitative Case Study of Teachers’ Perceptions and Practices in Social Justice Education and the Perceived Implications for K-2nd Grade Children

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Concordia University–Portland
College of Education
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A Qualitative Case Study of Teachers’ Perceptions and Practices in Social Justice Education and the Perceived Implications for K–2nd Grade Children

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Concordia University–Portland
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Transformational Leadership

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2017
Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the perceptions and practices of three teachers who teach social justice concepts in kindergarten and 2nd grade classrooms in an urban school district in the Northwest region of the United States. The research sought to answer the following central questions: (a) What do teachers perceive about how instruction on social justice concepts impact early grade learners in classroom settings? (b) What do teachers perceive about how this instruction influences learner perceptions regarding their role in society? Through a three-phase data collection approach that included teacher and parent interviews, teacher observations with observation debrief, and student artifact review, information was gathered to describe how teachers perceive social justice teaching, teaching practices the case study participants used to support social justice teaching, and teachers’ perceptions of child development with regard to social justice capacities. Data analysis showed that participants perceived social justice through a combination of social justice lenses. Teachers perceived the use of literature, class discussion and current events as essential teaching practices during social justice oriented lessons. The descriptive case study for the three teachers selected revealed five themes through data analysis. Teachers perceived social justice concept instruction as: enhancing students’ skills for participating in a diverse society; growing, challenging, and transforming students’ understanding of the world; fostering awareness of the inequalities and injustices that exist in the world; building empathy; and teachers perceived instruction as empowering students to consider themselves as social actors.

Keywords: teacher perception, teacher practice, social justice, early childhood development
Dedication

For all who believe in the capacity of young children to participate in creating a just society.
Acknowledgements

I want to express my eternal gratitude to Dr. Marty A. Bullis, my doctoral chair for his never-ending enthusiasm and encouragement. Thank you for asking just the right questions to get me to expand my thinking and keeping me focused. I will miss our conversations in my library study room.

To my doctoral committee members Dr. Regina Moreno and Dr. Damara Richen, thank you for your thoughtful comments throughout the writing process, your support for my topic, and pushing me to think in new ways.

Deep gratitude goes to the participants at the research site, especially the teachers. It was an honor to observe your teaching and dedication to our students. Thank you for contributing to my learning and allowing me to see new possibilities in the direction of public education.

Eternal love and gratitude to my husband Tom for unwavering love and support. When I doubted my abilities, you were always there with encouraging words, a hug, and a glass of wine. Thank you for believing in me!

To my many family members and friends, thank you for your love and support. To my mom, dad, and Jenn, thank you for believing in me. To my daughter Jessica, thank you for transcribing the interviews for this researcher project and being a cheerleader. To my daughter, Elisabeth, thank you for your no-nonsense critiques, comic relief, and inspiring comments during your edits of my rough drafts. I really appreciated the extra eyes on my work.

To my fellow Green Cohort members, Bobbi, Sarah, Gina, Megan, Lizzy, Kathleen, Lisa, and Gloria, it has been a true pleasure growing with you. Your friendship has been a blessing.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. iii

Dedication .............................................................................................................................. iv

Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................. v

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................. vi

List of Tables ........................................................................................................................ x

Chapter 1: Introduction .......................................................................................................... 1
  Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem ................. 3
  Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................. 7
  Purpose of the Study ......................................................................................................... 7
  Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 7
  Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study ....................................................... 8
  Definition of Terms ......................................................................................................... 8
  Limitations and Delimitations .......................................................................................... 10
  Summary ........................................................................................................................... 11

Chapter 2: Literature Review ................................................................................................ 12
  Conceptual Framework .................................................................................................... 12
  Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature .................................. 14
  Review of Methodological Issues .................................................................................. 43
  Synthesis of Research Findings ...................................................................................... 46
  Critique of Previous Research ....................................................................................... 48
  Summary ............................................................................................................................ 49

Chapter 3: Research Methodology ....................................................................................... 51
Research Questions .................................................................................................................. 51
Purpose and Design of the Research Study ............................................................................. 51
Research Population and Sampling Methods ......................................................................... 53
Identification of Variables ........................................................................................................ 58
Data Analysis Procedures ........................................................................................................ 61
Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design ......................................................... 63
Validation .................................................................................................................................. 64
Expected Findings ..................................................................................................................... 65
Ethical Issues in the Study ........................................................................................................ 66
Summary .................................................................................................................................. 68

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results .................................................................................... 70
Description of the Sample ........................................................................................................ 72
Research Methodology and Analysis ...................................................................................... 73
Summary of the Findings ........................................................................................................... 77
Conceptual Framework-Category 1: Social Justice Education .............................................. 80
Conceptual Framework-Category 2: Teacher Practice ............................................................ 117
Conceptual Framework-Category 3: Child Development ....................................................... 137
Summary .................................................................................................................................. 165

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion ................................................................................... 166
Summary of Results .................................................................................................................. 167
Discussion of Results ............................................................................................................... 168
Discussion of Results in Relation to Literature .................................................................... 178
Limitation ................................................................................................................................. 186
Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory .............................................. 186

Recommendations for Further Research ............................................................................. 189

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................. 191

References ............................................................................................................................ 192

Appendix A: Interview Protocol: Teachers ........................................................................... 205

Appendix B: Teacher Observation Tool .................................................................................. 208

Appendix C: Teacher Observation Debrief .......................................................................... 212

Appendix D: Artifact Review ................................................................................................. 213

Appendix E: Interview Protocol: Parent ............................................................................... 215

Appendix F: Consent Form for Teachers .............................................................................. 216

Appendix G: Consent Form for Parents ............................................................................... 219

Appendix H: Statement of Original Work ............................................................................ 222
List of Figures

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework ................................................................. 13
Figure 2: Phases of Data Collection ................................................................. 56
Figure 3: Classroom Poster Image: VOTE! ....................................................... 86
Figure 4: Classroom Poster Image: Protect Each Other .................................... 87
Figure 5: Children’s Work ............................................................................. 87
Figure 6: Anchor Chart .................................................................................. 88
Figure 7: Marjorie’s Carpet Area ................................................................. 93
Figure 8: Marjorie’s Class Promise ............................................................... 94
Figure 9: Student Classroom Biographies ..................................................... 95
Figure 10: Map of Friendship Town ............................................................. 96
Figure 11: Classroom Poster Image ............................................................... 100
Figure 12: Marjorie’s Student Created Classroom Chart .................................. 128
Figure 13: Artifact from Juliet’s Initial Lesson on "What is Fair?" .................... 129
Figure 14: Fair and Unfair Pipeline Chart ..................................................... 130
Figure 15: Needs Web from Juliet’s Observation 3 .......................................... 131
Figure 16: Dakota Access Pipeline Display .................................................. 139
Figure 17: Debbie Marie’s Student Artifacts Expressing Recognition of Differences .......... 142
Figure 18: Margorie’s Student Artifacts Expressing Recognition of Differences ............ 146
Figure 19: Debbie Marie’s Student Artifacts Expressing Tolerance of Diversity ............ 151
Figure 20: Debbie Marie’s Student Artifacts Expressing Empathy ...................... 156
Figure 21: Juliet’s Student Artifacts Expressing Empathy Around Pipeline Lessons ........ 157
Figure 22: Juliet’s Student Artifacts Expressing Empathy Around Wants and Needs .......... 160
List of Tables

Table 1 Initial Data Codes ................................................................. 72
Table 2 Researcher Participants .......................................................... 74
Table 3 Emergent Codes Corresponding to Attributes .............................. 77
Table 4 Code Quantities ..................................................................... 78
Table 5 Attribute and Data Source Alignment ......................................... 79
Table 6 Attributes Aligned to Data from Observations and Observation Debriefs ........ 81
Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past eight years the researcher has been on a personal and professional journey to understand her responsibility and role as an educator. Although older than some beginning teachers, she came into the profession with similar hopes and dreams for creating a better world. Having experienced the economic hardship that exists for poor families first hand, the researcher was sure she could relate to the struggles existing in other people’s lives. It took a long time for her to recognize that she had privileges not afforded to everyone. It took even longer to understand how to use that privilege to create social change.

Positioning her professional work in Title I communities offered the researcher the opportunity to create relationships with many people from diverse backgrounds and gain insight into different perspectives. Through years of experience the researcher learned about the hopes, fears and injustices that were daily experiences of the students she worked with and their families. With knowledge and collaboration from families, the researcher altered he classroom structures and materials to meet the needs of her students and to reflect their experiences and cultures.

One year while teaching at a school in the Pacific Northwest, the researcher experienced an influx of Somali families that immigrated to the community. Inexperienced in working with children and families from their culture, the researcher sought knowledge to ensure she presented a welcoming environment and met their specific needs. The researcher attended professional development, presented by Somali organizations to understand their culture and their experiences. To create a classroom environment that reflected the students in the classroom, the researcher added books about Somalia and books that showed children wearing hijabs into the already-diverse classroom library. Students were presented with opportunities to use their
language through counting and naming animals or other objects to teach vocabulary to the other students. By actively accessing the culture in the classroom, the children learned to appreciate similarities and differences between our language, experiences, and cultures. The classroom also offered a safe environment for children to discuss conflicts they were having at the apartment complexes where many of the students at the school lived. Possessing little cognizance of the culture, the researcher learned that conflicts existed between the Somali tribes and this created a hostile environment for families. Additionally, the limited knowledge between the various cultures in the complex caused misunderstandings. Conversations to address cultural conflict issues were fostered in classroom communities and the school community. Working daily with young children in a diverse and low-income community strengthened the researcher’s ability to advocate for the needs of her students and presented her with the knowledge that children’s capabilities went beyond those discussed in teacher textbooks.

While developing her awareness of social justice teaching, the researcher’s professional journey took her to a new school community. The researcher knew young children had the capacity to understanding many things, however the children at the new school had advantages and opportunities that were unavailable to her previous students. In the past, the researcher’s social justice teaching was prompted by the lived experiences of the community in which she worked; the diversity of the student body created many openings for discussion and learning. In the new environment, the researcher perceived presenting social justice concepts to a community of students with little experience of injustice, discrimination, or lack of necessities as the challenge. Since a primary goal of education is to introduce students to broader views and perspectives (Banks, 1993; Hytten & Bettez, 2011; Nieto, 1999), the researcher exposed the students to the injustices that exist for people both in their community and globally. While not
all teachers implement social justice into teaching their students, there is evidence of it becoming a growing movement (Au, Bigelow, & Karp, 2007; Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009; Bigelow, Harvey, & Karp, 2001). The driving force for this study was the knowledge produced through the researcher’s personal journey and exposure to the experiences of other teachers. Since not all teachers introduce social justice concepts to young children, this study focuses solely on educators who include social justice as part of their curriculum. This study sought to understand the perceptions and practices of teachers who make the choice to create opportunities for young children to challenge their thinking by implementing social justice education in their classroom.

**Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

While educational policies still present challenges, educators continue to push for education that is equitable and inclusive of all students. Positive changes in society begin with educators who recognize the importance of exposing students to new ideas, perspectives, and experiences (Banks, 1991; Banks & Banks, 2007; Silva & Langhout, 2011). Recognizing that teacher perspectives and practices is an essential influence on students led the researcher to center the studies conceptual framework on the topics of social justice and teacher practice in early childhood, specifically kindergarten to 2nd grade.

In their text, *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, Bell, Adams and Griffin (2007) expressed social justice both as a “process and a goal” (p. 1). The creation of a more just and equitable world requires a change in practices which are equitable, inclusive and affirming. Education should model the elements of a democratic and participatory society with equitable access to resources, and safety and security of all people. Social justice education aims to give individuals the tools to examine oppressions in their lives and society (Bell, Adams, & Griffin (2007). However, giving individuals, the tools is not enough to create social justice. Fulfilling
this vision requires devoted collaboration (Picower, 2007, 2011). Supporting social justice in education requires educators who have the skills and developmental understanding to implement appropriate practices for all students (Schoorman, 2011). Social justice is considered an essential part of education for older students. However, current research has begun to focus the conversation on social justice teaching to children as young as preschool (Durden, Escalante, & Blitch, 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Lee, 2014; Puig & Recchia, 2012). As a means of focusing the topic of this study, the study will proceed through a preliminary description of the areas of social justice, teacher practice in social justice teaching and early childhood development.

According to Marilyn Cochran-Smith, a leading scholar in education, social justice deals with “ideas, ideals, values, and assumptions” (Cochran-Smith, 2003). A cornerstone feature of social justice is the examination of the implicit biases that affect our social interactions within society and examination of the injustice that exists for some people and not others. To accomplish this, teachers must create a culture where diversity is valued. Presenting opportunities where members of society begin to examine the injustice that is created through negative biases and assumptions, teachers can begin to change the systems to reflect equity and human rights across all cultures and nations. It is imperative that the consciousness level of individuals in society is raised, fostering empowerment and dignity for those people who have been historically disadvantaged, and building relationships of diversity and equality (Freire, 1970). The researcher views social justice as foundational in teaching children that they can make positive change in the world. Children have a natural propensity toward seeing injustice in the world around them but need guidance in examining and critiquing these beliefs. By fostering students’ unique cultural perspectives and creating space for valuing the perspectives of others, students can critically examine injustice and develop avenues for shaping and changing society.
Teacher practice is foundational in creating a classroom environment and nurturing students’ knowledge construction (Tenorio, 2007). Building positive, respectful relationships with students is paramount to their success. The relationships formed within the classroom setting have a profound effect on children’s willingness to share and learn from diverse perspectives (Banks & Banks, 1995; Tenorio, 2007). Teachers who honor students’ experiences and foster caring relationships build inclusive, safe environments. This safe-haven creates a space for children to engage in dialogue, which has the potential to develop, challenge, and transform their understanding of the world. Through the inclusion of student voices in the design of instruction and the classroom setting, teachers both empower and address the diverse needs of their students. Teachers should create lessons and activities with a clear understanding of the developmental levels of their students and provide the instructional supports needed to help foster learning. Although instructional methods may vary, it is essential that teachers set high expectations for all students (Lee, 2014; Nieto, 1994). High levels of support and belief in students’ abilities, maximizes the learning potential of all students.

Social justice is best implemented with curriculum that is related to students’ lives, offering activities that engage the student’s natural curiosity (Banks & Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995). While students benefit from many instructional methods, young children construct their learning through active and cooperative learning experiences. Young students can make strong connections to ideas that are familiar or that connect with their personal experiences (Jensen, 2005; Williams & Cooney, 2006). For example, a lesson with pictures and discussion about different family structures can bring about much learning, because while the family structures may be diverse, most children can relate to having families. Through hands-on experiences, teachers can begin the process of creating a student’s personal love of learning and
encourage critical analysis of information and ideas with an eye toward creating action (Hammond et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Lee, Ramsey & Sweeney, 2008). If teachers leverage these educational methods, they can make larger global social justice issues relevant to children.

There are many theories that attempt to describe and explain human development by detailing key periods (or stages) of development and what occurs in these periods (Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2006; Kelly & Brooks, 2009; Sorin, 2005). During each stage, growth and development occur in each of the primary domains: physical, intellectual, language, and social-emotional. As each stage progresses, multiple changes occur in the brain (Jensen, 2005). These changes and how they occur can only be approximated, because genetics and environmental factors play a role in development. Some historic theorists, such as, Piaget and Vygotsky view children as having limited capabilities for critical thought and social understanding, believing that child development is concretely grounded in developmental stages both cognitively and morally. These same theorists often view children as egocentric and unable to see beyond their personal needs (Blake & Pope, 2008). However, more recent research shows young children are capable of showing empathy and perspective taking when presented with ideas they can relate to (Hawkins, 2014; Ruane et al., 2010). These research studies provide some evidence that young children have the ability to see beyond themselves and exhibit the capacity to comprehend, participate, and take action with regard to issues of social justice. By presenting information to children through the eyes of a child, teachers can make connections that can inspire participation in humanitarian efforts, which will improve the local community or world.

Social justice issues are prevalent in all facets of society, thus making it imperative that school communities engage in open and honest discussions. Through critical reflection and action, change is created. Perpetuating a culture of active engagement of all citizens can bridge
the cultural gaps that exist in society and create communities that benefit all citizens. These changes can begin in our schools with our youngest learners, through the inspirational work of educators who recognize the contributions that children can make toward the betterment of society.

**Statement of the Problem**

Since there is limited knowledge on social justice teaching with regard to young children, this research study sought to understand the perceptions and practices of teachers who implement instruction on social justice concepts to kindergarten and 2nd grade children. Additionally, this research study sought to understand the impact of this type of teaching on young children’s understand of their role in society.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions and practices of three teachers who teach social justice concepts to kindergarten and 2nd grade students and to understand the impact of these lessons on the students and their families. Specifically, the researcher was interested in understanding how teachers perceive social justice, their perceptions of teaching practices to use for social justice teaching, and to understand their perceptions of the capacities of children with regard to these lessons.

**Research Questions**

The following central questions guided this research:

1. What do teachers perceive about how instruction on social justice concepts impact early grade learners in classroom settings?

2. What do teachers perceive about how this instruction influences learner perceptions regarding their role in society?
Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

The results of this study may be used to guide kindergarten through 2nd grade teachers in their practice. The results may add to the impact of the capability approach in the field of early childhood education (Underwood et al., 2012; Unterhalter, Vaughan, & Walker, 2007; Vaughan, 2016). The capability approach recognizes that people have “priorities and potentialities” which they value, but achievement of these priorities is dependent on the freedom and opportunity available to achieve (Biggeri, Ballet, & Comim, 2011). Young children regardless of age or perceived ability level should have access to education that optimizes each child’s potential. Additionally, the results of this study may bring about further research on parent and teacher perspectives of children’s capacities to understand social justice issues. This research study could assist educators in understanding the significance of teaching social justice at an early age and present methods that educators use to teach social justice concepts.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are important for understanding the nature of this study. The terms and the definitions are the attributes that were used for data collection and data analysis.

Multicultural/anti-racist education. Multicultural/anti-racist education is defined through J. A. Banks’ (2004) comprehensive five core dimensions of multicultural education and Enid Lee’s (2007) definition of multicultural education as anti-racist education. Banks’ (1998; 2004) five dimensions of multicultural education include: (a) content integration—infusing curriculum with materials from diverse perspectives; (b) knowledge construction—understanding how knowledge construction can be biased by implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, and perspectives; (c) equity pedagogy—teaching strategies and environments designed to enable students from diverse racial and ethnic groups to access
academic achievement; (d) prejudice reduction—developing more positive racial attitudes by decreasing racial stereotypes and prejudices in the school and increasing democratic attitudes, values, and behaviors; and (e) empowering school culture and social structure—critical reflection and examination of school culture to create increased equity. Lee (2007) expanded on Banks’ definition to emphasize the anti-racist purpose of equipping students, parents, and teachers with tools to combat racism and ethnic discrimination, while building a society that includes all people equally.

**Equity pedagogy.** Equity pedagogy is defined as teaching practices intentionally designed to increase engagement and participation with the intent of assisting students from diverse racial, ethnic and cultural groups to attain gain skills and knowledge to function in and help create a just democratic society (Banks, 1995).

**Culturally relevant pedagogy.** Culturally relevant pedagogy is defined as teaching practices that empower students by using their frames of reference, cultural knowledge, and background experiences to make the learning more relevant to, and effective for, the students in order to enhance critical consciousness (Gay, 2010; Hyland, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

**Global citizenship.** Global citizenship is an educational view that recognizes our interconnectedness and interdependence as active citizens of a local community, state, and country, but of the world (Banks, 2004; Bell, Jean-Sigur, & Kim, 2015; Zahabioun et al., 2013).

**Capability approach.** Capability approach is an alternate view of human development which understands that each person has individually defined capabilities based on what they value, and we need to ensure that each person has the freedom to achieve his or her functionings (Nussbaum, 2011). Children are seen as active agents with human rights, and whose social participation exhibits values and priorities (Peleg, 2013).
**Functionings.** Functionings are defined as the valuable activities and states that make up people’s well-being (Unterhalter, Vaughn, & Walker, 2007).

**Literature.** Literature is defined as picture books, poetry, and other written works containing complex language and added illustrations which assist in conveying vivid events or situations (Ciardiello, 2010; Gibson & Parks, 2014; Hawkins, 2014).

**Classroom discussion or dialogue.** Classroom discussion or dialogue is defined as reflective conversation about a topic (Au et al., 2007; Kuby, 2013; Phillips, 2012).

**Knowledge construction.** Knowledge construction is defined as an active meaning-making process where students reflect on, challenge, and change the way they view and interact with knowledge (Banks, 2001; Gay, 2003).

**Recognition of differences.** Recognition of differences is defined as the awareness of diverse perspectives and characteristics of people and ideas (Kelly & Brooks, 2005; Lee, Ramsey & Sweeney, 2008).

**Tolerating diversity.** Tolerating diversity is defined as understanding, accepting, and respecting similarities and differences among people. (Ruane et al., 2010; Zakin, 2012).

**Empathy.** Empathy is defined as understanding or identifying with another person’s feelings or experiences (Hawkins, 2014; Louie, 2005). Kuhmerker (1975) adds that it is social perspective taking and the developments of the rudiments of a sense of justice.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

Several limitations and delimitations of this research design were identified. Limitations addressed the external factors that are beyond the control of the researcher while, delimitations addressed the internal factors, or boundary, which the researcher intentionally created to define the scope of the study.
Limitations within this research study included the researcher as the primary research instrument, time constraint, and sample size. The study was conducted over a 4-month period from late September through December, which required the researcher to have a more flexible schedule and complete data gathering during this small window of time. Limitations existed for participant access based on participant schedules. Additionally, the study was limited to three teachers at the research site who fit the study criteria. Delimitations, or the intentional boundaries created included, a focus on a single K–5 school in the Pacific Northwest, examination of kindergarten through 2nd grade teachers and the use of single-case study with three teachers, not multiple case study.

Summary

As an educator, the researcher is aware that personal experiences and beliefs impact teaching, as well as an educator’s view of the world. This study seeks to examine the perceptions and practices of teachers who teach social justice concepts to young children in kindergarten through 2nd grade. Chapter 2 presents the conceptual framework, a review of research and methodological research, a review of methodological issues, a synthesis of research findings, and a critique of previous literature. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology and design, participant description and selection, instrument design, data collection, analysis processes, and credibility and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 offers a detailed analysis and presentation of the data organized by the conceptual framework attributes that guided the case study. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the results as they relate to the research questions and the current literature.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Issues pertaining to race, gender, and other identifiers are imbedded in the structure and culture of our society. Through the advancement of society, it has become clear that to foster collaboration which respects and honors diversity while seeking to eliminate injustice and inequality, education must take an essential role in creating space for the examination of these issues. Teachers play a crucial role in this type of work. Although some educators place constraints upon the developmental possibilities of young children, still others seek to recognize the values and capabilities that exist within young children from their cultural perspectives and experiences.

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions and practices of teachers who teach social justice concepts to kindergarten through 2nd grade children, and the impact these lessons have on the children and their families. This literature review will illuminate the use of social justice in education, examine the most prevalently used teacher practices, and look at early childhood development.

Conceptual Framework

![Conceptual Framework Diagram]

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework for this study identifies attributes of social justice perspectives
in education, teacher practices used for implementing such perspectives, and child development theories that work to explain children’s capacities for social justice. Based on the literature review the researcher ascertained that social justice teaching has been defined through different lenses over the years: multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, critical pedagogy, global citizenship, and capability approach, to name a few. These social justice concepts encompass characteristics which both converge and differ. This variation in approaches can make the work that teachers seek to do more complicated because of their limited understanding of these avenues for creating social justice oriented classrooms.

The cultural perspectives and understandings that teachers bring to their practice present another dimension to their instructional practices. Geneva Gay (2013) asserted that there exists a long history of consistent research findings that show “teachers’ instructional behaviors are strongly influenced by their attitudes and beliefs” (p. 56) about student diversity. Teachers need a supportive environment where they can challenge their preconceived notions, reflect on their practice, and actively pursue their own social justice growth.

Valuing current knowledge and experience possessed by educators of young children is imperative to enhancing the potential of children. “Educators that espouse traditional modernist perspectives based on developmentalism believe that children under the age of seven are incapable of engaging with or understanding abstract issues around diversity, difference, human rights, social justice, discrimination, and prejudice” (Ruane et al., 2010, p. 14). In everyday practice, teachers witness children sharing stories of injustice, talking about differences, and exhibiting empathy. However, teachers also see evidence of stereotypes, conflicts using power relationships, and discrimination (Hawkins, 2014; Ruane et al., 2010). “Early childhood educators need to view themselves as leaders who possess insightful voices regarding the growth
and development of all children, regardless of ability, race, class, gender, culture, or language” (Fichtman, Dana, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2005, p. 191). Furthermore, despite pressures to standardize children, teachers should use their knowledge and understanding to create environments that challenge, and counteract socially constructed biases. Through the use of literature and other instructional practices, teachers can bring to light the capability and cultural understanding that exists within young learners.

The following review of research literature will illuminate the current perspectives associated with social justice in education, teachers’ practices in social justice education, and aspects of children’s developmental capacities connected with social justice.

**Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

Since social justice is such an amorphous topic, it is necessary to understand what this means for K–12 instruction. The researcher pursued a survey of the salient theories to demonstrate how this topic is being approached in education. The most noticeable theories that fall under the umbrella of social justice education theories, seek to unveil, and transform the oppressive policies and practices that exist in schools and other institutions (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2012). Some noted social justice theories such as critical theory is concerned with institutionally propagated inequities and seeks the implementation of practices that increase awareness of unequal power dynamics in society. Additionally, social justice theories such as multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy, recognize inequities in school culture and seek to transform educational practices to be inclusive and affirming to all students. The review of research literature has shown that social justice teaching can be thoughtfully approached from different personal perspectives. The following review will begin by presenting the relevant research on multicultural/ anti-racist education.
Multicultural/ anti-racist education. Multicultural education developed as a call to action during the Civil Rights movement, when African-Americans and members of other ethnic groups pushed for educational reform and equity (Banks, 1998). Multicultural or anti-racist education is an educational point of view with a specific focus on the history and experiences of those traditionally left out of school curriculum. Banks and Banks (2007) defined multicultural education as “an educational idea, an educational reform movement, and a process” (p. 1) used for creating systemic transformation which will allow all students to have an equal opportunity to achieve in school.

Historically, White culture has been the predominant lens for determining what is normal in society. To affect positive changes in society, teachers must look at all aspects of the community, school, or classroom, and examine the missing perspectives and inequalities that exist. Researchers have shown it is essential for students to develop the knowledge and skills to interact and make decisions with ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse people to cultivate a commitment to democratic change (Banks, 1991; Banks & Banks, 2007).

Implementation of multicultural education, for many teachers in the education field, has been synonymous with bilingual programs, ethnocentric curriculum, or superficial content integration. For instance, a teacher may create a unit of study that focuses on ethnic foods, folktales, religion, clothing, or the visible traits of culture, and disregard the underlying aspects of value, power, and practice within the culture. However, multicultural education is more than the inclusion of multicultural materials in the educational environment. This attenuated concept of multicultural education represents an incomplete conceptualization and operationalization of this complex movement (Nieto, 1994).

James A. Banks (1993, 2004) emphasized that although content integration in the
curriculum is important, it is only one dimension of multicultural education. Through the years, multicultural education has expanded to encompass dimensions from other pedagogical influences. The four other dimensions: (a) knowledge construction, (b) equity pedagogy, (c) prejudice reduction, and (d) empowering school cultural and social structure (Banks, 1993a, 1993b) are required to create a safe and healthy educational environment for everyone. The Commission on Multicultural Education endorses three premises: (a) cultural diversity is a valuable resource; (b) multicultural education preserves and extends the resources of cultural diversity, rather than merely tolerating it or making it “melt away;” and (c) multicultural education exists in a commitment to cultural pluralism (Cochran-Smith, 2003).

Multicultural curriculum has been transformational with a focus on students viewing concepts, issues, and problems from diverse cultural perspectives in a globally connected world (Banks, 1991). Within the multicultural classroom, multiple voices are heard and valued. Bringing the background and life experiences of students and family members into the classroom is an important way to honor the diversity of a community by including all voices and perspectives. Multicultural education contains an ongoing process of examining cultural biases and incorporating the lives and voices of people of color.

While there has been limited funding available for anti-racist educational materials, teachers can shift their teaching to challenge prejudices. Students presented with the opportunity to ask and answer questions gain a new perspective on an event or a person’s experiences. Discrimination works by treating some people’s lives, points of view, and experiences as less valuable than others (Lee, 2007). Students and families invited to include their experiences and points of view foster an understanding for differing perspectives. For the facilitation of education that is beneficial for all citizens, the curriculum must reflect the lives of all citizens (Banks,
Lee (2007) viewed multicultural, anti-racist education as a way of giving teachers, parents, and students the tools they need to combat racism and discrimination and to build a just society that incorporates all people equally (p. 15). In making this comment, Lee corroborated the importance of Banks’ fifth dimension, which speaks to empowering school and social culture (1998). According to Banks, “Education in a democratic society should help students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they will need to participate in civic action to make society more equitable and just” (Araujo & Strasser, 2003, p. 180).

Multicultural, anti-racist education contributes to empowering the voices and perspectives belonging to children of color, assists White children in expanding their knowledge, and makes visible how the world really exists for marginalized people (Banks & Banks, 1995; Lee, 2007). The sources of inequity and privilege can be difficult to see by people immersed in the system. Appreciation and awareness are built through opportunities to learn from people of diverse cultures. Transformation of society into a more equal and equitable place for all, begins with empowering people of color and prompting white students to participate in changing systems and challenging injustices. Fundamentally multicultural education was designed to empower all students to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens (Banks & Banks, 1995).

Multicultural education develops student ability to recognize and value diversity, while creating a democratic and just society, which is empowering for all groups. According to Banks (2004), education should play the role of exposing the injustice of the assimilation notion of citizenship. “Citizens in a diverse democratic society should be able to maintain attachments to their cultural communities, as well as participate effectively in the shared national culture”
(Banks, 2004, p. 291). The essence of Banks’ argument was that society is stronger with citizens maintaining their cultural communities and bringing that knowledge to their participation in the national culture. Classrooms and schools that exemplify respect for diversity, honor the individual and cultural attachments the bring strength to society.

Multicultural education should be envisioned as an avenue for creating connectedness and understanding, not division between cultures.

The world’s greatest problems do not result from people being unable to read and write. They result from people in the world—from different cultures, races, religions, and nations—being unable to get along and to work together to solve the world’s intractable problems. (Banks, 2004, p. 291)

Education should create an environment and system where beliefs are challenged, and acceptance can be built which fosters the creation of sustainable change. Identifying a problem with education’s focus on academic achievement, Banks and Banks (2007) recommended the teaching of social justice issues. They argued that a focus on academic achievement would not prepare student to be “reflective, moral, caring, and active citizens” (Banks & Banks, 2007, p. 5). This narrowed academic focus often hinders educators’ abilities to design instruction and environments which foster the connectedness needed for achievement to grow. “Multicultural education is designed to help unify a deeply divided nation, rather than to divide a highly cohesive one” (Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 23). If the goal as educators is to bring diverse groups of people together and build a respectful society for all, multicultural education is an important educational avenue.

The review of literature on multicultural education revealed the essential nature of creating classrooms that empower and value diverse perspectives, while challenging injustices
and discrimination. The literature review will proceed with an examination of current literature on equity pedagogy with regard to social justice in education.

**Equity pedagogy.** Equity pedagogy is defined as “teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, help create, and perpetuate a just, human, and democratic society” (Banks, 1995, p. 152). Essentially, Banks recognized that the role of education needed to be more than learning to read and write. Education must create a space for reflections, discussion, and democratic action to promote empowerment and eliminate bias in society. As an essential component of multicultural education, equity pedagogy reminds us of the important nature of countering biases. “Equity pedagogy assumes that if teachers and schools do not consciously attempt to counter injustice, then by default, they support it” (Hyland, 2010, p. 83). Hyland’s theory of equity pedagogy is extremely useful because it sheds light on the importance of professional development for teachers. Teachers who participate in professional development with peers, where reflection and discussion examine beliefs and biases, create awareness of injustice, and begin to make changes that create safe places for their students.

Within multicultural education, equity pedagogy pertains to the change in teaching methods that can enable students from diverse racial groups, genders, and abilities to access academic achievement (Banks, 1993b; Banks & Tucker, 1998). Equity pedagogy requires teachers to examine and reflect on their teaching methods and practice. As an example, one effective change in teaching practice that is gaining popularity is to create a classroom structure that offers more cooperative learning. This is a teaching method that allows students at different ability levels to actively work together in small groups to learn from one another, which has been
found to be effective with students from diverse racial and ethnic groups. Working in groups encourages racial acceptance, positive interpersonal skills, and promotes high achievement. Through this modification of instruction, teachers increase and vary student participation, allowing all students a fair opportunity to challenge the societal structures that increase inequity for students from diverse populations.

The review of equity pedagogy literature reveals the important nature of creating teaching practices and environments that build on students’ strengths. The literature review will continue with an examination of current literature on the use of culturally relevant pedagogy in the area of social justice in education.

**Culturally relevant pedagogy.** Gloria Ladson-Billings defined the term culturally relevant pedagogy as a pedagogy “that empowers students to maintain cultural integrity, while succeeding academically” (as cited in Gay, 2010). Ladson-Billing’s argued that academic success can be achieved without a person needing to give up their cultural identity. Culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching recognize the importance of connecting students’ learning experience with their own life experience.

In culturally relevant pedagogy, the relationship between the student and the teacher is crucial. Teachers spend a significant amount of time with students. To promote student learning, teachers must ensure that students must feel cared for and feel that teachers honor them, both as individuals and as members of cultural groups. This relationship construction is essential for all relationships, but especially when working with a power dynamic and with diverse students (Nieto, 1999). “Close observation combined with respect for children’s home cultures can create opportunities for better learning among children who have been historically marginalized and have experienced educational injustice in schools” (Hyland, 2010, p. 84).
Additionally, teachers who are willing to bond with their students through caring interactions and by establishing a respectful classroom atmosphere create a community that supports students’ self-acceptance, learning outcomes, and empowerment (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

Gay expanded the focus for culturally relevant teaching beyond race and ethnicity, and incorporated culture as a profound influence on the way we think, believe, and behave (Gay, 2010). This is a vital point because by incorporating culture, Gay acknowledged that a person’s values, attitudes, and beliefs occupy an essential role for enhancing a person’s ways of being in the world. This requires educators to be aware of the values and beliefs of their students but additionally to have awareness of how personal beliefs influence their instructional behavior. Nora Hyland (2010) affirms that,

    culturally relevant teachers make a concerted effort to learn the cultural norms and values of the ethnic, racial, or language group with whom they work and to use their knowledge to inform their practice and improve educational outcomes and experiences for children.

(Hyland, 2010, p. 84)

Researchers Geneva Gay (2010), Nora Hyland (2010), and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasize the significant role that culturally relevant teaching plays in raising critical consciousness among students. The significance of this practice is evident in Karen Hawkins’ (2014) participatory action research study with preschool children. The study, conducted with 3-5-year-old children, used critically selected literature and a combination of open-ended and higher order thinking questions to elicit deep reflection. The research shows that the student-driven discussions helped to challenge students’ assumptions, created an environment for listening to other perspectives, and created opportunities to refine perspectives (Hawkins, 2014). The results of this study and previous research suppositions exhibit that conscious reflection and
challenging of the status quo is imperative to creating social change.

The review of current literature on culturally relevant pedagogy indicated the importance of incorporating student race, ethnicity, and culture in the classrooms structure to support acquisition of diverse perspectives and improve learning outcomes for all students. The literature review will continue with an examination of current literature on critical pedagogy with regard to social justice in education.

**Critical pedagogy.** Critical pedagogy is a teaching and learning approach directly influenced by critical theory. Critical theory is an examination of the relationship between power and culture, aimed at addressing issues of class, race, gender, and social justice in societal institutions (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2014). Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach that raises awareness that members of society are divided into groups of unequal power.

Critical pedagogy is concerned with influencing educational knowledge and cultural formation through the examination of unjust systems in society. Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach which attempts to help uncover how everyday practices at schools create and maintain marginalized identities. In this way, education is viewed as not neutral; it can be used for subjugation or liberation. It exists not simply to help reveal the untruths in the world, but to additionally bring about change through action, which is a central component to critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). By examining and understanding power among all marginalized groups, social transformation and educational change can be facilitated.

Critical pedagogy was perceived by Freire (1970) as a form of liberating education based on dialogue between teacher and students, as well as student to student. Wink (2000) defined critical pedagogy as a critical reflection on an individual’s experiences and those of others (as cited in Bohórquez, 2012). Researchers advocate a problem-posing approach to education as a
means to shaping the person and society. The problem-posing approach recognizes that knowledge is constructed between people, through reflection, listening, and dialogue. The use of dialogue by teachers creates opportunity for “empowering the powerless and transforming social inequalities and injustices” (Bohórquez, 2012, p. 199).

Freire (1970) argued against seeing students as receptacles to be filled; instead, he thought students needed to be active participants in creating meaning through inquiry “in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). Critical pedagogy connects classroom learning with students’ experiences, histories, and cultural understandings. Through a process of formation and reformation of knowledge students challenge the dominant form of thinking allowing their own cognition to emerge.

For active participants of a system of oppression and privilege, it can be difficult to see the struggle that exists for those who are marginalized. In critical pedagogy, the general population is viewed as unable or unwilling to see the inequities, inaccuracies, or falsehoods that limit freedom (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Society has internalized and adopted a system creating “status-quo blindness.” Freedom can exist through awareness, reflection, and action. Education is the avenue for achieving freedom, “the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (Freire, 1970, p. 47). Through the examination of the status-quo teachers can foster critical capacities in students as citizens, empowering them with the knowledge needed to make significant changes in their own lives and society.

The review of literature on critical pedagogy presented the idea of education that connects student lives to the classroom as a means of raising students’ consciousness and revealing inequities in society. The literature review will proceed with an examination of current literature on global citizenship with regard to social justice in education.
Global citizenship. Living in an increasingly globalized society, education should foster understanding, values, and skills that assist people in learning to cooperate to solve the world's interconnect problems. Some researchers refer to it as global citizenship, and others refer to it as global education (Hicks, 2003). Regardless of the term used, the foundations are essentially the same. Global citizenship stems from the view that economically, environmentally, and politically, the world is interconnected and interdependent (Banks, 2004; Bell, Jean-Sigur, & Kim, 2015; Zahabioun, Yousefy, Yarmohammadian, & Keshtiaray, 2013). The essence of this argument is that issues such as poverty, human rights, global warming, and international trade, for instance, have a broader global impact, and that citizens of the world can come together and make sustainable change. Our deep interconnection makes it essential that our students are not ignorant of other people and cultures.

Global citizenship is not only principled on the interconnected and interdependent nature of societies, but also recognizes that people are not only citizens of individual nation-states, they are also citizens of the world (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014; Zahabioun et al., 2013). This global perspective recognizes the need to foster citizens that are concerned about the problems facing the world. Banks (2003) claims that “citizens in this century need the knowledge, attitude, and skills required to function within and beyond cultural communities and borders” (p. 1). Moreover, Banks stated that students need to understand the link between their own lives and the lives of others in the world, and the influential effect that international events have on their daily lives (2003).

It is important to note that this paradigm shift can be seen as a threat by some people. Global citizenship may be perceived as a challenge to an existing view of the United States as isolated or removed from international events (Harth, 2006). Some regard global citizenship as
defying the assimilationist view of citizenship (Banks, 2004), and still others may see it as a threat or disloyalty to their nation-state. However, more recent views express the notion of global citizenship and global education as the ability to gain knowledge and empathy toward one’s local, national, and global community (Capalo, n.d.; Langran, & Birk, 2016).

The United Nations views Global Citizen Education as a lifelong learning perspective that will inspire “action, partnership, dialogue, and cooperation through formal and non-formal education” (UNESCO, 2014). Young children are growing up in an increasingly interdependent world (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005; Martin, Smolen, Oswald, & Milam, 2012), and as citizens, they should learn to be reflective, moral, and active members (Banks, 2004).

Teachers cannot undo systemic inequalities, but they can make sure they do not replicate them within the sphere of their influence. While assisting students in gaining skills and knowledge is important, even more imperative is the development of perspectives and attitudes, because these elements shape our character and values. Researchers claim that in our global citizenship age, we must develop global perspectives and attitudes that build an appreciation for other cultures and a tolerance for other viewpoints and opinions (Bell, Jean-Sigur, & Kim, 2015; Harth, 2010; Zahabioun et al., 2013). Chris Harth (2010) from the Global Studies Foundation insists that,

young citizens must develop an ethical compass that enables them to see beyond themselves to recognize their connections and obligations to others, and to chart a responsible course of action that will serve themselves, their families, and their communities—including their schools, their neighborhoods, their towns and cities, their counties, their states, their regions, their countries, and our shared planet (para. 6).

In making this statement, Harth acknowledged the essential nature of creating environments that
encourage students to take an active role in understanding how the people of the world are connected, and the steps that can be taken to create a better world for everyone.

This review of literature on global citizenship revealed the essential nature of having a sense of belong as a community of human beings, with responsibility to and connected to a wider world. As participants in this interconnected world, children need to be given the freedom to develop the empathy and skills necessary to develop their skills as social actors. The review of literature will proceed with an examination of Capability Approach as it applies to social justice in education.

**Capability approach.** The capability approach is an alternative view of human development which focuses on the expansion of a person’s well-being based on their freedom to achieve what they value (Nussbaum, 2011; Terzi, 2005; Unterhalter, Vaughan, & Walker, 2007). Capability theorists affirm fundamental belief in the dignity for each person, and ensure each person has the freedom to achieve his or her functioning (Nussbaum, 2011), regardless of their differences and the causes of their differences (Terzi, 2005).

Over the last several years, numerous education researchers have turned to the capability approach to understand the implications for its use in the education field (Terzi, 2005; Unterhalter, Vaughan, & Walker, 2007; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007; Snauwaert, 2011; Underwood, Valeo, & Wood, 2012; Rogers, 2013; Vaughan, 2016). While the application to areas of education are growing, according to Peleg (2013), there are still debates about the theory’s application to children. These debates center on the conception of children as passive actors and lacking agency, rather than an actual lack of children’s abilities. Peleg (2013) argues that, “claiming that the capability approach is not relevant to children because children lack the capacity to choose undermines the core principle of the capability approach itself” (p. 534).
As a part of human development, the capability approach in education is a means of “equalizing people’s capabilities both in and through education” (Unterhalter, Vaughan, & Walker, 2007). Vaughan (2016) noted that at the center of human development is value development through education and values related to social justice. Since education is seen as central to human flourishing, and as a means of opening minds and acquiring valuable capabilities (Unterhalter, 2009), developing values related to social justice seems central to the education of children.

According to one theorist in this field, Saito (2003), it is important for children to not just develop skills that have economic value, but the reflective capacities that would lead to an examined life. Educators have a responsibility to offer equitable access and opportunities that will enhance children’s current and future possibilities for freedom by nurturing their capabilities (Saito, 2003). Supportive classroom environments promote children’s voices and ideas by means of active participation. Teachers have a responsibility to exhibit structures and practices in classrooms and schools that foster the capabilities we seek to transform.

Educators regard the development of thinking skills as a foundational component of learning and expanding students’ capabilities. Unterhalter, Vaughan, and Walker (2007) stated, “At the heart of the notion of a capability is a conception that a person is able to develop a reasoned understanding of valued beings and doings” (p. 3). It is broadly acknowledged that young children have the capacity to create reasoned understandings through examination of varying perspectives and with opportunities to reflect on personal values. Nussbaum (2000) views the development of children’s capabilities to critically reflect and plan autonomously as essential to the continued development of democracy and tolerance in society. Although teachers work to include voices and perspectives of people that their students cannot directly see
or hear by incorporating literature and other media in their lessons, these may not be enough to fully develop an understanding and appreciation for the perspectives of others. According to Vaughan (2016),

there is no substitute for actual interactions with people from different backgrounds and cultures in helping to understand different points of view, in forming a realistic picture of society, the current power relations and how individuals can fit into this, as well as ideas about what changes might be desirable and how such changes might come about (p. 215).

The interaction from different people with different perspectives begins with the community within the classroom. Nussbaum (1997, 2010) gives central importance to interactions and contact with people from differing cultures. Presenting opportunities for children to have discussion with a focus on the people and cultures accessible through your community is an essential starting point for building thinking and knowledge about the world from other points of view. By ensuring that education affords children the opportunities of exposure to a broad range of experiences and perspectives, teachers are developing their ability to reason and meaningfully participate around issues of injustice and inequity (Vaughan, 2016).

Childhood is a time of increased independence, which brings with it a sense of agency for children regarding their ideas, choices, and actions. Dixon and Nussbaum (2012) insist that agency is an integral part of building on a child’s full capabilities, by recognizing that children possess the internal capacity to understand and make choices. Dixon and Nussbaum (2012) and Peleg (2013) conceive children as active agents with human rights, and whose social participation exhibit values and priorities. According to Nussbaum (2011), basic capabilities are innate in all human beings, and internal capabilities are developed through supportive environments.
Children need to be aware of the existence of inequalities, reasons for the existence of the inequalities, and how these things can be transformed to develop agency for change. Vaughan (2016) claimed curriculum should explicitly explore and explain the existence of inequities in society. According to Vaughan (2016), the examination of inequities creates the opportunity for students to understand how they can have an active role in both an individual and collective empowerment to foster change. Some social justice curriculum seeks to convey a particular set of values, rather than increasing young people’s abilities to reason and form agency (Vaughan, 2016). For this reason, teachers should nurture children’s capabilities and foster autonomous practices as the foundation for development of mature adult capabilities.

Carlisle et al. (2006) defined social justice education “as the conscious and reflexive blend of content and process intended to enhance equity across multiple social identity groups (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability), foster critical perspectives, and promote social action” (as cited in Dover, 2009, p. 508). Young children are aware of injustice and can participate in the work of social justice education to transform oppression and social structural inequalities. Many social justice theorists look to restructuring society toward greater equity in race, class, gender, and disability (Grant & Sleeter, 2007). However, the difficulty exists in understanding how teachers are approaching this work. In the book Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice (1997), researcher Lee Anne Bell maintains that:

We believe that social justice education is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. We envision a society in which individuals are both self-determining
(able to develop their full capacities), and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others). Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole. (p. 3)

The transformation of society requires educators to recognize young children as social actors with the right to develop full capacities to participate in the shaping of a society. However, between educators there is a broad vision of social justice. In a study using constructivist grounded theory approach, Dover (2009) sought to contextualize the nature of social justice and how experienced English language arts teachers defined it. I discovered that teachers view social justice in terms of three categories: curriculum, pedagogical strategies, and social action. It is evident from Dover’s study, and others, that finding a single, univocal definition and vision for social justice is difficult.

The previous sections examined literature from several social justice perspectives. To understand methods and practices of social justice teaching, the following section of the literature review will examine current literature on teacher practices that foster children’s capacities toward social justice.

**Teacher practice.** Since social justice instruction is not mandated in many schools across the country, but is a growing area of importance in the world (Au et al., 2007; Bigelow, Harvey, & Karp, 2001), many teachers are developing their own instructional lessons as supplements for the classroom (Bentley & Reppucci, 2013; Brennan, 2006; Kraft, 2007; Lee, 2014; Lee, Ramsey & Sweeney, 2008). For the present study, it is necessary to understand the type of practices that are currently being employed in K–12 teacher curriculum selection and implementation, since this is the primary influencer of students’ social justice capacity growth in
schools (Allen, 1997; Hammond, Hesterman, & Knaus, 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Ruane et al., 2010). This section will survey current practical and theoretical literature around curriculum selection, as well as teaching practices for social justice instruction. This section will illustrate for the reader that thoughtfully constructed social justice teaching practices can enhance learning through literature, knowledge construction, discussion, and art.

Teacher practice within the classroom is directly connected to teacher perspectives and beliefs about teaching for social justice (Lee, 2014). In recent years, the most prevalent research on teaching for social justice focuses on the examination of preservice teacher education programs. Teacher education professionals are cognizant of the need to prepare and support teachers in social justice teaching. However, the research is showing the need for more support (Lee, 2011; Picower, 2007). Young Ah Lee (2011) conducted a qualitative study of six student teachers in a M.Ed. program at a Midwest university in the United States. Lee discovered that student teachers in the program exhibited changes in their knowledge and attitudes about social justice teaching; however, they did not always produce significant changes in action. In other words, Lee found that while student beliefs were changed during the study, the alteration in attitude was not compelling enough to produce significant change in practice. Lee’s results shed light on the influence teacher background and experience have on behavioral changes for both preservice and experienced teachers.

Teachers’ personal and professional beliefs are derived from an array of cultural and social learning experiences. Hogan (2013) argued that, “many teachers may be so habituated in inherited attitudes and practices” that they don’t have the awareness of how it can be narrowing the focus in the learning environment (p. 240). Young Ah Lee (2014) conducted a participatory action research case study to support teacher practice in social justice teaching, and to develop an
in-depth understanding of teacher candidate learning. From Lee’s frame of mind, social justice is experienced as “complex, fluid, and situated” (p. 20). The findings of the study provide evidence that in practice, creating a safe environment, questioning social norms and values, making inequity issues explicit, having a positive attitude, and high expectations are essential aspects of promoting social justice. In classrooms where practitioners facilitate discussions about controversial issues, the classroom must be a safe environment. In addition, practitioners should be honest about their position, should expose diverse positions on topics, and should have professional support (Barton & McCully, 2007).

Educators should routinely reflect on their practice and beliefs to enhance their skills and create classroom environments that benefit all students. Christman (2010) claimed that critical consciousness should be an embedded part of teacher and teacher-leader consistent practice to bring about the challenging of beliefs, and to thoughtfully create classroom cultures that are anti-oppressive. Howard (2003) noted that “reflection gives attention to one’s experiences and behaviors, and meanings are made and interpreted from them to inform future decision-making” (p. 197). Through critical reflection on their own or with colleagues, educators analyze and challenge their thinking to better inform their practice.

Many educators believe that the use of communities of inquiry is the most promising way to improve professional learning (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Grant & Agosto, 2008; Picower, 2007). Through their connections with other educators, teachers drive their own learning by challenging their own assumptions and advancing their knowledge on topics of racism and injustice. bell hooks (1994) states that to create more empowering teacher practices it is essential for teachers to “talk to one another, collaborate in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention” (p. 129). Picower (2007, 2011) developed studies using critical teacher inquiry,
and examined the use of a critical inquiry project (CIP) which was used to support beginning teachers in their understanding and implementation of social justice in their classrooms. Picower determined in each study that participation in the CIP offered a safe environment for teachers to reflect, and provided a supportive break from outside stressors. According to Bohórquez (2012) teachers who seek to work on the values of respect, tolerance, justice, and equity, should rethink their classrooms to empower both teachers and students to “think and act critically with the aim of transforming their context” (p. 195). By making changes within themselves, teachers are able to bring their knowledge into the classroom setting, and create safer environments for students.

Teacher practice plays an important role in the successful implementation of social justice classrooms and curriculum. Classrooms should be “places of hope, where students gain glimpses of the kind of society we could live in and where students learn the academic and critical skills needed to make it a reality” (Au et al., 2007, p. x). In the past, social justice has been perceived as a topic that could only be discussed with elementary students in upper grade classrooms, and in social studies curricula. Considered a topic too deep and too complex for young learners to understand, attempts to implement aspects of social justice into teaching young children have been watered down, showing little depth of topic (Lee, Ramsey, & Sweeney, 2008). The choice to limit the placement of social justice concepts in the curriculum disregard children’s personal experiences, and fail to take into considerations the capabilities of young children.

Educators have discovered that social justice topics can be incorporated in many curricula areas, not as simply stand-alone lessons, but also when infused as a part of recurring discussions in the classroom (Kraft, 2007). Still, for many, social justice issues are commonly viewed as a part of social studies curriculum, often allowing the students a look into a specific culture,
person, or time period, or teaching only about the “ideal of justice” and ignoring the social injustices (Tyson & Park, 2006). Within the current literature on teaching social justice, the use of literature, knowledge construction, discussions, and the arts are common approaches used in elementary school classrooms (Hammond et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Lee, Ramsey & Sweeney, 2008; Phillips, 2010; Ruane et al., 2010; Zakin; 2012).

The most widely accepted practices for teaching social justice incorporate literature as an essential component to facilitating discussion on social justice issues (Hawkins, 2014). Picture books and poetry are considered the best avenues for instruction, offering complex language and added illustrations which assist in conveying the vivid events or situations. Ciardiello (2010) proposed implementing the reading and writing of social justice poetry, claiming that “literacy can play a role as a resource for cultivating civic responsibility and social justice in childhood education” (p. 462). In a practitioner study, Damico and Carpenter (2005) showed that using poetry as a means of discussing slavery, racial identity, discrimination, and gender roles could assist students in communicating important ideas. Based on the findings of the study, the use of poetry appears to challenge students to think and feel about issues that are of importance to them.

Whether using oral storytelling, poetry, or picture books, some researchers claim that books should be critically selected (Hawkins, 2014). Still, others found that with practice, students were able to discover themes of unfairness and injustice in books that were not critically selected (Hawkins, 2014). “The potential for literature to engage readers toward new discoveries about the world and their varied roles in the world should not be underestimated; however, simply reading the literature selections does not automatically guarantee new insights for readers” (Gibson & Parks, 2014, p. 43). It is up to the teacher to facilitate discussion with critical reflection to bring out social justice themes in the literature for students. In the United
States and the United Kingdom, there have been numerous studies affirming the successful use of children’s literature to initiate critical discussions around elements of social justice in elementary school classrooms (Hawkins, 2014; Kuby, 2013; Martin, Smolen, Oswald, & Milam, 2012). In Hawkins’ study (2014) for example, the research team used a spiraling action research process to implement critically selected text in two preschool classrooms. Classroom observations were conducted, and social justice issues or comments were noted. Planning was conducted to critically select appropriate text, which was then implemented along with discussion, and the cycle of inquiry continued. Through the process of using critically selected text, the researchers noted that children engaged in deeper and more reflective discussions. However, the research team additionally discovered that non-critical text produced reflections that inspired the examination of underlying social issues. In other words, children found issues within the text that were not initially evident. The results showed that the children in the research study exhibited a heightened sensitivity to social justice issues, and teachers noted that they were more cohesive, harmonious, and inclusive than was evident at the beginning of the study (Hawkins, 2014).

According to Kuby (2013), schools have changed the context of critical literacy from a process of actively making mean about the perspectives, feelings, and lives of other people through the text, to the process of breaking the text down into component parts for analysis (p. 32). Kuby (2013) believes human relations should be at the center of the critical literacy work completed in early childhood classrooms. Traditionally, critical literacy has been a focused inquiry with marginalized people as a means of analysis of power relationships and injustice. In her research study, Kuby (2013) used a playground injustice as a catalyst for developing understanding of the injustices discussed in a critically selected book. Through their discussions
and role play, children were able to explore multiple perspectives and work through possible solutions for the problem.

Students construct knowledge by making choices on the incorporation of new information to their already existing worldview. According to Banks (1991), knowledge construction “describes ways teachers help students understand, investigate, and determine how implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline, influence how knowledge is created” (p. 139). Through conversation and exploration children construction their knowledge about the world around them. Students must be critical consumers of knowledge, examining and valuing multiple perspectives (Banks, 1993, p. 12). Using thoughtfully constructed questions during discussions, teachers can assist students to examine and challenge their thoughts and feels. Presenting opportunities to interact with and value multiple perspectives assists in strengthening our understanding. Building young children’s capacities for understanding and discussing social justice issues will assist in challenging socially and culturally embedded bias (Banks, 1991).

In early childhood classrooms, conversations are an essential part of learning about personal thoughts and other people. Literature and discussion can create opportunity for students to examine issues in new ways (Bigelow, 2001). To create meaningful learning, literature can be analyzed through careful questioning, think-aloud procedures and through acting out different perspectives of the issue (Brennan, 2006).

Teachers can push the boundaries of children’s thinking by offering alternative perspectives, contradictions, and inconsistencies (Hammond et al., 2015). Phillips (2012) conducted an action research study using a Living Theory approach to examine young children’s active citizenship ideas, where they were examined through a social justice storytelling
pedagogy. This approach used storytelling through “counternarratives,” making the social justice issue visible (Phillips, 2012). This approach offered opportunity for children to become critically aware of issues not previously visible, and showed evidence of producing elements of active citizenship.

Although most research discovered on teaching practice and social justice centered on literacy, some researchers reported creative arts as a beneficial way to examine social justice concepts. In a teacher researcher study conducted by Zakin (2012), the researcher used art as the vehicle for teaching social justice within a preschool setting. The researcher conducted an investigation on diversity regarding skin color using self-portraits. Through discussion, while creating self-portraits, the children explored the differences in skin color. The children exhibited that through artwork, they could verbalize differences without making value judgements. The research participants believed that instruction in diversity should include components of art, literature, and social studies. Silva and Langhout (2011) conducted an ethnographic study to examine a 1st grade teacher’s use of an art-focused curriculum to develop the idea of active social change in her students. The research was conducted by Silva, who was a participant observer in the classroom. The teacher conducted lessons on diversity during the school year through an artist-focus. Through week-long examinations of an artist, the students learned about how group membership impacted the artist’s life and work (2011). In this study, the teacher “engaged her students in discussions around social identities, group differences, prejudice, discrimination, and social change” (p. 85). The findings of the research indicate that through critical consciousness, children were able to move their thinking to a community view.

This section of the literature has revealed that social justice teaching to successful, teachers must diligently work to continually reflect on their personal biases to strengthen their
teaching practice. Additionally, the review has presented claims for the use of literacy, knowledge construction, classroom discussions and art as beneficial avenues to create opportunities for children to engage in social justice learning. To gain a better understanding about children’s capacities for social justice, it is essential to understand the current theories on child development. The subsequent section will examine the salient literature on child development.

**Child development.** Since the development of children’s capacity for participating in human society and developing skills for citizenship are primary goals in education (Banks & Banks, 1995; Nussbaum, 2009; Phillips, 2011), and since social justice capacities are understood as increasingly important for fully functioning citizens and the maintenance of a pluralistic society (Banks & Banks, 1995; Gollnick & Chinn, 2006; Hawkins, 2009), it is essential to understand the role of child development in acquiring these skills. The current theoretical understanding about childhood development regarding social justice capacities will be addressed in the literature review. This section is a survey of current literatures regarding social justice capacity building in children. The section will focus on the capacity children have regarding recognizing differences, tolerating diversity, and exhibiting empathy toward others.

The strongly held beliefs in the universality of developmental psychology theories pertaining to growth and development has limited children’s access to knowledge, and had a profound effect on society’s views of them as capable human beings (Peleg, 2013). Educators in the field of early childhood education have held the premise that children develop in a progression, through specific predetermined developmental stages which bring about specific skill development (Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2006; Kelly & Brooks, 2009; Sorin, 2005). In the United States, the work of Vygotsky and Piaget has been used to guide practices and policies of
early childhood education. According to Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006), “Piaget’s concept of “readiness” has unnecessarily helped to restrict the equity-related work that teachers envision by implying that it is developmentally inappropriate for younger children” (as cited in Kelly & Brooks, 2009, p.204). In other words, the use of Piaget’s biological maturation and stages view of child development as the dominant narrative, while disregarding the social and historical context to development, has restricted the opportunities that children have been offered.

In her book *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education: Social Justice and Revolution*, author Gail Sloan Cannella (1997) writes:

The acceptance of child development as universal truth has institutionalized notions of the “global” child in the image of the Euro-American middle class, marginalizing both the poor and cultures that do not appear western. Further, all younger human beings are limited by our institutionalized view of how they are to “be” in the world (p. 113).

In other words, viewing children and constructing education systems through narrowed perspectives is creating a system that is inherently grounded in cultural bias and placing limits on children. As a result, power dynamics are perpetuated, and a deficiency view exists for children who do not fit in the prescribed ideas of development. Young human beings are limited to the possibilities that fit society’s constructions of them (Cannella, 1997). The literature supports the view that society, having stifled children’s capabilities through a stringent development mindset, needs to examine more inclusive perspectives and incorporate them into educational practices and policies.

It has been traditional for young children to be viewed as immature, innocent, inexperienced, incompetent, powerless, and incapable of meaningful participation as active agents (Cannella, 1997; MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2008; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).
In contrast to this deficiency view of children, countries such as Finland and Australia create educational guidelines that foster children’s capabilities and value human dignity through the incorporation of the international conventions on the rights of the child into their education frameworks (Australia Department of Education and Training—Document Library, 2009; Finnish National Board of Education, 2004). Rather than view children through a lens of deficiency, educators and policymakers in other countries view children through multiple lenses that offer a more holistic view of children (Australia Department of Education and Training—Document library, 2009; Finnish National Board of Education, 2004).

Early childhood is a time of increased independence, which brings with it a sense of agency for children regarding their ideas, choices, and actions. Dixon and Nussbaum (2012) insisted that agency is an integral part of building on a child’s full capabilities, recognizing that children possess the internal capacity to understand and make choices. For example, Jennifer Keys Adair (2014) discussed the benefits of agency on a young 1st grade student who was labeled as behind and lacking in skills. When encouraged to expand her interest in volcanoes, and presented with the opportunity to make decisions about her classroom learning, the young student fostered a deeper interest in the topic. Having agency in her own learning the student expanded her skills in conversation and reflection, which greatly increased her capabilities. The student “was not required to wait until her knowledge and skills matched state-or adult-determined outcomes to develop a range of capabilities” (Keys Adair, 2014, p. 222). Keys Adair argued that children should be given the opportunity to develop their capabilities, regardless of when we think they are prepared.

Recent studies show children can be critically thinking, active citizens, with valuable contributions to make to families, communities, and society (MacNaughton, 2004; Robinson &
Jones Diaz, 2006). For example, Ruane, Kavanagh, Waldron, Dillon, Casey, Maunsell, and Prunty (2010) used a grounded theory approach in a study conducted in Ireland to study young children’s engagement with issues of social justice. The researchers found that children demonstrated logical thought, critical thinking, awareness of the wider world, and capacity to empathize (Ruane et al., 2010). New images of young children embody and express four key ideas about young children’s capacity:

- Young children can construct and communicate valid meanings about the world and their place in it
- Young children are capable social actors, with a right to participate in our social, cultural and political worlds and able to contribute valid and useful ideas to them
- Young children know the world in alternative (not ‘inferior’) ways to adults
- Young children’s perspectives and insights can help adults to understand their experiences better (MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2009).

Children are aware of differences through their social interactions with different people, as well as their exposure to social biases and the media. Through limited exposure to diverse experiences and perspectives, misconceptions about differences can impact children (Williams & Cooney, 2006; Picower, 2011). Researchers assert that by age three to four, young children construct racial and gender identities and use “racial language” for describing themselves and others (Araujo & Strasser, 2003; Hawkins, 2014; Ruane et al., 2010). It is important to have open discussions to create opportunities for children to reflect on their thinking and challenge stereotypes (Picower, 2011). Currently in the education field there are many books available that offer opportunities for teachers to create space to have discussions and build appreciation for the differences and similarities in people. The recognition of the unique nature of each individual is
important for creating a positive community. “Development of appreciation of differences, reveals individual uniqueness and enhances self-esteem, while appreciation of similarity furthers identification with others, including those in the classroom community” (Zakin, 2012, p. 4).

Tolerance is understanding, accepting, and respecting similarities and differences among people (Ruane et al. 2010; Zakin, 2012). For young children, recognition of the self in relation to others leads to an appreciation of differences and similarity (Bell, Jean-Sigur, & Kim, 2015). “Young students, because of their honesty and willingness to talk about issues, provide many opportunities for teachers to take seemingly minor incidents and turn them into powerful teaching moments” (Segura-Mora, 2004, p. 19). Teachers need to use these teaching moments to encourage a dialogue between children to assist students in challenging their thinking and build respect and acceptance. Hawkins (2014) showed through a participatory action research study that all text can be used for critical analysis. The children who participated in the study used critical reflection and discussion to examine social justice issues. In the results of the study, it was noted that the children showed sensitivity about issues of differences, diversity, and human dignity (Hawkins, 2014).

Empathy development through literature may help children cross the cultural gap to understand the perspectives, actions, and attitudes of the characters they encounter in multicultural literature (Louie, 2005). Offering opportunities to view multiple perspectives, teachers can challenge and expand children’s thinking. Through knowledge construction, students can empathize with others. They begin to understand other perspectives, recognize whose perspective is being examined, and whose voice is missing (Banks, 1991). Establishing high expectations and facilitating conversations, teachers frame the children as capable meaning-makers, and this perspective shapes each individual’s learning and progression
towards more nuanced understandings of social justice in the early years (Bentley & Reppucci, 2013).

This literature review has demonstrated that children can develop capabilities towards citizenship (Banks & Banks, 1995; Nussbaum, 2009; Phillips, 2011), critical thinking (MacNaughton, 2004; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Ruane et al., 2010), and recognize differences in themselves and others (Araujo & Strasser, 2003; Hawkins, 2014; Ruane et al., 2010). Creating space for children to deeply reflect on their ideas and openly discuss them offers opportunities for them to change.

The literature review has included an examination of social justice paradigms, teaching practices, and review of literature on children’s development capabilities. Having concluded an examination of current literature, the literature review will proceed to a review of methodological issues in research studies that focus on teacher practice, social justice teaching, and child development capacity.

Review of Methodological Issues

Through examination of the research available on teacher perceptions and practices in social justice teaching, as well as research on children’s development for social justice capacity, it is evident that most research on these topics is conducted using qualitative methodologies. Qualitative research on teachers’ perspectives on social justice has focused on preservice teachers. However, research has not been extended to a focus of experienced teachers at the kindergarten to 2nd grade level. Research on children’s development toward social justice capacity is limited. Predominantly, the research on teacher perception and practices has been investigated to understand how to support preservice teachers and new teachers (Carlisle,

Qualitative studies have been conducted to examine methods for supporting teachers in the development of their social justice practice. For example, Picower (2007) conducted a qualitative study using multiple data sources to understand the role of the Critical Inquiry Project (CIP) on four preservice teacher participants. Adding to this research using CIP, Picower (2011) investigated strategies that new teachers use to keep true to their vision of teaching for social justice. The qualitative study participants were four full-time teachers and two preservice teachers. Data collection consisted of transcripts from audio and video CIP sessions, ethnographic interviews, and participant-written reflections.

There is also evidence that researchers sought to understand conceptualization and implementation of social justice teaching. For example, in a Participatory Action Research to support student teachers, Lee (2014) sought to uncover how teacher candidates approach their teaching for social justice. A multiple-case study approach with three participants was conducted to develop an in-depth understanding of each participant’s learning. Examples of participants’ approaches to teaching for social justice included creating safe classrooms, challenging social norms and values by making inequity issues explicit, discussing diversity and equity, interactive teaching, high expectations, and viewing children holistically. Similarly, a multiple-case study (Sonu, Oppenheim, Epstein, & Agarwal, 2012) investigated new elementary school teachers’ conceptualizing and implementing of curricula promoting social justice. The research included 12 teachers and 12 co-researchers who conducted the interviews and observations. Although researchers used the same templates and protocols for data collection, the unusual nature of multiple perspectives from co-researchers with data gathering could add
lack of consistency in observations.

Elementary school teachers’ perceptions of students’ capacities to learn about issues involving equity was investigated by Kelly and Brooks (2009), in a qualitative study using a psychosocial approach. This study showed that preservice teachers were supportive of social justice teaching, but conceptualized it differently. Additionally, half of the participants perceived children as innocent, uninterested in current events, incapable of forming nuanced opinions, and unable to analyze political issues (Kelly & Brooks, 2009). The researchers found that teachers who viewed social justice teaching from an anti-oppression model challenged the myth of childhood innocence, as well as concepts of developmental appropriateness.

Examining citizenship, Phillips (2010) conducted an action research using a rhizomatic approach, which is a non-linear interconnecting approach to investigate the active citizenship that storytelling stories set in motion. Data was collected from transcripts of video recordings of a storytelling workshop. The teacher and researcher collaborated with the children as active citizens. Evidence from the study showed that children exhibit capacity as social actors with agency. Additionally, children were found to be capable of making their own inquiries, and had awareness of marginalization.

Adding to the research on citizenship, Ruane et al. (2010) examined a global citizenship perspective to understand how children engage with issues of social justice. The qualitative research study used a constructivist paradigm to approach adult-child interactions through dialogue. Data was collected through the use of stories and photographs to elicit children’s perspectives and opinions. Teachers acted as participant observers and co-researchers, recording observations, and participating in a semi-structured interview. A grounded theory approach was used for data analysis. Findings demonstrated that children had an awareness of the wider world,
began forming stereotypes, were conscious of diversity and identity, expressed concern and empathy for others, recognized lack of basic needs, and recognized the hardship encountered by others.

Other research pertaining to children capacities targeted specific social justice issues. For example, employing single-case study with embedded participant observers, Hammond et al. (2015) conducted research directly in a classroom setting with 6- and 7-year-olds. Using multiple data sources (drawings, group discussion, field notes), the research study sought to understand young children’s perspectives about families’ food access. Findings from this study support the claim that children have embedded stereotypes about poverty and family roles; recognize a relationship between work, money, and the capacity to buy food; possess a notion of fairness as sharing; and have a willingness to use their resources to help others.

Different from the study conducted by Hammond et al. (2015), Hawkins’ (2014) participatory action research was conducted in a preschool setting. The research used children’s picture books to support awareness and understanding of issues related to diversity, difference, and human dignity. Kuby (2013) utilized a practitioner inquiry approach to investigate children’s narratives in order to understand how emotions and emotional collisions through dialogue assist children in navigating social justice issues of injustice and power relationships. The research findings indicate that social and relational interactions produce the most growth in understanding inequity. For my study, this finding indicates that students will produce more growth in understanding social justice issues if given the opportunity to openly express themselves in dialogue with other classmates to create meaning around the topic.

**Synthesis of Research Findings**

Lee Ann Bell (2007) defined social justice as both a process and a goal. However, the
implementation of social justice through an educational lens is complicated with theorists approaching social justice from multiple avenues. Some theorists sought to create equal access to education, space for challenging bias and injustice, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives and student culture (Banks, 1995; Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee, 2007). Other researchers emphasized global interconnectedness, human rights, agency, and freedoms to achieve (Banks, 2004; Ruane et al., 2010). While theorists propose different avenues for engaging in social justice, their research results support the findings that, to teachers, it seems a more malleable concept (Kelly & Brooks, 2012; Lee, 2014; Sonu et al., 2012). Rather than adhering to one specific approach, in practice, the approaches to teaching social justice appear interchangeable, and subject to the ebb and flow of daily encounters.

Teachers’ personal experience and background influence their conceptualization of teaching for social justice (Kelly & Brooks, 2009; Lee, 2014; Sou et al., 2012). Lee notes that teaching for social justice is always being negotiated, because teachers’ understanding and practices are constantly being constructed and reconstructed (Lee, 2014). Teachers’ unique perspectives can bring about uncertainty in direction and practice. However, researchers showed that the use of critical collegial supports increase and extend social justice educators’ knowledge and practice (Picower, 2007, 2011). Establishing opportunities to engage in dialogue and work with other social justice educators is important for the continued reframing of perspectives that is necessary for teaching social justice in elementary school.

Although the research indicated the importance of using several different teaching practices, it was evident in the literature that active dialogue played an essential role in the creation of social justice understanding (Hammond et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Kuby, 2013; Phillips, 2010; Ruane et al., 2010). In these studies, children were offered space and time to
present their ideas in whole group as well as small group settings. This gave students the opportunity to debate and counteract the thinking of others and foster new knowledge construction. The use of literature and photos played a major role in the presentation of topics and ideas (Hammond et al, 2015; Ruane et al., 2010). Part of the social justice research conducted by Kuby (2013) used an event that happened at the school as a way to approach the discussion of power relationships and feelings of injustice. Additionally, there exist many other examples from practitioner researchers that support these practices and offer alternative suggestions (Bentley & Reppucci, 2013; Brennan, 2006; Kraft, 2007; Lee, Ramsey & Sweeney, 2008, Lee, 2014).

Researchers indicated there still exists some debate among teacher educators, informed by the theory of cognitive development, about young children’s capabilities to understand social justice issues. For instance, in research conducted by Kelly and Brooks (2009) half of the preservice elementary teachers that participated in the study regarded children as innocent and incapable of learning about equity issues. However, studies conducted by Hammond et al. (2015), Hawkins (2014), Kuby (2013) and Ruane et al., (2010) show evidence of children’s capacities to understand complex issues around poverty, power, stereotypes, and injustice. Even more relevant to the debate of capability around social justice is the research that indicates young children’s early use of stereotypes about cultures, race, gender, ability, and power dynamics (Ruane et al., 2010; Hawkins, 2014). These studies challenge teacher educators’ perceptions of children’s cognitive capabilities and illuminate the importance of learning about children’s capacity and methods for understating social justice issues.

**Critique of Previous Research**

In education research and in classrooms, the term social justice is conceptualized in many
ways. Within the scope of this literature review, there exists surveyed literature on multicultural education, equity pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, global citizenship, and the capability approach. Each methodology in the field has its own unique way of approaching teaching for social justice. Several research studies that were reviewed above examined how teachers conceptualized the teaching of social justice (Kelly & Brooks, 2009; Lee, 2014; Sou et al., 2012). Although most of the research did not identify a specific approach or combination of approaches being used, Picower (2011) specifically explained that the participants were using a critical pedagogy for the work in their classrooms. While all the studies were qualitative, the specific methodology varied. Multiple-case study and case study were the most common. Kelly and Brooks’ (2009) study was a smaller study within a larger study. Researchers were aware that participants would be favorable toward the idea of teaching social justice, but that it should not have had any implications of their views on children’s capacities. With multiple co-researchers conducting observation and interviews, there is a potential that a lack of consistency could have limitations for their research. However, the researchers note this in their study, and mention the potential value that exists in its qualitative approach.

**Summary**

This chapter described and examined the aspects of social justice in education, the examination of teacher practices in social justice teaching of young children, and examined the capability development of young children. The literature review has demonstrated that there is sufficient support in the literatures for thinking that an investigation into social justice instruction for elementary children is an area in which further research would yield fruitful knowledge for the academic community. Using the conceptual framework that identifies attributes of social justice perspectives in education, teacher practices used for implementing such perspectives, and
child development theories that work to explain children’s capacities for social justice, a scientific study will be outlined in the next chapter to answer the following research questions:

What do teachers perceive about how instruction on social justice concepts impact early grade learners in classroom settings? What do teachers perceive about how this instruction influences learner perceptions regarding their role in society?
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

As human migration changes the face of our communities, this growth brings to light the essential nature of learning to live and work with many different people. Education of our young children gives us the opportunity to create societies where diversity is respected, and where justice and equality are valued. In this study, the researcher sought to understand why some teachers choose to teach social justice concepts in early elementary school classrooms, and what impact these lessons have on young children and their families. It was the researcher’s goal to uncover: (a) teachers’ perceptions of young children’s capabilities for understanding social justice concepts, (b) what drives teachers to teach social justice concepts, (c) the impact of teaching social justice concepts on students, and (d) the impact of these social justice concept lessons on the children’s families.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research study: What do teachers perceive about how instruction on social justice concepts impact early grade learners in classroom settings? What do teachers perceive about how this instruction influences learner perceptions regarding their role in society?

Purpose and Design of the Research Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the perceptions and practices of three teachers who teach social justice concepts to kindergarten and 2nd grade students in an urban elementary school setting, and to understand the impact of these lessons on the children and their families. Lacking a clear and consistent definition, the practice of teaching for social justice has been critiqued as under-theorized, making it difficult to assess its impact (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Lahann, Shakman, & Terrell, 2009; Dover, 2009; Grant & Agosto, 2008). As a
teacher who has conducted classroom lessons on social justice concepts with young children, the researcher was interested in the professional practice and perceptions of other teachers working in the field. By conducting research on teachers’ perceptions and practices with regard to teaching social justice concepts to young children, the researcher hoped to add to the small but growing body of research on the topic. (Lee, 2014; Sonu et al., 2012).

The implementation of this study has the potential to extend the existing knowledge on teacher conceptualization and implementation of social justice in early elementary school classrooms. Expanding the knowledge on the various concepts of social justice in education, this study could advance educator understanding of the significance in teaching social justice concepts at an early age. For practicing educators, the results may be used to guide teachers in their practice and refine the methods that educators use to teach social justice concepts to young children. The research has the potential to expand the perceptions of young children’s developmental capacities.

In the field of education, research conducted on the topic of teaching social justice concepts predominantly centers on older students (Lucey & Laney, 2009; Seider, 2009), or examines social justice with regard to pre-service or new teachers’ attitudes (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gibson & Parks, 2014; Kelly & Brandes, 2001; Lee, 2011; Louie, 2005). Evidence of teacher-practitioner research is readily available in teaching magazines and teaching journals, with a focus on the practice of teaching social justice concepts (Au, Bigelow, & Karp, 2007; Gross, 2009; Kuby, 2013; Wood, 2005; Zakin, 2012). Formal research on social justice education with young children in the American public education system is growing (Durden et al., 2015; Husband, 2014; Martin et al., 2012; Powell & Serriere, 2013). Research on this topic has been prevalent outside the United States for many years (Hammond, Hesterman, & Knaus,
Based on an examination of the relevant literature, there is justification to warrant an examination of teacher perceptions and practice in social justice teaching, and an exploration of children’s developmental capacities for social justice, because it is an under-researched area.

In qualitative research, the process is inductive (Creswell, 2013), allowing the researcher an opportunity to explore data and create understanding. This type of research builds thoughts, concepts, or theories (Merriam, 1998), rather than testing existing theories. This inductive study has worked toward building a depth of understanding around teacher practice and perceptions in teaching social justice concepts to young children. Case study research seeks to explore, describe, or explain events or phenomena in a real-world context (Yin, 2014). The use of qualitative case study research facilitates the exploration of the context-based phenomenon through various data sources, ensuring that the issue is explored through multiple lenses to reveal and understand the many facets of the phenomenon.

Merriam (1998) described a qualitative case study as a deep, comprehensive description and analysis of a single event or social unit. The unit of analysis was the kindergarten through 5th grade research site. Case studies differ from other types of research in that “they are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). For this case study, the three-experienced kindergarten and 2nd grade teachers, classroom observation, and parents serve as the boundaries for this system.

**Research Population and Sampling Methods**

The following section will describe the research population, participant selection, and data sources. This case study research was conducted at a local elementary school in an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. The school was in a predominately White, middle to
upper income neighborhood. The student population was representative of the surrounding neighborhood with approximately 71% of students being White, 10% of students being Hispanic, 4% of students being African American, 3% of students being Asian, 12% of students being Multiracial, and less than 1% of students being Native American and Pacific Islander. This school site was chosen because of ease of access, as well as rapport already built with the staff.

This single-case study included two groupings of participants: teachers and parents. The first category of participants for this study were kindergarten and 2nd grade teachers who identify as teaching social justice concepts. Three teachers were selected who fit the criteria and attributes of the study. The selection process was conducted through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) of teachers who teach in kindergarten and 2nd grade and are teaching social justice concepts. Information about the study was presented and a request for participation was made. Informed consent was obtained from all three teachers who agreed to participate in the study.

The second category was parents of children who are students in the classrooms of teacher-participants. The selection of parents for participation in the study was conducted through a purposeful sample of returned acceptance/abstention forms from parents willing to participate. The participating teachers distributed a recruitment packet for the study to each classroom parent, which included: a recruitment letter, a recruitment acceptance/abstention form, and a labeled envelope to inform them of the study (Appendix F). Parents returned the acceptance/abstention form in the envelope provided to a secure drop box located in the office by October 5, 2016. Using the returned forms, the researcher randomly selected two parents from each class to participate in interviews at the end of the study. Each parent selected was contacted and necessary consent forms were signed and each interview scheduled. All recruitment and
consent forms were placed in a secure file, and parent participants were assigned, a code associated with teacher pseudonym to affirm confidentiality. Parents who indicated their willingness to participate, but were not selected, were notified by mail with a thank-you note.

**Data Collection**

*Figure 2. Phases of data collection.*

Data collection occurred from September 2016 through December 2016. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews of three teachers, three formal classroom observations with each teacher, teacher observation debriefs, examination of student artifacts created for understanding children’s capacity with regard to social justice concepts, and six semi-structured parent interviews. The use of multiple data sources provided a wide and diverse pool of information from which to draw (Yin, 2014). The researcher developed an understanding of the whole phenomenon through the convergence of each piece of data contributed to strengthen the study.

Before data collection began, clearance from the district’s Institutional Review Board and site permission from the principal were obtained. The researcher hosted individual semi-structured, audio-taped interviews at a time that was convenient for each teacher’s schedule, and took place in the teacher’s personal classroom. The interviews were confidential and private,
with only the teacher and researcher present. The interview for each teacher occurred at the beginning of the school year in late September, before other data was gathered. Interviews are considered optimal for collecting data on personal histories, perspectives, and experiences (Turner, 2010). Exploratory research gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, and evoking responses that are meaningful to the participants. Interviews for this study contained open-ended questions to elicit the sharing of teacher conceptions of social justice teaching, and their perception of the benefits of these lessons to young children (see Appendix A). Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were transcribed by an outside transcriptionist who signed a confidentiality agreement before transcribing began. A copy of the transcribed interview and researcher field notes were given to each teacher for member checking. Member checking is an important method used for verifying and validating information (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Taking data and interpretations back to the study participants, added to the credibility of the information obtained. After the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and the member checking process was completed, the researcher proceeded to the next phase of data gathering through observation.

Teacher observations took place between the months of October and December 2016. The researcher conducted three observations per teacher with a follow-up observation debrief after each observed lesson (see Appendices B & C), and collected social justice artifacts created by students, when available (see Appendix D). The researcher worked with each teacher to schedule observations during social justice lessons, and scheduled lesson debriefing sessions to follow 1–2 days later. During the observation, both descriptive and reflective notes were gathered to gain a deeper understanding of the teacher’s practice and perceptions. Within one-two days of each lesson, the researcher conducted a 20–30-minute debriefing of each observed
lesson. These meetings were utilized to assist in accessing reflective insight from the teachers on their perspectives of what knowledge children gained from the social justice lessons.

Social justice lesson artifacts created by students were examined. Teachers gathered artifacts and the teachers, or the researcher removed personally identifying information. Social justice artifacts were scanned or photographed and uploaded to Atlas.ti (2017) for qualitative data analysis. Artifacts were analyzed, using attributes in the artifact review matrix (Appendix D) to understand children’s capacity with regard to social justice concepts.

The study concluded with six one-on-one audio-taped interviews to understand parent perspectives of the impact of social justice lessons on their children’s capacity to understand and incorporate social justice into their understanding of the world (see Appendix E). In late September, the selection of parents for participation in the study was conducted through random sample of returned acceptance forms distributed by teacher-participants. Since the recruitment forms contained identifying information and participation decisions, collection of acceptance form by teacher-participants was deemed a breach of confidentiality. Parent participants returned the acceptance/abstention form in the envelope that was provided to a secure drop box located in the office. Parent participants were given 6 days to summit their form. Upon receiving the forms, the researcher separated the forms by teacher-participant. Next, she randomly selected two parents for each class to participate in interviews at the end of the study. Parents who indicated their willingness to participate but were not selected were each notified by mail with a thank you note.

After the recruitment and selection procedure was completed, the researcher contacted each parent-participant to answer questions, obtain signed consent forms, and scheduled a convenient time to conduct the interview. All personal identification of parent-participants was
eliminated, and they were assigned a code based on teacher pseudonym and a number. The interviews all took place at the research site, in a secluded room with only the parent-participant and researcher in attendance. The semi-structured interviews were audio-taped and when interviews were completed audio-taped recordings were given to the transcriptionist for transcribing.

**Identification of Variables**

The conceptual framework for this study identifies attributes of social justice perspectives in education, teacher practices used for implementing such perspectives, and child development theories that work to explain children’s capacities for social justice. The researcher defined each of these three conceptual frames using specific attributes. In the following section, the researcher will review these attributes and identify the operationalization of them for the research.

**Social justice.** The following section contains definitions of the social justice attributes specific to this research study, and the operationalization of them for this research study. The study defines *multicultural/anti-racist education* using Banks’s (2004) comprehensive five dimensions of multicultural education and Lee’s (2007) definition of multicultural education as anti-racist education. Banks’s (1998, 2004) five dimensions of multicultural education include: (a) content integration—infusing curriculum with materials from diverse perspectives; (b) knowledge construction—understanding how knowledge constructions can be biased by implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, and perspectives; (c) equity pedagogy—teaching strategies and environments designed to enable students from diverse racial and ethnic groups to access academic achievement; (d) prejudice reduction—developing more positive racial attitudes by decreasing racial stereotypes and prejudices in the school and increasing democratic attitudes,
values and behaviors; (e) empowering school culture and social structure—critical reflection and examination of school culture to create increased equity. Lee (2007) expands on Banks’ definition to emphasize the anti-racist purpose as equipping students, parents, and teachers with tools to combat racism and ethnic discrimination, while building a society that includes all people equally.

In this research study, equity pedagogy is defined as teaching practices that are intentionally designed to increase engagement and participation, with the intent of assisting students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups in attaining skills and knowledge to function in, and help create, a just democratic society (Banks, 1995).

For this study culturally relevant pedagogy is defined as teaching practices that empower students by using their frames of reference, cultural knowledge, and background experiences to make the learning more relevant to and effective for the students, and in order to enhance critical consciousness (Gay, 2010; Hyland, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The term global citizenship is defined as an educational view that recognizes our interconnectedness and interdependence not only as active citizens of local communities, states, and countries, but of the world (Banks, 2004; Bell, Jean-Sigur, & Kim, 2015; Zahabioun et al., 2013).

For this research, capability approach is defined as an alternate view of human development which understands that each person has individually-defined capabilities based on what they value. This view affirms the need to ensure that each person has the freedom to achieve his or her functioning (Nussbaum, 2011). Children are seen as active agents with human rights, and whose social participation exhibits values and priorities (Peleg, 2013).

Social justice attributes will be investigated using a one-on-one interview process and
classroom observation in order to elicit teachers’ perceptions identified above. While conducting one-on-one teacher interviews, the interview will include several questions that will elicit teachers’ perceptions of social justice pedagogies. This will help to reveal what concepts they are using in their teaching methods and perceptions of children’s capabilities.

The implementation of lessons will be observed through observation and an observation protocol. Observations will be used to examine classroom structures to understand social justice perspectives being employed in the research classrooms.

**Teacher practice.** The following section contains definitions of the teacher practice attributes specific to this research study, and the operationalization of them for this research study. In this study, the term *literature* is defined as picture books, poetry, and other written works containing complex language and added illustrations which assist in conveying vivid events or situations (Ciardiello, 2010; Gibson & Parks, 2014; Hawkins, 2014). The study defines *classroom discussion* or *dialogue* as reflective conversation about a topic (Au et al., 2007; Kuby, 2013; Phillips, 2012). Discussion helps to set the context of stories or images, make connections with student’s lives, and extend their perceptions and understandings (Allen, 1997). In this study, *knowledge construction* is defined as an active meaning-making process where students reflect on, challenge, and change the way they view and interact with knowledge (Banks, 2001; Gay, 2003).

The attributes of teacher practice were investigated using one-on-one teacher interviews, and included questions that ascertained the teachers’ choice of practices used for social justice lessons. The researcher conducted classroom observations to observe evidence of the teacher-participant’s teaching practices.

**Child development.** The following section contains definitions of the child development
attributes specific to this research study, and the operationalization of them for this research study. Recognition of differences is defined as the awareness of diverse perspectives and characteristics of people and ideas (Kelly & Brooks, 2005; Lee, Ramsey, & Sweeney, 2008), and awareness of stereotypes and specific characteristics attributed to groups (Allen, 1997). For this study, tolerating diversity is defined as understanding, accepting, and respecting similarities and differences among people (Ruane et al., 2010; Zakin, 2012). In this study, empathy is defined as understanding or identifying with another person’s feelings or experiences (Hawkins, 2014; Louie, 2005). Kuhmerker (1975) noted that empathy is social perspective-taking and the development of the rudiments of a sense of justice.

The attributes of child development were investigated by conducting classroom observations and examining student artifacts created during social justice lessons. Teacher observation debriefs assisted the researcher in understanding teachers’ perceptions of children’s capacity to understand social justice concepts. Questions about perception of children’s development attributes were included in the one-on-one teacher interviews, teacher observation debrief, and one-on-one parent interviews.

Data Analysis Procedures

In case study research, “data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence to produce empirically based findings” (Yin, 2014, p. 132). In qualitative case study research, the researcher must conduct data analysis and data collection concurrently. The use of multiple sources of data and simultaneous collection and analysis make it imperative that researchers manage the data collections. For this purpose, analysis began as data was collected, using Atlas.ti (2017) to track codes and themes.

A professional transcriptionist transcribed verbatim teacher and parent audio-taped
interviews. The transcriptionist then create a clean verbatim copy that was used for member checking. This translated the transcription into a more “polished” form (Creswell, 2009). A translated version of the teacher interview transcript showing major findings, themes, and descriptions was presented for member checking by teachers. At the end of member checking, which was employed to clarify interpretations, the researcher began data analysis of each teacher interview. First, open coding was used through repeated readings to uncover emergent categories and concepts pertaining to the attributes of social justice, teacher practice, and child development. This was followed by the use of axial coding, to code for relationships among the categories and concepts revealed in the open coding method. Second, teacher observation data was analyzed using open coding, followed by axial coding to bring forth emergent categories and concepts pertaining to the attributes of social justice and teacher practice. Next, the teacher observation debriefs, and artifact reviews continued the coding process, with open coding and axial coding to reveal emergent codes and concepts concerning the attributes of child development. Finally, parent interview transcripts were analyzed using open coding to expose categories and concepts, followed by axial coding to uncover relationships between the code and concepts concerning the attributes of social justice and child development. As coding was completed for each source, the researcher looked for codes, concepts, and similar themes noted across the multiple sources. Pattern matching was applied for the purpose of linking data to the conceptual framework propositions:

1. Teachers perceive social justice as essential for consciousness raising and transforming society.

2. Teachers perceive literature and language acquisition as essential elements of understanding social justice concepts.
3. Children have the capacity to understand and incorporate social justice into their understanding of the world.

Data storage and protection procedures were incorporated from the beginning of the study. All computer data was securely stored on the researcher’s password protected laptop. The researcher created folders using teacher-participant pseudonyms or parent-participant’s identification code along with data type to distinguish the multiple sources of data. This made access to information more organized and maintained confidentiality of information. Computer data and uploaded paper data were securely stored through Atlas. ti (2017) for ease of access to data analysis. All original paper data, including researcher’s reflective journal, were securely stored in a locked cabinet at the research site, or a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s home. The research transcriptionist followed data storage and protection procedures agreed upon in the signed confidentiality forms.

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

One of the most prominent limitations for this study consisted in time constraints. Given the research process, the conditions associated with schedules and time frame for conducting data gathering, were outside of the researcher’s control. This study was conducted from September through December 2016. Access to participants for this research was contingent on teacher, parent, and the researcher’s schedules. Being respectful of a teacher’s time meant the researcher had to be prepared to schedule interviews and observations but be flexible enough to handle schedule changes. As a working teacher at the study site, the researcher had the additional role of mentoring student teachers during the research study. With the additional adult, the researcher was enabled to have a flexible schedule for conducting classroom observations.
This qualitative case study was structured to gain understanding on teachers’ perceptions and practices with regard to teaching social justice concepts, and the perceived impact on young learners. For this study, the unit of analysis was three kindergarten through 2nd grade teachers that teach social justice concepts at the research site. A single research site was chosen because inclusion of an alternative site was not convenient for the researcher and there are limited locations to find research participants that fit the necessary criteria. To gain depth of information, the scope of the study was limited to three teachers of early learners. The inclusion of three teachers versus multiple teachers was justified, because the purpose of the research was to understand the experiences and perspectives of kindergarten through 2nd grade teachers who teach social justice concepts and there were no other teachers at the research site who identified as social justice teachers.

A delimitation for this single-case study was the small sample size of teachers and parents. According to Merriam (2002), however, “Providing rich, thick description is a major strategy to ensure for external validity and generalizability in the qualitative sense” (p. 29). This case study used thick detailed description, transcripts, and photographic evidence to bring the reader into the research setting and connect with the research participants.

**Validation**

In qualitative research, Creswell (2014) views validation as an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (p. 249). Both Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) conceptualize data validation as a thorough description to show the author’s conclusions and lend credence to the analysis (Yazan, 2015). This case study used multiple methods for validation, including detailed guidelines and procedures, rich description, triangulation, and member checking to increase the credibility and dependability of
In qualitative research, credibility is created by establishing believability of research results from the perspective of the participants in the research. Credibility was established through the richness of the data gathered. Triangulation of multiple data sources provides strength to the credibility of the research findings (Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2014). The researcher used member checking of the interview transcripts and field notes, to assure accurate meaning behind teachers’ interview data. Taking data and interpretations back to the participants will allow the participants to clarify or add to any misinterpretations. Credibility was established using Atlas. ti (2017) as a case study database to organize transcribed interviews, field notes, observation notes, observation debriefs, document analysis, and researcher journal. The researcher created an audit trail using a research journal to capture reflections, questions, ideas, and decision making during data collection (Merriam, 2002).

**Dependability.** In qualitative research, dependability of the research refers to the consistency of the research findings. Clear guidelines and procedures were established for data collection, documentation, and results, thereby including essential components for a dependable study. A document trail is created by following “systematic procedures, employing rigorous standards and clearly identifying procedures” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129). The researcher imparted information about procedures through a thick, rich narrative of the processes and results that bring the details of the research to life.

**Expected Findings**

For this qualitative case study, the researcher expected to discover that teacher participants perceive social justice instruction as playing an essential role in challenging socialization and creating the opportunity for integration of different perspectives. Since there
are many attributes to social justice, the researcher expected to discover that teacher participants identify with a combination of attributes, rather than one single attribute. Additionally, it was expected that teachers perceive literature and language acquisition as an important avenue for understanding elements of social justice. Finally, it was expected that the teacher participants perceive this instruction as impacting learner empowerment and expanding learner capabilities.

**Ethical Issues in the Study**

This section described the potential ethical issues of this study. “In qualitative research, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and the dissemination of findings” (Merriam, 2002, p. 29). The purpose of disclosure is the protection of credibility and trustworthiness in data collection and data analysis. Through the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district’s review board ethical issues were reviewed and the ethical soundness of the study protocol was confirmed. Additional strategies to diminish potential ethical issues were addressed.

**Conflict of interest assessment.** The conflict of interest for this research study was minimal. At the time of the research, the researcher was employed by the school district associated with the research site, and was a staff member at the research site. The researcher maintained both professional and personal relationships with the teacher-participants. As a member of the school community, the researcher may have had professional relationships or acquaintance with the potential parent-participants. With the parent relationships, the implication could be that some parents feel they should be selected to take part in the study. The recruitment letter made clear the procedures for participant selection, and any personal requests to join as a participant received a polite explanation of the required procedures which must be follow for credibility and dependability of data. Additionally, thank-you notes were given to
participants who were not selected.

**Researcher’s position.** The researcher approached this dissertation case study with previous experience as a teacher in early childhood education, and as a graduate student in curriculum and instruction. During the many years of teaching children in a diverse population, it became clear there was a disconnection between the perceived abilities of children and their actual abilities. This new understanding affected the researcher’s perceived notion of what could be accomplished through education. The interest in conducting this research stems from personal experiences in creating social justice lessons and teaching social justice concepts to young children. Through conversation with children and parents, the researcher became aware that for some children, the social justice conversations were having an effect on their motivation to make change. Through the avenues of personal education, professional development, and connection with colleagues, other educators were discovered with the same passion and belief in the capacity of children. The connections built with parents, teachers, and administrators who seek to create change in our society has enhanced and affected the personal practice used by the researcher in the classroom, and intensified her desire to seek understanding about the perceptions of other educators in the field.

**Ethical issues in the study.** To assure that the research was carried out in an ethical manner, permission from Concordia University’s Institutional Review Board was obtained, followed by permission from the school district’s Institutional Review Board. After approval from IRB, the principal of the research site was contacted for consent. As a member of the staff at the research site, the principal and other staff members already were aware of the researcher’s interest in this topic, which made the process of consent easier. Following formal consent from the principal, the researcher contacted the purposefully selected teachers to request their
participation. With approval from IRB, the researcher contacted a family member who is an experienced transcriptionist, and had her complete a confidentiality agreement before research began.

Informed consent was explained clearly with each participant, and each participant signed the informed consent form before starting the interview process. The voluntary nature of the study and their right to remove themselves from the study at any time was outlined for each participant. Additionally, teacher selected pseudonyms, rather than teacher-participant names were used on all transcripts, debriefs, observations and field notes. The audio-recordings of teacher interviews were destroyed following transcription. Parent-participant data was stored and analyzed using an assigned code which connected parent-participants to teacher-participants, similar to the following example: M. Parent 1 (teacher pseudonym initial, parent-participant). Identifying information such as the names of schools, school district, colleagues, or students were removed. The real names of participants and all computer-based transcripts were secured on the researcher’s password protected computer. All printed material was kept in a secured and locked cabinet at the research site and transported to a secured and locked file cabinet at the researcher’s home.

Summary

Previously, other research around the area of social justice teaching has centered on the perceptions of novice teachers and the practice with regard to older students. However, there is minimal research available on the perceptions and practices of teachers of early learners. The case study was conducted at one local elementary school, selected for ease of access and participants who fit the boundaries of the study. This single-case study includes two groupings of participants: teachers and parents. Data for this study was collected through semi-structured
interviews, formal classroom observations, teacher observation debriefs, and examination of student artifacts. The data analysis for this study was conducted using open coding and axial coding to uncover categories and concepts pertaining to social justice, teacher practice, and child development. Data analysis concluded with the application of pattern matching to link data to conceptual framework propositions. Chapter 4 will provide an analysis and interpretations of the multiple sources of data collected over the course of this study.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the perceptions and practices of three teachers who teach social justice concepts to kindergarten and 2nd grade students in an urban elementary school setting and to understand the impacts of these lessons on the children and their families. The primary research questions for this study was addressed through the exploration of the attributes rooted in the concepts that frame this study. As identified in the conceptual framework (see page 13) the attribute categories of: (a) social justice perspectives in education, (b) teacher practices used for implementing such perspectives, and (c) child development theories that work to explain children’s capacities for social justice. The primary questions addressed in this are: What do teachers perceive about how instruction on social justice concepts impact early grade learners (kindergarten through 2nd grade) in classroom settings? What do teachers perceive about how this instruction influences learner perceptions regarding their role in society?

This chapter presents the results of the study showing how the analyzed data relates to the case study attributes presented in the study’s framework. Data was collected through semi-structured teacher interviews, formal teacher observation, semi-structured parent interviews and student artifact reviews. Data collection and analysis for this study occurred simultaneously through four phases: (a) semi-structured teacher interviews, (b) formal teacher observations followed by a teacher debrief of the lesson, (c) student artifact review, and (d) semi-structured parent interviews. Data analysis proceeded as each source of data was collected. Since the researcher did not transcribe the teacher interviews, extra time was taken to get a general understanding of the data. Data from the teacher interviews was reviewed to identify initial codes for broad categories. Seven codes were initially identified using open coding techniques (see
Following the initial coding, the data was uploaded to ATLAS.ti (2017) where the researcher continued open coding to uncover emergent attributes that aligned with the categories. The data was then analyzed through axial coding to code for relationships among the categories and concepts revealed. The process of open coding and axial coding techniques continued as data was collected and uploaded to ATLAS. ti (2017). Since the convergence of each of the pieces of data contributed to the understanding of the whole phenomenon that was the subject of this case study, the researcher began looking for similarities and differences. As coding was being completed the researcher looked for common and emerging attributes, concepts, and themes across the multiple sources through constant comparison. Finally, a descriptive case study pattern matching was applied with the purpose of linking data from multiple sources to the conceptual framework categories and their corresponding attributes to enhance the construct validity of the research (Yin, 2014).

Table 1

*Initial Data Codes for Teacher Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Interview Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice concepts/lens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of content development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions-Social Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher developed and executed a descriptive single case study design. Within a qualitative case study methodology, the researcher plays a critical role as the primary collection instrument, allowing the researcher to create a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.
(Creswell, 2013). During the development and execution of the study, the researcher was a public-school kindergarten teacher with 12 years of experience teaching kindergarten and additional years of teaching pre-kindergarten and toddlers. The researcher acquired most of her teaching experience in Title 1 schools, working with low-income children and families. During the last five years of employment a change in teaching position to a less diverse, middle-income environment brought new awareness to the researcher. The new school position prompted the deeper interest in social justice teaching. The researcher brought social justice concepts to the classroom and became intrigued with the perceptions and practices of teachers who are social justice educators. The primary research questions, “What do teachers perceive about how instruction on social justice concepts impact early grade learners in classroom settings? What do teachers perceive about how this instruction influences learner perceptions regarding their role in society?” and the selection of a qualitative case study method emanated from a desire to learn from other teachers and to understand children’s capacities with regard to social justice. During data collection, participants were informed that I was a teacher who valued social justice teaching and was seeking to understand how other teachers perceive social justice teaching and their perceptions of young students’ capacities with social justice.

**Description of the Sample**

Table 2

*Research Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Pseudonym</th>
<th>Debbie Marie</th>
<th>Marjorie</th>
<th>Juliet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Pseudonym</td>
<td>D.M. Parent 1</td>
<td>M. Parent 1</td>
<td>J. Parent 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D.M. Parent 2</td>
<td>M. Parent 2</td>
<td>J. Parent 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This single case study was conducted at a local elementary school in an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. The research site was a K–5 school located in a predominately White, middle-to-upper-income neighborhood. This single case study included two participant groups, teachers, and parents. Three teachers were selected who fit the inclusion criteria for the study. The researcher sought to include kindergarten through 2nd grade teachers who identified as actively teaching social justice concepts in their classrooms. Applying purposeful and convenience sampling the researcher selected one kindergarten teacher and two 2nd grade teachers who identified as teaching social justice concepts and agreed to participate in the study. See Table 2 for researcher participant pseudonyms. Purposeful and convenience sampling was used to limit the parent participants for the study to those with current students in the teacher participant’s rooms. A total of 170 parent recruitment letters were sent out and 11 were returned on time, 2 letters were returned a day late and were eliminated from the selection process. From the 11 on time recruitment letters the researcher randomly selected 2 parents from each classroom, a total of 6 parents were contacted and all 6 parents agreed to participate in the study. Although winter weather complicated the timeline for parent interviews, and required rescheduling of several parent interview sessions, all the enrolled parent participants completed their interviews.

**Research Methodology and Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions and practices of three teachers who identify as teaching social justice concepts to kindergarten and 2nd grade students and to understand the impact of these lessons on the children and their family. The researcher selected a single case study design as the best fit to answer the research questions through the description of a phenomenon in a real-world context (Yin, 2014). The research was a single case
study because the unit of analysis was a single K–5 research site, bounded by the three teachers, observations, and parent participants. Additionally, the use of case study research facilitates the exploration of multiple data sources, to examine an issue through multiple lenses and create an understanding of the many facets of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

In seeking to uncover perceptions and attitudes from the participants on the focused research topics, the researcher chose to use semi-structured interviews with both teachers and parents. Although the focus of the one-on-one interviews was slightly different for each group of participants, the interviews were considered optimal for collecting data on personal histories, perspectives, and experiences (Turner, 2010). The teacher interviews offered rich narratives of the teachers’ conceptions of social justice teaching and their perceptions of the benefits of social justice teaching for young students (see Appendix A). The parent interviews described the perceived impact of classroom lessons on the children’s capacity to understand and integrate social justice into their understanding of the world (see Appendix E). Teacher observations were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of teacher social justice practice and perceptions in action through descriptive and reflective notes (see Appendix B). Teacher observation debriefs were used to gain information about teachers’ perspectives of children’s capacity for the social justice lessons (see Appendix C). Social justice artifacts created by students during observed lessons were used to analyze children’s capacities regarding social justice concepts (see Appendix D).

Analysis began as each data gathering phase was completed. Since interview recordings were transcribed by a transcriptionist, the coding process was lengthier for this data group. An iterative process of reading and reflecting on the data was necessary for the researcher to become immersed in the data (Yin, 2014). The themes (attributes) that emerged were determined to align
with the categories and attributes as identified in the conceptual framework in which the study is based on (see Table 3). The researcher continued the process of analysis by looking for connections between the categories and attributes. To strengthen validity of the research the quantity of codes created during analysis of each phase is presented in Table 4.
### Table 3
**Categories/Themes and Corresponding Attributes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher perceptions</th>
<th>Parent perceptions</th>
<th>Social Justice</th>
<th>Child Development</th>
<th>Teacher Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Personal experience</td>
<td>▪ Family learning</td>
<td>▪ Capabilities</td>
<td>▪ Awareness</td>
<td>▪ Current events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Professional growth</td>
<td>▪ Impact on family and child</td>
<td>▪ Freedom to achieve</td>
<td>▪ Empathy</td>
<td>▪ Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Current trends in education</td>
<td>▪ Home connection</td>
<td>▪ Skill development</td>
<td>▪ Fairness</td>
<td>▪ Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Child development</td>
<td>▪ Parent perception of capacity</td>
<td>▪ Values/interests</td>
<td>▪ Interdependent/Interconnected</td>
<td>▪ Knowledge construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Personal experience-child development</td>
<td>▪ Social Justice concepts/lens</td>
<td>▪ Active agent</td>
<td>▪ Tolerating Diversity</td>
<td>▪ Audio-video resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Facilitator/learner</td>
<td>▪ Motivation to action</td>
<td>▪ Critical thinking</td>
<td>▪ Recognize Differences</td>
<td>▪ Challenge misconceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Purpose of education</td>
<td>▪ Purpose of education</td>
<td>▪ Other intelligences</td>
<td>▪ Self-advocacy</td>
<td>▪ Questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Process of content development</td>
<td>▪ Process of content development</td>
<td>▪ Multicultural</td>
<td>▪ Social Action/Social actor</td>
<td>▪ Democratic practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Social Justice concepts/lens</td>
<td>▪ Social Justice concepts/lens</td>
<td>▪ Community</td>
<td>▪ Multiple perspectives</td>
<td>▪ Multiple perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Children’s exposure to society</td>
<td>▪ Child development</td>
<td>▪ Classroom structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Definitions-Social Justice</td>
<td>▪ Child development</td>
<td>▪ Equity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Student connection to learning</td>
<td>▪ Child development</td>
<td>▪ Cultural Relevant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Environment focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Global Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Code Quantity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Teacher Interview</th>
<th>Observation &amp; Debrief</th>
<th>Parent Interview</th>
<th>Student Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Coding</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axial Coding</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of the Findings**

The researcher gathered data through four distinct phases: (a) teacher interview, (b) observation and observation debrief, (c) artifact review, and (d) parent interview. Through each phase patterns were gathered as they related to the attributes of social justice, teacher practice and child development capacity. In the following sections, relevant data are presented for each attribute defined by the conceptual framework, by teacher participant and data source.

As described in detail in Chapter 2, the conceptual framework for this study identifies attributes of Social Justice Perspectives in Education, Teacher Practices used for implementing such perspectives, and Child Development theories that work to explain children’s capacities for social justice. Data was acquired on teacher social justice perspectives through teacher interview, teacher observation and parent interview. Teacher interviews and teacher observations were implemented to gather data on teacher practices. Data on teacher perceptions of children’s social justice capacity was acquired through teacher interviews, observation debrief, parent interviews and student artifacts. The alignment of the attributes to multiple data sources is shown in Table 5.
Table 5

Attribute and Data Source Alignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories and Attributes</th>
<th>Teacher Interview</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Observation Debrief</th>
<th>Parent Interview</th>
<th>Student Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural/Anti-Racist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Relevant</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Citizenship</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Capability Approach</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Practices:</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom Discussion</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge Construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Development:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of Differences</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerating Diversity, Empathy</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Presentation of the Data and Results**

The presentation of the data and results for the study will depict a detailed description of findings pursuant to the structure of the conceptual framework and attributes to understand teacher perceptions. All data on teacher perceptions will be presented using teacher pseudonyms. Next, the researcher will present a synthesis of findings as they relate to the study’s research questions.

The presentation of data will begin with the attributes of social justice. First, Debbie Marie’s perspectives will be presented from her interview data, teacher observation data and parent interview data. Next, Marjorie’s social justice perspectives will be presented from her interview data, teacher observation data and parent interview data. Finally, Juliet’s social justice perspectives will be presented from her interview data, teacher observation data and parent
interview data. Following social justice, the presentation of data will focus on the attributes of teacher practices. First, Debbie Marie’s perspectives on teacher practices will be presented from her interview data and teacher observation data. Next, Marjorie’s teacher practices perspectives will be presented from her interview data and teacher observation data. Finally, Juliet’s perspectives on teacher practice will be presented from her interview data and teacher observation data. Following the presentation of data on social justice and teacher practice the researcher will conclude with a presentation of data on child development perspectives. First, Debbie Marie’s perspectives on child development will be presented from her interview data, observation debrief data, parent interview data, and student artifact review. Next, Marjorie’s child development perspectives will be presented from her interview data, observation debrief data, parent interview data and student artifact review. Finally, Juliet’s child development perspectives will be presented from her interview data, observation debrief data, parent interview data and student artifact review. See Table 6 for data that presented an alignment between conceptual framework attributes and observation data.
Table 6

*Attributes alignment to data from the 3 observations and observation debrief data collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Debbie Marie</th>
<th>Marjorie</th>
<th>Juliet</th>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capability Approach</td>
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<td><strong>1</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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</table>

*Note.* *Emergent attributes are in boldface.*

**Conceptual Framework-Category 1: Social Justice Education**

The conceptual framework for this study identified Multicultural/Anti-racist education, Equity Pedagogy, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Global Citizenship, and Capability Approach as current perspectives associated with social justice in education. These attributes were derived through the examination of current research literature to uncover the salient theories on social justice in education. The data analysis results suggest the teacher participants approach social
justice from a combination of social justice perspectives rather than a single approach dominating. This section will begin with a description of findings for each teacher participant.

Multicultural/Anti-bias education. Multicultural/Anti-bias education is defined through James A. Banks’ (2004) comprehensive five core dimensions of multicultural education and Enid Lee’s (2007) definition of multicultural education as anti-racist education. Banks (1998; 2004) five dimensions of multicultural education include: (a) content integration—infusing curriculum with materials from diverse perspectives; (b) knowledge construction—understanding how knowledge constructions can be biased by implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, and perspectives; (c) equity pedagogy—teaching strategies and environments designed to enable students from diverse racial and ethnic groups to access academic achievement; (d) prejudice reduction—developing more positive racial attitudes by decreasing racial stereotypes and prejudices in the school and increasing democratic attitudes, values and behaviors; (e) empowering school culture and social structure—critical reflection and examine of school culture to create increased equity. Enid Lee (2007) expanded on Banks definition to emphasis the anti-racist purpose as equipping students, parents, and teachers with tools to combat racism and ethnic discrimination while building a society that includes all people equally. The following code words were used to organize data related to multicultural/anti-biased education: student-centered, community relationships, multiple perspectives, equity pedagogy, awareness/consciousness raising, skill building, and social actors.

Debbie Marie interview. Debbie Marie has worked for many years in the field of education. She is currently a 2nd grade teacher at the research site. Debbie Marie indicated that her perceptions around the topic of social justice may reflect her family’s experiences of discrimination, values in active citizenship and her own personal growth as an active citizen.
Debbie Marie expressed social justice was primarily an essential foundation for her classroom culture. She said, “I think the social justice vent [expression] is in the culture of the classroom as opposed to lessons.” Although she acknowledged that certain things are done intentionally—for example, examining stories through a racial equity lens or focusing on gender specifically—she observes social justice as an overall filter for the whole structure of the classroom. “I think that one of the best parts of teaching with a social justice framework is that kids get to find out what’s meaningful for them and that they have the power to act on that.”

Debbie Marie defined social justice as,

giving the students the skills, abilities, and opportunity to view the real world as it really is—our very real inequities in our world, in our society and be able to ask questions about that, and think about what can be done about these problems.

In partnership with her students and in order to create an equitable environment, Debbie Marie sought to raise the consciousness level of the students. Debbie Marie viewed her classroom setting as a “macro level of social justice.” It is a place in which the students can practice their skills as citizens:

where every student is valued exactly how they are, and not put in a hierarchal position based on what they look like, their belief system, their academic abilities, their disabilities—any of those things—are not going to detract their value and worth as a member in the classroom community.

Children were encouraged to ask critical questions, to pursue knowledge and were given the support and materials needed to discover the answers and share their findings with the community. The expansion of student knowledge and understanding beyond their personal experience was an essential component to Debbie Marie’s social justice view. “We have a
responsibility to stop perpetuating this myth that there is an even playing field [for everyone].”

With her years of experience teaching and clear understanding of how public education fits into the larger social justice issues, Debbie Marie has come to feel, “we have more responsibility to be honest with kids about the real problems and issues that exist.”

Evidence from observation. The data from Debbie Marie’s three observations revealed a classroom where social justice perspectives were used to create a community classroom structure and indicated that social justice perspectives were a part of the curriculum presented by the teacher. An unexpected finding during the classroom observation process revealed the inclusion of ecological justice as a component of social justice in the classroom curriculum, which was displayed through her presentation of information on the Dakota Access Pipeline and other pipelines in the United States.

Debbie Marie’s classroom consisted of a large space for table groups to work and a large carpet area for whole group meetings. Materials were displayed in containers for easy access and the classroom library was stocked with an array of books of varying levels and subject matter. Upon entering the classroom, I saw evidence of Debbie Marie’s social justice perspectives displayed around the classroom. Prominently displayed at the front of the classroom was a poster depicting the school value statement and located next to this was a community generated classroom promise which expressed shared standards of treatment for the classroom community. Debbie Marie’s view of social justice as a fundamental component of classroom culture was evident through her thoughtful classroom structure and the implementation of group norms which formed the building blocks for a safe place for all community members. Based on stated expectations, rules, and behavioral clues, I observed evidence that Debbie Marie had created a space where mutual respect was exhibited and
expected from all community members. I found the classroom to be a calm, organized, and energized environment.

Debbie Marie displayed evidence of her social justice activism in her classroom and various social justice discussion subjects on her bulletin boards. During the period when this research was conducted, I observed that national and local news media offered many reports about the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, global human rights violations, and environmental concerns. During this time, I was aware that conversations about these topics were daily occurrences in the local school community. Debbie Marie had multiple signs displayed in her classroom that spoke to some of the current social justice topics. Posters included, “Black Lives Matter” (Silverman, n.d.), “Vote!” (Vote!, n.d.) (see Figure 3), “Do the right things even when no one is looking” (Long, 2012) and three of the “We the People posters” created by Shepard Fairey (The Amplifier Foundation, n.d.) (see Figure 4). Additionally, Debbie Marie created space in the classroom to display student work (see Figure 5). The classroom work displayed focused on the neighborhood unit, which all 2nd grade classes were working on. This included a classroom-created neighborhood map and community member biographies that were on display, which gave a narrative of citizenship roles in the neighborhood. Additionally, I observed classroom-created anchor charts on display (see Figure 6).
Figure 3. “Classroom poster image: VOTE!, Copyright © Nikki McClure.”
Figure 4. “Classroom poster image: Protect Each Other, Copyright © Amplifier and Obey Giant.”

Figure 5. An example of displayed student work.
To build positive classroom and school culture, restorative justice classroom circles were a regular activity in many of the research school’s classrooms (Clifford, 2013). Circle guidelines included: respect the talking piece, speak from the heart, listen from the heart, trust that you will know what to say, and say just enough (Clifford, 2013). Debbie Marie used these same circle guidelines for discussing classroom issues and curriculum topics which built trust. This trust-building created an environment where students were open to engage with Debbie Marie on difficult and deep issues. Such difficult issues included: economic injustice, immigration, gender, sexuality, and race.

The effects of this trust-building were shown through students’ willingness to engage actively in the classroom. During the first observation, the classroom was already engaged in the start of an activity when I entered the room. Debbie Marie gathered all the students on the carpet and asked permission to use a student’s work as an example. Without hesitation, the student
presented his work. It was evident that the student was comfortable and proud to have the work used as an example. In another instance when she requested some knowledge, asking, “Who can tell me what empathy means?” the question was followed promptly by an answer from a student. “Yes, that is a good definition,” she responded. These small interactions demonstrated an environment where students were willing to take chances.

The observations showed evidence of a focus on honoring multiple perspectives, student-centered discussions, and literature. I observed social justice lessons that included a continuation of stories and discussions about people in history who have stood up for worker’s rights, women’s rights, or civil rights, and two lessons centered on the 2nd grade neighborhood unit. Debbie Marie used multicultural texts to connect students with the histories of people from different cultures that stood up for their rights as change agents. During the first observation Debbie Marie introduced the students to Cesar Chavez by reading the book *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* (Krull, 2003). The reading activity included a time for discussion and reflection on the perspectives and experiences of migrant workers. Many other multicultural books were on display showing evidence of past stories shared with the students, on the topics of civil rights and women’s rights from various cultural perspectives.

*Evidence from parent interviews.* Parent interview data suggested that parents perceive the teaching of social justice topics as an essential factor to classroom climate and curriculum choice. Both parents explained the classroom setting as building understanding and trust through example. D.M. Parent 1 described the classroom structure as understanding and practicing the basic concepts of being a good person in the world. While D.M. Parent 2 noted the use of community circles and the social justice topics as impactful on the way students were treating each other when she said, “I think everybody seems really nice to each other . . . and kind.” Both
parents noted that Debbie Marie modeled empathy and trust using personal stories that build a connection with the students.

The parents described the use of social justice concepts in the classroom, including a racial incident in the school. D.M. Parent 1 and D.M. Parent 2 reported their students as discussing or showing an interest in topics around the election and political issues, environmental topics, and racial issues. Both parents also referred to the excitement and sharing of information that was resulting from the implementation of the neighborhood project. In the discussion about new concepts being discussed, D.M. Parent 1 noted that a deep discussion perpetuated by a school incident of discrimination was personally impactful on her student.

Both parents expressed appreciation that the social justice topics were being discussed and noted that it offered them more opportunity for discussion at home. D.M. Parent 1 expressed “I mean it’s important that they learn how to read and write . . . But—to me, it’s—it’s just more important for them to learn how to be, like, a citizen and a human.” D.M. Parent 2 described it as critical work.

**Marjorie interview.** Of the three teachers in the study, Marjorie had the longest teaching experience. Although she had experience teaching other grade levels at the time of the research study, she taught 2nd grade at the research site. Marjorie attributed her social justice vision to her continued professional development over the years, which includes professional learning from her 2nd grade teammates, district equity work, teacher courses, and her personal drive for learning. Marjorie noted, “I’ve just been more interested . . . gone to things like social justice conferences, reading articles, watching things on television and using that knowledge to dive deeper into the school curriculum.” Marjorie emphasized her teammates as an important
component to her work, “We work so well together and we really are sort of committed to—
social justice—and telling kids the truth and developing stuff like that.”

Marjorie described social justice as classroom structures and curriculum that give
students the skills to understand how they both affect the world and are affected by the world.
Marjorie noted that social justice was a continuous component “interspersed throughout the
year.”

Marjorie commented on the essential nature of creating awareness around equity through
exposure to multiple perspectives. Marjorie expressed social justice as “teaching children about
fairness, themselves, their families, and the world around them—history—Are these things fair?
Are people having their needs met? All of that kind of stuff.” For Marjorie, interrupting
misconceptions about race, social class, gender, human differences, and being truthful with
children, are major components of her social justice teaching. Marjorie pointed out, “I just think
it’s important for kids to know, and that maybe they can make a change themselves. Or be part
of change.” As Marjorie’s social justice vision has expanded it has directly impacted what she
brings to the classroom. Marjorie explained:

Really learning myself about what kind of . . . untold stories there are in our history, and
things that you don’t hear in the mainstream. And how you don’t always get the real
story, has made me want to . . . make sure kids hear the right thing.

This statement described Marjorie’s continual effort to present students with stories from
multiple perspectives and recognize the missing voices in the stories.

Evidence from observation. The three observations in Marjorie’s room revealed a
classroom where the teacher’s social justice perspectives created a positive and open classroom
environment with high expectations for all students. The classroom observations showed
classroom structure with an embedded idea of social justice and the use of topics of social justice in the curriculum. The classroom observation process exposed a focus on multicultural classroom components and ecological justice in the curriculum.

Marjorie’s classroom was average sized and contained two main sections that consisted of work space for students and a community gathering space, both used for multiple functions. Marjorie thoughtfully created table clusters in the back half of the classroom to create small community groups which could facilitate cooperative learning opportunities for all students. At the front of the classroom there was a carpet space large enough for a classroom of students to sit and have discussion and classroom meetings (see Figure 7). In this area, I could see on display a variety of books on social justice topics that had been read to students. Topics included civil rights, worker’s rights, women’s rights, and picture book biographies, as evidenced by the display of Separate is Never Equal (Tonatiuh, 2014), Harvest of Hope (Krull, 2003), Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers’ Strike of 1909 (Markel, 2013), and I Dissent (Levy, 2016). In one corner of the room there was a table used for small group work with the teacher, and used as a teacher work-space. Marjorie had teaching materials stored close to the table for easy access and location maps for reference material. The outer perimeter had bookshelves that contained labeled tubs for the classroom library. I observed the classroom library was rich with books at multiple reading levels and contained popular fiction books, multicultural biographies, and non-fiction books. I noted evidence of organized classroom materials in various locations throughout the room offering shared access to materials for all community members.
Marjorie represented her perspective of social justice as a component of her classroom community-building through visible classroom displays. The front of the classroom contained the school-wide expectations and located next to these the teacher displayed student-created agreements, which were regularly referred to during the observations, as a reminder of the community’s expectations for behavior (see Figure 8). Marjorie’s focus on building a strong community foundation through active participation in these agreements offered a safe space for students to grow and learn from one another.
Figure 8. Marjorie’s classroom promise.

When entering Marjorie’s classroom, it was clear that Marjorie saw displaying cultural evidence of students as an important factor in her classroom. A display focusing on student classroom biographies (see Figure 9) and a large map of Friendship Town (see Figure 10), as part of the neighborhood unit took up most of the classroom bulletin board space. Displaying student work established a positive way for students to view themselves and exposed students to their similarities and differences.
Figure 9. Student biographies for the neighborhood unit.
The two observed lessons on the theme *We Are All Related* revealed Marjorie’s perception of social justice as culturally relevant and multicultural based. These two lessons specifically focused on students sharing about their families and researching what makes their family unique.

*Evidence from parent interviews.* Marjorie’s parent interview data suggested that 1 parent perceive the teaching of social justice topics as a positive community climate and both parents discussed the concepts as curriculum. When asked about the concepts being discussed at home, M. Parent 1 explained “I guess this year our daughter has come home with more of the kind of school community message. Like the sort of caring community that perseveres.” This
statement directly connects to the classroom expectations and school expectations being used at the research site.

Both parents discussed their student expressing interest in climate change and the pipeline. M. Parent 2 described her student having an interest in topics around “racial inequities—having to do with Native Americans and African Americans and generally people whose skin looked different than his.” M. Parent 1 and M. Parent 2 both perceived their children as significantly impacted by the Dakota Access Pipeline movie and discussions.

It should be noted that M. Parent 2 felt that she lacked awareness of the focus on social justice in the classroom. Although she expressed that her child talked about concepts discussed in class, she thought her child was taking an interest in social justice issues as a result of things heard at home. However, during the interview she illustrated several discussions initiated by her child on the Dakota Access Pipeline, racial inequity, and homelessness, all topics that had been discussed at school. At the end of the interview she acknowledged the following about the conversations with her child, “He may have brought up lots of things that I just put within my own perspective and didn’t really think about but it may be coming from something else—I’m going to need to leave him more space to talk at bedtime.”

**Juliet interview.** Juliet has years of experience in education and has taught several different grades but is currently teaching kindergarten at the research site. Juliet perceives her personal and family experience as a factor in her social justice perspectives. She described her experience coming from a racially and economically isolated neighborhood as facilitating her awareness that “some people are treated differently and have different opportunities.” With this knowledge, she declared she “just became more sensitive and aware of these things.” As she got older she became aware of clubs and groups that were “working toward social justice.” Juliet
has continued to make connections with other professionals to share her perspective and to expand her knowledge on social justice issues.

Juliet perceived social justice as building equitable classroom structures and awareness of inequities. Centering her work first around her students, Juliet explained social justice in education as “encouraging the students to be aware of inequities in the classroom and the school, but then also bringing that awareness and empathy and activism outside of the school. You know starting with your community.” Juliet reported the use of multiple perspectives, both student-centered and from literature as critical to creating awareness. She asserted “it’s basically just creating that awareness that there are people who have basic needs that they’re not receiving, and the difference between basic needs and wants. And, you know, what people are receiving those, and what people are not receiving those.” Juliet emphasized “I feel like my practice just has a constant overtone of justice.”

Several times in the interview, Juliet described social justice in kindergarten as foundational skills. Juliet asserted, “with kindergarten, it’s more like everything else in kindergarten [it’s] building the foundation. You know, what does social justice mean?—not necessarily like, isolated social—but you do have to build this foundation with them of the ideas and the philosophy.”

Evidence from observation. The data from the three observations in Juliet’s classroom revealed that Juliet perceived social justice as a component of how she structures her classroom and as an embedded component into the kindergarten curriculum. Juliet’s social justice perspective has created a classroom setting that empowers the students by valuing student opinion, prioritizing reflection, and sets high expectations for being a community member in the
space. An unexpected finding of the classroom observations was the use of ecological justice as a component of social justice.

Juliet’s classroom was well lit with large windows and neatly organized into different areas for multiple uses. The two biggest portions of the classroom consisted of student workspace and the large carpeted area. Juliet’s student seating consisted of small rectangle tables with space for 5-6 students to complete independent work or participate on collaborative work. In the center of the student workspace was a round table with the label “Science Table.” The science table contained theme related materials for the students to examine. However, children were encouraged to share science artifacts they collect for their peers to examine. Juliet created a small library area with a bench seat, bookshelves, and a carpet space, for children to read both leveled books and view pictures books about diverse topics previously read, such as homelessness, race issues, and families. In the far corner, there was a hexagon table which was used for small group instruction with the teacher and for a quiet assessment area. The carpet area was a large space used for whole curriculum discussions, classroom meetings, and as a large space to play during their free choice time. Community supplies were kept on the tables and the back counter of the classroom for easy access for all community members.

Juliet created a positive classroom environment through her classroom structures which fosters students’ classroom citizenship. Displayed outside of Juliet’s room were aspects of the work she has been doing with her students and a poster illustrating a component of Juliet’s social justice beliefs (see Figure 11).
Researcher field notes recorded the following observation about the work displayed outside and inside Juliet’s classroom door:

**November 29, 2016:** Juliet has prominently displayed outside the classroom her work on building a positive classroom environment. The terms “I am likable, capable, and valued” are on display with student work illustrating those terms. Inside her classroom she displays classroom work that shares student understanding of the terms collaboration, inclusion, caring and perseverance.

In Juliet’s classroom, the school-wide expectations were displayed at the front of the classroom as the main focus for classroom expectations. These expectations created by the staff at the research site presented a clear focus on character education components. Additionally, Juliet empowered her students through the use of Kelso’s Choice (Clark & Lee, n.d.), a program

*Figure 11. “Classroom poster image: Copyright © Micah Bazant.”*
for conflict management to create a warm and inviting classroom. To incorporate students in the shared responsibility of the classroom, a student job chart was on display and actively used.

Juliet revealed in the interview the essential nature of knowing her students and families’ experiences and using her knowledge to structure her classroom to be accessible to her students. Juliet created resources for some students who needed additional support because of language barriers and/or emotional needs. Some of these supports included personal schedules, preferred seating and additional labeled vocabulary in the classroom. To support students who needed an emotional break, a small corner of the carpet area was created into a calming place called “outer space.” These components are meant to assist in creating a positive and inclusive classroom environment for the students, regardless of their needs.

The three observations in Juliet’s room were conducted during her scheduled social justice time. As indicated by Juliet’s interview, she perceives social justice as a constant running theme through all her work, however she made it a priority to schedule time weekly to focus on social justice concepts to assist in building the foundational skills. This focus on social justice concepts in kindergarten speaks to Juliet’s belief in young children’s capabilities as active citizens. Juliet’s observations were conducted during her social justice time on consecutive days. Each day that I entered the classroom, a student greeted me and I took a seat at the back of the room while Juliet and the student were on the carpet. Two of the lessons observed combined aspects of a Native American unit being taught with the idea of fairness around the Dakota Access Pipeline. The other lesson observed was a discussion of wants and needs as a component of a yearlong homelessness unit. During all three lessons, Juliet created space for children to voice their opinions and cultivated an environment for opinions to be honored by all community members, even if there was disagreement. Juliet established this during the first observation on
fairness; she asserted, “It is okay to have our own opinions and ideas . . . . We want to learn from our friends so, do we tell our friends we won’t play with them if we don’t agree?” Juliet honored students by writing their ideas down so that the class could go back and review the information for future lessons.

Evidence from parent interviews. Juliet’s parent interview data showed that both parents viewed social justice as the curriculum being taught in the classroom. Both parents discussed the concepts of wants and needs, homelessness, and the Dakota Access Pipeline as topics brought up at home. Additionally, J. Parent 1 described social justice for her child as recognizing choices. J. Parent 1 stated, “he understands he has choices in how he treats others and how he wants to be treated.” This could be a component of Juliet’s perception of social justice as classroom structure, which includes building respectful social interactions and problem-solving skills. J. Parent 2 noted her child also discussing treatment of others as: “we treat everyone the same, and it doesn’t matter the color of their skin or what they do.” These additional views of social justice in the classroom reflected components of Juliet’s work around school-wide expectations, which focused on inclusiveness, caring and collaboration.

Culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy is defined as teaching practices that empower students by using their frames of reference, cultural knowledge, and background experiences to make the learning more relevant to and effective for the students in order to enhance critical consciousness (Gay, 2010; Hyland, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The following code words were used to organize data related to Culturally Relevant pedagogy: student-centered, community relationship, awareness of inequities, collaborative work, and engagement.
**Debbie Marie interview.** Debbie Marie created a classroom culture that was student-centered, working in partnership with students to create knowledge and an equitable classroom environment. Debbie Marie fostered students’ learning through the focus of their experiences and their families.

Having kids tell about their own experience, explore their own families—their own beliefs, is one way that you can share with one another and expand kids’ sort of understanding of the things that are special and different about our families.

Debbie Marie pointed out that because diversity at the research site can be limited, it is also essential to expose children to other people, places, beliefs, and traditions, “all these things that might not be represented by anyone in our school, or in our present classroom.” Through this statement Debbie Marie asserted her belief in the need to present students with examples of other ways of living as a human being that go beyond their personal experience.

**Evidence from observation.** Debbie Marie actively involved students in knowledge construction by honoring the strengths, beliefs, and values of her students. This is evident in the classroom discussions and student pride in presenting information about their culture. I observed evidence that Debbie Marie created space in the day for students to share student-initiated research projects or to share about their culture. Toward the end of Observation 2, which was focused on the Dakota Access Pipeline, Debbie Marie invited a Native American student to present a research project that she had completed at home on Chief Joseph and to answer students’ questions about her topic. Additionally, this student had assisted her parents in creating a display in the main hall at the research site that displayed Native American artifacts and information about the Dakota Access Pipeline protests (see Figure 16). Debbie Marie’s implementation of the neighborhood unit as a socially constructed community, placed students at
the center for the creation and growth of the town. Centering the learning on the students offered opportunities for students to collaboratively work through issues affecting the student-created identities, and problem-solve events that impacted the town.

Evidence from parent interviews. D.M. Parent 1 and D.M. Parent 2 discussed the level of enthusiasm and connectedness their child exhibited with regards to the events happening in the neighborhood unit. As an example, D.M. Parent 1 noted that the excitement generated around the child from Aleppo joining the class-created neighborhood, motivated her student to learn more about the island. Additionally, she expressed her belief that the students working together as a community was an important factor in her child’s growth and development. D.M. Parent 1 expressed that the structure of the classroom fostered her child’s receptiveness to learning about cultural inequities, environmental issues, and other concepts being discussed. She explained, “when it's brought up by her teacher—someone she really admires and respects—and it’s a whole group of kids, listening and asking questions—I believe she is just more receptive.”

Marjorie interview. Marjorie fosters students’ learning by emphasizing issues that are meaningful to the students and extending their knowledge through examination of students’ cultures and life experiences. Marjorie explained that in terms of social justice, “[the focus] changes every year a little bit, because of the students and how their interests drive it.” The students and teacher work collaboratively to create the neighborhood unit and create real-world context for learning information and skills. Students’ questions, cultural knowledge, interests, and current events of the time, enhance and expand the plot as the community addresses issues that arise. Through understanding family structures and children’s experiences, Marjorie could begin the process of building community. Marjorie described the process as,
Starting from you, and then expanding throughout, so eventually you’d get to like, kind of your place in the world. And how your affect—you know, you’re affected by the world, and how you can make changes yourself.

_Evidence from observation._ Marjorie’s Observation 1 and Observation 2 were centered around the examination of the similarities and differences in families. _We Are All Related_ lesson, positioned the student as the researcher and brought in family participation. Students worked both individually and collaboratively creating an artifact about themselves and their families. Marjorie’s implementation of the neighborhood unit, constructed through the ideas and thoughts of the students, created opportunities to collaboratively work through issues that affected student-created identities, and problem-solve events that impacted the town.

_Evidence from parent interview._ The parents in Marjorie’s classroom discussed teaching practices that were enhancing cultural relevance. M. Parent 2 believed that her students’ exposure to knowledge about cultural inequities created opportunities for the student and family to reflect on their biases. This shows a connection from the learning in the classroom as extending into the home. M. Parent 1 focused on the results of strong community building focus. She noted the focus on creating positive community connections was meaningful for her child.

_Juliet interview._ Juliet discussed one of the first things she does is to get to know her population. “By just knowing my population and knowing what backgrounds, what experiences—maybe any injustices that my students or their families have had to endure—I start there and will finding books and things, or just work it into the conversations.” Acknowledging her students and their family experiences assisted her in creating a community. Juliet viewed a component of knowing her student population was knowing social justice concepts which connect with their everyday life. As an example, because homelessness was visibly prevalent in
the city and the students were seeing evidence of people in their local neighborhood sleeping in cars and tents, this knowledge became part of the discussion that the class had on homelessness.

Juliet expressed the idea of community relationships and valuing the thoughts and ideas of other community members to be essential components to her classroom.

**Evidence from observation.** In the three observations completed in Juliet’s classroom, I noted that Juliet’s previous work had set clear expectations for appropriate interactions during discussions. Juliet showed evidence of using class charts and webs to center the discussion around student knowledge (see Figure 11, 12 and 13). Juliet used questioning strategies during discussions fostering students’ ideas and knowledge as central to the discussions.

**Evidence from parent interviews.** Both J. Parent 1 and J. Parent 2 reported how impactful the discussion surrounding wants and needs had been for their children. They each noted that the topic became a recurring conversation and structured a deeper awareness of inequities. J. Parent 2 noted that using the terms “wants and needs”, was a beneficial way to talk with her child about items requested.

**Global citizenship.** Global citizenship is defined as an educational view that recognizes our interconnectedness and interdependence not only as active citizens of local communities, states, and countries, but of the world (Banks, 2004; Bell, Jean-Sigur, & Kim, 2015; Zahabioun et al., 2013). The following code words were used to organize data related to Global citizenship: interconnectedness and interdependence and global awareness.

**Debbie Marie interview.** Debbie Marie explained her belief in recognizing the interconnectedness of people across the globe by, “trying to foster a curiosity about the world that it goes beyond your neighbors—or the people you socialize with, or who you see on a day to day basis.” She brought in materials, stories, and current events to bring to life the experiences
and the connection between the students’ lives and the lives of others. Debbie Marie explained, “Change does not happen through hopelessness or giving up and just going along with the way things are going.” Instead, Debbie Marie declared, it is people who have vision, talk with other people, and organize with others who make change. Debbie Marie believed that the purpose of education is to give students the skills to participate in creating change now and in the future. Debbie Marie cautioned,

We’re at a critical point in history where things have got to change for people to be okay, and we have to teach kids how to either make the change that we have failed to do ourselves or to prevent this kind of failure from happening again if we can make some corrections or solve some problems.

Evidence from observation. The neighborhood unit revealed evidence of Debbie Marie’s perception of social justice as environmental justice and global citizenship. As a part of the neighborhood unit, the students created a town and established citizen roles, then engaged in problem-solving for different situations affecting the town. Two current event issues were used to gain understanding about the role of citizenship and to increase students’ learning about different people, perspectives, and experiences. The first current event problem involved an examination of information about the Dakota Access Pipeline and other pipelines in the United States. This unit brought into focus the beliefs of indigenous peoples, environmental concerns, political issues, and citizenship rights. The second current event focus during the neighborhood unit continued the environmental theme by providing an opportunity for students to examine issues affecting climate refugees.

Evidence from parent interview. Components of global citizenship were evident in parent discussions. D.M. Parent 2 expressed the extended awareness and concern that her
daughter exhibited for people outside of the local community. Both parents discussed students learning about the Dakota Access Pipeline and the importance of awareness around that issue both with respect to the racial inequities and the environment. However, one parent expressed concern about depth of understanding around global issues. D.M. Parent 1 commented that while she felt her child had an understanding about the basic concepts about power usage she believed that her child did not have the deeper understanding of global climate change

**Marjorie interview.** Marjorie brought in a sense of interconnectedness through her selection of books and videos which offer a connection between the students and the outside world. Marjorie expressed the idea of global citizenship as “you started small” and “then went kind of global.” I interpreted this statement to mean starting local and then focusing outward. She explained this idea through the 2nd grade neighborhood unit, where the focus was on individual roles and community roles. Marjorie discussed the addition of environmental justice to their neighborhood unit and their animal habitat unit. Marjorie asserted the belief in expanding student knowledge by adding “global warming and climate refugees—and things like—how people can change those things for the good and the bad.”

**Evidence from observation.** The neighborhood unit revealed evidence of Marjorie’s perception of social justice as environmental justice and global citizenship. The third lesson I observed, specifically focused on the inclusion of climate refugees into the neighborhood storyline. Student-centered research created awareness of the environmental issues and the people affected. Marjorie noted during our observation debrief that she viewed the *We Are All Related* activity as a way of showing students our interconnectedness as citizens.

**Evidence from parent interviews.** The parents from Marjorie’s room focused on the extension of knowledge attributed to the concepts embedded in the neighborhood storyline. M.
Parent 1 noted the personalized nature of learning about the Marshall Islands and the conversations around climate change as extending her child’s knowledge into global issues. M. Parent 2 commented on the topic of the Dakota Access Pipeline as expanding awareness beyond her child’s local knowledge.

**Juliet interview.** Juliet noted in her interview that she believed in discussing general injustices with her students. Some examples she gave were homelessness, fairness, environmental issues, and humanitarian issues. Juliet explained, “I try really, really hard to just get out of our bubble of the classroom—especially at this school, where we have such a specific demographic—there’s a lot going on in the world that is not happening here—and it’s really important that we still learn about what is happening in the world.”

**Evidence from observation.** The observations conducted in Juliet’s room showed evidence of global citizenship as awareness of other people and places outside of the student’s local community. In the lesson on the Dakota Access Pipeline, Juliet was discussing an issue that has a global impact for everyone and giving an example of how people can come together to make change. In the discussions on wants and needs, the lessons were building on an understanding of the needs of all human beings and moving into the direction about social action to make changes for those who do not have access.

**Evidence from parent interviews.** There was a lack of significant data from parents around the topic of global citizenship. J. Parent 1 and J. Parent 2 both discussed their children having conversations around the Dakota Access Pipeline.

**Capability approach.** Capability approach is defined as an alternate view of human development which understands that each person has individually-defined capabilities based on what they value. This view affirms the need to ensure that each person has the freedom to
achieve his or her functioning (Nussbaum, 2011). Children are viewed as active agents, with human rights and whose social participation exhibits values and priorities (Peleg, 2013). The following code words were used to organize data related to Capability Approach: values and priorities, freedom to achieve, skill development, and active agents.

**Debbie Marie interview.** Recognizing the capabilities that existed within each individual student and creating a structure that allowed for valued participation within the community was essential to Debbie Marie’s social justice view. She saw each student as an active agent. Debbie Marie noted: “every child has the ability to questions things, learn, grow and be an actor. A participant in the world.” She recognized that these capabilities will manifest differently for each child but “they are given that framework [that] they have a place, the ability and responsibility and they are citizens.”

Debbie Marie emphasized that she doesn’t want to scare students or make them afraid of the world. “I want them to have hope, and I want them to feel like they have power, [and] the way that I feel like I have power—I mean these are the same things—my same traumatic world that I’m living in, right?” However, Debbie Marie strongly believed that children need to know that the truth is that the world is not fair.

Debbie Marie declared that her past experiences with young children expanded her concept of their capabilities. She noted that she has much higher expectations, than those who believe in traditional developmental theories and does not believe in “infantilizing kids.” Debbie Marie’s perspective on children is:

I do know that I use different language, but I do not talk to kids differently than I talk to adults. I see them as human. Complicated, with dreams, desires, struggles, strengths.
All these things, and obviously they’re in a different place developmentally and maturity wise, but I still see them as very, very capable.

Evidence from observation. Debbie Marie was easily accessible to all students, during the observations. She allowed students to casually move about the room and access the materials, while Debbie Marie moved between the students offering support and encouragement. I heard Debbie Marie several times saying to students, “Just do your best,” thereby acknowledging her elevated view of their skills. Debbie Marie offered opportunities for students to select their preferred seating and make personal choices about their work, honoring their capacities as community members. With struggling students, she showed great pride in their accomplishments. This was evident after an exchange with a student where she affirmed, “I knew you could do it.” This was followed by a quiet comment to the researcher, “His first finished story of the entire year. I am so excited!”

Evidence from parent interviews. The parents each seem to have a little different view of their child’s capabilities. When asked about her child’s understanding of social justice concepts, D.M. Parent 1 asserted: “She understands them on a very basic—as it associates to her world on a daily basis.” The following is a part of the transcript that explains her perspective:

D.M. PARENT 1: You know, she says—she’ll say things like, “Mom, it shouldn’t matter what someone looks like, it should matter how nice they are to you.” Or things like that. RESEARCHER: Right.
D.M. PARENT 1: But she won’t—she still has a hard time grasping larger concepts, I feel like. Like to her, she doesn’t understand—and I’m not like trying to be political. RESEARCHER: No. It’s okay.
D.M. PARENT 1: She doesn’t understand how someone like Donald Trump—could be elected president . . . she doesn’t understand those larger topics . . . that are beyond her.

D.M. Parent 2 asserted her student had a strong capacity for understanding the social justice concepts. She emphasized “I’ve been completely amazed, and so happy about how she does seem to understand it and ask a lot of questions.” D.M. Parent 2 described a new propensity for non-fiction text and deep discussions about history and people.

The parents were asked if they had noticed any new activities or actions that they thought might be attributed to the social justice learning that had happened so far in the school year. D.M. Parent 1 expressed a belief that she was unaware of any new activities or actions that she felt could be attributed to the social justice topics discussed at school. She noted that because of the season and past activities, she felt that the desire from her student to donate items to a school homelessness project was simply a natural part of the family’s activity during this time of the year. D.M. Parent 1, described her child as “in her head a lot . . . a big thinker,” so she wasn’t surprised about a lack of “action.” However, she noted earlier in our conversation that her child brought home information on topics they wouldn’t usually discuss at home and it was opening-up a lot of conversation. D.M. Parent 2 noted that her child had a change in book interests from fiction to non-fiction, a strong desire to learning about other countries, and an interest in newspaper and television current events. Additionally, D.M. Parent 2 discussed an important change in behavior that she attributes to the lessons and the classroom:

I do think it’s directly related to talking about social justice and, and human rights—is resiliency. Is that I think she’s becoming stronger . . . [can] stand up for herself . . . more confident, and just—looking out for other people, too, it seems like.
**Marjorie interview.** Creating a classroom setting that values the participation of children is an important component to Marjorie’s classroom structure. When asked about her students’ capabilities in understanding social justice concepts, Marjorie asserted, “I think they can—I think they’re old enough that they can talk about difficult things, problem solve, think about them. Maybe they don’t understand everything.” Marjorie continued to express her belief in her students, “Like some people think kids can’t hear the truth, or hear hard stuff, or hear things that don’t have happy endings. And I think they can, so they respond to that.”

**Evidence from observation.** Marjorie’s classroom observations indicated that she believed in the capabilities of her students. She had high expectations of their abilities and created a classroom atmosphere that encouraged collaboration and respectful interactions. As an example of high expectations, Observation 1 and 2 focused on the “We Are All Related” lesson. In this lesson children were instructed to interview a family member and bring to school pictures or ideas for their collage. This put the responsibility on the students to be accountable for their project. Students who were unable to bring in photographs were given the option to create pictures of the family to use in their collage. Marjorie was always accessible to the students as she moved around the classroom giving assistance and encouragement where needed. She structured her lessons so that students could work collaboratively. Sometimes they chose their partners from the student sitting close to them and other times the partner was randomly selected. Observation 3, presented an example of this, Marjorie drew sticks with names out of a cup and that was how she selected the partners. This encouraged diverse collaborative groupings and offered the opportunity for children to access different perspectives.

The observations also showed evidence of Marjorie’s belief in the value of children’s work and thoughts. I observed several classroom discussions, where children were actively
engaged in sharing ideas. Marjorie facilitated these discussions by posing questions about the topic. Marjorie honored students’ responses and questions. Through the observations I became aware that Marjorie had taken time to structure her discussion time so that everyone had an opportunity to speak and that there were expectations for respectful listening. In Marjorie’s classroom, conversations during work-time between students was encouraged. When student behavior was a hindrance to student learning, I witnessed Marjorie have a quiet conversation with the students to assist them in solving any issues and focusing on their task.

*Evidence from parent interviews.* Both parents from Marjorie’s room expressed a belief in their children’s growing capabilities and understanding around social justice issues. When asked about their child’s understanding of social justice issues, M. Parent 1 claimed, “Her understanding is pretty good. Um, sometimes, there’ll be something that she kind of needs more context for . . . seems to want to kind of flesh out a little bit more, and that usually happens, you know, at dinner or . . . the same day.” M. Parent 1 asserted “I would say overall, she’s—we are surprised and thrilled about um, these conversations that come up, and her grasp on them. Especially the pipeline.” M. Parent 1 emphasized, “That one—that one really stuck out as being, like, ‘Whoa, you understand that better than me.’ So that was cool.” Based on the responses to interview questions by M. Parent 2, I was lead to believe that she sees her child as capable of understanding many of the social justice concepts. During the interview she asserted, “I listen to NPR in the morning and I don’t shield that from him—my husband and I talk about politics and we don’t shield that from him.” I perceived, M. Parent 2’s assertion that she did not feel the need to shield her child as an indication that M. Parent 2 felt the child could both emotionally and cognitively handle the content and she was open to the inquiries that may be stimulated through
exposure to real world events. Additionally, M. Parent 2 admitted “I think as parents we tend to underestimate our kids.”

M. Parent 1 and M. Parent 2 discussed sharing of information, asking questions, and interest in deeper conversations as their perception of action from their children. M. Parent 1 noted “I would say the only things that I can really pinpoint right now would be related to energy, and, and not contributing further to climate change.” M. Parent 1 reported that her child gave constant reminders about energy use and questioned their use of the car since discussing environmental issues at school. M. Parent 2 reported deep conversations to understand unfair treatment of others. She noted that these conversations were first instigated after a racial discrimination issue at school presented opportunities for discussion, both school-wide and in the classroom.

**Juliet interview.** Juliet expressed her belief in children’s capabilities as a part of her personal belief of every human being. Juliet reported,

I come from the belief, and again, it’s just my personal belief that every human—we’re human. So, we have innate empathy. I just think we do. And I think that for some of us, it’s really down deep in there, and for some of us it’s on the surface. And I think for students, it’s, it’s the ability to—um they have the capability, but it’s teachers, and their experiences, and being at school, and other students encouraging their ability to realize that capability.

Juliet emphasized the awareness that some students come in already with a strong empathy capability. Juliet endorsed for those students, it’s “How can you use that to make change? You know, how can you advocate for yourself? How can you advocate for other people? How can you advocate for the world?” Juliet added, “So those students—[it] happens a
little faster—their abilities. But I think all children have the capability to, to practice social justice, not just learn about it.”

Evidence from observation. Juliet’s observation showed a classroom structure which values the thoughts and feelings of the students as community members. In Observation 1 she discusses with the students about the essential nature of respecting diverse opinions. During all three observations, Juliet honored students’ ideas and thoughts by writing them down, creating an equitable environment for everyone to achieve. Additionally, Juliet encouraged students to share thoughts and feelings on the topic with one another during turn-and-talk activities in the classroom, and at home with family members. Juliet’s observations indicated that she takes complex topics and breaks them into concepts that students can connect with and then expand. For instance, Juliet talked about the ideas of wants and needs as a means of connecting to the concept of homelessness and she addressed the issues with the Dakota Access Pipeline by centering it around the ideas of fair and unfair.

Evidence from parent interviews. J. Parent 1 and J. Parent 2 both agreed that their children were capable of understanding the social justice concepts discussed in class. J. Parent 1 remarked, “He comes home and talks about them [social justice concepts].” J. Parent 2 asserted, “Yeah, I think she understands very well. She comes home and talks about everything.” J. Parent 2 admitted “I love talking about the pipeline and Native Americans . . . it is something we talk about at home—but to include her is not something that I would have even thought of.” J. Parent 2 added “It’s amazing what children can do. We don’t always think about it.”

In the interview both parents expressed appreciation for the conversations coming home with their children on social justice concepts. J. Parent 1 noted the following about her student:
He talks about the pipeline, and he talks about his wants and needs, and, um, yeah. We talk about a lot of that stuff, actually. It’s, it’s interesting. He comes home and asks me about things, or he asks me, you know, what happens when oil spills, or he asks me, That’s really a want and not a need, but it is Christmas, so—So you know, he’s sorting it out . . . It’s really nice to see that reinforced in the classroom.

J. Parent 2 explained her experience, “[she] drew pictures and explained it to us, what was going on.—so she is just like a little sponge. Soaking up everything and so [we are] appreciative of like, that these concepts are being discussed and that she’s coming home and we can talk about them further.” J. Parent 2 added, “We can elaborate, we can do what we want, but they’re absolutely coming home and being part of our conversations, for sure.” The following is a part of the transcript that explained the perceived impact to J. Parent 2:

J. PARENT 2 I just love conversations about it, and understanding that not every family looks like ours. Um, but I had the news on last night, hoping to see something about the weather, and the situation in Syria came on.

RESEARCHER: Oh, Uh-huh.

J. PARENT 2: And [she] saw it and was like, “Well, what’s going on?”

RESEARCHER: Mm-hmm.

J. PARENT 2: So, to be able to have some like, words to use—around situations like that is just so helpful for even just at home. Like I love that it’s happening at school, but then—it makes it like a whole family discussion—Um, and I think, you know, these are really important topics right now, and—we shouldn’t shy away from.

During the interview parents were asked to think of any actions or new interests their children had exhibited. The interview data showed parents viewed the initiation of conversations
around social justice topics as a new action. Specifically, both parents noted the discussions around wants and needs as an important learning opportunity that initiated some desire to give aid to others. J. Parent 1 expressed that her child had a desire to support the kindergarten homeless drive by bringing in donations. J. Parent 1 described a comment from her child “Well, we’re doing a, a drive at school. We should really get something for someone who doesn’t have a lot.” J. Parent 2 acknowledged the donation of items to the school drive, however she asserted, “She doesn’t understand that there are people that don’t have a home. That don’t have what we have.”

**Conceptual Framework-Category 2: Teacher Practice**

The conceptual framework for this study identified social justice teaching practices which can enhance learning. Literature, knowledge construction, and discussion were teacher practices identified in the literature review as enhancing learning of social justice concepts. The data results from this research indicated literature, knowledge construction and discussion were practices implemented in all three classrooms. Additionally, the data results revealed the use of current events as an emerging practice used by all the teachers in the study.

**Literature.** Literature is defined as picture books, poetry and other written works containing complex language and added illustrations which assist in conveying the vivid events or situations (Ciardiello, 2010; Gibson & Parks, 2014; Hawkins, 2014). The following code words were used to organize data related to literature: Literature.

**Debbie Marie interview.** Debbie Marie perceived her role, as a social justice educator, as both a facilitator and a learner. She explained that she does not let her lack of knowledge in certain topics stop her from exploring them with her students. “I really, firmly believe in the idea that I am not the master pouring the knowledge into the students’ open heads. That we are
going through the process together. Of course, there’s guidance.” In her statement, Debbie Marie disputed the idea of her having all the answers and simply giving it to the students. Rather she saw the process as working together, teacher and student to think deeply about and uncover answers for themselves.

Debbie Marie emphasized the importance of offering a variety of reading materials that deal with a “plethora of social justice issues—economic justice, immigration, gender, sexuality, and race.” Debbie Marie added that she hoped that people see in her classroom “representations of a wide array of experiences and backgrounds and people and religions.” The following transcript speaks to Debbie Marie’s use of literature in the classroom:

RESEARCHER: How do you determine the important social justice ideas or concepts that students should know, and what is your process for creating the lessons?

DEBBIE MARIE: So, every year, if I notice that there are things missing from my room, stories I’m not telling or people I’m not talking about, I try to make a conscious effort to bring that in.

Next, she explained how she accomplished this,

DEBBIE MARIE: —[I] look at the stories that we teach every year—

RESEARCHER: Mm-hmm.

DEBBIE MARIE:—or the books that we use, and how—how can this story be told in another way? Or how can we expand on a really great story that you only have this one thing about?

This portion of her interview implied that Debbie Marie saw value in the use of literature within her classroom setting.
Evidence from observation. Data from the observation protocol showed several books and news articles were used during the researcher’s observations. The story *We Are All Related: A Celebration of Our Cultural Heritage* (Littlechild, 1996) was used during the first observation. Debbie Marie had previously read this book. The book was the inspiration for a project about families that students were finishing. When I entered the classroom that first day she was presenting an example of the work and clarifying project details while examining components of the book. Additionally, during the first observation Debbie Marie read the book *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* (Krull, 2003). This book was read as a continuation of stories on various agents of change. Observation notes indicated during the second and third observation a variety of news articles were read on the Dakota Access Pipeline. Debbie Marie brought in books and articles based on ideas expressed by students. As an example, books on alternative sources of energy were brought in for students to read during the last observation.

Marjorie interview. Marjorie perceived her role as both a facilitator and learner with her students. When Marjorie discussed learning about the pipeline she remarked, “Actually, I learn a lot. Like I learned a lot on this. It was about things I didn’t know, so I think we’re all learning; not just kids . . . . It makes it exciting for me too.” While Marjorie recognized herself as a learner, she explained her teaching practice around social justice as more intentional. “Being more conscious about it [topics] . . . getting better resources for the kids . . . exposing them to different perspectives.”

Marjorie described her use of literature in the classroom: “Instead of just creating everything from scratch—we tried to take existing things we thought we could develop, and go deeper into it.” Marjorie described an example of a story she saw on the television about Jackie Robinson:
The story you read about in every children’s book never really happened. It’s a nice, great story, but it never really happened. And I thought, I’ve got to look at our books and see if that’s in there. And sure enough, it was.

Recognizing that literature does not always depict the whole truth, Marjorie expanded and enriched the current literature to make visible more perspectives. She explained that a few quality books in the literacy curriculum were fortified to go deeper into the social justice topics:

The first one is about George Washington Carver. We learned a lot about, you know, slavery at the time—and how people were treated, and how he couldn’t go to school, and you know kind of the history, and all the things he did. There’s another one about um, Negro League Baseball, because of one of the stories in the book—and they researched all the different people and how—why would you have to have a different baseball league because you weren’t allowed to be in baseball.

Evidence from observation. The data for the observation protocol revealed that literature was used during two of the three observations. Evidence of multicultural literature was observed in many locations in the classroom and Marjorie had books displayed in her whole group reading area identifying previously read books (see Figure 4). The book, *We Are All Related: A Celebration of Our Cultural Heritage* (Littlechild, 1996) was used during the first observation as a catalyst for a project about families. The book contained heritage collages made by students in Canada. The images and writings in the book were used to guide students in visualizing their own heritage collages (see Figure 18). The book, *Coming to America: The Story of Immigration* (Maestro, 1996) had been previously read and was used during the third observation to connect student knowledge about reasons for immigrating and the challenges immigrants face, with the refugee family moving into the town in the neighborhood storyline.
Juliet interview. The research data indicated that Juliet’s selection of topics began with gaining knowledge about her students and their families. Juliet remarked, “By just knowing my population and knowing what backgrounds, what experiences, um, maybe any injustices that my students or their families have had to endure, I find books and things or just work it into the conversations.” Incorporating books that are culturally relevant assists Juliet in creating a classroom community, where students see themselves reflected in the materials. Books and materials on families and cultures not represented by the students, as well as current event topics are also presented to create awareness.

Evidence from observation. Although Juliet discussed her use of literature in her interview, and literature use was evident throughout the classroom setting, I did not witness literature being used during the three observations I conducted in her classroom. The use of current events was revealed as an unexpected teaching practice. While Juliet created a classroom-culture embedded with social justice, Juliet made the conscious choice to have a separate social justice time in her weekly schedule for discussion on topics of fairness, wants and needs, and diversity as foundations for understanding other social justice issues.

Discussion. Classroom discussion or dialogue is defined as reflective conversation about a topic (Au et al., 2007; Kuby, 2013; Phillips, 2012). The following code words were used to organize data related to discussion: Discussion.

Debbie Marie interview. Classroom discussions were a commonly used practice at the research site both for classroom meetings and curriculum focused discussions. Debbie Marie explained that discussions may be generated by a question from either the students or the teacher. She admitted sometimes it is a planned discussion, and sometimes Debbie Marie pointed out “somebody else being inspired or excited about something, and asking questions can bring up
questions for me” thereby initiating the discussion. Debbie Marie added, “So really, like, curiosity about the world and other people and other perspectives, and big questions guide what I do.”

Debbie Marie recognized the essential nature of creating a classroom climate that is conducive to conversations. Debbie Marie asserted her belief in the importance of “creating a safe place to ask questions—and try to find some answers.”

**Evidence from observation.** Using observations, I discovered discussions were prominently used as a teaching practice in the classroom. The use of discussion and knowledge sharing were in constant use during all three observations. Some discussions were initiated by the work students were doing; other times discussions were initiated by the material being read. The following excerpts from researcher-observation field notes presents examples of discussions observed:

**November 29, 2016:** Debbie Marie is reading *Harvest of Hope* (Krull, 2003) a story about Cesar Chavez, as students sit on the carpet listening. She is animated in her reading, creating a desire to focus on what is being read. She pauses—“What kind of boy was he?” A quick response from a student is heard. Continues reading—“What is a drought?” Another quick student response. Continues reading—“They had a huge farm and had to sell it”—discussion ensues between the students on reasons behind selling. Debbie Marie responds after some time, “They may not have made lots of money.” Continues reading—“Lost the ranch—do you think that means they made money?” Students respond. Debbie Marie pauses says, “Migrants on farms—what does that remind you of?” Again, discussion ensues as students make connections to previously read books.
**December 1, 2016:** As part of the neighborhood unit, the neighborhood received a letter from a company stating they were going to put a pipeline through their neighborhood (see appendices A). This letter initiated discussions and information gathering about pipelines. Debbie Marie and the students are gathered on the carpet. Debbie says, “We had a talk yesterday, a lot of people were against the pipeline. If we say no where will it go?” Discussion ensues—“Do we use oil for cars? Homes? What do we do if we don’t want it in our neighborhood?” More discussion happens while Mayors return to a meeting to discuss the matter.

**December 5, 2016:** Debbie Marie informs the students the Dakota Pipeline has been halted. She begins reading a news article *The Lessons from Standing Rock Organizing and Resistance Can Win* (Klein, 2016). “How many people here are 7?” Looks around at raised hands. “How many people here are 8?” Again, looks around. “I want to share something with you about a girl just a little older than you.” Debbie Marie continues reading the article sharing the story of a 13-year-old who protests. “What do you think about this news?” Students respond. Continues reading the article. “The people building have money, police, military, water cannons, weapons and power on their side” “What did the Native American’s have?” Class discussion begins.

It was evident throughout the observation in Debbie Marie’s classroom that it was important to her that student had an opportunity to express their opinions. She was consistent in her use of questions to promote thinking and connect student prior knowledge to the issues being discussed

*Marjorie interview.* Research data indicated that discussions were repeatedly used in Marjorie’s classroom. Marjorie commented that during enhanced lessons or just for regular
community activities, discussions were common. Marjorie said, “I think they [observers] would see and hear kids asking a lot of questions, or having conversations about things that they hear.” Marjorie noted that sometimes a book that was selected as a read-aloud becomes a catalyst for deep conversation. Marjorie shared an example during our interview:

MARJORIE: I read that book that’s over there, *Lilian’s Right to Vote* (Winter & Evans, 2015), about the . . . voting rights act of 1965—

RESEARCHER: Mm-hmm.

MARJORIE:—and we’ve read through it twice, and it was just going to be a read-aloud, but it’s full of so much. I don’t know if you’ve read it.

RESEARCHER: I haven’t.

MARJORIE: It’s like, really great. And it talks all about, you know, kind of black history and people who got to vote.

RESEARCHER: Mm-hmm.

MARJORIE: And so, we read it a couple times. We spent a lot of time discussing stuff that’s going on, so trying to get kids to think deeper would be kind of my goal.

Later, Marjorie explained the discussion around this text included a talk about an angry mob telling the family they couldn’t vote and the mob burning a cross. Marjorie implied that she created understanding by discussing what an angry mob is and having students reflect how scared they would be if they were in the situation. When explaining the use of discussions Marjorie cautioned, “It isn’t always necessarily a specific lesson, but things just kind of come up, and so we talked about—talk about them when they happen, also.”

*Evidence from observation.* Observation protocol data indicated the use of classroom discussions during all three observations. During the first observation Marjorie used discussion
to set context for the story. During observation 2 Marjorie’s discussions were less whole group and more with small groups of children or individuals. This was mostly a work session for students. Marjorie had small discussions with students by asking them questions. For example, Marjorie would ask students to explain the meaning behind the symbols they had chosen or would ask students to talk about where their family comes from for deeper examination of their origins. Marjorie offered support but she encouraged support between students. The following is a reflective note on student support from the researcher’s observation field notes made during the observation:

**November 28, 2016:** Marjorie is encouraging the students to support one another. So much of this lesson is student work time. It is so hard to ignore the rich conversation from the children about their families. Students keep wanting to talk to me and share about their project. I will be excited to see the artifacts.

Observation 3 was conducted during a day when Marjorie’s class was working on their neighborhood unit. Marjorie read a letter from a family coming to Friendship Town (see Appendix F). After some whole-class discussion about this news, Marjorie asked the students the following questions: “Why would someone move to a new country?” and “How can we be a welcoming community?” Marjorie used students answers to her questions to create a classroom chart with the students (see Figure 12).
Interview data revealed that discussions as a teaching practice were perceived as an essential component in Juliet’s classroom. Discussions may be facilitated because of a classroom justice issue, a story, or some event of interest to the students or teacher. Juliet revealed that she usually starts off with a question. She described a recent lesson she started with a question, “Like our initial lesson was, “What is fair?” And then I just let them go at it. And I find some way to record it because I want it to, again, be an overtone of our class (see Figure 13). So if they said, “This is fair”—we can go back and refer to it.”
Figure 13. Artifact from the initial lesson on “What is Fair?”

Juliet suggested that she uses discussions as a means of teaching young children about multiple perspectives through peer interaction. Juliet explained, “I think that they come away with multiple perspectives, whether they believe or agree with what another person is saying, or even what their teacher is saying. They don’t have to agree with it.”

Evidence from observation. Teacher observation protocol data indicated that Juliet used discussion as a teaching practice in all three observations (see Table 6). In observation 1 discussions were used to center student ideas about fairness and to establish shared vocabulary around the Dakota Access Pipeline. The discussion continued as the teacher and students created a whole class fair/unfair chart (see Figure 14). In observation 2 discussion continued around the terms fair and unfair with regard to the pipeline and additional perspectives were added to the
chart. The following is an excerpt from the observation field notes that depicts Juliet sharing students’ thinking:

**November 29, 2016:** Juliet instructs students, tell a friend something you are wondering, hopes, or thinking. Individual students share. Juliet says [student] is believing fish might be able to breath in oil. [Student] hopes if the pipeline breaks no animals will be in the water. [Student] hoping it doesn’t break and make people move. [Student] thinking not just animals on the land but unsafe for our pets.

![Figure 14. Fair and Unfair Pipeline chart](image)

The focus of observation 3 continued with the ideas of wants and needs. Juliet began the discussion by acknowledging that children had been talking to parents about the pipeline and their knowledge about wants and needs. Students were encouraged to respond with their perspective on wants and needs. Juliet used one question that brought a lot of conversation: “Do you need money?” For the final discussion before completing the writing artifact, Juliet instructed students, “I would like you to share with our class something we need for us to
survive.” Juliet created a class web from what children shared as an item to reference during the creation of the student artifact (see Figure 15).

![Figure 15. Needs web from Juliet’s observation 3](image)

**Knowledge construction.** Knowledge Construction is defined as an active meaning-making process where students reflect on, challenge, and change the way they view and interact with knowledge (Banks, 2001; Gay, 2003). The following code words were used to organize data related to knowledge construction: knowledge construction.

**Debbie Marie interview.** Debbie Marie emphasized the importance of hearing multiple perspectives as a means of creating understanding. She described this when talking about her own learning and how she applied it to her teaching in the following transcript:

DEBBIE MARIE: I teach kind of, uh, how I learn, which is, um, not linear and involves a lot of out loud processing with other people, talking about things.

RESEARCHER: Mm-hmm.
DEBBIE MARIE: —hearing different ways that people think about the same idea. The same book or story, the same historical moment . . . and hearing all these different approaches and ways that people think—and that helps me grow and think, um, you know, in a more-rich way.

Debbie Marie explained her classroom process, which aids in knowledge construction, as “asking students questions for them to make their own, uh, connections—follow their own thought process.” For example, she described asking students the following questions to elicit critical thinking, “Well, why did that happen? Why do you think that happened? Why would that be okay? What makes this, you know, period of time different from now?”

Evidence from observation. Observation data revealed that the structure of Debbie Marie’s classroom created the conditions for knowledge construction to exist. Through the creation of a safe place, Debbie Marie fostered an environment where students’ thoughts and feelings were honored making it conducive for them to fully participate in learning. The creation of the neighborhood unit produced opportunities for students to examine their thinking, learn about the experiences of other people, and practice democratic citizenship on local and global issues. Debbie Marie’s selection of multicultural books and open discussions about societal issues built students’ skills in examining information and finding the missing stories.

Marjorie interview. The interview data revealed that Marjorie perceived knowledge construction as a vital aspect of her teaching practice. Marjorie discussed the significance of presenting new information to students that may challenge their current knowledge:

I think little kids are—have an innate sense of fairness—so it’s really interesting. When you talk to them about things, they just sometimes—the looks on their faces, and their shock that stuff . . . goes on in the world, or did at one time, um, I just think it’s important
for kids to know, and that maybe they can make a change themselves. Or be part of change.

Marjorie articulated knowledge construction as an essential component to challenging misconceptions. Marjorie commented on this when she talked about wanting the children to make connections between events and stories. “And that they question things that they hear about . . . That not everything you hear is true or accurate.” She explained that the day before, a student had identified the character Lilian from the previously mentioned book, as Rosa Parks. She stated that the student described the character as, “You know, that tired really poor old woman that um, had to sit on the back of the bus.” Marjorie observed, “So we have to work on that story now, I thought. Because they, they also have inaccurate information.”

Although multicultural literature was regularly used, Marjorie reported the use of timelines, audio clips, and video clips to assist in bringing context to the information being discussed. For example, she noted the creation of a timeline of George Washington Carver’s life to connect student knowledge of slavery during the time and track his accomplishments.

Evidence from observation. Observation protocol data indicated that knowledge construction was constantly implemented to produce new understanding during all three observations. During observation 1 and 2 students were challenged with taking the information they gained from interviewing their elders and creating an artifact that represented their family. Observation 1, 2 and 3 offered opportunities for students to increase knowledge about key vocabulary to foster a deeper understanding of the literature and discussions on the topics presented in the lessons. The research and discussion during observation 3 created an opportunity for students to reflect on what it takes to be a welcoming community.
**Juliet interview.** Juliet referred to knowledge construction as a regular part of creating understanding. She described the following example based on a general injustice lesson around homes:

JULIET: Like, you know, like people who don’t have homes. Like, we can be learning about, the word tent—

RESEARCHER: Uh-huh.

JULIET: —or the sound T, and I will hold up the picture of a tent, and I’ll talk about, “This is somebody’s home. Like, what do you think about when you see a tent?” And a lot of them will say camping.

RESEARCHER: Uh-huh.

JULIET: Because that’s their experience. But I’ll throw in there, this is also [can]—be considered someone’s home.

Juliet endorsed the challenging of student knowledge as a basic component of building a social justice foundation and creating awareness of multiple perspectives.

**Evidence from observation.** Teacher observation protocol data indicated the use of knowledge construction as a teaching practice in all three observations. The following excerpt from observation field notes exhibits Juliet building knowledge around the word fair:

**November 29, 2016:** Juliet displays a previously used chart that says “Fair.” I see the word fair. Juliet reads the statements written around the word. What does fair mean? Juliet requests student input. Students respond and Juliet repeats each child’s statement. She adds having the same amount, making a deal, taking turns, having good manners, and taking a break (see Figure 13).
Juliet used classroom discussions and the creation of multiple classroom anchor charts to assist children in building their knowledge and gaining diverse perspectives on the topics. These charts were continually referred to for clarification and adapted as children gained new knowledge.

**Current events.** I am defining current events as present-time news and events. The use of current events was not originally identified in the researcher’s conceptual framework but emerged as a teaching practice through data analysis. The term Current Events was used as a code word for organization of data.

**Debbie Marie interview.** Debbie Marie discussed current events as bringing an awareness of the real world into the classroom. Specifically, she expressed a belief in not just teaching children about change makers in history, but people who are currently working to make the world a better place. Debbie Marie acknowledged that sometimes students come to class with knowledge of current events from the news or family discussions and need a place to express their concerns or questions in a safe space.

**Evidence from observation.** Data revealed the use of current events as a teaching practice within the classroom. During both the second and third observations, current event articles were read concerning the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline (Nichols, 2016), the environmental concerns presented by protesters (Klein, 2016) and an article by Jack Healy (2016) that presented both sides of the argument. Additionally, during the third observation while discussing the temporary halt of the pipeline, Debbie Marie presented a video of 13-year-old Tokata Iron Eyes, one of the water protectors from the Standing Rock reservation (Naomi Klein, 2016). The video discussed her role as one of the youth leaders of the movement and how empowered she felt from the denial of the easement. Debbie Marie presented materials for the students to learn
about how many pipelines exist in the United States and students initiated their own research on pipeline accidents. Additional material was presented on alternative forms of energy.

*Marjorie interview.* During the time of this research study, I was aware that conversations about the topic of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election were happening in the school community. During data collection, Marjorie was the only teacher who made any reference to the election, with the previously discussed book on institutional racism associated with voter rights. This current event topic generated additional opportunities for teachers to present literature and have discussions centered on standing up to injustices. The most prominent research data collection happened after the election when Marjorie discussed, “we wanted this year to start including some things like global warming and climate refugees . . . incorporate that in like, our neighborhood, and then our animals and habitats [unit].” The following transcript talks about that experience:

**MARJORIE:** Because we had that oil pipeline go through, and then we started researching it. Kids just wanted to know more about it, and I had no idea—like how many pipelines there are in the U.S., and how many accidents there have been, and—

**RESEARCHER:** Right.

**MARJORIE:** —what a slant the oil companies put. Because we read their point of view also.

The following piece of transcript compared Marjorie’s experience this time to past neighborhood units:

**MARJORIE:** Well, we’ve done better I think this year than ever before—

**RESEARCHER:** Uh-huh.
MARJORIE: —because the problems were sort of abstract things. Like there was a volcano erupting or a hurricane coming, but—this time, and I think because we had that display out there in the hallway—it was something that they could relate to—

RESEARCHER: Right.

MARJORIE: —that was like, really happening in the world.

RESEARCHER: Mm-hmm.

MARJORIE: So, it was more— much more meaningful.

Evidence from observation. Observational data revealed the use of current events as a teaching practice within the classroom. Although I was aware of current events being used during other portions of the neighborhood unit, including the discussions and work with regard to the Dakota Access pipeline, in Marjorie’s room, data for the current event attribute was only available during the third observation. The previously mentioned letter from a refugee family to the town was used to foster a personal connection between the community members. Marjorie included the use of newspaper articles and videos about the effects of climate change on the Marshall Islands to raise student awareness. The books and classroom discussions assisted students in gaining some understanding about why someone might move from their home.

Juliet interview. Research data revealed that Juliet emphasized current events topics as essential to social justice teaching. Juliet asserted “there is a lot happening in the world that is not happening here, but it is still important that we are learning about what is happening in the world.” Juliet reported teaching about Nepal several years ago because that was a current situation that needed “awareness and assistance.” In the interview Juliet commented that last year with Flint’s water issues in the news and connections to local lead issues in the drinking water, all of it was so current that it made sense to focus on water. “It’s just like, how do you not
talk about that?” In this way awareness for the teachers and students leads to discussion. This year, Juliet revealed homelessness as the concept being focused on which is a significant issue affecting school children and families across the country and has had an impact locally (Bolt, 2015–2016).

*Evidence from observation.* Observation research data revealed the use of current events as an unexpected teaching practice. The topic of fairness was examined during Observation 1 and 2 using information about the Dakota Access Pipeline. Juliet had previously visited and read information on display in the research sites hallway (see Figure 16). During observation 1 Juliet presented a video of a young water protector discussing the impact of the Dakota Access pipeline (Upworthy, 2016). Observation 3 touched on the issue of homelessness by building a foundation around understanding wants and needs.
Juliet. Juliet described her teaching practice as “always having social justice at the forefront.” She explained she could be reading any book and still the questions are there, “Like, how is this person in the story being treated? How would you see that in the real world? It’s always that connection between what’s happening in the classroom, what’s happening in a book, what’s happening in whatever we’re learning about and how does that relate to the outside world? How does that relate to, you know, what people are receiving in terms of basic needs, and what’s fair? What’s not fair?”

Conceptual Framework-Category 3: Child Development

The conceptual framework for this study examined children’s capacity towards social justice concepts. The conceptual framework demonstrated that children are capable of
recognizing differences, tolerating diversity, and exhibiting empathy. The research data revealed evidence of recognizing differences, tolerating diversity, and exhibiting empathy. The research data additionally revealed the perception of children as social actors.

**Recognition of differences.** Recognition of differences is defined as the awareness of diverse perspectives and characteristics of people and ideas (Kelly & Brooks, 2005; Lee, Ramsey, & Sweeney, 2008). The following code words were used to organize data related to recognition of difference: recognition of difference and multiple perspectives.

**Debbie Marie interview.** Debbie Marie perceived her students as capable of realizing there are many different experiences in the world. Debbie Marie asserted:

I know that the way they think now is to think about what other people might be experiencing in a certain situation, and being able to make connections—between historical events, or—other people that they’ve studied. Um, I know that, uh, some of my students, um, seem to—I don’t know. Have been like— touched on a certain issue that becomes a passion, or very meaningful for them.

Debbie Marie’s use of resources and topics suggested that she strongly felt that students had the capacity to experience other perspectives and incorporate that knowledge into their thinking.

**Evidence from observation debriefs.** Debbie Marie perceived children learning about multiple perspectives through the examination of books read about change makers. Debbie Marie suggested, “references to other change makers gave me evidence that students were broadening their perspective taking.” Debbie Marie noted that children were engaged with multiple perspectives through the presentation of both sides of the pipeline issue.
Evidence from parent interviews. Both parents expressed their children have a better awareness of differences among peoples’ experiences. D.M. Parent 1 expressed, “she has talked more about people of color being like—she didn’t use the word discriminated against—but being treated differently. When that was really not in her wheelhouse before.” Learning about different cultures and the lives of different people was impactful to the child of D.M. Parent 2.

Evidence from student artifacts. The following student artifact were created by 2nd grade students (see Figure 17). Debbie Marie read the book, *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* (Krull, 2003). The students had a discussion around the information as the story was being read. Students were directed to take out their writing journal and produce a reflection about the story. This could be anything new they learned, feelings or ideas generated from the story. These artifacts were selected because of the awareness of differences though the examination of another person’s experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11-29-16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harvesting Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the story Harvesting Hope, I learned that the march was 300 miles long! We have read many books about marches and freedom and this is one of those good ones! Some other strikes and the DAPL protest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
That people were treated poorly. Kids had to work. And the people were getting blisters.

In Harvesting hope the farmers do not have any money to keep their farms so they have to work at other farms. It isn’t as much fun as work at home. They definitely don’t get enough money. They only get 30¢ a day. Finally he organized a march.

In the book Harvesting Hope, I learned that some people don’t get paid for their job. I also learned that a long time ago people had to work all day long with no bathroom breaks or just breaks.
In the book *Harvesting Hope*, I learned that some people don't get paid for there job. I also learned that a long time ago people had to work all day long with no bathroom breaks or just breaks were you could cool down or drink water.

*Figure 17.* Debbie Marie’s student artifacts expressing recognition of differences.

**Marjorie interview.** Marjorie asserted, “I just think it’s really important that kids, um learn about what’s going on. How people are treated. I think they can handle hearing the truth.” Later in the interview Marjorie declared, “I think kids can handle hard topics, and I think second graders, which I know the best, can talk about difficult things. So I think that they developmentally can do that.” Marjorie emphasized, “In fact, I think we, we should assume that they can think more than we give them credit for . . . everything is not like, you know, ‘and they lived happily ever after.’” While Marjorie argued that kids need to know all stories don’t have a happy ending and sometimes bad things happen, she admitted, “I don’t know that they need to know everything.” She explained that she presents the information at a vocabulary level that they understand but still being truthful about what goes on.

Marjorie indicated that awareness of different perspectives and people is focused on through the examination of historical perspectives but also an investigation into students’ families. Marjorie reported that the school year started with a unit on identity. In this unit, the
students had the opportunity to explore and discuss who they are, and their cultural and group identities. Marjorie discussed that following the focus on self,

we talked about different kinds of families . . . then we do community in second grade.

So, what kind of people are in your community? How are people treated? How are laws made? And then trying to expand outside of that.

*Evidence from observation debriefs.* Marjorie explained that through students’ family research and sharing their knowledge with the classroom community, the students were creating connections between similarities and differences between community members. Additionally, Marjorie viewed presenting diverse perspectives through literature or articles as an important component of student learning because of the limited diversity at the research site. By presenting these multiple perspectives and having discussion, Marjorie hoped children were given the opportunity to gain new knowledge or challenge biased thinking.

*Evidence from parent interviews.* While M. Parent 1 gave little data around recognition of difference M. Parent 2 acknowledged recognition of difference as understanding privilege. M. Parent 2 believed that children were learning about their privilege as it related to their skin color. She expressed a hope that the “conversations continue so that they[children] can protect their, their friend—who may not have the privilege—just based on nothing more than their skin color.” M. Parent 2 noted, “it’s like once your eyes have been opened a little bit [as a parent], then you want to— you want to think about it more and you want to make sure that that, you know, epiphany can happen with your child earlier.”

*Evidence from student artifacts.* The following student artifacts were created by 2nd grade students during their *We Are All Related* lessons (see Figure 18). Students talked with their families to gather symbols, photographs, and wise words from elders. These materials were
used to create their collage. On the left the collages are presented, on the discussion answers used to create the collage. The collages show an awareness of the differences between families.

Although the researcher was unable to attend the display and presentation of the collages, hosted for the families, she was aware of the use of the artifacts as means of building knowledge and acceptance about family culture. With that awareness, the researcher additionally identified the artifacts as 
*

tolerating diversity


Knowing that the presentation created an opportunity for children to exhibit respect and acceptance of the unique features of their classmate’s families.

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*My ancestors come from:*
Puerto Rico, USA, Cuba, Dominican Republic.
*A symbol for my family* is the Coqui because it is from Puerto Rico where most of my family is from.

_Elder: What would you like young people to learn?*_
To love parent and study hard.

*My family thinks We Are All Related means:* That we love each other even if we get mad, and we support each other and help each other.

---

*My ancestors come from:*
Nigeria, Africa, Missouri, Alabama, and Indiana
*A symbol for my family:* our family is like a rock because we are never broken, we are under pressure we turn into diamonds.

_Elder: What would you like young people to learn?*_ I would like young people to learn to treat people how they want to be treated.

*My family thinks We Are All Related means:* We are all from the same blood we all care and love one another.
My ancestors come from:
Saipan
A symbol for my family a latte stone because they were the foundation of the Chamorro house. A turtle because it represents wisdom, knowledge, and longevity.
Elder: What would you like young people to learn? I would like to teach them our language.

My family thinks We Are All Related means: That we are all friends and family. We include not just our family but also our friends. We care for family and friends. We help each other out and we stand up for others even if they are different.

Figure 18. Marjorie’s student artifacts expressing recognition of differences.

Juliet interview. Juliet described child development as “a combination of experiences children have from the time they are born, sometimes before they were born and any experiences they have had since.” Juliet asserted that it especially includes family traditions and cultures. Juliet suggested that attending school assists children in building an awareness of other narratives. Juliet compared the building of foundation skills in social justice in this way,

Look at like, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs—because it’s that—that it’s that thing again.
There’s like, these basic needs and we can’t get to that higher level of thinking and learning unless we have those basic needs. And so, if a child comes in and they haven’t had those basic needs—that’s where we have to start, and that’s what we have to think about before we try to teach them, like, academically.
The data from Juliet’s interview illustrated her belief in children’s ability to have an awareness of diverse perspectives through conversations with their peers. Specifically, Juliet spent time creating opportunities for students to build up their understanding of wants and needs and fairness. These foundations were then used to build on to larger projects reflecting on the cultures and backgrounds of people who were not having their needs met.

*Evidence from observation debriefs.* Juliet suggested that children learning a further distinction between fair and unfair and wants and needs fostered children’s knowledge of different perspectives. Juliet noted “children learned why builders think the pipeline is necessary and fair while those protesting its implementation think it is unfair and a threat to their basic needs.” This presentation of two opposing positions created a situation where children could move beyond awareness.

*Evidence from parent interviews.* While there was little data from J. Parent 1 about recognizing differences, J. Parent 2 discussed her child expressing differences in racial and gender terms. J. Parent 2—Um, so she came home sort of talking about a lot of these issues around like, you know, we treat everyone the same, and it doesn’t matter the color of their skin or what they do, or you know, even she, she came—she comes home and talks about um, she’s like, “You can love anybody you want. Girls can marry girls, and boys can marry boys, and you can—you can love anyone.”

*Evidence from student artifacts.* In the whole class created artifact, children contributed ideas depicting indigenous peoples’ perspectives while the teacher offered the perspectives of the people in support of the pipeline (see Figure 12). This artifact was coded as recognition of difference because students were sharing the perspectives and ideas of the indigenous people.
The class created needs web (see Figure 13), was coded as recognition of differences. The web showed evidence of children beginning to recognize that humans all have similar needs but some people don’t have access.

**Tolerating diversity.** Tolerating diversity is defined as understanding, accepting and respecting similarities and differences among people. (Ruane et al., 2010; Zakin, 2012). The following code words were used to code tolerating diversity: Tolerating Diversity.

**Debbie Marie interview.** The acceptance and respect of similarities and differences among people are a part of Debbie Marie’s community structure. Debbie Marie remarked that “students participating in their community—is a fundamental skill they need to have.” The interaction within the classroom, respectful discussions and class meetings indicated the capacity of accepting and respecting others.

**Evidence from observation debriefs.** Student interactions during discussions and acceptance of differing ideas indicated a level of respect for each community member. Debbie Marie noted discussions around race as they pertained to the Indigenous people, and school-wide discussions on racial inequities revealed a willingness to accept and respect the feeling of others. Debbie Marie explained the collaborative nature of learning through the neighborhood unit presented opportunities for children of different skill levels and backgrounds to learn from one another.

**Evidence from parent interviews.** Both parents discussed how acceptance and respect were discussed in the classroom. D.M. Parent 1 suggested that a discrimination incident in the school made an impact on many people. The incident she referred to was between two children, one who was Black and one who was White. The White student, age 8–9 years old told the other student, who was 5–6 years old, that she wished their school only had White students. The
courage of the young Black student to reveal their pain to a teacher at the school prompted immediate conversations in all classrooms and school wide during assemblies. D.M. Parent 1 suggested it was an important learning opportunity for all the students.

D.M. PARENT 1: And here, nothing really came up until this year when that—that incident happened, and we’re really close with that family.

Researcher: Uh-huh.

D.M. PARENT 1: So she heard a lot about that, and then they talked about it, you know, in the classroom, and—I actually thought it was like, a really good opportunity for all the kids to realize that stuff like this does happen.

Researcher: Right.

D.M. PARENT 1: It could happen right in your neighborhood. And that’s when you have to say, “You know what? It’s just not okay.”

While, D.M. Parent 1 expressed it through a specific incident, D.M. Parent 2 expressed tolerating diversity as a part of the community dynamics. She felt like she witnessed and heard more about how the community was accepting and respecting of each other.

*Evidence from student artifacts.* The following student artifacts were created by 2nd grade students (see Figure 19). Debbie Marie read the book, *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* (Krull, 2003). The students had a discussion around the information as the story was being read. Students were directed to take out their writing journal and produce a reflection about the story. This could be anything new they learned, feeling or ideas generated from the story. The following student artifacts show evidence of the concept of accepting and respecting similarities and differences.
I learned that you have to treat people equally. No matter what color of skin they have. My dad says that he has been beaten up. He also said that I am lucky that I have such light skin color.

I learned that nobody should ever treat anyone poorly. I learned that you shouldn’t fight with violence. I’d rather go on strike. I learned that people from a long time ago have walked 300 miles.

**Figure 19.** Debbie Marie’s student artifacts expressing tolerance for diversity.

**Marjorie interview.** Marjorie discussed the idea of “starting with me, the kid . . . . How do you feel about yourself? And we do lots of stuff about you know, your skin color . . . . who you are, and then sort of expand out, kind of like a ripple effect.” In this description Marjorie indicated that accepting and respecting the things that are unique about each individual in the community is discussed and then expanded to looking at families and beyond.
Evidence from observation debriefs. Marjorie viewed acceptance as a learning component fostered through the We Are All Related collages that children created about their families. Marjorie asserted, “The diverse nature of families is accepted as fact and the students don’t think twice about it. Maybe that might be different in a different school or with a different group, but this group has been accepting of differences.” Marjorie pointed out that the structure of the neighborhood project presented opportunities for students to work collaboratively with students at different skill levels, creating opportunities for mutual support.

Evidence from parent interviews. M. Parent 1 and 2 discussed part of accepting and respecting differences as an awareness of the privileges that some people have, and other people don’t. D.M. Parent 2 asserts that her child has exhibited more awareness about racial inequities.

Evidence from student artifacts. The research data did not contain any student artifacts to illustrate the concept of tolerating diversity.

Juliet interview. The interview data suggested that Juliet perceived children as capable of respecting and accepting differences. In the interview Juliet related this to children’s learning, “they come away with multiple perspectives, whether they believe or agree with what another person is saying, or even what their teacher is saying.” Juliet described opportunities for children to learn about similarities and differences through the material that she brought in centered on the student and family community.

Evidence from observation debriefs. Juliet explained that classroom discussions offered opportunities for children to practice respecting the differences between their ideas and skill development. As an example, Juliet reported that a student in the class chose to vote for the pipeline, she was the only one who voted that it was fair. According to Juliet, when she shared
her writing, the other children were respectful of her perspective even though it was contrary to everyone else’s.

*Evidence from parent interviews.* A comment made by one of Juliet’s parents indicated the child was bringing home information about diverse people and families. J. Parent 2, “I just love conversations about it, and understanding that not every family looks like ours. Not every life looks like ours.”

*Evidence from student artifacts.* The research data did not contain any student artifacts to illustrate the concept of tolerating diversity.

**Empathy.** Empathy is defined as understanding or identifying with another person’s feelings or experiences (Hawkins, 2014; Louie, 2005). Kuhmerker (1975) adds that it is social perspective taking and the developments of the rudiments of a sense of justice. The following code words were used to code empathy: Empathy.

**Debbie Marie interview.** Debbie Marie expressed empathy as a fundamental component to society. She expounded, “When we teach kids to see other people’s pain and struggle, and how they’ve had to fight and have courage and try to overcome something—whether they’re successful or not—we’re teaching them empathy.” Debbie Marie asserted the essential nature of empathy development, “We’re teaching them how to take somebody else’s perspective, and that is just something that’s sorely lacking in a large segment of our population, and it’s really a fundamental, like, cause of our misery in this country right now.”

Debbie Marie viewed empathy and protectiveness as being developed on the local level in her classroom, but also on a global level. As supported by the following quotation, Debbie Marie believed the children should be exposed to other types of people and beliefs and experiences beyond their own: “There is a huge world out there. A lot of different experiences.
Some much more privileged than yours and some much less, and being able to recognize that and recognize that your experience is not it.” Creating this awareness of other people’s experiences and connecting them to self builds an environment for empathy to develop.

Evidence from observation debriefs. Through the articles and discussions of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, and the hypothetical pipeline going through the classroom town, Debbie Marie observed that her students began to empathize with the protesters from the Dakota pipeline as they gained more information. During Debbie Marie’s final observation, which happened to be the day the Dakota pipeline was stopped, Debbie Marie showed a video of the 13-year-old girl who started the movement with other youth members. After watching the video and listening to Debbie Marie’s discussion with students, the researcher made the following observation in her field notes:

December 5, 2016: Debbie Marie started the video featuring a 13-year-old girl who started the movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline. The classroom was extremely quiet as everyone watched the screen. The young girl was told the pipeline was halted and the classroom experienced an emotional reaction. I feel it was a very moving and powerful video.

During the observation debrief Debbie Marie discussed how moving the video was for the students. Debbie Marie commented on how focused the classroom students were during the video and how the class cheered. Debbie Marie revealed, “I don’t know if you noticed but one of the students cried during the video.” Additionally, Debbie Marie commented, “Students were worried about how it would impact another location if they said no.” Debbie Marie asserted, “I know that the way they think now is to think about what other people might be experiencing in a
certain situation, and being able to make connections. Kids start caring about things and doing something about it.”

Evidence from parent interviews. Both parents agreed that the students exhibited awareness of and respect for differences and similarities among people. D.M. Parent 2 described the impacts of the social justice lessons as building empathy for other classmates, and empathy for the different cultures they were learning about. D.M. Parent 1 explained how her student had shown concern about the welfare of a person living in their car. D.M. Parent 2 discussed that her student was focusing on “looking out for and caring for other people.”

Evidence from student artifacts. The following student artifact were created by 2nd grade students (see Figure 20). Debbie Marie read the book, *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* (Krull, 2003). The students had a discussion around the information as the story was being read. Students were directed to take out their writing journal and produce a reflection about the story. This could be anything new they learned, such as feelings or ideas generated from the story. The following student artifacts exhibit student awareness of others and a connection to self.
I learned that you shouldn’t fight you should use your words. I didn’t like when the boss said when you complain you either get beaten up or murdered. My favorite part was when they won the war with no violence.

Harvesting hope.
I think that it was unfair that they worked all day for 30 cents. So unfair.
Marjorie interview. Marjorie expressed empathy as perspective taking. She explained empathy as students “thinking about themselves and how people are treated.” In action, Marjorie described this by relating events in a book to children’s feelings to create understanding and empathy. She explained, “Like in that book [Lilian’s Right to Vote] (Winter & Evans, 2015), they talk about an angry mob telling the family they couldn’t vote, and they burned the cross, and we talked about, What’s an angry mob? Look at how scared you would be.”

Evidence from observation debriefs. Marjorie observed children exhibiting empathy during their neighborhood unit. Marjorie believed the work and discussions around the fictitious family coming from the Marshal Islands, gave evidence of how the children were connecting to the situation. “Learning about the island—the rising water and how hard it would be to leave your home and come to a strange place.” Using their newly acquired knowledge, the student community created a list of ideas for how to make Friendship Town a welcoming community for the new family.

Evidence from parent interviews. Both parents discussed empathy as their children expressed their feeling about issues related to another person’s experience. During her interview M. Parent 2 expressed her child exhibiting empathy in the following way:
M. PARENT 2: Now, we’ve- we live uh, close to a family, um, that has a kindergartener and a second grader, and they’re black, and the kindergartener had someone say something very mean to him.

RESEARCHER: Mm-hmm.

M. PARENT 2: —this year. And um, he came home and said, “Did you hear that this happened?” And I had gotten the email from the mom, and I said, “Yes. What do you think about that?” And he’s like, “I’m so mad.” God, it actually makes me kind of tear up.

RESEARCHER: Uh-huh.

M. PARENT 2: Because he was like, “I am so mad, why would someone say something like that?” Like, he was really upset.

M. Parent 2 additionally noted her children expressing empathy about the Native Americans. She said, “it was really clear that it really bothered him that there was this group of people that, um, seemed to have no say in what was being done to their land.”

M. Parent 1 described her child’s demonstration of empathy exhibited through conversations about the fictitious family coming from the Marshall Islands to their classroom neighborhood. She explained, “a lot of conversations about climate change, and what that means, and the Marshall Islands especially, since we’ve really—they’ve really, personalized that place—and how sad, you know, just—a lot of emotion tied to like, how life must be for the people there.”

Evidence from student artifacts. The student-created classroom chart from observation 3, exhibited empathy (see Figure 12). The chart displayed student generated ideas about how the
community could be welcoming. This required students to have some understanding about the family, their experiences, and the feelings they may have as newcomers.

**Juliet interview.** Juliet noted that she perceives empathy as innate in all human beings. She feels that all children can express empathy, but some children need more time to build the skills. In her classroom structure children have daily practice showing compassion for one another.

**Evidence from observation debriefs.** The discussions on fairness and unfairness of the pipeline presented children with the chance to understand deeper how people were feeling and then used that information to present their feelings. Juliet perceived children as expressing empathy after the discussions of wants and needs through their writing. Students were instructed to select and write about one need they would imagine going without, and the emotions that would arise if the need was not fulfilled.

**Evidence from parent interviews.** Both parents stated that they had observed their children expressing components of empathy. J. Parent 2 described her child as having “just maybe a little bit more openness or—just more awareness of people.” J. Parent 1 noted, “I think the wants and needs, had an impact on his desire to help others.” J. Parent 1 added, “So, I think he’s starting to understand that we may have resources, but other people don’t.”

**Evidence from student artifacts.** The following student artifacts build on empathy development around the experiences of the Indigenous people protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline (see Figure 21). Upon learning about different perspectives about the Dakota Access Pipeline and having multiple conversations to understand the perspectives of those involved, the children were asked to write and draw their opinion with supporting reasoning. These artifacts exhibit students’ awareness and concern for people, animals, and the environment. I included
the last student artifact because it stood out as an example of a child who had awareness but, who
found the results acceptable.

I think the pipeline is not fair because it goes into the people houses and destroys buildings.

I think the pipeline is not fair because cuz I am scared the pipeline might break.

I think the pipeline is not fair because would have made people die. I care about it.
I think the pipeline is not fair because I am sad about the animals.

I think the pipeline is not fair because it gets in to the water and people get sick.

I think the pipeline is fair because I want trees to die.

Figure 21. Juliet’s student artifacts expressing empathy around pipeline lessons.

The following student artifacts expressed children’s understandings from the lesson on wants and needs (see Figure 22). Students were instructed to choose/write about one need they would have to go without and their emotions as a result. The intention of the writing was to develop or increase empathy for the homeless population. The students’ writing revealed that they saw food, water, homes and love as important things that are needed to survive.
If I did not have water I would feel sick because if I did not have water I would maybe I would die.

If I did not have a home I would feel sad because I would be freezing cold.

If I did not have food I would feel sad because food makes you not die.
If I did not have water, I would feel sad because I need water to survive.

If I did not have love, I would feel afraid because no one would love me.

If I did not have a home, I would feel sad because I would be cold.
If I did not have love I would feel embarrassed because other children would have love.

Figure 22. Juliet’s student artifacts expressing empathy around people’s wants and needs.

Social Actors. A social actor is an individual, who has purpose, and who influences as well as who is open to being influenced; as people who construct relationships and childhoods, and who can report on and discuss their experience (Mayall, 1999, p. 12). The following code words were used to code social actors: social actors, self-advocacy, and social action.

Debbie Marie interview. Debbie Marie revealed her belief in children’s abilities,

I personally think that my students think about really big issues and make really amazing connections—and come out of my class being critical thinkers and know how to ask questions, and knowing how to researcher a question on their own, and how to talk about things and how to respect other people’s point of view.

Debbie Marie asserted that every year children start caring about things and begin taking action. “I mean, every year, kids will come up with ideas to write letters to somebody—like a persuasive letter about something that’s actually meaningful.”

Evidence from observation debriefs. According to Debbie Marie, some of the students were motivated to action after their hypothetical town was impacted by a proposed pipeline. “A
few students created protest signs at home, some students completed research at home on how many pipeline accidents have happened in each state to get a clearer understanding of how many places are impacted, and some students wrote stories for the hypothetical town newspaper.”

These student-initiated actions present students as social actors. Following a democratic process, the town community held an election to vote on the implementation of the pipeline. Much like the real protesters of the pipeline, the community members in the classroom opposed the pipeline and unanimously voted “no” on the pipeline.

**Evidence from parent interviews.** Both parents perceived their children as applying their knowledge through sharing. D.M. Parent 1 described her child as both sharing and seeking new information. She noted that her daughter initiated discussions about racial inequities and discussions about treating people with respect as a way of sharing information. D.M. Parent 2 expressed her child as an actor through her new-found desire to share her knowledge with family and friends. She also expressed that her child has more self-confidence and will stand up for herself. D.M. Parent 2 added that her student has a deep interest in reading informational text on many topics. Both D.M. Parent 1 and D.M. Parent 2 reported that following the presidential election, their students initiated regular conversations to try and understand the current events.

**Evidence from student artifacts.** The research data did not contain any student artifacts to illustrate the concept of students as social actors.

**Marjorie interview.** Marjorie perceived children as social actors through their engagement in classroom discussions and the neighborhood unit. Marjorie described children as voicing a desire to make changes when gaining knowledge about things they deemed unfair. Children participated in community roles and responsibilities in the neighborhood unit. Participation as a social actor extended to sharing new knowledge with family members.
Evidence from observation debriefs. Marjorie reported that children were “teaching parents about climate change and the oil pipelines” and that the parents have been “very supportive.” Marjorie pointed out that children went home and did things on their own. As one example, Marjorie noted that students were interested in researching more information on how many oil pipelines in the U.S. and accidents involving the pipelines.

Evidence from parent interviews. Both parents explained their children as exhibiting new actions of informing family members of new knowledge and initiated conversations. M. Parent 1 observed her child regularly bringing up topics during dinner or sometime the same day.

M. PARENT 1 discussed her hopes as, and it’s a great privilege to live in a bubble, and that’s just not—that’s not where we should be, especially moving into a year like we’re moving into, that’s just not the right choice.

RESEARCHER: Right.

M. PARENT 1: Um, so yeah. That’s, that’s my hope, is that this motivates some, some action, and at least, uh, uh, a consciousness um, that goes beyond just sort of our happy little house.

M. Parent 2 discussed in her interview her children sharing information and concerns about a racial discrimination incident discussed at school. He voiced a lack of understanding about why someone would treat someone in an unfair way and it provided opportunities for the family to have a discussion. M. Parent 2 voiced that he shared information about the pipeline at home.

Evidence from student artifacts. The research data did not contain any student artifacts to illustrate the concept of students as social actors. All data available was anecdotal from parents and teachers.
**Juliet interview.** Interview data suggested that Juliet saw student engagement and advocacy as indicators that they are building skills from the social justice lessons. Juliet described students bringing in personal experience to lessons and using their skills past the classroom as strong indicators. Juliet pointed out that sometimes empathy comes out in actions. She described this idea in the following way: “If they’re out on recess and they’re, you know, protecting a child that they see that something is not fair—there’s an inequality—then I know they are taking it [their learning] out past the classroom.

**Evidence from observation debriefs.** Juliet indicated that she perceived students as social actors through the sharing of knowledge with family members and participation in the democratic process of voting. Juliet noted during the first observation debrief that she perceived children were participating as social actors when they submitted a paper with a happy or sad face to indicate whether they perceived the pipeline as fair or unfair. Students were going home and sharing information with family members about the Dakota Access Pipeline. Juliet noted, “I received a drawing of 2 sides of people arguing about the pipeline from a father who said his daughter talked non-stop about the pipeline and made the illustrations the first day.” Juliet commented that she had received emails for parents showing appreciation for the discussions that children were having with their parents at home.

**Evidence from parent interviews.** Both J. Parent 1 and J. Parent 2 indicated that their children came home and shared with parents about their new knowledge. J. Parent 2 commented that her child, “came home and drew pictures explaining about wants and needs and the issues around the pipeline.” J. Parent 1 and 2 suggested that their children expressed their own desire to participate in the homelessness supply drive. Supporting their efforts, parents fostered their children’s expressed desire to help others by participating in the service learning activities.
Evidence from student artifacts. The research data did not contain any student artifacts to illustrate the concept of students as social actors. The researcher was not able to obtain a copy of the drawing that Juliet mentioned in her observation debrief or the drawings J. Parent 2 referred to in her interview.

Summary

This chapter presented an analysis of the data collected as it related to the case study attributes presented in the study’s framework. The study presented an analysis of the attributes related to social justice, teacher practice and child development through the three phases of data collection: teacher interview, observation and observation debrief, student artifact review and parent interview. While this chapter examined each of the attributes, the next Chapter presents a discussion of the propositions, and attempts to draw conclusions from the research findings to answer the research questions.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This descriptive case study explored the perceptions and practices of three teachers who teach social justice concepts to their kindergarten and 2nd grade students. The study investigated: (a) how teachers perceive social justice teaching, (b) the teaching practices participants used to support social justice teaching, and (c) the teachers’ perceptions of child development with regard to social justice capacities of their students. Chapter 4 offered a detailed analysis and presentation of the data organized by the conceptual framework attributes that guided the case study. The researcher presented findings in that chapter from each data collection method in a manner that revealed the relationships with the case study attributes. In this chapter, the researcher will discuss and evaluate the results in order to answer the study’s research questions:

1. What do teachers perceive about how instruction on social justice concepts impact early grade learners in classroom settings?

2. What do teachers perceive about how this instruction influences learner perceptions regarding their role in society?

The first section provides a summary of the data results presented in Chapter 4, which is followed by a discussion of the results in relation to each research question. Next, the chapter contains a discussion of the results in relation to the literature, and then limitations of the study are considered. Finally, implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory are presented. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research and final conclusions for the study.
Summary of Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the perceptions and practices of three teachers who teach social justice concepts to kindergarten and 2nd grade students in an urban elementary school setting and to understand the impacts of these lessons on the children and their families. This study addressed two central questions: (a) What do teachers perceive about how instruction on social justice concepts impact early grade learners in classroom settings?, and (b) What do teachers perceive about how this instruction influences learner perceptions regarding their role in society?

The researcher addressed the primary research questions for this study through a single case study design guided by the following attributes: (a) social justice perspectives in education; (b) teacher practices used for implementing such perspectives; and (c) child development theories that work to explain children’s capacities for social justice. Data was collected using semi-structured teacher interviews, formal teacher observation, observation debrief, semi-structured parent interviews, and student artifact review. Collecting data from multiple data sources provided a larger array of information to draw from (Yin, 2014). The convergence of each piece of data contributed to the researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon.

Analysis of the attributes of social justice revealed that the teacher participants perceived social justice through a combination of lenses rather than following one social justice pedagogy. In Chapter 4 ecological justice was presented as an additional social justice instruction lens that was being used by participants in the study. Data on the teacher practices attribute revealed participants’ routine use of children’s literature for social justice lessons. Data also showed that classroom discussions, which teachers facilitated using open-ended questions in order to elicit knowledge-construction and perspective-taking, were a consistent practice among the study
participants. The researcher found that all three teachers used current events to bring the real world into the classroom. As a method of discussing ecological justice, economic injustice and racial injustice, the teachers focused on current events associated with the Dakota Access Pipeline, climate refugees, and local issues of homelessness. The focus on such deep concepts with kindergarten and 2nd grade students was an unexpected finding. Additionally, the researcher discovered that the two 2nd grade teachers used a storyline method to construct an engaging framework for their social justice teaching. The use of current events and storyline for teaching social justice concepts was an unexpected finding that was not previously discovered in the literature, prior to or during the study. Data on the attribute of child development exhibited that teachers perceived children as having the capacity for empathy, tolerating diversity, and recognizing difference. The data additionally revealed a teacher perception of children as social actors.

The following section contains a discussion of the research results. The discussion begins with the three propositions that guided this research and then moves into a discussion based on the two research questions.

**Discussion of Results**

The qualitative case study’s conceptual framework centered on social justice education, teacher practice and child development. Review of relevant literature was guided by these three attributes. The following three propositions were developed based on the review of current literature and used to guide the research study:

1. Teachers perceive social justice as essential for consciousness raising and transforming society.
2. Teachers perceive literature and language acquisition as essential elements of understanding social justice concepts.

3. Children have the capacity to understand and incorporate social justice into their understanding of the world.

Through teacher interviews, classroom observations, observation debriefs, parent interviews, and student artifact analysis, the researcher sought to acquire data to answer the two research questions that frame this research. What follows is a discussion of results in relation to research questions.

**Research question 1: What do teachers perceive about how instruction on social justice concepts impact early grade learners (kindergarten and 2nd grade) in classroom settings?**

*Teachers perceive social justice concept instruction as enhancing students’ skills for participating in a diverse society.* Society’s growing diversity is a fundamental fact that must be addressed in our education system to create a society that is equitable for all people. Building relationships requires learning to work with diverse community members to resolve conflicts, share, cooperate, and listen. The teachers in this study believed that a vital component of social justice education is learning to work together with diverse people. Juliet discussed, social justice education as “building the foundation” for examining inequities in society. Similarly, Marjorie described it as developing critical thinking skills where students learn to raise questions such as: “Are these things fair? Are people having their needs met?” Debbie Marie identified the foundational citizenship skills she perceives her students gaining as their ability to,
make really amazing connections, and come out of my class being critical thinkers and knowing how to ask questions, and knowing how to research a question on their own, and how to talk about things, and how to respect other people’s point of view. This means that while kindergarten students and 2nd grade students may be at different grade levels the teachers in this study see value in focusing on skills that allow children to think deeply about injustice and its impact on members of the community. Evidence of the skill development was exhibited through daily classroom interactions. Through the implementation of the observations the researcher was given the opportunity to witness teachers conducting skill development through the examination of children’s literature, current event topics, and classroom discussion in the three classrooms.

Teachers recognize that conversations around topics of race, class, gender, and systemic patterns of oppression require building a community of trust or “circle of trust” (Palmer, 2009). Recognizing that constructing safe-spaces is essential for learning, the case study participants expressed value in a classroom environment infused with social justice principles. Debbie Marie explained, “I try to have it in like every[thing]—it’s like the culture of the classroom.” Marjorie similarly expressed social justice as “ongoing all the time.” Further, the teachers recognized the integration of social justice principles in their practice, such as when Juliet shared, “I feel like my practice just has an overtone—a constant overtone of justice.” Constructing a classroom that promotes equity, inclusiveness, and relationship building requires teachers to exhibit a continuous process of reflective teaching (Schön, 1987). During observations, evidence of classroom expectations were displayed and the researcher noted respectful interactions between the teachers and students in practice. In observation debriefs teachers noted the respectful interactions between students. All three classrooms displayed the school-wide expectations,
which were written with administrator, teacher, and parent input. Implementing democratic participation, the two 2nd grade teachers displayed a student- and teacher-created classroom promise (Dewey, 1916). In the kindergarten classroom, the researcher viewed an established classroom job chart, which offered daily student participation in the classroom. All three teachers created physical environments that established equitable access to classroom materials. Supplies used in the classroom were community supplies, offering opportunities for sharing and cooperation. Classroom supports such as books, charts and other learning materials were displayed and available to all community members to access for their learning needs. Parent interview data confirmed the establishment of safe and collaborative environments. Parents described children discussing the school and classroom as “a caring community that perseveres.” The establishment of an environment where trust has been built creates a community where children are willing to take chances, dialogue with other members of the community, and challenge their knowledge.

Teachers established a student-centered classroom where student’s thoughts and beliefs are valued. All three teachers discussed in their interviews the importance of bringing student and family experience into the classroom. Juliet described this as a process of knowing her population, “knowing what backgrounds, what experiences—maybe any injustices that my students or their families have had to endure—and start there.” Both Debbie Marie and Marjorie discussed the process of bringing cultural relevance into the classroom through the year in slightly different ways. Debbie Marie discussed it in terms of a deep personal reflection, “Having kids tell about their own experiences, explore their own families—their own beliefs.” However, Marjorie discussed extending the reflection beyond person reflection to examining a global connection. She expressed it as, “Starting from you and then expanding kind of [to] your
place in the world.” Classroom observations proved additional confirming evidence of student-centered classrooms. All three classrooms, exhibited student work and student photographs, or student self-portraits. This established a message that student work is valued and that students are an important partner in the classroom and school community. All material in the classroom reflected different cultures, experiences, and topics. Students contributed to classroom discussions on curriculum topics and participated in classroom meetings to discuss or solve community issues. The teacher observations showed evidence of classroom structures that empowered students as community members through classroom jobs or roles, creating ownership of the community. Artifact evidence confirmed the valuing of students’ voices as demonstrated in the student-created anchor charts prominently displayed in the participant classrooms. The student-centered classroom is important because the collaboration inherent in this type of classroom environment means the student has a more active role in their learning through the inclusion of student culture (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010; Hyland, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

*Teachers perceive instruction in social justice concepts as growing, challenging, and transforming students’ understanding of the world.* Teachers empower students by challenging and expanding the curriculum beyond what has been established by the school district. The establishment of equitable teaching practices and the inclusion of culturally relevant teaching broaden student learning experiences (Banks, 1993b; Hyland, 2010). All three teachers discussed expanding or change curriculum to expose students to diverse cultures and life experiences. Debbie Marie explained, “I hope that people see representations of a wide array of experiences and backgrounds and people and religions.” Through observation it was evident that the teachers started by incorporating the cultures of the students in the classroom and then brought in stories of life experiences that were not represented in the classroom community.
Juliet noted a belief in expanding and challenging knowledge because of the specific demographic of the students. This is important because Juliet perceives the predominately White students as having a limited perspective. Researcher observation confirmed the representation of diverse perspectives within the classroom curriculum and as available classroom materials for students. The researcher observed teachers conducting discussions with students to assist with critical examination of racial inequities and building knowledge about similarities and differences among people. Parent interviews not only confirmed the implementation of diverse perspectives but, several parents made comments about the importance of having these conversations at school. Parents voiced the opinion that what was happening at school assisted them in having conversations at home with their children but, especially for those families whose daily life had limited exposure to diversity of race, class or culture, it was believed that school-based social justice instruction challenged their students thinking. The parents from the kindergarten class described students talking about family and gender differences, and caring about everybody. In interviews, parents whose children were students in Marjorie’s and Debbie Marie’s classroom discussed information coming home about racial inequities specifically for African American and Native American people. Student artifacts, exhibited attitudes of recognizing differences and tolerating diversity. Artifacts from Debbie Marie’s classroom exhibited the awareness of difference though the examination of another person’s perspective and tolerating diversity through exhibiting acceptance and respect for similarities and differences. Student artifacts from Marjorie’s class exhibited an awareness of differences through an examination of their families. Student artifacts for Juliet’s classroom included two charts constructed as a class that depicted awareness of differences, through acceptance of
student opinion and perspective. No student artifacts were available for Marjorie or Juliet that exhibited the concept of tolerating differences.

Teachers perceived children’s literature as an effective tool for social justice instruction. Teachers thoughtfully selected books that presented the valued contributions, the struggles, and the perseverance of people from diverse cultures. The inclusion of multicultural books created the opportunity for children to learn from new perspectives and examine bias. Literature is considered a core part of elementary instruction and an efficient way to address topics. The researcher discovered that although literature was a commonly used component to teaching social justice concepts, classroom discussions were extensively used. Teachers perceived classroom discussion as enhancing students’ abilities to develop critical thinking skills, share ideas, respect other points of view, and ask questions. This finding is important because these skills not only assist in the construction of knowledge, but they are essential skills for communicating within a community. Researcher observations showed evidence of the three teachers incorporating current events into their classroom, with the discussion of the Dakota Access Pipeline and the study of climate refugees in 2nd grade classrooms and discussions about the Dakota Access Pipeline and the examination of homelessness in the kindergarten classroom. Additional, 2nd grade teacher implemented and active storyline teaching method to construct learning about the development and growth of a neighborhood. The use of current events and the active neighborhood storyline were unexpected findings that I did not find in the literature prior to the study. Marjorie and Debbie Marie’s parent interviews indicated that children discussed the Dakota Access Pipeline and the events of the Neighborhood storyline. Juliet’s parent interviews also indicated conversation around the Dakota Access Pipeline was happening at home as well as discussions around the concepts of wants and needs. This finding intrigued
the researcher especially regarding how engaged the students at both levels were with the inclusion of an active current event. This was particularly motivating because current event awareness builds global awareness and the protest organizers were pre-teen students, so it showed the elementary students associated with this case study that everyone can participate in social action.

*Teachers perceive that instruction in social justice concepts fosters awareness of the inequalities and injustices that exist in the world.* Teachers shared that they believe in assisting children to uncover the truth about the world. Juliet shared, “Social justice in education is encouraging the students to be aware of inequities in the classroom and the school, but then also bringing that awareness and empathy and activism outside of the school, starting with your community.” Similarly, Debbie Marie articulated, “Social justice in education[is] giving students the skills and the ability to, and [the] opportunity to, look at the real world as is and our very real inequities in our world, in our society, and be able to ask questions about that.” Both Debbie Marie and Juliet believed that education is about showing children reality in a deeper way. All three teachers discussed the importance of telling students the truth. Debbie Marie asserted, we need to “stop perpetuating the myth that there is an even playing field.” Marjorie noted, that children need to know that “not every story has a happy ending.” All three teachers agree that young children have the capacity to learn and discuss hard topics such as racial inequity and economic inequality. Marjorie discussed the capacity of students, “I just think it’s really important that kids learn about what’s going on. How people are treated. I think that they can handle hearing the truth.” Classroom observation and parent interviews both confirm the work teachers are doing to bring an awareness of inequities into the classroom. Both parents from Juliet’s room expressed their child’s discussion of fairness in relation to the study of the
pipeline. J. Parent 1 made an interesting comment about her son, “I think that he is starting to understand that we, may have resources but, other people don’t.” The parents from Marjorie and Debbie Marie’s classroom shared in their interviews that their children discussed the inequitable treatment of the Native Americans.

**Teachers perceive social justice concept instruction as building empathy.** Juliet and Debbie Marie expressed empathy as a foundational skill in the classroom. Debbie Marie explained, “When we teach kids to see other people’s pain and struggle, and how they’ve had to fight and have courage and try to overcome something—whether they’re successful or not—we’re teaching them empathy.” This “perspective taking” as Marjorie voiced it is important for participating as a member of the community. Both Juliet and Debbie Marie expressed a belief in extending empathy to a global awareness. Debbie Marie explained this further by saying she was “teaching empathy and protectiveness on that base level in the classroom, but also on a global level.” Marjorie’s parents expressed empathy through the description of emotions associated with knowledge about other people’s struggles. M. Parent 1, expressed her child had “a lot of emotion around—how life must be for other people there [Marshall Islands]. M. Parent 2 explained empathy as her son feeling mad and sad about how a friend’s brother was treated. Debbie Marie’s parents expressed empathy as caring for or looking out for other people. Juliet’s parents described empathy in terms of extra thoughtfulness, openness, and an interest in people’s needs being met. All three classrooms had artifacts that exhibited empathy awareness. Even though, I use open-ended questions in my classroom discussions, I did not anticipate how effective the practice was for building critical thinking and empathy building.

**Research question 2:** What do teachers perceive about how this instruction influences learner perceptions regarding their role in society?
Teachers perceive instruction as empowering students to consider themselves as social actors. The three teachers all view young children as capable of participating in society as citizens with valued perspectives and ideas. Debbie Marie acknowledged what that looks like in the classroom:

Every child has the ability to question things, learn, grow, and be an actor; a participant in the world. What that looks like for them and how that plays out will be very different, but that kids are given that framework that they have a place, and ability and responsibility, and they’re citizens.

Teachers build a classroom with the students that fosters the development of a sense of agency (Adair, 2014; Dixon and Nussbaum, 2012; Peleg, 2013). Marjorie remarked, “I just think it’s important for kids to know that maybe they can make a change themselves or be part of change or be part of doing the right thing, thinking about themselves and how people are treated, and our history and things like that. I think it’s really important.” The three teachers each expressed the hope and belief that children are capable of participating as social actors. Juliet expressed in terms creating change for others, “It’s about taking what they’re learning and putting out there, and making change, and like I said, being an advocate for themselves and also being an activist for other people.” Debbie Marie related her hope for student empowerment to what empowers her: “I want them to have hope, and I want them to feel like they have power, and the way that I feel like I have power—I mean, these are the same things. My same traumatic world that I’m living in, right? And the thing that empowers me is doing something about it.” The essential idea in Debbie Marie’s statement is the acknowledgement that regardless of our roles, we are all social actors in the same world. Observation debrief data indicated that teachers viewed students as actively engaged in class activities. Debbie Marie and Marjorie described the development of
democratic participation through the civic engagement roles embedded in the construction of the neighborhood storyline. All three teachers discussed some student-driven activities that happened outside the classroom. Teachers and parents viewed children-initiated discussion on the social justice topics as the students’ participating as social actors.

**Discussion of Results in Relation to Literature**

This research study sought to understand the perceptions and practices of three teachers who teaching social justice concepts to kindergarten and 2nd grade students in an urban elementary school setting. This section seeks to connect the research results to the research literature. The researcher noted 5 themes that emerged from the data to answer the 2 research questions.

**Research question 1: What do teachers perceive about how instruction on social justice concepts impact early grade learners (kindergarten and 2nd grade) in classroom settings?**

**Theme 1: Teachers perceive social justice concept instruction as enhancing students’ skills for participating in a diverse society.** The literature in Chapter 2 exposed the difficulty in finding a univocal definition for social justice education (Dover, 2009; Bell, 1997), because of the variety of social justice perspectives that seek to uncover inequity and empower members of society (Banks, 1991; Banks & Banks, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Similar to the literature, the examination of the interview data and observation data for all three teachers exhibited a difficulty in defining one specific lens used as their social justice perspective. Instead, what was observed was an integration of perspectives. A belief in working to create systemic transformation from within the classroom setting (Banks & Banks, 2007), a strong focus on explicitly exploring issues of injustice and discrimination (Cochran-Smith, 2003), and a hope of
consciousness raising and action (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The three teachers expressed a belief in the strengths and abilities of even the youngest learners and centered their teaching to foster opportunities for students to achieve. This view of educating children connects to the concepts of the capability approach, which recognizes that children are active agents with values and educators must enhance their possibilities by nurturing their capabilities (Peleg, 2013; Pendlebury, 2008; Saito, 2003). Marjorie, Juliet, and Debbie Marie expressed ideas around their focus for expanding children’s knowledge globally. This connects to the literature revealing the view of society as globally connected (Banks, 2004; Bell, Jean-Sigur, & Kim, 2015; Zahabioun et al., 2013). According to Young Ah Lee (2014), teacher’s perspectives and beliefs on social justice teaching directly connect to teacher practice.

Marjorie, Juliet, and Debbie Marie expressed the construction of a social justice oriented classroom and the teaching of social justice concepts as critical skill development for students. Debbie Marie explained, “kids are given that framework that they have a place, and ability and responsibility, and they’re citizens.” Juliet shared about kindergarteners, “it’s basically building the foundation.” Observation data provided evidence of this skill-building, through collaboration, problem-solving, and skill development for being a respectful community member. For example, in Marjorie and Debbie Marie’s classrooms the creation of the classroom neighborhood required students to participate in civic roles and learning in order to problem-solve issues as a community. The teachers’ perceptions give the researcher reason to think that the teachers perceive the purpose of education as “assisting students in the development of the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are need to share in civic action to make society more equitable and just” (Araujo & Strasser, 2003; Banks, 2004). This concept of skill development through critical thinking is expressed as an essential element of building a person’s capabilities.
through education (Nussbaum, 2001; Vaughan, 2016).

The teachers recognized that the expansion of student knowledge around difficult topics requires an environment where trusting relationships have been formed. The three teachers perceived the classroom environment as promoting, equity, inclusion, and respect for community members. Juliet expressed the feel of her classroom and teaching practice as having “a constant overtone” of social justice. Researcher James Banks, Cherry McGee Banks (1995), and Tenorio (2007) emphasized that the classroom setting has a profound effect on a student’s willingness to engage and learn from diverse perspectives. Debbie Marie explained that by creating a classroom community that “feels respectful, inclusive, safe, where people are curious and engaged and thoughtful” it gives a model of how the world can be. This classroom structure presents a “glimpses of the kind of society we could live in in and where students learn the academic and critical skills needed to make it a reality” (Au et al., 2007, p. x). During observations, the researcher noted the energized and respectful feeling in each classroom. The interactions between each teacher and their students indicated the formation of trusted relationship. The construction of these relationships is essential for children to feel cared for and honored as individuals and members of cultural groups (Gay; 2010; Hyland, 2010; Nieto, 1999). It was evident that children participated as active members of the classroom. As an example, in Juliet’s room there was evidence of a job chart in use. This indicated Juliet’s belief in members of the classroom actively engaging in shared responsibilities within the classroom. Parent interview data confirmed the establishment of a caring community space.

The case study participants placed a strong emphasis on creating a student-centered classroom. This included taking the time to build cultural knowledge about the students and their family and utilizing that knowledge in the classroom. All three teachers discussed
gathering background knowledge. The way Juliet described this idea could be viewed as preparatory information-gathering and information processed through student sharing. Alternatively, Debbie Marie referred to it as a deeper reflection of exploring and sharing about family experiences and beliefs. The observations showed an inclusion of culturally relevant materials, posters, books, and children’s work displayed. Including multicultural materials and books, honors the diverse cultures in the classroom (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010) and teachers who express value for their students and their culture, improve the experiences and educational outcomes for children (Hyland, 2010).

**Theme 2: Teachers perceive instruction in social justice concepts as growing, challenging, and transforming students understand of the world.** Within the school district in which this case study was conducted there has been a lack of social justice oriented focus, this has meant that other educators similar to the research participants are creating the curriculum they need on their own or through connections with like-minded teachers in the district. The case study participants all discussed expanding student knowledge of diverse perspectives and life experiences into the classroom curriculum. The teachers began by incorporating evidence of student culture into the curriculum and then expanded the experiences presented. Banks (1993) believed students must be critical consumers of knowledge, examining and valuing multiple perspectives. Juliet viewed this as especially important with the lack of diversity at the school setting. Classroom observations presented an opportunity to observe the presentation of multicultural literature, current events, and classroom discussions that were used for constructing knowledge.

As noted by Banks (1994, 2004) and Gay (2010) the use of multicultural literature is effective for the discussion of diverse perspectives and cultural differences. Both Debbie Marie
and Marjorie discussed and displayed a wide array of books that represented people with
different experiences, backgrounds, and religions. The teacher selected books depicted the
valued contributions, and the perseverance of people from a variety of cultures. According to
Brennan (2006), to create meaningful learning, literature can be analyzed through careful
questioning, think-aloud procedures, and through acting out different perspectives of the issue.
This kind of meaningful learning was present in Debbie Marie’s classroom during observations
where she had students complete a personal reflection after hearing a story and having a
discussion.

Teachers explained their use of classroom discussions as means of developing deeper
meaning. All three teachers presented themselves as facilitators and discussed learning
alongside students as a discussion unfolds. The teachers used open-ended questions to develop
critical thinking skills needed to go deeper into the topics. However, the teachers noted that not
all discussions are planned. Marjorie said, “things kind of come up all the time. It isn’t always
necessarily a specific lesson, but things just kind of come up, and so we talk about them when
they happen.” The value in student-driven discussions is supported by research conducted with
3–5-year-old children which indicated that discussions helped to challenge students’
assumptions, created an environment for listening to other perspectives, and created
opportunities to refine perspectives (Hawkins, 2014). In the present study, the researcher
observed classroom discussions as a central part of every observation. Previous research
conducted with young children presented evidence that active dialogue played an essential role
in the creation of social justice understanding (Hammond et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Kuby,
2013; Phillips, 2010; Ruane et al., 2010).
Teacher observation showed evidence of two additional practices that were used for constructing knowledge around social justice issues. All three teachers incorporated current events into their classroom to discuss the Dakota Access Pipeline and in kindergarten additionally to discuss homelessness. These were unexpected findings, but the researcher can see how they would connect Banks theory of Multicultural Education as a means of applying cultural knowledge and awareness. Following the completion of data analysis, the researcher conducted a subsequent review of literature to support the use of current events with young learners to “connect students to civic life” (Obenchain & Pennington, 2008) and to “help reduce fear and worry” (Passe, 2008). Interviews and observations in the 2nd grade classroom presented an active neighborhood storyline as an unexpected finding that was not found in the literature prior to research. Creswell (1997) views storyline as a constructivist philosophy. Debbie Marie and Marjorie created the idea of the storyline to have children practice civic engagement, how to get along with diverse people and explore problem-solving. The construction of the neighborhood was then extended to relate to the real-like issues of Ecological Justice, specifically the Dakota Access Pipeline and climate refugees. The lessons observed in Debbie Marie and Marjorie classrooms connected to a research study using a Global Storyline focusing on environmental themes (McNaughton, 2014). The finding from the teacher participants showed that the process helped to develop awareness of real-world issues and children were able to understand and empathize with the plight of the people. This explains the deep engagement witnessed by the researcher, and the deep learning perceived by teachers. Second grade parents confirmed the engagement of their children with regard to the neighborhood projects. The parents for all three teachers discussed the extensive conversations being had at home about the pipelines, climate refugees and the homeless.
Theme 3: Teachers perceive that instruction in social justice concepts fosters awareness of the inequalities and injustices that exist in the world. The three teachers articulated a value in helping children to uncover the truth about the world. Juliet discussed examining the inequities as they exist in the classroom and school and the world. Debbie Marie feels, “we have more responsibility to be honest with kids about the real problems and issues that exist.” Education can empower the voices of children of color and assist white children to expand their knowledge and make visible injustices (Lee, 2007; Banks & Banks, 1995). Teacher observation data presented the use of multicultural literature used to discuss injustices. An example, is Debbie Marie’s reading of the book *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* (Krull, 2003). The research shows that the student-driven discussions helped to challenge students’ assumptions, created an environment for listening to other perspectives, and created opportunities to refine perspectives (Hawkins, 2014).

Theme 4: Teachers perceive social justice concept instruction as building empathy. At the teacher interviews, there were several skills that teachers perceived children would learn through social justice teaching. Being aware of differences between people, appreciating diverse perspectives, and examining equity where just a few. These skills connect to previous studies that showed young children are aware of different perspectives (Kelly & Brooks, 2005; Lee, Ramsey, & Sweeney, 2008), have an appreciation and acceptance for others (Ruane et al., 2010; Zakin, 2012) and exhibiting empathy (Hawkins, 2014; Louie, 2005). During observation debriefs with Debbie she referred to children broadening their perspective taking, empathetic responses learning about people’s situations, and discussion about racial issues. Marjorie observed students learning about their different families—accepting the diverse nature of families as fact—and developed perspective-taking by learning about climate refugees. Juliet
observed that students developed awareness of indigenous peoples, and developed increased empathy for homeless population and differences between wants and needs. Researcher observation data indicated that maybe because teachers felt empathy building was an essential part of being a citizen, they often used questions that would require student to dig deeper and related to what they the person or character. The current data connects to the results from a study conducted by Ruane et al. (2010) where findings presented young children as expressing concern and empathy for others.

**Research question 2: What do teachers perceive about how this instruction influences learner perceptions regarding their role in society?**

**Theme 5: Teachers perceive instruction as empowering students to consider themselves social actors.** Like many other educators the three teachers voiced in their interviews a hope that new knowledge would create social action. Teachers perceived young children as capable members of the classroom community with valued perspectives. This viewpoint was evident in the teachers’ high expectations around children’s capabilities to look at complicated issues. Marjorie expressed her perception as “I think they can, and so I think they respond to that.” In the observation debrief, the teachers said they observed social action both inside the classroom and out in the larger community. Both Marjorie and Debbie Marie explained the extra work that children were doing outside of the classroom to oppose the pipeline coming into the neighborhood storyline. Other researchers perceive social justice education as promoting social action (Carlisle et al., 2006; Dover, 2009). In this study, during observations the researcher detected the kinds of classroom structures, student agency, and valued interactions that assist in supporting social action. Through hands-on experiences, teachers can begin the process of creating a student’s personal love of learning and encourage critical analysis of information and
ideas with an eye toward creating action (Hammond et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Lee, Ramsey & Sweeney, 2008). To build a social justice society for everyone we need to support the skills and values needed for children to fully participate in society.

Limitation

One limitation of selecting single case study design centers on generalizability (Yin, 2014). The decisions made by the researcher surrounding the context of the study, number of participants, number of observations, interviews and artifacts reviewed, affect the content of the data gathered. Generalization of the findings to a larger population was not the aim of this qualitative research study. Rather, the focus was on gaining a deeper understanding of teachers’ perceptions and practices with regard to social justice teaching and possible impacts for children and families.

A second limitation to the research study may be the time constraint factors of the research design. Access to participants for this research was contingent on teachers’, parents’, and the researcher’s schedule, which placed limits on the amount of data collected because of the short exposure to social justice teaching during the research time frame. The research was designed to be conducted from September to mid-December. This short period of time limited the data that could be collected regarding parent perceptions, observational perceptions of teacher participants, and student artifact evidence. While, multiple data sources provided ample evidence, the study would have been richer if data collection occurred using a longitudinal design.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

This research study was built upon a conceptual framework that considered foundations of social justice theories (Banks, 1995; Banks, 2004; Freire, 1970; Gay, 2010; Hyland, 2010;
Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee, 2007; Unterhalter, Vaughn, & Walker, 2007; Zahabioun et al., 2013), teacher practices in social justice teaching (Gibson & Parks, 2014; Hammond et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Lee, Ramsey & Sweeney, 2008; Phillips, 2010; Ruane et al., 2010; Zakin; 2012), and research on children’s developmental capacities for social justice concepts (Banks & Banks, 1995; MacNaughton, 2004; Nussbaum, 2009; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Ruane et al., 2010; Sorin, 2005). Although research on social justice teaching with young children is growing in the American public education system (Durden et al., 2015; Husband, 2014; Martin et al., 2012; Powell & Serriere, 2013), research on this topic has been prevalent outside the United States for many years (Hammond, Hesterman, & Knaus, 2015; Hawkins, 2009; Hawkins, 2014a; Hawkins, 2014b; Ruane et al., 2010), furthermore this kind of teaching is so strong in other countries that educators and policy makers have included social justice components in their educational frameworks (Australia Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009; Finnish National Board of Education, 2004; United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014).

In this study, the researcher sought to understand the perceptions and practices of kindergarten and 2nd grade teachers who teach social justice concepts and the perceived impact of these lessons on the students. Specifically, the researcher was interested in understanding how teachers perceive social justice, their perceptions of teaching practices to use for social justice teaching, and to understand their perceptions of the capacities of children with regard to these lessons. The aim of the research was especially relevant considering recent studies suggesting that teacher conceptualizations of social justice are malleable (Kelly & Brooks, 2009; Lee, 2014; Sou et al., 2012), that the use of dialogue and literature play an essential role in social justice understanding (Hammond et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Kuby, 2013; Phillips, 2010; Ruane et al.,
and that recent studies show children have the capacities to understand complex issues around poverty, power, stereotypes, and injustice (Hammond et al., 2015; Hawkins, 2014; Kuby, 2013; Ruane et al., 2010). The findings for this study indicate that teachers perceive social justice instruction as enhancing citizenship skills, transforming students’ worldview, fostering awareness of inequities and injustice, and building empathy skills. Additionally, the findings suggest that social justice instruction empowers students to consider themselves social actors. Considering the findings presented in Chapter 4 and the discussion of results presented in this chapter, the research results lend support for the following recommendations for teacher practice.

**Provide professional development opportunities for practicing teachers.** During interviews, the research participants noted the creation of their social justice lessons with their grade level team members. Teachers in this study used personal time to create these lessons, rather than time during their professional day. It would be beneficial for teachers to be provided adequate time and resources to work with other social justice educators in the building or across the district. Many teacher educators believe that the use of communities of inquiry is the most promising way to improve professional learning (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Grant & Agosto, 2008; Picower, 2007).

For the teachers in this study, the perceived importance of the learning produced from social justice lessons appeared to be enough motivation to find time to connect with each other on the progression of the lessons. However, such short conversation times leaves little room for real reflection on practice. bell hooks (1994) states that to create more empowering teacher practices it is essential for teachers to “talk to one another, collaborate in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention” (p. 129). Teachers need support from administrators and school board members to establish consistent dedicated time for teachers meet.
for creating and reflecting on social justice instruction.

**Know the research on children’s capabilities.** Educators should be aware of the expanded knowledge on child development that has moved early childhood theory and practice beyond the traditional perspective of child development as universal truth and recognizes the social and historical context of development. Viewing children through narrowed perspectives and then constructing education systems using a narrowed lens creates a system that is inherently grounded in cultural bias and may place limits on children. Young human beings are limited to the possibilities that fit society’s constructions of them (Cannella, 1997). However, the teachers in this study view students as having an abundance of capabilities. The teachers viewed children as having cultural value and they used that for the creation of an environment that supports student knowledge acquisition and developed agency.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study examined social justice teaching in a community population that was 71% White with little diversity. A future study could expand the research to look at social justice teaching in other schools that have similar populations. The inclusion of more teachers has the potential to increase our understanding about teaching practices that raise privileged students’ awareness of social inequities and the possible implications of that knowledge on school culture.

A study focused on more diverse student populations could examine if the diversity of the classroom motivates teachers, parents, and students to engage in more social justice topics. This type of study has the potential to inform social justice teaching and learning.

Each of the emergent teacher perceptions discovered during the study and identified in the discussion section, present possible areas for further study. For example, the teachers in this study perceived social justice concept-instruction as enhancing students’ skills for participating
in a diverse society. Investigating how teachers define participation could present an opportunity for a future study. Participation in a diverse society may look very different based on grade level. By using teacher interviews, the researcher could discover how different teachers defined student participation in society and collect narratives from teachers based on previous experiences in the classroom. Additionally, the classroom observations conducted could contribute to gaining evidence of participation.

The finding for this study revealed two unexpected teaching practices being used by study participants to teach social justice concepts: current events and a storyline approach. Further investigation of these teaching practices is warranted to expand the understanding of these instructional activities when used with elementary students.

The delimitations in this study, that is, intentional boundary choices the researcher made, present additional areas for further research. In this study, the researcher was limited by the constraints of time afforded in a doctoral research project. Data collection for this study had to occur from October to December. A study that would expand beyond the 3-month time constraint of this study might yield deeper insights and results. The researcher perceived that a longitudinal study conducted from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year would have yielded a deeper understanding of social justice teaching and the impact on families and students.

This study was limited to teacher and parent participants in order to understand their perceptions. Future researchers could expand beyond the participant groups to directly include students in a study. Interviewing elementary students and conducting observations that examine the students as well as the teachers may create a stronger understanding of the implications of social justice education for the elementary students.
Conclusion

This dissertation has presented an examination of the perceptions and practices of teachers who teach social justice concepts. This chapter provided a summary of the data results presented in Chapter 4, followed by a discussion of the results in relation to each research question. Next, the chapter presented a discussion of the results in relation to the literature. The study’s limitations, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research were also discussed. The emergent themes discovered during this study suggest that the study participants perceive social justice concept instruction as enhancing students’ skills for participating in a diverse society, through growing, challenging, and transforming students’ understanding of the world, by fostering awareness of the inequalities and injustices that exist in the world; and building empathy and empowering students to consider themselves social actors. It is significant and inspiring to see the work being conducted in public school classrooms to foster the skills and abilities of young children to participate in society. The teachers in this study seem to recognize that the goal isn’t for everyone to think the same way but, to grapple with the same questions and make sense of the inequities that exist (Swalwell, 2015).
References


Lucey, T. A., & Laney, J. D. (2009). This land was made for you and me: Teaching for economic justice in upper elementary and middle school grades. *The Social Studies, 100*(6), 260–272.


doi:10.1080/01596301003786993  


Terzi, L. (2005). A capability perspective on impairment, disability and special needs: Towards


Appendix A: Interview Protocol: Teachers

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Grade Level:

(This case study research project is an examination of teacher perceptions and practice in teaching social justice concepts to young children)

Thank you for allowing me to interview you. This interview will take between 45-60 minutes. I will be tape recording this interview: it will be transcribed verbatim and returned to you to check for accuracy and additional comments. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or have data extracted from the study.

The purpose of this interview is to gain insight into your social justice philosophy and teaching practices, what drives your teaching of these concepts to young children and how you perceive children’s capabilities in understanding these topics.

Point of Query:

- What drives teachers to teach social justice concepts?
- What are teachers’ perceptions of young children’s capabilities to understand social justice concepts?

Social Justice:

1. How would you define social justice in education?
2. What experiences have you had that have framed your ideas about social justice?

Practice:

3. How does your belief in social justice inform your practice?
4. How do you determine the important social justice ideas/concepts students should know and what is your process for creating the lessons? (Prompt: If someone were to walk into your classroom during a social justice lesson, what would that person see? hear?) (adapted from Agarwal, 2008)

Child Development:

5. What are your beliefs about child development? What thinkers have influenced your thinking about child development?

205
6. What are children’s capabilities with regard to understanding social justice lessons?
7. What do you think students come away with from social justice lessons? How do you know?

Teacher Background Information

Thank you for participating in my research study on teachers’ perceptions of teaching social justice concepts to young children and how it impacts children’s perceptions of themselves. Please complete the following background questions and turn it in with your consent form before I conduct the interview at your scheduled appointment. You may turn the form into me directly or return it in a sealed envelope to my office mailbox. Completing these questions should take you approximately 10-15 minutes. Your responses will be kept confidential, and stored in a secured location.

1. Name: __________________________________________
2. Preferred Pseudonym: ______________________________
3. How long have you been teaching? ___________________
4. Why did you become a teacher?
Appendix B: Teacher Observation Tool

The researcher will be conducting observations in a classroom setting with teachers teaching social justice lessons to K-2nd grade students. During the observations the researcher will be looking for evidence of teachers’ perceptions of social justice teaching, the teaching practices used and teachers’ perception of children’s capacity for understanding and expanding their perceptions of social justice concepts through these lessons. Within one day of each observation, the researcher will meet with each teacher for approximately 20 minutes to debrief the lesson and elicit the teacher’s perspectives on the lesson and what children learned from the lesson.

- The observation tool contains a checklist as well as a section for reflective and descriptive notes.
- The researcher will take descriptive notes (communication, behaviors, materials, attitude) and reflective notes (researcher’s thoughts, impression, hunches, or broad themes that emerge, etc.) of the classroom lessons (Creswell, 2013).
- The checklist is intended as a means of indicating specific attributes associated with the conceptual framework that the researcher observes while taking detailed field notes.
- Please note that no data will be collected on children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Justice</th>
<th>Multicultural/anti-racist education- five dimensions of multicultural education- content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, empowering school culture (Banks, 1998;2004) and equipping students, parents and teachers with tools to combat racism and ethnic discrimination (Lee, 2007)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equity pedagogy is defined as teaching practices that are intentionally designed to increase engagement and participation with the intent of assisting students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups to attain gain skills and knowledge to function in and help create a just democratic society (Banks, 1995).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Culturally relevant pedagogy** will be defined as teaching practices that empower students by using their frames of reference, cultural knowledge, and background experiences to make the learning more relevant to and effective for the students in order to enhance critical consciousness (Gay, 2010; Hyland, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

*Global citizenship* is an educational view that recognizes our interconnectedness and interdependence not only as active citizens of local communities, states, and countries, but of the world (Banks, 2004; Bell, Jean-Sigur, & Kim, 2015; Zahabioun et al., 2013).

*Capability approach* is an alternate view of human development which understands that each person has individually-defined capabilities based on what they value. This view affirms the need to ensure that each person has the freedom to achieve his or her functionings (Nussbaum, 2011). Children are seen as active agents, with human rights and whose social participation exhibits values and priorities (Peleg, 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Practice</th>
<th>Literature is defined as picture books, poetry and other written works containing complex language and added illustrations which assist in conveying the vivid events or situations (Ciardiello, 2010; Gibson &amp; Parks, 2014; Hawkins, 2014).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Classroom discussion</em> or <em>dialogue</em> is defined as reflective conversation about a topic (Au et al., 2007; Kuby, 2012; Phillips, 2012). Discussion help to set the context of stories or images, make connections with student’s lives, and extend their perceptions and understandings (Allen, 1997).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Knowledge construction</em> is defined as an active meaning-making process where students reflect on, challenge, and change the way they view and interact with knowledge (Banks, 2001; Gay, 2003).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Development</th>
<th>Recognition of differences is defined as the awareness of diverse perspectives and characteristics of people and ideas (Kelly &amp; Brooks, 2005; Lee, Ramsey &amp; Sweeney, 2008) and awareness of stereotypes and specific characteristics attributed to groups (Allen, 1997).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Tolerating diversity</em> is defined as understanding, accepting and respecting similarities and differences among people (Ruane et al, 2010; Zakin, 2012).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Empathy is defined as understanding or identifying with another person’s feelings or experiences (Hawkins, 2014; Louie, 2005). Kuhmerker (1975) adds that it is social perspective taking and the development of the rudiments of a sense of justice.
Teacher Observation Protocol

Date: 

Time: 

Pre-Identified Subject of Lesson: 

Teacher Pseudonym: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Justice</th>
<th>Teacher Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Multicultural/Anti-Racist Education (Banks, 2004; Lee, 2007)</td>
<td>□ Literature (Ciardiello, 2010; Hawkins, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Equity Pedagogy (Banks, 2004)</td>
<td>□ Discussion (Au et al., 2007; Kuby, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Global Citizenship (Banks, 2004; Bell, Jean-Sigur, &amp; Kim, 2015)</td>
<td>□ Recognition of Differences (Kelly &amp; Brooks, 2005; Allen, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Capabilities Approach (Nussbaum, 2010; Peleg, 2013)</td>
<td>□ Tolerating Diversity (Ruane et al., 2010; Zakin, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Artifact Collected</td>
<td>□ Empathy (Louie, 2005; Kuhmerker, 1975)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Notes</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
</tr>
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</table>

211
Appendix C: Teacher Observation Debrief

The researcher will request a meeting within one day of each observation, at a time convenient for the teacher, to meet for approximately 20-30 minutes to debrief each observed lesson and elicit the teacher’s perspectives on the lesson and what children learned from the lesson. Teachers have a right to refuse to answer any question presented.

Teacher Pseudonym:

________________________________________________________________________

Lesson Date:

________________________________________________________________________

Lesson Social Justice Topic:

________________________________________________________________________

1. What did students learn from this lesson? How do you know?
2. What are your next steps for this lesson?
3. Have you received any feedback on the impact of these lessons from families? (This question will be asked after the 3rd observation.)
## Appendix D: Artifact Review

**Teacher Pseudonym:**

**Artifact Collected:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Evidence</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Was this area addressed? How?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of student work will be performed using Atlas.ti</td>
<td><strong>Recognition of Differences:</strong> awareness of diverse perspectives and characteristics of people and ideas (Kelly &amp; Brooks, 2005; Lee, Ramsey &amp; Sweeney, 2008).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Student artwork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Student writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tolerating Diversity:</strong> understanding, accepting and respect similarities and differences among people. (Ruane et al, 2010; Zakin, 2012).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empathy:</strong> understanding or identifying with another person’s feelings or experiences and development of a sense of justice (Hawkins,</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Other attributes that emphasize children’s capacity for social justice concepts:*
Appendix E: Interview Protocol: Parent

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

Point of Query: What impact does teaching social justice concepts have on Kindergarten through 2nd grade children’s understanding of their role in society?

Thank you for allowing me to interview you. As the researcher for this doctoral study I want you to know that your participation in this study will not impact your relationship with the school or teachers in any way. This interview will take between 20-30 minutes. I will be tape recording this interview: it will be transcribed verbatim for data analysis. The interview recording will be permanently deleted as soon as the transcription process is complete. No personally identifying information will be included in the published findings of this study. You have the right to withdraw your data at any time from this study.

This interview is focusing on social justice concepts- Social Justice Concepts are defined as lesson topics focusing on human rights, gender, race, disabilities, poverty, and environmental issues.

Your child’s teacher has taught lessons on the following social justice concepts:

1. How well do you feel your child understands these social justice concepts?
2. How would you hope these lessons are impacting your child and family?
3. What new concepts have you heard your child talk about this year that they weren’t talking about before?
4. What new activities or actions have you noticed from your child related to learning about these social justice concepts?
Appendix F: Consent Form for Teachers

CONSENT FORM for Teachers

Research Study Title: A Qualitative Case Study of Teachers Perceptions and Practices in Social Justice Education and the Perceived Implications for K-2nd Grade Children

Principle Investigator: Tina Lageson
Research Institution: Concordia University
Faculty Advisor: Marty Bullis, Ph.D.

Purpose and what you will be doing:
The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the perceptions and practices of teachers who teach social justice concepts to Kindergarten through 2nd grade students in an urban elementary school setting and to understand the impact of these lessons on the students and their families. I expect 3 teacher-volunteers to participate. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on August 24th, 2016, and end enrollment on December 16th, 2016. Your participation will involve a one-on-one, 45 minute, semi-structured audio-taped interview, three teacher observations of your social justice lessons, three observation debriefs, and collecting student artifacts created during social justice lessons. Additionally, there will be opportunities for you to check interview transcripts to confirm accuracy of your contributions and my interpretations of data. The total time commitment for participation is estimated at less than 6 hours over 15 weeks.

Risks:
I do not anticipate any risks to you for participating in this study other than providing your personally identifying information. However, we will protect your information. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept secure via electronic encryption or locked inside a secure file cabinet in the researcher’s home. The audio recordings of your interview will be permanently deleted following transcription by a trained research assistant. A pseudonym will be assigned to the transcription data and will be used by the researcher when reviewing and analyzing the data. Since we are colleagues, it may still be possible for me to identify you during the data analysis from your unique characteristics. However, I will not identify you by name in any publication or report. I will take care to remove as much identifying information from any reported interview data, so as to avoid deductive disclosure of your identity. All study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.
Benefits:
Information you provide will help may benefit you by reflecting on your perceptions of social justice teaching, teacher practices and child capacity for social justice lessons. Your participation may benefit others by extending our knowledge about teachers’ perceptions and practices in social justice teaching of K-2nd grade students.

Confidentiality:
The research being done in the school community may draw attention and if you participate you may be asked questions by other people in the community. I will not be sharing information about you with anyone. The information that I collect from this research project will be kept private. Any interview and observation data about you will have a pseudonym on it instead of your name. Only the researcher and the transcriptionist will know that pseudonym is attached to you. The researcher will keep all personally identifying information secure. This personally identifying information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions, and ask if you want to continue.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Tina Lageson at email [Researcher email redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).
Your Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_________________________________________                   ___________
Participant Name                                      Date

_________________________________________                   ___________
Participant Signature                                 Date

_________________________________________                   ___________
Investigator Name                                     Date

_________________________________________                   ___________
Investigator Signature                                Date

Mailing address: Tina Lageson, c/o: Faculty Advisor, Dr. Marty Bullis, Concordia University – Portland
2811 NE Holman Street, Portland, Oregon 97221
Appendix G: Consent Form for Parents

CONSENT FORM for Parents

Research Study Title: A Qualitative Case Study of Teachers Perceptions and Practices in Social Justice Education and the Perceived Implications for K-2nd Grade Children

Principle Investigator: Tina Lageson
Research Institution: Concordia University
Faculty Advisor: Marty Bullis, Ph.D.

Purpose and what you will be doing:
The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the perceptions and practices of three teachers who teach social justice concepts to Kindergarten through 2nd grade students in an urban elementary school setting and to understand the impact of these lessons on the students and their families. I expect 6 parent-volunteers to participate. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on September 28th, 2016, and end enrollment on December 16th, 2016. To be in the study, you will need to participate in a one-on-one audio recorded interview with the researcher. The interview will assist the researcher to understand your viewpoints on the influence the teacher’s lessons focusing on human rights, gender, race, disabilities, poverty, and environmental issues have on your child. Participating in this interview should take less than 1 hour of your time.

Risks:
There are no risks to you for participating in this study other than providing your personally identifying information. However, we will protect your information. Audio recordings of your interview will be permanently deleted following transcription by a trained research assistant. An alphanumeric code will be assigned to the interviews and be used by the researcher when reviewing the research data. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept secure via electronic encryption or locked inside a file cabinet. I will not identify you by name in any publication or report and will only use alphanumeric codes when reporting interview data. After we conclude this study, your information will be kept private at all times and all study documents will be destroyed after 3 years.

Benefits:
Information you provide may benefit educations by extending teacher knowledge about the impact of teaching social justice concepts.
Confidentiality:
The research being done in the school community may draw attention and if you participate you may be asked questions by other people in the community. We will not be sharing information about you to anyone. The information that I collect from this research project will be kept private. Any information about you will have an alphanumeric number, instead of your name. Only the researcher and transcriptionist will know the alphanumeric code is attached to you. The researcher will keep all personally identifying information secure. This personally identifying information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions and ask you if you want to continue.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Tina Lageson at email, [Researcher email redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).
Your Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_________________________________________  __________________________
Participant Name  Date

_________________________________________  __________________________
Participant Signature  Date

_________________________________________  __________________________
Investigator Name  Date

_________________________________________  __________________________
Investigator Signature  Date

Mailing address: Tina Lageson, c/o: Faculty Advisor, Dr. Marty Bullis, Concordia University – Portland
2811 NE Holman Street, Portland, Oregon 97221
Appendix H: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

**Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

**Explanations:**

*What does “fraudulent” mean?*

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

*What is “unauthorized” assistance?*

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.
Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Tina Marie Lageson

Digital Signature

Tina Marie Lageson

Name (Typed)

10/22/17

Date