

Resisting Compliance: Learning to Teach for Social Justice in a Neoliberal Context

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Background/Context: *This study examines education in the context of neoliberalism and how current educational policies such as high-stakes testing and mandated curriculum create schooling environments hostile to social justice education. Relying on education for liberation literature, teacher education for social justice scholarship, and work on critical pedagogy, this study explores how new teachers who teach from a social justice perspective navigate the challenges of their first year in teaching.*

Purpose/Objective/Research Question/Focus of Study: *This study asks, What strategies do new teachers use to stay true to their vision of teaching for social justice despite the challenges they face in their school environments?*

Population/Participants/Subjects: *During the course of the study, 4 of the 6 participants were full-time classroom teachers. The 2 other participants were still taking education classes while student- and assistant teaching. All worked in a variety of urban elementary schools.*

Intervention/Program/Practice: *The participants were all members of a social justice critical inquiry project (CIP) group that met at the university from which they graduated.*

Research Design: *This was a qualitative study that used design-based research.*

Data Collection and Analysis: *Data were collected from three sources: transcripts from audio and videotaped CIP sessions, ethnographic interviews with participants, and participants' written reflections. Data were analyzed using grounded theory method.*

Findings/Results: *The teachers developed four strategies for teaching for social justice. First, by participating in a critical inquiry project, the teachers supported each other by building a safe haven that protected their vision. Second, the participants camouflaged their critical pedagogy by integrating it with the mandated curriculum, which allowed them to teach from a social justice perspective without rousing the concerns of their administration. The third strategy was to develop their students as agents of change. Finally, in a few instances, the teachers went public with their work by rejecting or speaking against policies that they felt were not in the best interests of their students.*

Conclusions/Recommendations: *Although these four strategies allowed participants to successfully create critical classrooms, they did not impact the larger neoliberal forces that maintain unjust schooling experiences. This has implications for teacher education, and the author suggests recommendations for schools of education.*

Schools across the country are under attack by a broader neoliberal agenda that is severely limiting opportunities for equity and justice in education. From standardized testing to scripted

curriculum, teachers are being handcuffed by mandates that are often in conflict with their own desires to work for more just societal conditions for their students. Many teachers who enter the field specifically with the hopes of working toward social change quickly leave the profession as they find themselves alienated and alone while trying to navigate highly political terrain (Miech & Elder, 1996). In the current educational context in which neoliberal forces are pillaging public funds (Kozol, 2007), implementing ethnocentric mandated curricular programs, and using high-stakes testing to justify increased privatization (Hursh, 2007; Kumashiro, 2008; Lipman, 2004), such teachers find themselves complicit in a system in which they are forced to reproduce the very inequalities they went into teaching to ameliorate.

Neoliberalism is an ideology and set of policies that privilege market strategies over public institutions to redress social issues (Kumashiro, 2008). Such policies champion privatizing formerly public services, deregulating trade, and increasing efficiency while simultaneously reducing wages, deunionizing, and slashing public services (Martinez & Garcia, 2000; Tabb, 2001). Neoliberalism defends the rights of the individual and uses the ideology of individual choice to promote the idea of a meritocracy “that presumes an even playing field” (Kumashiro, p. 37). Unfortunately, within education, these policies work to challenge the legitimacy of public schooling by promoting vouchers, charters, and other quasi-private schools while privatizing services that were once the domain of public institutions, such as curriculum development and testing (Lipman, 2005). By focusing on the rights and responsibilities of individuals, neoliberal policies have resulted in increasing accountability systems that place blame and punishment on individual students and teachers rather than on the inequitable school systems that have inadequately served them. Rather than improving quality of education, this vicious circle creates school climates characterized by compliance, conformity, and fear.

This article is about a small group of new educators who attempted to hold true to their vision of socially just education despite the constraints they faced in their early teaching experiences. By developing four survival strategies, these teachers were able to resist the pressure to comply with educational mandates antithetical to their classroom goals. First, these teachers worked together to build a safe haven that protected their vision of social justice education (SJE), while defending them from criticism from within their individual school contexts. Second, they camouflaged their social justice pedagogy within their classrooms by using tactics such as integrating it into the mandated curriculum and substituting alternative materials. Third, they prepared their students to become critically conscious of larger systems of inequity and taught them the tools needed to struggle for social change. Fourth, in a few instances, the teachers went public with their stances by openly rejecting school policies and voicing their dissent. By using these strategies, the teachers were successful in creating classrooms in which students engaged in critical social justice pedagogy. However, the tactics they used were not designed to attack the broader neoliberal agenda that is bearing down on schools and that remained largely untouched by these strategies. Understanding this dilemma provides insights for those concerned with the role of social justice in the war being waged for our schools.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

There is a rich tradition of teachers who view education as a vehicle for freedom and liberation (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998; Freire, 1993; Greene, 1988; Payne & Strickland, 2008). Several

teacher education programs attempt to prepare teachers to ally themselves with students and their communities and to join in movements that struggle against forms of oppression (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Using the Freirean framework of praxis, or problem-posing education, these educators often see “the recognition of the conditions of inequality and the desire to overturn those conditions for oneself and for all suffering communities as the starting point and motivator for the urban educator and for the urban student” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 10). In the current context, such educators are concerned with multiple areas. They want to overturn political economic conditions that maintain urban poverty, such as housing costs, gentrification, and minimum wage policies (Anyon, 2005). These educators also struggle against policies that shift the blame of educational problems to low-income students of color rather than to the institutions that are failing them—policies such as high-stakes testing (Hursh, 2007) and youth criminalization (Ayers, Dohrn, & Ayers, 2001). For educators to address such concerns, “it means framing a classroom and school culture that utilizes critical pedagogy to critique notions of equal opportunity and access, making education a weapon to name, analyze, deconstruct, and act upon the unequal conditions in urban schools, urban communities, and other disenfranchised communities across the nation and the world” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, p. 10). The role of the teacher, then, in this situation, is to use the classroom as a space to “read the world” (Freire) and take action on systemic forces that affect the material conditions of students’ lives. The metaphor of education as a weapon is telling in that it recognizes the battlelike conditions in the landscape of schooling and the need for teachers to act as warriors using education as a weapon for freedom and equity.

For teachers who adopt this role, to fight against oppression necessitates the ability to engage at two levels. The first is to recognize the highly political arena that masquerades as neutral, which allows reforms such as mandated curriculum and standardized testing to act as gatekeepers for low-income students of color in the name of meritocracy and common sense (Hursh, 2007; Kumashiro, 2008). The second is the willingness to join broader movements of social justice to combat the ways in which education is used as a tool to maintain inequality (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006). This requires, first and foremost, a space in which teachers have an opportunity to awaken their consciousness and to find ways to develop this kind of consciousness with their students (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Freire, 1993; Greene, 1988). Following this tradition of education for liberation, this article follows a new group of young educators as they attempted to use education as a tool for liberation while beginning to teach in the current neoliberal context of schooling.

METHODS

The study used design-based research, which seeks to develop innovative learning environments while also using these environments as research sites to study teaching and learning (Sandoval & Bell, 2004). According to Bell (2004),

This type of research is premised on the notion that we can learn important things about the nature and conditions of learning by attempting to engineer and sustain educational innovation in everyday settings. Complex educational interventions can be used to surface phenomena of interest for systematic study to better promote specific educational outcomes. (p. 243)

In this vein, I designed the social justice critical inquiry project (CIP) as an environment in which to collect phenomenological data that uncovered the issues facing new teachers in urban schools as they attempted to teach from a social justice perspective. Forty seniors who made up one cohort of graduating seniors in an undergraduate childhood teacher education program in New York City were invited to participate in the study if they planned on teaching in a local urban setting in the year following their graduation.¹ Six participants who fit the criteria joined the study.

Data were collected from three sources during the first year of the ongoing study: transcripts from audio and videotaped CIP sessions; ethnographic interviews with participants; and written reflections collected throughout the year. The biweekly CIP sessions, in which the teachers discussed classroom issues they faced and ways to embed social justice in their curricula, were a key component of the project. Topics for discussions were based on issues and concerns the teachers raised, ensuring that the meetings were relevant to and driven by the participants. These sessions were audio- and videotaped to capture issues along with the strategies the teachers developed to integrate social justice themes into their practice. Observations from sessions were kept using field notes that consisted of my detailed descriptions and reflections in the form of observer's comments, analytic memos, transcribed interviews, and observations (Bogdan & Biklan, 1992; Ely, Vinz, Anzul, & Downing, 1997). Videotapes and audiotapes of CIP sessions and interviews were transcribed and were analyzed on an ongoing basis. Observer comments about the sessions helped to keep track of ongoing impressions, hunches, problems, and possibilities about the data and process.

The focus of the qualitative interviews was dependent on the responses of the participants (Ely et al., 1997), and my role was to lift up the themes and issues that they raised. These in-depth interviews were guided conversations used to elicit a rich sense of their experiences, perceptions, feelings, and knowledge and were used for qualitative analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Questions were broad and open-ended, allowing participants to reflect on the role of CIP and how they saw themselves developing as social justice teachers. The individual interviews were audio taped to ensure the accuracy of the data collected.

The data were analyzed using grounded theory method because it allowed the data to inform the analysis, rather than forcing the data into a priori categories. I read through all interview transcriptions, mining for themes and initial categories; my conceptual framework emerged from the themes, categories, and patterns found in the data, thereby providing a richer understanding of the phenomena. Glaser and Strauss (1967) contended that this approach ensures that the theory fits the phenomenon studied, that it does not include any forced elements, and that it is most usable because it comes directly from where those in the area are most familiar.

PARTICIPANTS

Understanding that teaching from a social justice perspective would be challenging, 6 new teachers joined CIP to find support (Table 1 provides an overview of the CIP participants). During the course of the study, 4 of the 6 participants were full-time classroom teachers. The 2

other participants were still taking education classes; Julie entered a one-year master’s program in special education and was student-teaching in a fifth-grade public school classroom, and Nina needed to finish some coursework for her bachelor’s degree and was working as a part-time substitute early-childhood teacher.²

As a professor within the program from which they graduated, I had taught the participants for four semesters as they were learning to teach. The topics I covered provided a foundation in critical multicultural, social justice education that prepared them to integrate a framework of social justice into a rigorous academic program in elementary school settings (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Irvine, 2003; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2001). I served as both the facilitator and researcher of the group.³

CIP began convening biweekly for dinner meetings in the fall of 2007 at the university from which the members graduated. I, as the facilitator, set the initial one-day retreat and the first meeting agenda. Early meetings were dedicated to developing shared norms, goals, and future agendas. The meetings consisted of focused discussions on shared readings, curriculum development, lesson feedback, presentation preparation, and general issues and concerns that arose from their classroom settings. The project received minimal funding from an internal challenge grant that covered the costs of food and meeting supplies, and facilitating the group did not count as part of my course load at the university. The teachers received no credit or financial incentives to participate; they chose to participate solely because of their desire to continue to develop as social justice educators.⁴

Table 1. Participant Information

Participant	Race	Role	Location	Type of school
Marissa	Latina	Kindergarten teacher	New Jersey	Catholic school
Hally	White	Kindergarten teacher	New York City	Catholic school
Nina	African American	Substitute early childhood teacher	New York City	Private day care
Stephanie	White	Fifth-grade teacher	New York City	Public school
Jonathon	White	Fifth-grade teacher	New York City	Public school
Julie	White	Master’s student, special ed Student-teaching fifth grade	New York City	Public school

PARTICIPANTS’ DEFINITION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION

The first step in establishing the group was for the participants to set the project goals and to create a working definition of social justice education (SJE). The group decided they wanted “a place to bounce ideas around for curriculum,” “to learn to teach for social justice in the early childhood program,” to “learn more about current social issues,” “to present their experiences to others,” and to “share resources” (CIP session, 9/29/2007). The CIP teachers had a very specific vision of what SJE entailed based on their two years of coursework, readings, and experiences. They choose to define SJE on four levels:

It's a philosophy: Teachers must center equity despite whatever academic trends come and go.

It's about us: Teachers must take an active, nonneutral stance.

It's about what and how we teach: Teachers need to choose culturally relevant content and pedagogy that respects multiple perspectives in all subject areas.

It's about our students: Teachers must focus on students' interests and provide them with opportunities to examine oppression and take social action.

As Stephanie articulated,

I am teaching my students the skills they need to succeed in school, through a medium that also teaches them to respect people who are different from them. It teaches them to be active participants in the world around them by teaching them to take a stand for what they believe. (Written reflection, 9/29/2007).

The four levels that the CIPers explicated and Stephanie's definition of teaching run counter to traditional notions of knowledge transmission and teacher neutrality. The participants understood that they were going into hostile territory and looked to each other to help them stay on course with the goals and vision they collectively shared. Although they didn't explicitly include academic rigor as a part of their definition, I believe this was because they saw that as a necessary component of all teaching, not just SJE.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study illustrate how the participants held true to their vision of socially just education despite the constraints they faced in their early teaching experiences. Although they found themselves in environments characterized by fear, compliance, and pressure to conform, the teachers employed four different strategies to implement their critical pedagogy. First, they worked collectively to build a safe haven that protected their social justice pedagogy by participating in CIP. This provided them with a space to develop their curriculum and devise strategies to defend themselves from unsupportive colleagues. Second, they camouflaged their social justice pedagogy within their classrooms by using tactics such as integrating it into the mandated curriculum and substituting alternative materials as a way to keep their work under the radar. Third, they gave their students opportunities to become critically conscious of larger systems of inequity by teaching them the tools they would need to engage in social activism themselves. Fourth, in a few instances, the teachers went public with their work by openly rejecting school policies or speaking out about their pedagogy.⁵

TEACHING IN A STATE OF FEAR

The school environments that many educators find themselves within are often antithetical to a vision of social justice education. By using corporate trends rather than community voices to

decide what curricular packages should be used in schools (Kozol, 2007; National Education Association, 2008) and by relying on high-stakes testing and merit pay as tools for accountability (Sleeter, 2007), such policies control what information and ideological perspectives are shared in schools. This serves to reproduce inequality rather than create environments that engage students in struggles against oppression. Additionally, much of the neoliberal agenda that dictates local and school policy creates a state of fear for educators who wish to veer from this corporate-driven status quo of teaching as usual. For teachers who explicitly want to provide a different kind of educational experience for their students, this state of fear severely limits their ability to teach for social justice because of the constant monitoring and policing of their classrooms and curriculum. This state of fear refers both to the emotional state that individual educators find themselves in, as well as to the general environment of schools in which teachers and administrators find their jobs and autonomy threatened if they do not conform to the pressures of school accountability policies.

Because of the vision of education that the CIP members held, the implementation of these policies at the local level created a politically charged terrain that was difficult to navigate. This “state of fear” was reinforced by colleagues and administrators who, under the same pressures to conform to normative styles of education, functioned as spies and traitors because of their inability or unwillingness to take risks to transform their classrooms. This made it challenging for the CIP teachers to know whom to trust or with whom they could collaborate. From ideologically intimidating teacher lounges to testing policies and curricular mandates, their school climate was filled with landmines that made it difficult to feel safe or to learn how to use their classrooms for social change. In the section that follows, the teachers described their experiences working in what often felt like menacing territory.

The maintenance of this state of fear requires strict control over what information is taught and what political ideology is reproduced in schools. As Bowles and Gintis (1976) explained, “dominant classes seeking a stable social order have consistently nurtured and underwritten these ideological facades and, insofar as their power permitted, blocked the emergence of alternatives” (p. 104). To this end, two current tools used to reproduce the status quo in schools are mandated curricula and standardized testing (Oakes & Lipton, 2007; Sleeter, 2005). Mandated curriculum can take the form of a textbook, a loosely defined program, or a tightly controlled curriculum supervised by coaches or administrators who strictly monitor the way in which the program is delivered. These function as tools of the neoliberal state in that they funnel public funding to private corporations and are framed as strategies that ostensibly help support student learning (Kumashiro, 2008). In reality, they function to carefully control and monitor the content, form, and ideological perspective of the instruction that students receive, while requiring constant monitoring and surveillance to ensure conformity.

Although many educators surrender to these forms of oversight and control, the CIP members began to recognize the dilemma that teachers face and the way in which bravely resisting the mandated curriculum was a political choice they needed to make. Jonathon reflected,

One of the understandings I’ve been coming to over the last four years is that this [SJE] is not neutral. There is a lot of fear that am I going to offend someone, or that I am going to get fired

for this. But it's really about knowing what your opinion is and choosing a side. (Jonathon, CIP presentation, December 5, 2007)

Jonathon recognized that there are potential consequences and risks associated with social justice education and that teachers must take an active stand. He continued, "It's [SJE] a very active process, you can't be passive. It's more than just communicating information . . . and that is a big part about whether you are a social justice educator or just doing what another history book says" (Jonathon, CIP presentation, December 5, 2007). Jonathon learned to recognize the inherently political nature of curriculum and that obediently following the mandated curriculum is not neutral, but rather is siding with the status quo. Developing this awareness was critical to his understanding that teaching for social justice requires taking risks and making waves in a sea of conformity.

For Jonathon and Stephanie, both public school fifth-grade teachers, one of the most oppressive policies of the neoliberal context was the mandated literacy curriculum, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (T.C.). The T.C. program, adopted citywide in 2003 under New York City's mayoral control, was an attempt to standardize curriculum across schools (Traub, 2003). Although the program pedagogically has both advantages and challenges, the blanket way that it has been enforced in city schools has served to negate teacher autonomy and ignores local context. Each school has a literacy coach on staff and has regular visits from T.C. consultants who train the teachers to identically implement the curriculum across classrooms and schools. Jonathon explained,

The reading and writing curriculum is kind of dull, and social studies keeps getting pushed off to the side, especially in NYC public schools. At the elementary school level, it's either not taught or it's something boring like map skills or latitude and longitude. . . . Unfortunately in NYC public schools, the curriculum is really rigid. (Jonathon, CIP presentation, December 5, 2007)

As Jonathon articulated, social studies, the subject most amenable to social justice, had virtually disappeared from the curriculum because of the national emphasis on reading test scores. A national survey on the effects of No Child Left Behind showed that 71% of school districts reduced instructional time in subjects other than math and reading, with social studies reported as the most frequently cut subject area (Westheimer & Kahne, 2007). The CIP teachers repeatedly expressed concern about their students', as well as their own, lack of historical knowledge ("How does a fifth grader not know what 9/11 is?"), and this became a driving motivation for their pursuit of developing strategies to address social issues in their classrooms.

By making it difficult, if not impossible, for teachers to provide social studies instruction, the use of mandated curriculum is producing generations of students who are not learning about where they come from or why current inequalities exist. The strategy of stealing the history of oppressed people can result in internalized feelings of inferiority or blame for their circumstances created not by personal failure but by institutionalized oppression (Freire, 1970; Loewen, 1996). This is one of the most problematic effects of federal policies and how they play out in local contexts.

The rigidity of the curriculum that the CIP members were given and the pressure to conform to it were confounded by the high-stakes testing environment of NYC schools. As fifth-grade teachers, Jonathon and Stephanie shared that they were responsible for administering dozens of standardized tests over the course of the year. Jonathon explained that from December to March, the entire school focus is only on preparing students for the tests. Stephanie clearly understood the broader political and economic context that drove the test prep frenzy in her school:

They're spending money for me to go to a test prep P.D. [professional development] to learn how to do this garbage and how to teach garbage better when they could be spending me to a P.D. where I could learn how to create a thematic unit with great social justice themes. (Stephanie, CIP session, January 22, 2008)

Stephanie was infuriated that her school was prioritizing testing, a policy that she saw as harmful to her students, over programs that she believed could better prepare her to lead her students for academic success.

As a social justice educator teaching in a neoliberal context, Stephanie was able to critically analyze the forces and pressures that determined the kind of professional development she received. She continued,

So why are they sending me here and not there? Because tests are the most important thing to administrators because the most important thing is the school report card, and if it isn't up to par, that means test scores aren't up to par, which means THEY aren't up to par. So they have to make sure that the teachers are teaching to the test because if not it makes them look bad. And, you know all those principals want that \$25,000 bonus they get if they get an "A." (Stephanie, CIP session, January 22, 2008)

Stephanie recognized that this form of professional development was part of a political-economic milieu that valued financial incentives over her students' best interest. Like Jonathon's acknowledgment that nothing was neutral, Stephanie was able to identify the political motivation behind the mandates. Neoliberal policies such as mandated, uniform curriculum and high-stakes testing created an ideological environment hostile to SJE. On the school level, such policies were maintained by individual coworkers and administrators who were also operating under fear, reinforcing the CIP members' sense that they were teaching in an environment dominated by compliance.

Within this context, seemingly innocent coworkers unwittingly functioned as traitors or spies to the CIP participants. Although these colleagues were most likely well-intentioned and caring educators, their own unwillingness to rock the boat created an environment that made it difficult for the CIP members to implement their social justice curriculum. As a result, the CIP teachers began to finely hone their ability to analyze where their colleagues stood ideologically and to decide whether they could risk opening up about their teaching goals. Stephanie reported a story from when she was first setting up her classroom at her school in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, a school that served mainly Latino children. Another teacher welcomed her by showing her where things were and to look over the class list to give advice about and insights

into Stephanie's new fifth graders. When reading that Lourdes was in her class, the teacher warned, "Oh, that girl and her mother are going to hate you because you are White" (Stephanie, CIP session, September 29, 2007).

Although this coteacher was offering what she most likely assumed to be insider and friendly advice, Stephanie, a young White woman who was just beginning to develop her own racial consciousness, recognized it as traitorism. "It made me so mad, I mean, if I weren't already thinking from a social justice lens, I might not have liked that student, or I might have treated her differently!" (Stephanie, CIP session, September 29, 2007). Stephanie understood how the hand that was offered to her functioned more as a tool of Whiteness (Picower, 2009), serving to maintain racial stereotyping rather than suggesting real strategies to build cross-cultural relationships with her students. Examples such as this created unfriendly environments for the participants because, without knowing whom to trust or where their colleagues were coming from, the CIPers often found themselves alienated and without support.

Stephanie reported that at first she tried to collaborate with other teachers, and she described a time when she showed them a unit that traced the historical routes of racism that led to the situation of the Jena 6. "At first they were like, 'yeah, that's a really great idea.' But then they were like, 'Well, this makes White people look bad' We just had arguments about it because they wouldn't teach anything that made White people 'look bad'" (Stephanie, CIP session, November 29, 2007). For a young, inexperienced teacher, having veteran school-based colleagues who support one's work and provide advice is invaluable. However, Stephanie's colleagues were fearful of teaching about race and created an environment that made her feel alienated because of her commitment to the tenets of social justice that included exposing and addressing historical and current racism.

This created an unwelcoming environment in which she had no colleagues to turn to in order to help her plan lessons or to help her with the kinds of challenges that all first-year teachers experience.

I don't really talk about it with them. I don't say, "Let's develop this together," and I feel like they are criticizing me for it. I don't really care, but I do because I guess I want to be respected by the other teachers and I want them to come by my room and be like, "Wow, look what she's doing. This is amazing," whereas I don't always feel like they do that. They are more like, "What is she doing, is she crazy?" (Stephanie, CIP session, November 29, 2007)

Stephanie found herself craving the support and approval of her peers, but became alienated by their political ideology and the ways in which they dismissed her commitment to issues of race and inequality.

At other times, Stephanie found herself in situations in which she initially felt at ease with her coworkers, only to unwittingly step into landmines. She reported that one day while passing time in the teachers' lounge, Stephanie and her colleagues were flipping through the *Daily News* and engaging in casual conversation when they came across an article about then presidential candidate Barack Obama that claimed he was Muslim.

I was like, “this is propaganda” and I was saying how the article was trying to make Obama look bad because he was Muslim, and I was like (a) he is not Muslim, and (b) it’s not a bad thing if he was. And the other coworker was like, “No, he’s got to have some ties with terrorists, and we are all going to get attacked” and I was like, “Never again will I bring that up,” because I don’t want to have a bad relationship with them and I think, you know, they’re good people but they can keep their politics to themselves and I’m not going to bring that up again. (Stephanie, CIP session, February 28, 2008).

Stephanie inadvertently stepped into a landmine that exposed that the ideology of her coworkers was antithetical to her analysis of current issues. This exposed the complex challenge of being committed to social justice while also wanting to have the camaraderie and validation of coworkers that help any new teacher feel accepted at his or her school. It kept her in a state of paranoia because she felt she had to watch what she said at all times. Between the ideological imprisonment of mandated curriculum and standardized testing, and the traitors, spies, and landmines at their school sites, these new teachers recognized that they always had to watch their backs. With a lack of places to turn, they committed themselves strongly to CIP and used it as a safe space in which to seek respite and reinforcement for their social justice goals.

BUILDING A SAFE HAVEN

Although most of their time was spent in their politically charged schools, the participants used CIP as a safe haven that protected their vision of social justice pedagogy. By maintaining this safe haven, they created a space that served several purposes. First, it allowed them to further develop their own understandings about social justice and current issues away from their schools and watchful administrators. Second, they worked inside this safe haven to collectively create and critique curricula and to develop strategies to help them avoid complying with mandates they found problematic. This safe haven served as a respite where they received reinforcement, solidarity, healthy competition, and a sense that they were part of something bigger.

By building and maintaining a safe haven, the group served as a respite from the stress and alienation that teachers felt daily in their schools. As a teacher in a Catholic school, Hally shared that she often had to have conversations she found uncomfortable and difficult in order to have her perspective included in the school curriculum. Within the safe haven, however, she found a protected space to catch her breath and reenergize. She said, “I think this group is kind of like a winter break. You come here, you get away from it all, and then it motivates you to do better. . . . It lets you separate yourself a little bit” (CIP Session, April 10, 2008). This “break” served to reinforce her commitment and prepared her to reenter her school with more clarity and strength. Stephanie added,

I would come to the meetings and I would be all over the place, worried about the curriculum and the students and the parents and the administration and I would come here . . . and it was this group that helped me regain my center and refocus. . . . Having a place to go where if I felt something was wrong or not being addressed, I can say, “Listen guys, this is messed up, or this is what my principal is doing” . . . Whenever I left here, I was like [takes a deep breath], I would feel balanced again. I’m excited for our meetings now, that we are going to get to talk, I’m like,

“YES!” (Stephanie, CIP Session, April 10, 2008)

The CIP members appreciated having a place to discuss tough issues away from their school-based colleagues with whom they often clashed ideologically. For Stephanie, who had been unable to find teachers at her school who were willing to veer from curricular mandates, the solidarity she found in the group provided her with a place to better understand issues and injustices at her school and the strength to return to work.

Because so many of their school colleagues held divergent ideological beliefs, the safe haven served as a place where the teachers could receive the reinforcement and the encouragement they needed to enact their critical pedagogy. The trust they felt within CIP enabled them to push each other deeper because they were able to encourage and check each other while holding themselves accountable to their shared vision. Stephanie discussed the role of the group in helping her push against the mandated curriculum by substituting a book about racism in the 1950s, the very book her colleagues claimed “made White people look bad.”

I pushed against that [the mandated curriculum], and I felt like I had this support with you and Jonathon and the rest of the members who were like, “Yeah—that’s awesome, you are doing great!” So that was the first step I took to actually do something on my own. (Stephanie, personal communication, April 29, 2008)

Stephanie, like the other teachers in CIP, was unable to find the encouragement and support to bolster her SJE at her school and used the safe haven as the place to receive the validation she needed to feel confident about her pedagogy that diverged from the norm of her school.

In addition to receiving support to implement SJE in their classrooms, the safe haven also served as a place where participants received the kind of feedback and critique that they were unable to find at school. At their schools, the feedback they received was often centered on why their perspective was problematic, “political,” or not aligned with the mandated curriculum. This left them unable to share their curricula with veteran teachers, ultimately locking the CIPers out of opportunities to develop or improve their instruction or techniques as new teachers. The safe haven served, then, as a place to share ideas and give and receive feedback that they trusted and that came without the fear of being reported to administration. As Hally explained, “If you throw out an idea and it actually is horrendous, I feel that there are seven people that will tell you that it’s a horrendous idea . . . so that gives you a sounding board” (personal communication, May 6, 2008). The participants used the feedback from the group to hone their individual practice in their classrooms.

Hally, who taught kindergarten in a private Catholic school, used this sounding board in developing a unit on homelessness. She reported that whereas her school colleagues wanted to do activities such as can drives and visits to soup kitchens, Hally wanted assistance in taking a more critical approach. “I don’t want to ‘us’ and ‘them’ it. My students are privileged children, and I don’t want them to say ‘some children don’t have,’ which can be a problem” (Hally, CIP session, November 8, 2007). Being conscious of class and privilege in ways that her coworkers were not, the group aided Hally in developing a unit called “people living without homes” that

looked at conditions that cause and maintain poverty rather than essentializing “homeless people.” By having the sounding board provided by politically like-minded and trusted peers, Hally used the support from the safe haven to improve and deepen a lesson that would otherwise have reproduced her students’ sense of social hierarchies and not questioned deeper power relations.

The solidarity the participants found within the safe haven provided them with a sense that if another member could take on the challenge of implementing SJE, then they could as well. That they had been in a cohort with each other for two years and were all experiencing the beginning of their careers together also helped to solidify their personal bonds while strengthening the group. Throughout the year and in the interviews, the teachers reiterated the phrase, “If she could do it, I can do it.” Particularly for Julie and Nina, the two group members who were still students and substitute teaching as they finished their coursework, seeing their peers as first-year teachers was inspirational. As Julie, who was still student-teaching, said,

I saw what I can push myself toward. To see that they were first-year teachers and not only did they survive, they did something that mattered . . . I can do that! If I get kindergarten, I can do that. If I have 5th grade, I can do that too. (Julie, personal communication, May 7, 2008)

Because the CIP members knew each other so well, they understood that no one was better positioned than anyone else in the group to succeed. This allowed them to see each other’s successes as motivation for their own personal growth. With a lack of examples of social justice educators to turn to when teaching and with student-teaching in environments characterized by compliance, the participants served as role models to each other.

The CIP members also used the safe haven as a site for healthy competition, which they used to push each other to strengthen their pedagogy and to take risks. Whereas for some members, group encouragement served as their motivation, for others, it was the nagging feeling that they weren’t doing as much as their peers that pressed them forward. Jonathon stated, “I would come out [of CIP sessions] feeling stressed out because it was like ‘shit, I don’t do that,’ like what other people were doing in their classrooms. We can be critical of what we do, and have moments of ‘I have to do this better’” (Jonathon, personal communication, May 8, 2008). Jonathon’s reflection showed how other group members became role models whom he had to live up to. Living up to each other’s examples became a form of accountability that participants used to stay true to the vision that brought them together.

Marissa also appreciated the pressure from the group, but in a way different from Jonathon. For her, it played a role in helping her to negotiate her own identity as a Latina doing SJE at her school with predominantly White coworkers.

I have this fear, being Latino, that if I talk about this [SJE], that they think it’s just because I’m Latino. So I think that coming to these meetings really gave me that “slap in the face, come on, you can do it, you can teach these topics that you are limiting yourself to.” (Marissa, CIP session, April 10, 2008)

Although expressed as a “slap in the face,” Marissa recognized that this support came from a place of encouragement, and that compelled her to actualize her vision despite reservations about how she was perceived at her school. By using each other’s progress as a gauge for where they felt they should be, the CIP teachers relied on a sense of healthy competition to press each other toward their shared goals.

Another way in which the teachers felt supported was from strength in numbers. In the broadest sense, the CIP allowed them to feel that their contributions were part of something bigger—a broader movement for social justice. As Nina explained, “Even though I feel like I’m just doing a small little part, and I still feel like I could do a lot more, I feel that what I am doing is something” (Nina, personal communication, May 6, 2008). The feeling Nina described was greatly increased after the group presented at a conference on social justice and teacher education in Chicago. The members began to see how what they were doing in New York was connected to a national movement of educators who shared their vision and provided them with a sense of efficacy in their efforts.

Stephanie stated,

Knowing that there are other people out there that want to do the same thing that I now want to do is really exciting and motivating and pushes me almost every day where I’m like, “Well, I really don’t know if I want to teach this lesson but I will because I *need* to.” (Stephanie, personal communication, April 29, 2008)

The feeling that she was part of something bigger provided her with a sense of responsibility to a larger entity that fueled Stephanie to push herself further than she would have if she had been on her own. It also helped her to feel that her effort was part of something more powerful. “Before, if I didn’t like something, I’d go, “Well that sucks,” and I didn’t realize that other people think it sucks too and we can all get together and do something” (Stephanie, CIP session, June 16, 2008). Just as one pencil can easily be split in half whereas a group of pencils is unbreakable, Stephanie realized that by working collectively on issues, she was part of a powerful whole. This sense of belonging strengthened the CIP members’ commitment to social justice and pushed their practice in the classroom. Rather than buying into the nagging sense that they were crazy radicals who were alienated at their schools, they began to understand that they were part of something bigger, a professional movement of caring and committed educators.

Finally, all the group members believed that without the respite and reinforcement of the group, it was unlikely that they would have focused as much on their social justice pedagogy. They felt that it would have been done in “passing.” Jonathon summarized how the group functioned to provide a sense of belonging and accountability: “Maybe none of us would be doing this if we weren’t together in it. Don’t you feel like it’s kind of a club, or kind of like a coalition? I feel that way—it’s like a pledge” (Jonathon, personal communication, May 8, 2008). This pledge that the members made to each other kept them committed to the safe haven, protecting their visions of social justice in unfriendly environments and helping them to develop strategies to make this vision real in the classroom.

CAMOUFLAGING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

In an effort to survive the multitude of challenges experienced during the first year of teaching, the CIP members attempted to camouflage their critical pedagogy to keep what they were doing out of the view of others. This allowed them to successfully create critical classroom communities. By substituting alternative materials and integrating themes of equity and justice into the mandated curriculum, the teachers became quite adept at figuring out how to teach within the constraints they faced while still focusing on issues of social justice within their classrooms.

By using the mandated curriculum as a starting point, the participants were able to camouflage the more controversial topics they wished to cover. Inspired by the unit that Hally taught on people without homes, Marissa decided that she wanted to introduce the unit to her kindergarten class in a strict Catholic school. She had already been chastised for teaching about Martin Luther King and had constant “visits” to her classroom by administrators and other school personnel. Understanding her context, she decided to disguise the inquiry on poverty within the mandated unit on “families.”

According to Marissa, she introduced the unit by talking about her own family and how families are similar and different, focusing particularly on where different families live. She then read the children the book *Fly Away Home* (Bunting & Himler, 1991), a story about a father and his son who live in an airport. “My kids enjoyed talking about this because I really zoomed in on the fact that not all homeless people are alone, but they have families just like them (as one of my kids brought up)” (Marissa, CIP session, January 31, 2008). Marissa felt that this helped her students break free of some of the stereotypes they held about people without homes. “They understood that not all homeless people are mean, stink (one of my students shared that her mom thought that), or are starving (shelter homes and food banks)” (Marissa, CIP session, January 31, 2008). The project culminated with a showing of the Reading Rainbow video of *Fly Away Home*, which also featured children and young teens who lived without homes because of fires or economic problems. By centering this unit on families and by using children’s literature, read-alouds, writing webs, and other traditional and mandated forms of literacy instruction, her approach protected her from watchdog colleagues because it appeared that she was teaching a safe unit about families. In reality, she was infusing time-honored academic skills with critical topics about poverty and equity with her 5-year-old students.

In another attempt to conceal her critical pedagogy, Marissa used activities that could be deemed as politically neutral as opportunities to challenge students’ stereotypes. For example, she shared that her students held very stereotypical understandings of gender roles, views that were reinforced by school policies such as separating boys and girls for lining up and other activities. To challenge these notions, Marissa built on an ordinary mathematics lesson on bar graphs by introducing content on gender roles. “What I did was a t-chart and the students named what they thought boys like to do and what girls like to do. We compared the columns, and it was really stereotypes, like girls like dolls” (Marissa, personal communication, July 20, 2008). She shared that the next day, she listed the activities separately and had the students put checks next to the activities they themselves like to do. The activities did not fall into gender-predictive categories;

both the boys and the girls in the class enjoyed activities originally assigned to one gender, such as playing with trucks. They used these data to create bar graphs and compared both graphs, contrasting what they thought boys and girls enjoyed with the reality of what they liked to do. By using a traditional math activity appropriate for early childhood education, Marissa was able to help her young students develop critical thinking skills and challenge stereotypes while never appearing to have strayed from the mandated math curriculum.

Jonathon and Stephanie, the two fifth-grade teachers in traditional public schools, reported that they were under strict orders and surveillance to execute the mandated literacy curriculum. They both became quite skillful at looking for openings within the curricular structure to integrate social justice themes into their reading and writing blocks. Their most common strategy was to substitute culturally relevant books for the mandated materials. For lessons on “short texts,” both chose to use articles from a progressive independent children’s newspaper called *INDYKids* rather than use what Stephanie described as “stupid little books that are just questions and passages, passages and questions” (Stephanie, CIP session, January, 22, 2008). Both teachers also decided to use the book *Leon’s Story* (Tillage, 1997) as part of their mandated character study unit. This allowed them to teach about historical oppression while still using the same lesson format that was required by the administrators and coaches who sporadically entered their classrooms to ensure that they were at the designated part of the program. The teachers quickly found that as long as they were addressing the skills required within the units, the administrators were rather indifferent to, and sometimes supportive of, the texts they chose. By understanding the administration’s priorities and looking for opportunities to teach critical pedagogy while addressing the mandated curriculum, the teachers were able to continue to teach to their vision without negative consequences.

DEVELOPING THEIR STUDENTS AS ACTIVISTS

Another strategy these new teachers used while trying to stay true to their vision was that of teaching their students to analyze and address issues that they faced in their own lives. By providing their students practice with the tools of activism, the teachers gave them opportunities to engage in the movement for social justice. The CIPers worked to prepare children who would themselves be positioned as agents of change by teaching concrete skills needed to challenge injustices.

One of the most in-depth social justice projects was completed in Jonathon’s classroom. The C.A.C.A.O. Project (c) was a semester-long unit that Jonathon and a fellow teacher developed to provide students with multiple experiences with social activism skills, from letter writing, to petitioning, to campaigning, and finally, to carrying out a public demonstration. According to Jonathon, the project began simply enough when he and Nick,⁶ the other fifth-grade teacher at his school, substituted a test prep passage with an article about child labor on cocoa farms. After seeing how shocked and angry, yet engaged, their students were about the issue, Jonathon helped his students research more on the topic.

We looked at the list of companies, and the kids were like “M&M’s!” And I said, “Well, what’s one thing we could do?” and they were like, “We can stop eating M&M’s!” and I said “What

else can we do?” and it was cool because they were automatic with it: “Get other people to stop eating M&M’s!” I was thinking, “Right on.” (Jonathon, CIP session, December 12, 2007)

As part of their development, Jonathon wanted to build on his students’ righteous indignation and clear motivation to take action on the issue.

Working with fellow CIP members, the group looked over the scope, sequence, and upcoming units for opportunities to develop further inquiry within the confines of Jonathon’s literacy program. During the mandated “realistic fiction” unit, he helped his students imagine what it must be like to be forced to work in intolerable conditions. To develop a sense of empathy, he taught about Cesar Chavez and had students write short stories from the perspective of a fictional child farm worker. Just as Marissa and Hally did in the people without homes unit, Jonathon reframed what could have been a typical charitable approach to one that developed empathy for the purpose of justice.

Next, Jonathon and Nick wanted to provide their students with an opportunity to voice their dissent to the corporations that benefit from child labor on cocoa farms. Using a curriculum developed by Global Exchange (Schweisguth, 2008), the students wrote Valentine cards to the CEO of World’s Finest Chocolates. These letters easily fit the criteria of the mandated persuasive essay unit. The cards expressed their anger about child labor and demanded that the company start using fair trade practices. Through this part of the unit, the children engaged in a classic activist strategy, power analysis, to understand which stakeholders were perpetuating and benefiting from this injustice and to decide what could be done.

The next leg of the mandated curriculum focused on “social issues,” making it easier to integrate the unit with this segment. The students learned how to write petitions that they then used to organize their community to persuade the local grocery store to stock fair trade chocolate. After drafting a compelling petition, collecting over 400 signatures, and hand-delivering the petition to the store, the manager happily began stocking the fair trade candy. The students also worked with the technology teacher to write and create public service announcements, which they filmed and screened for other upper-grade students.

Jonathon and Nick next prepared their students to hold a public demonstration. They watched video footage of other protests, made posters and fliers for the event, called the local police precinct, and then took a field trip to Times Square, where they held a demonstration in front of the M&M/Mars store. The students chanted, held their homemade posters, and passed out their informational fliers to protest the company’s use of child labor and to encourage M&M/Mars to use fair trade practices.

Through the C.A.C.A.O. Project, Jonathon raised his students’ consciousness, helped them build empathy with those affected by the injustice, engaged in a power analysis, and provided concrete skills in letter and petition writing, media production, community organizing, and public demonstration. By providing practice with the hands-on tools and skills of social activism, Jonathon and Nick gave their students opportunities to look critically at the world around them and to take action about injustices that anger them. Because he understood the priorities of his

school, he worked within the boundaries of the mandated curriculum, allowing him to enact his vision. By integrating this unit within the reading and writing program, Jonathon and Nick won the support of the principal, who was impressed with the blog of the project the teachers created to spread word of their work with other educators.

GOING PUBLIC

The final strategy was for the teachers to go public with their unwillingness to conform to or comply with the pressures found in their schools. Although this was used less frequently than camouflaging and developing their students as activists, the teachers employed this tactic by rejecting certain school policies, voicing their dissent to colleagues, and teaching their critical pedagogy out in the open. This served to challenge the policies and individuals who continued to make their schools hostile for social justice. By openly questioning or disagreeing with colleagues or policies, the participants invited people to stop complying with mandates and unjust practices by making, or at least exploring, an ideological switch. Examples of going public happened in moments when the participants could have retreated to the protection of the safe haven, but instead felt resilient enough to stand up for their beliefs.

Of all the environments, Marissa's Catholic school was the most restrictive, yet it was she who was the most public with her social justice perspective. Time and time again, Marissa shared stories in which other teachers "popped" into her room to oversee her teaching. She described a colleague: "She comes into my room, pops in all the time. I was teaching about Martin Luther King, and she was just staring at me. She was like, 'Why are you teaching that? You are going to get yourself in so much trouble. Just leave it for some other teacher' she said." Rather than "leave it," this watchdog motivated Marissa to speak out at a faculty meeting.

Just the fact that they tell me "Oh, don't teach that just makes me want to teach it more now. It's like, "No. We are going to learn it" . . . I know it's a Catholic school, but you know, I think there are things that are more important that go beyond prayer . . . I said that at a meeting, I said it goes beyond prayer—it's who you are as a role model, reality is that it's not by praying that you are going to solve issues. You have to get out there and be aware of your surroundings . . . I told the kids that too. (Marissa, personal communication, May 1, 2008)

Marissa stood up to her colleagues who were attempting to get her to comply with the school norms of staying away from social issues. By making her stance public to her faculty, students, and parent communities, she invited them to question themselves and their actions. This served as an advanced strategy because she moved beyond camouflaging and attempted to challenge her nonactive colleagues to move away from their own complacency and change what they themselves teach and believe.

In keeping with her comment at the faculty meeting, Marissa kept her critical pedagogy public. She still used the strategy of beginning with the mandated curriculum as her starting point, but she did so out in the open, in plain view of other teachers and families.

I am drawing together Malcolm X with the [required] fairness unit. I wrote to the parents and

told them that we are using great books, they can read them, the pictures match the words and also it brings an important message. I put it right in my parent communication that I do every day. (Marissa, CIP session, January 31, 2008)

Because Marissa was excited about and committed to this unit, she felt bolstered to share the details of the project openly.

Whereas many of the parents had positive reactions (“Good job, My kid was telling me about Malcolm X when I was showering him!”), many of her coworkers did not. Marissa did not allow negative reactions from these teachers to deter her. She described her heritage month unit: “I didn’t even close my door for this. I was like, ‘I’m going to leave it open and if they hear it, they hear it.’ Special education teachers would come in and pull my kids, and they would just sit and stare” (Marissa, CIP session, April 10, 2008). Rather than stop her lesson, Marissa went on to describe how she would have her students engage the stunned visitors in a conversation about the topic. Despite the reactions of her coteachers, Marissa said that her principal did not interfere in her classroom, and Marissa never changed her focus. By keeping her pedagogy public, Marissa refused to give in to a climate of fear and silencing. She stood up against the conservative ideology of her school by demanding that people be aware of the kind of critical pedagogy that is possible with young children.

DISCUSSION

By building a safe haven to protect their vision and developing strategies such as camouflaging, developing their students as activists, and going public, the teachers in this study were successful in creating classrooms that explored issues of social justice. As a result, their students had opportunities to investigate current and historical oppression, they learned how to research issues of injustice, they made connections to their own lives, and they engaged in many levels of social action.

Participating in the critical inquiry project enabled these new teachers to create a context that supported them to enact their vision in environments that weren’t necessarily supportive of their goals. Several factors about CIP allowed this to happen. The fact that long-term relationships existed between the participants, as well as with myself, helped the teachers to have a strong degree of trust. The teachers, all members of the same cohort of undergraduates, were all at the same stage of their careers and had transitioned together from students to new professionals, helping them to feel a sense of camaraderie and equality. Because of my experience as a classroom teacher in urban settings and my work as an activist with a local teacher activist group, and because I was someone who had supported them for the last three years as their undergraduate professor, they trusted the direction in which I led the group. Through constant check-ins, shared agenda and schedule setting, and goal and norm setting, I set into place structures that allowed the participants to feel ownership over CIP so that it was their group rather than a generic professional development project that they came to on campus twice a month. This commitment to shared leadership allowed me to hold multiple roles with the participants, from mentor, to friend, to someone who held them accountable to the social justice goals they had set. I believe these elements of CIP contributed to the teachers’ ability to enact

their visions in ways that simply meeting informally and chatting might not have accomplished.

For teacher educators committed to preparing new educators to teach for social justice, these findings are bittersweet. On one hand, what the participants accomplished was no small feat considering that they were young, inexperienced teachers working in conditions that did not support their vision of education as a vehicle for social change. By having access to a network of supportive peers, these teachers were able to implement their vision, unlike many of their contemporaries. Research on teacher attrition shows that a key group of educators who leave the profession are teachers like the ones in this study, who could be described as “service oriented” and “idealistic” (Miech & Elder, 1996). These are teachers who enter the profession with the hopes of “making a difference” and contributing to positive change in society. However, the constraints they face within public schools make it difficult for them to realize their idealism, leading to frustration, a lack of efficacy, and attrition. Although further longitudinal data are needed, all the teachers in this study returned to the classroom, and the enrollment in the CIP more than doubled the following year. By building their safe haven and developing strategies, it appears as if the teachers in this study found an outlet to funnel their frustration and alienation and establish efficacy in ways that contributed to their ability to navigate the unsupportive environment that other teachers are unable to thrive in.

On the other hand, these strategies as a whole did little to transform the larger forces that are waging a war for control over public education. Although it may be all that we can hope for with new teachers, working solely within one’s classroom will have little impact on the existing power structure. When we consider neoliberal forces such as privatization and corporate control as some of the enemies of educational justice (Anyon, 2005; Kumashiro, 2008), simply substituting readings about child labor into the curriculum may be a successful strategy for survival, but it is not a tactic that will affect or hold back the economic and political forces advancing on schools. An additional danger with the strategies used by the teachers in this study is that they can provide a false sense of satisfaction that what they are doing is “enough”; in reality, the context in which they are teaching remains just as menacing to the well-being of students.

This has serious implications for those concerned with using social justice education as a vehicle for equity and change. The findings from this study reveal that although teachers can be successful at creating socially just classrooms, without larger forays into social movements or activism, they are fighting a losing battle because they are not transforming the broader neoliberal agenda (Anyon, 2005; Oakes & Lipton, 2007). If teachers continue to work as individuals in their classrooms, they can make the confines of their narrowing academic freedom more palatable, but they are doing little to stop the continuing invasion of corporate takeovers of schools. You can decorate a jail cell, but you still aren’t free. By creatively adapting their classroom practice, teachers impact only the effects of the neoliberal policies, and not the root causes that will continue to bare down on schools, making ongoing strategies that much more difficult to negotiate.

Teacher educators must provide students with preservice and in-service experiences in which they both learn how to critically recognize injustice and have opportunities to engage in activism

to transform the conditions perpetuating inequity. Although the teachers in this study all taught their students about social action, only one among them, Nina, regularly engaged in social activism in her own life. Those of us involved in preservice teacher education for social justice often attempt to prepare people to teach something with which they have no experience. Just as it is problematic to send a math teacher into the classroom with little to no mathematics content, it is equally ineffective to expect teachers who have never participated in activism to train their students to engage in social change.

Teacher educators need to provide opportunities for teachers to connect with broader social movements. Across the country, growing numbers of teacher activist groups are emerging in urban areas, such as the New York Collective of Radical Educators in New York, Teachers for Social Justice in Chicago, and Teachers 4 Social Justice in San Francisco (Au, Bigelow, Burant, & Dawson, 2005; Doster, 2008). By participating in groups such as these, teachers can use their professional expertise to argue against policies that are based not on educational research or students' best interest, but corporate agendas. These groups have active campaigns against broader issues such as high-stakes tests, school council representation, and No Child Left Behind. Working both inside and outside the classroom (NYCoRE, 2003), educators can work within the system to do what is right for their current students while working to change the constraints that are perpetuating unjust educational experiences for their future students.

Teacher educators need to tap into groups such as these, either as members themselves or by creating partnerships and opportunities for their students. By participating alongside teachers, teacher educators remain connected and knowledgeable about how neoliberal policies are impacting the daily lives of classrooms. We can use our academic voices and research to join with teachers, parents, and students as a united front against the lack of democracy and transparency in public education. As teacher educators, we must take on the role of activists if we hope to have any credibility with the preservice teachers we prepare to be social justice educators. Just as we cannot ask our preservice teachers to engage their students in social action if they are not doing it themselves, we must also unite in struggling against the same forces that we are training our students to challenge. Teachers who want to engage in social justice education need role models of educational activists, and new teachers benefit from having access to activist networks so they know where to turn when they are ready to step up.

Typically, teacher educators wave goodbye to their preservice teachers after their graduation caps are flung in the air, sending them off alone. If we are committed to their success, we have a moral responsibility to continue to support them as they enter unreceptive terrain. Strategies such as creating critical inquiry projects with a focus on social justice education give them the needed space to transition into the profession while remaining connected to the goals which with they entered (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Picower, 2007). By providing opportunities for teachers to build and develop safe havens and connect to broader movements for social justice, teacher educators can help our graduates not only to survive in the profession but also to challenge the larger neoliberal forces that are waging war for control of public education.

Notes

1. Only about half of the cohort of 40 went into teaching the following year, and of those, many returned to their hometowns to teach, significantly reducing the number of eligible participants.
2. Fewer data were reported on Nina and Julie because neither had her own classroom at the time

of the study. They were active CIP participants equally engaged with the ideas of CIP but were unable to apply them to the same extent as other members because of their situation.

3. As their former professor and facilitator of the group, it is very likely that I had an influence on the participants. However, this article is a review of the unique strategies that they developed. I did not suggest the four strategies discussed in the article; it was in the context of CIP that these ideas were nurtured and developed by the participants.

4. For more information on the logistics of the critical inquiry group, see Picower (2009). This previous article describes a pilot project of CIP.

5. This article focuses specifically on the strategies developed by the teachers to integrate SJE into their classrooms. For more information on the purpose, role, and logistics of the critical inquiry group, see Picower (2007). This previous article describes a pilot project of CIP.

6. Nick, a second-year teacher at the school, was an unusual ally for any CIPer. Unlike other teachers who were placed to coteach with strangers with no commitment to social justice, Jonathon benefitted from being placed with Nick, who was also a former student of mine and who shared his dedication to teaching for social justice.

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